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The Birth of the Cultural Treaty in Europe's Age of Crisis

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Bilateral treaties are an age-old tool of diplomacy, but before the First World War they were only rarely applied to the world of intellectual and cultural relations. This article explores the process by which diplomatic agreements on intellectual and cultural exchange came instead to be a common feature of interwar European international relations by contrasting two types of agreements identified by period observers: 'intellectual' accords, typified by the agreements France signed in the 1920s, and 'cultural' treaties, advanced by fascist Italy in the 1930s. Comparing France and Italy's use of such agreements in Central-Eastern Europe reveals that Italy's fascist regime responded to the crises and opportunities of the interwar period by developing a distinctive model of 'cultural treaty' that applied state power to international cultural exchange, and mobilised the idea of 'culture' itself, in a new and influential manner.

In 1934 the Executive Committee of the Intellectual Cooperation Organisation, a Geneva-based organ of the League of Nations, commissioned a report on the apparent boom in academic, scientific and cultural agreements between states.¹ Bilateral agreements (broadly defined to include treaties, accords, conventions and other signed diplomatic instruments) were, then as now, a standard instrument of diplomacy and a major source of international law. Bilateral treaty making had increased dramatically in the nineteenth century, as different treaty types were developed to address different issues, and by the start of the First World War had become a major feature of international life.² But only rarely had diplomats turned this tool to the world of intellectual and cultural exchange. The increase in diplomatic attention to such matters since the war caught the attention of League of Nations officials in Geneva, who saw this trend as bearing on their own project of 'intellectual cooperation'.

Based on the belief that the cross-border exchange among scholars, students and men of letters would promote peace, and that peace was too important to be left to politicians, the League-sponsored institutions of intellectual cooperation balanced the political interests of the League's member states against the autonomy of intellectual and artistic life by promoting exchanges, conferences and publications that were international, but not strictly intergovernmental. The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, founded in 1922, brought together prominent writers and scholars (including figures like Henri Bergson, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore) in Geneva, where they met as great minds, not as representatives of their countries. Beyond this, the Committee's executive agency, the Paris-based International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (IICI), acted as a kind of intergovernmental organisation: member states of the League of Nations could appoint delegates to the Institute, which coordinated relations among these states' 'national commissions for intellectual cooperation'.³ Politics and state power were rarely far from the real

¹ This is recounted in *Circulaire* (C.L. 32–1935), IICI president Henri Bonnet to the presidents of all National Commissions of Intellectual Cooperation, 31 Oct. 1935, UNESCO Archives, Paris, AG 1-IICI-B-III-2a (box 70).

² Edward Keene, 'The Treaty-Making Revolution of the Nineteenth Century', *International History Review*, 34, 3 (2012), 475–500.

³ See, especially, Jan Kolasa, *International Intellectual Cooperation: The League Experience and the Beginnings of Unesco* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy 1962); Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L'Unesco oubliée: la Société des nations et la coopération*

workings of these institutions, whose internationalism was often placed at the service of the participants' national (or indeed nationalist) ambitions.⁴ Nonetheless, if more and more states were directly regulating intellectual and cultural exchange through diplomatic agreements, altering the role of state power in that important sphere of international life, then this was a development that merited close attention.

The task of compiling the report was entrusted to the German historian and archivist Margarete Rothbarth, a member of the staff of the IICI in Paris since 1926.⁵ Her report, presented to the Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation at its July 1935 meeting in Geneva, confirmed the impression that a significant development was underway. State-to-state agreements promoting or facilitating academic and intellectual exchange had been signed since the mid-nineteenth century. But these had been rare and haphazard, 'the result of no specific emergency nor any clearly defined policy aiming at the regulating of inter-State cultural relations'. Since the end of the First World War, however, a dramatic change had taken place: 'two States, France and Italy, concluded each in their respective spheres, a whole series of intellectual agreements' in 'two definite phases'.⁶ First, in the years immediately after the war, French officials had signed agreements with Italy and Romania (1919), Yugoslavia (1920), Belgium (1921), Poland (1922), Luxembourg (1923) and Czechoslovakia (1923). Then, in the first months of 1935, Italian officials concluded bilateral agreements with Austria and Hungary. These two accords, Rothbarth argued, reflected a particularly significant trend: 'the advent of a new form of bilateral agreement embracing every possible intellectual intercourse between two countries'.⁷ While France's agreements facilitated academic exchange in a manner similar to agreements that had been signed before 1914, Italy's 1935 accords called for exchange between universities, but also among school-age students, the creation of national cultural institutes in each country's capital, the creation of permanent professorships in the language and culture of the opposite country and exchanges in literature, theatre, the visual arts, cinema and radio. Rothbarth's survey, she concluded, 'shows that a new type of diplomatic treaty is beginning to develop'.⁸ Not only were states taking a new interest in exercising control over the world of international intellectual exchange, they were also developing new tools with which to do it.

In 1938 the IICI published a book based on a revised version of Rothbarth's report, including the texts (in French) of thirty-six bilateral agreements. Here the 'new type of diplomatic treaty' Rothbarth had outlined in 1935 came more clearly into focus, and had been given a name. The book distinguished between two categories: 'intellectual accords' included bilateral agreements related to educational matters (of which France was the first and most active signatory), as well as narrow agreements calling for the foundation of an institute or arranging a particular art exhibition. The more comprehensive agreements, addressing exchanges in education but also in literature, the arts, music, science and mass media – 'embracing the quasi-totality of intellectual matters common to two nations' – comprised a second category: 'cultural accords'. Even more clearly than in 1935, the IICI now gave credit for having 'inaugurated' this innovation to one state: fascist Italy.⁹

intellectuelle, 1919–1946 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999); Daniel Laqua, 'Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order', *Journal of Global History*, 6, 2 (2011).

⁴ Daniel Laqua, 'Internationalism and Nationalism in the League of Nations' Work for Intellectual Cooperation', in Miguel Bendeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds., *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁵ Eulalia Ghazali, *Contribution à l'étude des accords culturels: vers un droit international de la culture*, PhD thesis, University of Grenoble, 1977, 102. On Rothbarth, see: <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/rothbarth-margarete>, last visited 17 Apr. 2020.

⁶ 'Bilateral Agreements Concerning Intellectual Questions' (A.7. 1935), undated [July 1935], AG 1-IICI-A-7, 2888, UNESCO Archives, Paris.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ Institut international de coopération intellectuelle (IICI), *Recueil des accords intellectuels* (Paris: Institut international de coopération intellectuelle, 1938), 5.

The application of one of diplomacy's oldest tools to the field of intellectual and cultural relations among peoples would seem to have been a major event in the history of cultural diplomacy, with relevance also for the broader history of the role of the state in international cultural relations. The degree or kind of power that states have exercised over transnational cultural flows has been a major theme in the historical literature on this topic, which has highlighted the tensions revealed by state efforts to exercise power over cultural and intellectual networks that were increasingly interconnected and transnational.¹⁰ The interwar increase in the use of state-to-state agreements to manage those networks offers a fascinating case through which to further explore these issues. Diplomatic agreements of this kind have been discussed in the historical literature on several states' twentieth-century cultural diplomacy, and a few individual treaties have been the subjects of detailed study.¹¹ But a transnational historical study of the treaty genre as such remains to be written.¹²

As a contribution toward such a history, this article explores the process by which diplomatic agreements on intellectual and cultural exchange came to be a common feature of European international relations in the interwar period. Following Rothbarth's lead, I approach this subject by characterising and contrasting the two types of agreements that she identified: the 'intellectual' accords typified by the agreements that France embraced in the 1920s and the 'cultural' treaties of the kind advanced by fascist Italy in the 1930s. Focusing on these states' use of such agreements with countries in Central-Eastern Europe, I approach these agreements in two ways. First, I place the development and use of these diplomatic tools in the context of the crises – and opportunities – perceived by leading figures in those two countries' educational and political elites. Second, I analyse these agreements as cultural texts, scrutinising their word choices and interpreting these in terms drawn more from intellectual history than from diplomatic history. Comparing them in this way reveals that both states used agreements of this type to advance different geopolitical goals and ideological agendas, based on opposed views of the international political order created after the First World War. Contrasting them shows, however, that the conceptual content of the two diplomatic forms outlined opposed models of transnational cultural relations, reflecting divergent positions on core questions about the nation, the state and the value and meaning of the exchange of ideas across borders. Through this approach, in sum, I find that Rothbarth was right to give these two treaty types two different names. France's intellectual accords drew on practices of academic diplomacy and visions of international cooperation from before 1914, now repurposed to serve French interests in the 1920s. In pursuit of its own national interests, fascist Italy developed a type of cultural treaty that, by contrast, was a real diplomatic

¹⁰ For example, Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World: 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Gisèle Sapiro, 'L'internationalisation des champs intellectuels dans l'entre-deux-guerres: facteurs professionnels et politiques', in Gisèle Sapiro, ed., *L'espace intellectuelle en Europe: de la formation des États-nations à la mondialisation. XIX–XXI siècle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009).

¹¹ Recent discussions of particular countries' cultural agreements can be found in, for example, Albert Salon, *L'action culturelle de la France dans le monde* (Paris: Nathan, 1983); Jan-Pieter Barbian, "'Kulturwerte im Zeitkampf". Die Kulturabkommen des "Dritten Reiches" als Instrumente nationalsozialistischer Außenpolitik', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 74 (1992); J. M. Lee, 'British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War 1945–61', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9, 1 (1998); Herman Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Stefano Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918–1943* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005); Katja Gesche, *Kultur als Instrument der Aussenpolitik totalitärer Staaten: das Deutsche Ausland-Institut 1933–1945* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006); Kurt Düwell, 'Zwischen Propaganda and Friedensarbeit. 100 Jahre der deutschen Auswärtigen Kulturpolitik', in Kurt-Jürgen Maaß, ed., *Kultur und Außenpolitik: Handbuch für Studium und Praxis* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009); Lorenzo Medici, *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione: la diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944–1950)* (Wolters Kluwer Italia, 2009). An outstanding study of a particular treaty is Jens Petersen, 'Vorspiel zu "Stahlpakt" und Kriegsallianz: Das Deutsch-Italienische Kulturabkommen vom 23. November 1938', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 36, 1 (1988).

¹² The most ambitious discussion of the cultural treaty genre, albeit from the perspective of international law rather than history, is Ghazali, *Contribution*.

innovation, significant for its formal extension of diplomatic power to the sphere of international intellectual and cultural exchange and for the way it mobilised the category of ‘culture’ itself.

Illuminating these contrasts helps make sense of the ideologically charged conflict that accompanied the spread of this diplomatic technology in the late 1930s, as the cultural treaty of the Italian type was embraced by more and more states. At the same time, this approach highlights the way both states used international cultural exchange to advance national goals, underscoring the degree to which internationalism and nationalism were intertwined in this period.¹³ A brief look at the fate of cultural agreements after 1945 leads, finally, to a striking finding: that the cultural treaty model pioneered by fascist Italy was the one that thrived in the post-imperial international order that emerged after 1945. To understand the significance of that fact, we need to know more about the interwar birth of the cultural treaty.

Crisis and Opportunity in Central-Eastern Europe

France’s ‘intellectual accords’ of the early interwar years resembled in content and form the bilateral academic exchange agreements that had been used sporadically since the mid-nineteenth century. Pre-war examples cited in Rothbart’s report include a 1874 agreement between Germany and Greece regulating excavations at Olympus, a 1905 agreement between France and the United Kingdom on exchange of university professors, a 1912 agreement between France and Italy over the exchange of professors of modern languages and several agreements among Latin American republics, and between these states and Spain, establishing equivalences in the liberal professions.¹⁴ Sometimes government officials dealt directly with universities, such as in the exchange agreements Prussia signed with Harvard University in 1904 and Columbia University in 1905.¹⁵

Such agreements – signed by university officials or representatives of education ministries and rarely requiring ratification – grew out of several different types of cooperation between government offices, universities and academies. In this way, they reflected the broader landscape of pre-1914 ‘academic diplomacy’, in which state officials and non-state actors, including universities themselves but also municipal officials and philanthropists, eagerly forged international academic connections in an atmosphere marked both by transnational cooperation and keen competition for leadership of this increasingly important arena.¹⁶ Most university exchanges proceeded without formal bilateral agreements, however. The academic and intellectual agreements signed before 1914, Rothbart concluded, had been ‘more or less isolated cases that were not the expression of a clearly defined politics, of the kind that one has seen developed in the post-war period’.¹⁷ Indeed, the bilateral academic agreements French officials signed after the war, although broadly similar to pre-war agreements in their content, were new in that they *did* express a clear politics: a politics of French intellectual expansionism in response to the crises and opportunities presented by Europe’s post-war international order.

Nowhere was the post-war blend of crisis and opportunity for France more evident than in Central-Eastern Europe. There, the redrawn map presented grave geopolitical dangers. Multiple small states, economically weak and riven by revanchist passions, were in danger of falling prey to German expansion. France responded to the military and strategic crisis in the region by developing alliances with the states of the so-called ‘Little Entente’, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia.

¹³ Sluga, *Internationalism*, 3.

¹⁴ ‘Bilateral Agreements Concerning Intellectual Questions’ (A.7. 1935), 4–5. A list of such agreements, going as far back as 1840, is in *Index of Cultural Agreements* (Paris: UNESCO, 1962), 82.

¹⁵ Thomas Adam and Charlotte Lerg, ‘Diplomacy on Campus: The Political Dimensions of Academic Exchange in the North Atlantic’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 13, 4 (2015), 301; Emily Levine, ‘Baltimore Teaches, Göttingen Learns: Cooperation, Competition, and the Research University’, *American Historical Review*, 121, 3 (2016), 780–1.

¹⁶ Adam and Lerg, ‘Diplomacy’, 301–3; Guillaume Tronchet, ‘Diplomatie universitaire ou diplomatie culturelle ? La Cité internationale universitaire de Paris entre deux rives (1920–1940)’, in Dzovinar Kévonian and Guillaume Tronchet, eds., *La Babel étudiante. La Cité internationale universitaire de Paris (1920–1950)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014); Levine, ‘Baltimore Teaches’.

¹⁷ ‘Bilateral Agreements Concerning Intellectual Questions’ (A.7. 1935), 5.

Building on a shared interest in upholding the Paris Peace settlements, France signed treaties with this regional bloc between 1924 and 1926. Alongside a military pact with Poland of September 1922, these treaties offered the promise of advancing French economic penetration of the region – or at least of blocking the emergence of a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*.¹⁸ The security guarantees offered by the Little Entente (such as they were) meant less to French officials than the principle they embodied: the defence of the integrity of the Paris treaties.

In the geopolitics of academic diplomacy, by contrast, the post-war years offered a moment of great opportunity. The collapse of the Central Powers had left the German language and German-Austrian culture dramatically weakened in the region, and French officials were quick to recognise a chance to use academic diplomacy to effect a lasting change to the region's intellectual and cultural alignment. Already before 1914 a group of French university officials and parliamentarians sought to strengthen and expand France's university networks through a new national office of French universities and schools (*Office national des universités et écoles françaises*; ONUF), designed as 'a weapon aimed against the German university and its expansionist dynamism'.¹⁹ During the war French state officials had mobilised France's universities for international political purposes, for example through an academic exchange agreement with Serbia in November 1916, which offered scholarships for Serbian students to study at French universities, and through the creation of new 'inter-allied' academic networks that excluded German scholars and institutions.²⁰ Determined to accelerate and expand such efforts after the war, France's ministry of public instruction increasingly took control of the international relations of France's universities – not least in Central-Eastern Europe.²¹ Even before the Quai d'Orsay decided on its alliances with the countries of the Little Entente, French university leaders and education ministry officials prepared bilateral agreements to facilitate university exchange and collaboration with these same countries. The first of these, France's 1919 agreement with Romania, was a short and simple document. But features of this agreement – of the accord itself and of the motivations behind it – would prove typical of the 'intellectual agreements' that France so eagerly applied in the 1920s.²²

The Franco-Romanian intellectual agreement was signed on 15 June 1919 by Romanian education minister Constantin Angelescu and Lucien Poincaré, rector of the University of Paris (and younger brother of France's president, Raymond Poincaré). The heart of the treaty was France's promise to disburse 1,450,000 francs to Romania's education ministry, with which to pay for the services of French academics at Romanian universities. Implementation would be overseen by a new permanent body, the French university mission in Romania (*Mission Universitaire Française en Roumanie*), coordinating a steady flow of French academics to Romania's universities, in particular at the universities of Czernowitz (known in Romanian as Cernăuți) and Cluj.²³

The team of Romanian professors assigned to oversee the project, four men who had all studied and worked in France, hoped French influence (and financing) would help raise academic quality

¹⁸ Zara S. Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 270, 300; Jacques Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 45.

¹⁹ Johann Chapoutot, 'L'ONUFE face à l'Allemagne: du rejet à la séduction (1910–1939)', in Hans Manfred Bock and Gilbert Krebs, eds., *Échanges culturels et relations diplomatiques: Présences françaises à Berlin au temps de la République de Weimar* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2005), 135.

²⁰ Guillaume Tronchet, 'The Defeat of University Autonomy: French Academic Diplomacy, Mobility Scholarships and Exchange Programs (1880s–1930s)', in Ludovic Tournès and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Global Exchanges: Scholarships and Transnational Circulations in the Modern World* (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 60–1; Tomás Irish, 'From International to Inter-Allied: Transatlantic University Relations in the Ear of the First World War, 1905–1920', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 13, 4 (2015).

²¹ Tronchet presents France's 'academic and scientific agreements' of the 1920s as evidence of the growing power of the state over the autonomy of the universities to manage their international affairs. Tronchet, 'Defeat', 56.

²² The treaty is published in IICI, *Recueil*, 132–6.

²³ Ana-Maria Stan, 'Un exemple de rayonnement universitaire occidental en Europe centrale et orientale: étude de cas sur les enseignants français embauchés à l'université roumaine de Cluj après 1919', *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 6 (Dec. 2010), 17. Available at <http://journals.openedition.org/framespa/477>, last visited 17 Apr. 2020.

to a Western European standard while also speeding the transformation of these universities – located in the territories of Bukovina and Transylvania granted to Romania when the Austro-Hungarian empire was carved up at the Paris Peace Conference – into Romanian and Latin-European institutions, distinguished from their Hungarian and German-influenced past in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²⁴ For Poincaré, the accord advanced an on-going effort to strengthen his university's international position, while supporting the broader project of projecting French 'intellectual influence' (*rayonnement intellectuel*) in a strategically sensitive region.²⁵ French diplomats viewed the agreement as a winning move on the region's geo-cultural chessboard. France's ambassador to Romania visited the university at Cluj shortly after the agreement was signed and filed an enthusiastic report, filled with visions of strategic significance and regional influence. The University at Cluj was as strong, in terms of its libraries and infrastructure, as the best of France's provincial universities ('those of Nancy or Grenoble, for example'). 'The Hungarians had decided to make it a fortress of magyarization and had spared no sacrifice to succeed', but now the Romanians hoped to make the university into 'a hearth of Latin culture'. Lacking the resources to do this on their own, they were offering 'the keys to this citadel' to France, and with it an extraordinary opportunity: 'this commanding position will give our professors the means not only to make ourselves master over the intellectual direction of the new generation [of Romanians], but moreover to make our influence, through the applied sciences and technical training, radiate in all domains of [Romanian] economic life'.²⁶ To make the leading university of Transylvania into a 'citadel of Latin culture' would moreover be a powerful means of solidifying French influence, and the status of the French language, in a region traditionally dominated by German-speaking elites.

These goals were specific to Romania, but the strategic vision behind them can be seen in the agreements France's minister of public instruction went on to sign with educational officials of the other Little Entente states. France's 'academic convention' with Yugoslavia (5 March 1920), its accord with Poland (9 May 1923) and its 'Declaration relative to scientific, literary, and scholarly relations' with Czechoslovakia (25 June 1923) likewise outlined university-level academic exchanges that expanded France's status as leading academic power, forged valuable economic contacts, seized positions lost by German speakers and expanded the domain of the French language. As in the Romanian case, the French pursued these goals by assisting the ambitions of the other country's elites to modernise and strengthen their own national universities.

Civilisation, Science and Order

In a subtler way, these agreements advanced France's interests also through their language. The terms deployed in these texts suggested a high-minded, internationalist commitment to the universalist values of the Enlightenment. The preamble to France's treaty with Czechoslovakia (1923), for example, declared that the object of the agreement was 'to render closer the intellectual relations between [the two countries] by all appropriate means, and to make better known to each their scientific, literary and academic [*scolaire*] development and to facilitate their constant collaboration in these domains'.²⁷ The watchword here was 'development'. This term implied a vision of scientific and scholarly progress rooted in universal standards of excellence, not bound to any particular feature of these two nations or their peoples. Indeed neither 'nation' nor 'people' are invoked in the agreement.

This language, outlining a vision of cooperation on a high, supra-national plane of science and development, cast France's efforts to establish academic hegemony in the region as acts of generosity in support of universal progress, masking the way these served French national interests. It likewise made France's bilateral outreach, although conducted outside of the framework of the League of Nations, appear consonant with the goals of League-sponsored 'intellectual cooperation': the effort

²⁴ Stan, 'Exemple de rayonnement', 19–22.

²⁵ Tronchet, 'Diplomatie universitaire', 61.

²⁶ Report of 4 Oct. 1919, quoted in Stan, 'Exemple de rayonnement', 18.

²⁷ IICI, *Recueil*, 137.

(in the words of one sympathetic observer), ‘to ensure the progress of general civilisation and human knowledge, notably the development and the diffusion of the sciences, letters and the arts’.²⁸

These agreements’ emphasis on the spirit of science and ‘civilisation’ built on a well-established body of ideas that posited an essential connection between these universalist values and international order. Throughout the nineteenth century, European intellectuals inspired by figures like Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte had popularised the notion that modern science, understood as a non-political and supra-national ‘spiritual power’, held the key to the rational organisation of domestic society, but also to a new age of peaceful relations among states.²⁹ The idea of civilisation was likewise used in French-speaking academic circles to refer to broadly human – that is, not merely national – social achievements. At a 1929 international symposium in Paris devoted to the concept, scholars like the influential anthropologist Marcel Mauss defined ‘civilisation’ as a collection of ‘social phenomena that are not attached to a particular social organism; they . . . surpass a national territory; or rather, they develop over periods of time that surpass the history of a single society’.³⁰ This event was one example of the rich discussion on the idea of civilisation that took place in the 1920s – a discussion that reflected liberal internationalists’ belief that a broad vision of civilisation would be an essential support to the creation of an international order of peace.

As participants at this symposium were well aware, however, the idea of civilisation had come to stand for much more than this. During the bitter intellectual conflict that accompanied the First World War, the term had been deeply politicised as one side of the dichotomy between the civilisation of the West and German *Kultur*. Western European intellectuals had portrayed the Entente’s struggle against the Germans and Austrians as what philosopher Henri Bergson called the ‘struggle of civilisation against barbarism’. German scholars had responded in kind, celebrating the richness and depth of German *Kultur* and deriding the hollow and materialist arrogance of Western Europe’s *Zivilisation*.³¹ The anti-German character of French invocations of civilisation was no mere figure of speech. During the war French scholars used the concept to justify efforts to punish Germany by purging German science and scholarship from international networks. This project continued with vigour after the war, as French academic and political leaders worked to make the exclusion of German scholarly life into a permanent feature of the post-war international order.³² To celebrate science and the spirit of civilisation in the 1920s denied the degree to which the universal and politically neutral quality of those concepts had been shattered, even as it used these concepts to continue France’s effort to consolidate its gains over Germany in the international academic realm.³³

This apparently contradictory deployment of universalist language to advance national goals reflected a central claim of France’s interwar bid for the intellectual leadership of post-war Europe: that France’s national particularity was its unique commitment to universal ideas of progress and civilisation. France could solidify its international leadership, the scholar and education ministry official

²⁸ Charles André, ‘L’organisation de la coopération intellectuelle’, Thèse, Université de Rennes. Faculté de Droit, 1938, 13. Quoted in Ghazali, *Contribution*, 32–3.

²⁹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 100.

³⁰ Quoted in Philippe Bénéton, *Histoire de mots : culture et civilisation* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1975), 126.

³¹ Quoted in Ute Frevert, *Eurovisionen. Ansichten guter Europäer im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2003), 103. On European intellectuals’ wartime deployment of ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ see Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 78–105; Wolfgang Mommsen, ed., *Kultur und Krieg: die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler und Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldebourg, 1996).

³² Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, ‘Pas de Locarno pour la science. La coopération scientifique internationale et la politique étrangère des États pendant l’entre-deux-guerres’, *Relations internationales*, 46 (1986); Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen, *Au nom de la patrie : les intellectuels et la première guerre mondiale (1910–1919)* (Paris: Découverte, 1996), 188–203, 255–63.

³³ Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, ‘Probing the Master Narrative of Scientific Internationalism: Nationals and Neutrals in the 1920s’, in Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen and Sven Widmalm, eds., *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

Julien Luchaire argued in 1923, if, 'following an ancient tradition, [she] presents herself as the nation that is best equipped to understand the intellectual effort of all others, to serve as a meeting place for their different products, to harmonise them in accordance with their spirit and thus transform them into the common heritage of humanity'.³⁴ Luchaire went on to pursue this agenda from 1926 as the first director of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, an organisation that the French state funded and hosted precisely so as to underline the central, hegemonic status of Paris and of the French language in transnational intellectual life.³⁵ By then, similar visions of France's leadership role were being advanced by various newly minted parts of the French state, such as the foreign ministry's division devoted to cultural outreach (*Services des oeuvres françaises à l'étranger*), or the arts promotion unit under the ministry of public instruction and fine arts (*Service d'études et d'action artistique à l'étranger*, reorganised under both ministries in 1922 as the *Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques*).³⁶ In this same spirit, France's Ministry of Public Instruction used 'intellectual accords' to target, direct and advance intellectual relations with particular countries, serving French foreign policy interests even while articulating these relationships in apolitical and universalist language.

But from the French point of view, these 'intellectual accords' served a higher goal: to preserve order against chaos. They assisted in the defence of the post-war international order, enshrined in the Paris treaties, against the chaos that treaty revision (and German revanchism) threatened to unleash. They were tools for the creation of a transnational intellectual order, centred on universalising notions of 'intellectual development' and civilisation, that would support France's multi-pronged effort to legitimate and defend the international status quo.³⁷ Like academic exchange itself, these notions were not new. But in the context of interwar political and cultural competition, they served to strengthen the universalist claims of the international system created at the Paris Peace conference and of France's hegemonic role in that system.

Culture, Nation and Revision: Italy's 'Cultural' Accords

If France's interwar intellectual agreements represented a new use of an existing model, the agreements that Rothbarth classified as 'cultural' were actually something new. Indeed, the treaties signed by Mussolini's Italy with Austria and Hungary in February 1935, the first of this new category, differed from France's 'intellectual' accords in several respects. Their novelty consisted of three elements. First, Italy's cultural accords with Austria and Hungary were concluded at a higher diplomatic level than earlier academic exchange agreements. Previous agreements had been signed by no higher authority than an education minister and were generally not subject to ratification. These, by contrast, were signed by Austria and Hungary's education ministers, but by Italy's minister of foreign affairs (who in 1935 was Mussolini himself), and explicitly required ratification.³⁸ In this formal sense, these diplomatic texts can be classified as *treaties* (according to the definition offered by the Treaty Section of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs), in contrast to France's bilateral agreements.³⁹ By concluding

³⁴ Quoted in Laqua, 'Internationalism and Nationalism', 63.

³⁵ Suspicious of the way the institutions of intellectual cooperation supported French interests, Albert Einstein argued (in vain) that the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation should reject the French government's offer to found the IICI in Paris and refused to attend the Committee's subsequent meeting there. Jimena Canales, 'Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment that Failed: Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations', *MLN*, 120, 5 (2005), 1181.

³⁶ Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort*, 181–2; Bernard Piniau, *L'action artistique de la France dans le monde: histoire de l'Association française d'action artistique (AFAA) de 1922 à nos jours* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

³⁷ On the notion of intellectual order, see Laqua, 'Transnational Intellectual Cooperation', 226.

³⁸ Italo-Austrian cultural accord, art. 18; Italo-Hungarian cultural accord, art. 20.

³⁹ The term 'treaty' has no precise definition in international law but has generally been 'reserved for matters of some gravity that require more solemn agreements. Their signatures are usually sealed and they normally require ratification.' France's academic exchange accords of the 1920s generally corresponded instead to the category of 'agreements', a term 'employed especially for [bilateral] instruments of a technical or administrative character, which are signed by the representatives of government departments, but are not subject to ratification'. *United Nations Treaty Collection: Treaty Reference Guide* (New York: United Nations, 1999), 3.

these accords at this level, the Italian state signalled the importance it granted to the field of intellectual and cultural exchange and communicated a high level of diplomatic dignity and respect to its treaty partner.

Second, Italy's agreements were much longer and more comprehensive than their French predecessors, calling for exchange and cooperation in fields far beyond the academic exchanges on which France's agreements focused. The Italo–Austrian accord, signed in Rome on 2 February 1935, called on the parties to maintain a professorship for Italian history at the University of Vienna and create one for Austrian history at the University of Rome (art. 6); promote (and pay for) the exchange of professors of the 'history of the literature and culture' of the opposite country (art. 7); advance language teaching at the secondary school level (art. 8 and 9); promote study trips for students and teachers at all levels, as well as travel by each country's youth organisations (art. 13) and promote exchanges in visual art, music and theatre, including reciprocal organisation of exhibitions, concerts, art shows and operas. Government officials would share the other country's radio broadcasts, facilitate the exchange of state-produced films (art. 14) and promote exchanges between the two countries' libraries, archives and book publishers (art. 15–17). The centrepiece of the treaty was the creation of an Italian Institute, to be located in a grand palace in central Vienna, and an Austrian institute, placed in Rome's Villa Borghese park. These national institutes would oversee the implementation of many of the activities outlined in the treaty, coordinate events and host a permanent exhibition of new books and periodicals.⁴⁰

The Italo–Hungarian treaty, signed two weeks later, on 16 February, by Mussolini and Hungarian Minister of Public Worship and Education Valentin Bálint Hóman, called for a similar list of programmes and institutions, as well as some new ones: the treaty earmarked a post for a Hungarian biologist at the prestigious Stazione zoologica in Naples and a research post for an Italian at the Hungarian Biological Research Institute in Tihany (art. 8). And, in the first such case I am aware of, this treaty promoted tourism. Hungary's government committed to encouraging Hungarians to travel in Italy 'for the purpose of studying monuments and works of art in general', Italian authorities would encourage tourism to Hungary (art. 16) and both national broadcasting services would help by broadcasting 'lectures on the history, literature, art, music, customs, touring possibilities and life' of the opposite country (art. 19).⁴¹

It was these treaties' comprehensive character – their embrace of 'the quasi-totality of intellectual matters common to two nations' – that Rothbarth, in her 1938 book for the IICI, noted in justifying the choice to call these 'cultural'.⁴² But the texts themselves also mobilised this word, using it to refer to the particular identity of the nation as reflected by its distinctive aesthetic and intellectual traditions. The preamble to the Italo–Austrian treaty called for 'a broader and deeper knowledge of the culture [*Kultur/civiltà*] and intellectual life [*Geistesleben/vita spirituale*] of the two peoples and . . . an ever greater development and more active and organic exchange of the traditional spiritual [*geistig/spirituale*] relations between Italy and Austria in every field of the sciences, literature and the arts'.⁴³ The Italo–Hungarian accord likewise referred to 'the cultural ties . . . between the Italian people and the Hungarian people' and called for their development through 'a wider extension of Italian culture in Hungary and of Hungarian culture in Italy'.⁴⁴

This mobilisation of 'culture' was the third novel element of Italy's 1935 accords. For while such language appears unremarkable today, in 1935 this use of the culture concept in the realm of international exchange was new. The word 'culture' was almost totally absent from academic and 'intellectual' agreements up to this date.⁴⁵ Of course, those agreements did not have the comprehensive

⁴⁰ The treaty's official German and Italian texts were published in *Bundesgesetzblatt Österreich*, 39 (1935), 531–8; in French translation in IICI, *Recueil*, 65–74.

⁴¹ *League of Nations Treaty Series (LNTS)* v. 163 (Geneva, 1935), 15; in French translation in IICI, *Recueil*, 144–50.

⁴² IICI, *Recueil*, 5.

⁴³ *Bundesgesetzblatt Österreich*, 39 (1935), 531.

⁴⁴ IICI, *Recueil*, 144.

⁴⁵ The word 'culture' appears once in the Franco–Czechoslovak agreement (1923) but only in the name of Czechoslovakia's Ministry of Public Instruction and National Culture. IICI, *Recueil*, 137.

ambitions of Italy's treaties, but discussions of broader, more comprehensive forms of cross-border cooperation in the 1920s tended also to be grouped under the heading 'intellectual', which was after all the rubric chosen by the League's bodies for 'intellectual cooperation'.⁴⁶ Indeed, 'culture', it is worth recalling, was a developing, contested concept in the 1930s, with not nearly the broad use it enjoys today.⁴⁷ In France, the word was embraced especially by intellectuals on the anti-fascist left, but many of their less radical peers regarded it as a 'neologism' with worrying Germanic roots. Explicit references to 'culture' were in fact strikingly rare in the liberal world of what the historian Akria Iriye has famously described as 'cultural internationalism'.⁴⁸

The Italian's deployment of 'culture' in this context, moreover, marked a significant conceptual difference. Unlike earlier academic cooperation agreements, Italy's treaties with Austria and Hungary did not refer to the unified pursuit of excellence, progress or 'development' in common endeavours that shared a universal standard, like science or scholarship. These agreements instead embraced difference between the two parties – and highlighted it. The contracting parties were presented not only as governments or 'countries' but as nations or people (*Völker/popoli*), treated as having separate and distinct national cultures. The purpose of a 'cultural' agreement between these nations was, then, *not* to promote cooperation in the universal, non-national realm of 'intellectual development'. It was, rather, to bring each of these distinct peoples into contact with the specific culture of the other. Italy's agreements embraced, in a word, not universalism but particularism, not civilisation but culture. Italy's 1935 treaties with Austria and Hungary, in what can only be considered a milestone in the development of modern cultural diplomacy, operationalised the culture concept in an international legal instrument for the first time.

Italy's German Crisis

What can account for the innovations in bilateral treaty making represented by the Italo–Austrian and Italo–Hungarian agreements? Every bilateral agreement is a two-way street, and further archival research in Rome, Budapest and Vienna would be needed to answer this question fully. Indeed, it was apparently Hungarian officials who first proposed to the Italians that the two states complement their political alignment with an educational or intellectual accord.⁴⁹ This proposal extended Hungary's deployment of bilateral agreements in the mid-1930s, including educational exchange agreements with Nazi Germany (an unpublished protocol of October 1934) and Poland (an intellectual accord of 21 October 1934), as part of its own ambitious cultural diplomacy.⁵⁰ But neither Hungary's accord with Poland nor the Hungarian–Austrian agreement of March 1935 makes any reference to 'culture', suggesting that the impetus behind the pronounced 'cultural' and ideological character of Italy's 1935 treaties came from the Italians.⁵¹ Further evidence of the Italians' cultural-diplomatic leadership comes from

⁴⁶ Julien Luchaire, while coordinating France's proposal to establish the IICI, argued in 1925 for the 'unity' of the subject matter of intellectual cooperation as including education, science and culture. Ghazali, *Contribution*, 14.

⁴⁷ On the transformation of the culture concept in interwar Europe, see in particular Bénétou, *Culture et civilisation*, 104–10, 121–4, 128–37; Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort*, 44–6.

⁴⁸ Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism*. On left-wing uses of the concept in France see Pascal Ory, *La belle illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire, 1935–1938* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 17–19; Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort*, 46. French intellectuals' suspicious attitudes toward 'culture' are discussed in Bénétou, *Culture et civilisation*, 76, 101, 130.

⁴⁹ Giorgio Petracchi, 'Un modello di diplomazia culturale: l'Istituto italiano di cultura per l'Ungheria, 1935–1943', *Storia Contemporanea*, 24, 3 (1995), 387.

⁵⁰ Catherine Horel, 'La politique culturelle de la Hongrie dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Une arme au service du révisionnisme?', in Anne Dulphy et al., eds., *Les relations culturelles internationales au XXe siècle. De la diplomatie culturelle à l'acculturation* (Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2010); Zsolt Nagy, *Great Expectations and Interwar Realities: Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy, 1918–1941* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017) and Zsolt Nagy's article in this special issue. On Hungary's 1934 agreements see: Jan-Pieter Barbian, "'Kulturwerte'", 420; Petracchi, 'Modello', 386.

⁵¹ The Austrian–Hungarian and Hungarian–Polish accords are published (in French translation) in IICI, *Recueil*, 59–64 and 151–3.

Spain, where in May 1935 the Italian embassy in Madrid drafted a bilateral cultural agreement with that country. After the Spanish election of February 1936 brought the Popular Front to power, Italy's diplomatic relations with the Spanish state cooled and the text was never signed. But the final draft of this treaty, the nineteen articles of which share the breadth of coverage and focus on national particularity with Italy's agreements with Austria and Hungary, strengthens the impression that the new 'cultural' treaty model originated in Rome.⁵²

The novel aspects of Italy's cultural treaties with Austria and Hungary advanced an Italian strategic agenda in the region and reflected new ideas among fascist leaders about the role culture should play in Italian diplomacy. Like their French counterparts, Italian officials entered into bilateral agreements that reflected their perception of the crises and opportunities of the moment, in particular in Central-Eastern Europe. These looked rather different from Rome in the mid-1930s than they had from Paris in the early 1920s, yet they shared a common element: competition with Germany.

Mussolini had long nurtured a desire to establish Italian leadership over the Danube basin, or at least to block France from achieving hegemony there.⁵³ He cultivated Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss as an ideological ally while presenting himself to Hungary's leaders as that nation's natural partner in the struggle for the revision of the Paris treaties. For the fascists, Italy, like Hungary, was a victim of the post-war treaty system, which by denying Italy's irredentist territorial claims had left Italy with a 'mutilated victory'. In the 1920s Italian professors and officials supported these ambitions through forms of academic diplomacy that were typical for the period. The philosopher and education minister Giovanni Gentile oversaw the foundation of the Italian Inter-University Institute (*Istituto interuniversitario italiano*) in 1923.⁵⁴ This organisation promoted academic exchanges and in 1924 became Italy's point of contact to the world of inter-university activities connected to the League of Nations, serving as the core of Italy's national committee for intellectual cooperation.⁵⁵ Related initiatives focused on Central-Eastern Europe in particular, such as the Italian-Romanian Institute that opened in Rome in May 1923, or, in Hungary, the Società Mattia Corvino.⁵⁶ Named for the legendary fifteenth-century Hungarian king (Matthias Corvinus) who fought back the Ottomans and patronised the arts, this association brought together scholars, artists, statesmen and high society figures for lectures, exhibitions and elite Italo-Hungarian social activities. At events like these, and in the pages of the society's journal *Corvina*, the Italians flattered the Hungarians' vision of their nation as bulwark of cultured, Catholic Europe against the East, while promoting Italy's prestige (and Italian economic influence) by highlighting Hungary's debt to the legacy of ancient Rome, Catholicism and the Renaissance.⁵⁷ But none of this academic and high-cultural outreach was codified in treaties. Indeed, Italy had not signed a single academic or intellectual agreement since the liberal state's 1919 agreement with France.

The Nazis' seizure of power in Germany in 1933 was perceived in Rome as a crisis that demanded changes to this approach. German economic penetration in the Danube basin undermined Italy's fragile expansion there, and the prospect of an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria was a major security threat.⁵⁸ Mussolini responded by negotiating a tripartite alliance with Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös and Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, the Rome Protocols of 18 March 1934. The scheme was nearly destroyed when Austrian Nazis assassinated Mussolini's protégé Dollfuss in July 1934, but the Duce's regional vision remained the same: to promote 'a

⁵² Rubén Domínguez Méndez, *Mussolini y la exportación de la cultura italiana a España* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 2012), 49–50.

⁵³ Luciano Monzali, *Il sogno dell' egemonia. L'Italia, la questione jugoslava e l'Europa centrale (1918–1941)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010), 50–5.

⁵⁴ Santoro, 'The Cultural Penetration of Fascist Italy Abroad and in Eastern Europe', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8, 1 (2003), 39. See also Santoro, *L'Italia*, 57.

⁵⁵ Santoro, *L'Italia*, 62.

⁵⁶ Santoro, 'Cultural Penetration', 40–1.

⁵⁷ Santoro, *L'Italia*, 98–107.

⁵⁸ Santoro, *L'Italia*, 166. See also Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

tripartite front consisting of Italy, Austria, and Hungary, whose governments were based on authoritarian principles that would prevail over the Little Entente and the democratic idea', while reaffirming Rome's role as regional hegemon.⁵⁹ Italy's bilateral cultural agreements with Austria and Hungary, along with the Hungarian–Austrian cultural accord of 4 March 1935, forged a triangle of cultural relations that deepened the three state's geopolitical alliance, thus opposing both French and German designs on the region.

The Nazi takeover in Germany likewise led Italian fascist officials and pro-fascist intellectuals to recalibrate the country's intellectual and cultural outreach, in particular by rethinking the relationship between cultural and ideological propaganda. In the first years of the 1930s, encouraged by Mussolini's recent declaration that fascism was 'universal' and convinced that the depression revealed a broader crisis of the liberal order, Italian intellectuals and regime officials had launched an international campaign presenting Italian fascism as having the answers to modernity's problems, and rallying like-minded movements across Europe.⁶⁰ At events like the international Volta Conference on the idea of Europe, held in Rome in 1932, fascists sought to position Italy as the dynamic place where responses to Europe's multiple crises were being developed, responses rooted in principles opposed to those of the liberal West: hierarchy, nationalism and statist corporatism.⁶¹ But the Italians quickly came to perceive National Socialism as a threat to fascism's status as the most dynamic ideology of the age, and feared that the Germans would eclipse the influence and prestige that the Italians had managed to gain, particularly in Central-Eastern Europe.⁶²

Feeling a new urgency to communicate that Rome, not Berlin, was the guiding light for a broader European revolt against Western liberalism, fascist officials sought new ways to highlight the distinctive features of Italian fascism so as to allow foreigners to distinguish it from its German competitor. The regime's leading intellectual journal, *Critica fascista*, argued that the regime should do this by developing new forms of diplomatic outreach that fused culture and ideology, mobilising the innovations of fascist policy alongside the riches of Italy's traditions in literature and the arts.⁶³ Such a blend should culminate in a distinctive fascist vision of cultural modernity: one able to profile itself against the liberal West, hold aloft the banner of anti-Bolshevism and retain an edge against National Socialism. New state institutions, such as the Directorate General for Propaganda, created in September 1934 under the leadership of the young journalist and diplomat (and Mussolini's son-in-law) Galeazzo Ciano, took up this challenge.⁶⁴

The best way to advance fascist Italy's distinctive message abroad, Ciano argued, was through Italian cultural institutes: permanent institutions, in prominent settings, where prestigious Italian intellectuals, hand-picked by the regime, could host courses, events and exhibitions designed to promote this novel mixture of scholarship, high culture and ideological propaganda. Such an institute, he later explained, was the only institution 'that, due to its character as a high cultural institution, was able to bring about the widest diffusion and affirmation of Italian thought and, at the same time, to rebut communist propaganda, which, because of its doctrinal and scientific form, tends to penetrate more

⁵⁹ H.J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period 1918–1940* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 87.

⁶⁰ Michael Arthur Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928–1936* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972); Beate Scholz, 'Italienischer Faschismus als 'Exportartikel'. Ideologische und organisatorische Ansätze zur Verbreitung des Faschismus im Ausland', PhD, Universität Trier, 2001; Marco Cuzzi, *L'internazionale delle camicie nere. I CAUR 1933–1939* (Milan: Mursia, 2005); Francesca Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito: il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero* (Rome: Carocci, 2010); Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 16–7; Madeleine Herren, 'Fascist Internationalism', in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶¹ *Atti del Convegno 'Volta' 1932–XI della Reale Accademia d'Italia. Tema: L'Europa*. 3 vols. (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1933).

⁶² Santoro, *L'Italia*, 172.

⁶³ Petracchi, 'Modello', 385.

⁶⁴ Benedetta Garzarelli, *Parleremo al mondo intero: la propaganda del fascismo all'estero* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004).

deeply into intellectual circles'.⁶⁵ It was above all in order to promote the creation of such institutes that Ciano threw his political weight behind another new diplomatic initiative: the preparation of bilateral cultural treaties.⁶⁶

Against this background, we can see how the novel features of the 'cultural' treaty embodied the regime's effort to forge a new type of international cultural and ideological outreach in response to the Italian leadership's perception of crisis. Addressing a broad range of cultural fields, rather than only university-level exchanges, these treaties highlighted cultural and ideological affinities between the three nations, forging a Catholic-conservative, nationalist-statist and fascist-authoritarian bloc that marked its opposition to the French-led Little Entente and to Nazi Germany (as well as to left-wing movements across Europe). Granting the signatory states broad powers to control cross-border cultural flows, the treaties proposed fascist authoritarianism as the best means of resolving the problems of transnational cultural exchange in a manner consonant with the regime's model of statist control over international economic life. Above all, these treaties embodied a radically nationalist understanding of culture that Italian fascists claimed as their own. This culture concept, posited in opposition to the vision of civilisation embodied by France's intellectual accords, was reminiscent of the distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* made famous by German intellectuals during the First World War. But Italians could draw on their own, well-established traditions in this regard. A representative view of culture's national character had been articulated in 1930 by Giovanni Gentile, the most important philosopher of Italian fascism. Art, he argued in characteristically grand terms, was *necessarily* national: 'nationality is a historical form of the universality of the subject, in so far as he [the subject] gradually takes to himself and fuses into his own personality certain elements that are common and peculiar to that historical individuality that is formed by all the men who live together a common spiritual life, having thus the same interests and the same will'.⁶⁷ In 1935 it was the Italians, not the Germans, who made such an essentialist concept of culture into the basis of a model of interstate relations.

The Spread of the Cultural Treaty

In the second half of the 1930s bilateral treaty making regarding cultural and intellectual exchange grew rapidly. In July 1937 delegates to the second General Conference of National Commissions of Intellectual Cooperation adopted a resolution underlining the importance of such agreements and calling on the national commissions to 'participate in the preparation of these accords and . . . equally in their implementation'.⁶⁸ IICI director Henri Bonnet suggested in turn that the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation should develop a model agreement (*accord-type*) to facilitate wider use.⁶⁹ These declarations voiced the concern that such agreements, created outside of the multi-lateral framework of the League, needed proper guidance to ensure that they advanced the goals of international intellectual cooperation. But as Rothbarth showed in her 1938 book, a 'model agreement' already existed: the 1935 cultural accord between Italy and Hungary. This, she noted, had already 'served as model for a certain number of subsequent agreements', especially among states that rejected the League's vision of international cooperation.⁷⁰ One that clearly followed this model was the 1936 cultural accord between Hungary and Nazi Germany. Signed in Berlin on 28 May 1936 by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, Reich Education Minister Bernhard Rust and Hungarian Education

⁶⁵ Ciano to Paolo Thaon di Revel, 27 Jan. 1937, quoted in Santoro, 'Cultural Penetration', 52.

⁶⁶ Santoro, *L'Italia*, 209.

⁶⁷ Giovanni Gentile, *Opere complete. 8, La filosofia dell'arte* (Florence: Sansoni, 1950), 282–3. On the concept of culture in fascist Italy see also Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); the overview of the Italian-language scholarship in Alessandra Tarquini, *Storia della cultura fascista* (Bologna: Mulino, 2016); and the classic analysis by Notker Glöcker, 'Italienisch Civiltà, Cultura, Zivilizzazione im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert', in Johann Knobloch, et al., eds., *Kultur und Zivilisation* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1967).

⁶⁸ Quoted in Ghazali, *Contribution*, 120, 121.

⁶⁹ Ghazali, *Contribution*, 123.

⁷⁰ IICI, *Recueil*, 6.

Minister Bálint Hóman, the treaty shares almost all the same provisions as the Italo–Hungarian accord of the previous year, mostly in the same order.⁷¹

Germany's Foreign Ministry had long been aware of the new trend of 'intellectual' treaties – these had been the subject of an internal report filed in 1929 – but no German state had ever signed a bilateral agreement on intellectual, educational or cultural exchange.⁷² The initiative behind Germany's first such agreement came from Hungarian officials, who hoped to upgrade the informal agreement between the two states' education ministries into a treaty on the model of those Hungary had signed with Poland, Italy and Austria.⁷³ In the meantime, German foreign ministry officials were evidently paying attention to the Italians' cultural-diplomatic innovations: a copy of the text of the Italo–Austrian accord can be found in the ministry's papers.⁷⁴ Closely following the nationalist and culturalist language of its predecessors, the German–Hungarian agreement promised to promote 'the mutual exchange of the cultural and spiritual goods of the two nations and thus the mutual understanding of the two peoples'.⁷⁵

The ideological character of the cultural treaty became even clearer in the debate surrounding the German–Italian cultural accord, signed in Rome by Ciano and German ambassador Hans Georg von Mackensen on 23 November 1938.⁷⁶ Italians and Germans presented their 1938 accord as a new model, in hostile opposition to a caricatured version of liberal ideals. 'Cultural accords,' announced Alessandro Pavolini, the head of fascist Italy's Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, in Berlin in 1939, 'are a novelty of modern diplomacy, and it is significant that the richest in content of all cultural accords signed in the history of diplomacy hitherto is indeed the one that has been concluded between the powers of the Axis.'⁷⁷ What was so rich and new about cultural treaties, according to Pavolini, was that they sought to improve relations among nations by highlighting each nation's unique character. He contrasted this approach to that advanced by those 'intellectuals – among whom the Jews are naturally in large numbers – who strive as much as possible to free themselves from any national characteristic and who, in art and science, do not speak the language of their race, but a kind of world-Esperanto'. The cultural treaty between Rome and Berlin promised an alternative model of international cultural relations designed to appeal to conservative nationalists across Europe: 'cultural interaction, for us, does not mean spiritual degeneration'.⁷⁸

The Nazi press likewise presented the treaty as a basis for cooperation among nationalist and anti-Semitic forces elsewhere in Europe. One German daily saw in the Italo–German cultural accord the promise of 'a gradual cultural union among all European nations that have purified themselves of the Jewish element'.⁷⁹ For intellectuals in the Nazi foreign relations establishment, the agreement reflected the theoretical model of what they called 'cultural contact' (*kulturelle Begegnung*). Calling for contact between clearly defined and self-conscious nations, each with its own distinct culture, this model envisioned exchanges through which participants would develop a stronger sense of their own national particularities, while avoiding the dangers of pollution and 'degeneration' that racists associated with cultural mixing.⁸⁰

⁷¹ See Barbian, "Kulturwerte", 419–26; Santoro, *L'Italia*, 213–4. The treaty text is published in: *Reichsgesetzblatt* (1937), II, 132–8 and in *LNTS*, 178 (Geneva, 1937), 445.

⁷² Barbian, "Kulturwerte", 415–6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 422.

⁷⁴ Jens Petersen, 'L'accordo culturale fra l'Italia e la Germania del 23 novembre 1938', in Karl Dietrich Bracher and Leo Valiani, eds., *Fascismo e nazionalsocialismo* (Bologna: Mulino, 1986), 334.

⁷⁵ *Reichsgesetzblatt* (1937), II, 132.

⁷⁶ See Petersen, 'Vorspiel'. The treaty text is published in Alessandro Somma, *I giuristi e l'Asse culturale Roma-Berlino. Economia e politica nel diritto fascista e nazionalsocialista* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005), 376–85.

⁷⁷ Alessandro Pavolini, 'Die Achse und die kulturellen Beziehungen', in *Eröffnungsfeier der Deutsch-Italienischen Studienstiftung: Text der Vorträge* (Berlin, 1939), 6.

⁷⁸ Pavolini, 'Achse', 8–9. See also Martin, *Nazi-Fascist New Order*, 113–6.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Petersen, 'Vorspiel', 55.

⁸⁰ Volkhard Laitenberger, 'Theorie und Praxis der "Kulturellen Begegnung zwischen den Nationen" in der deutschen auswärtigen Kulturpolitik der 30er Jahre', *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*, 31, 2 (1981).

Liberal observers agreed that the ‘cultural treaty’ bore a distinct ideological profile – one they regarded as objectionable and dangerous. Writing in a leading international law journal, one liberal jurist cautioned that ‘certain accords of the type . . . that the Institute’s publication calls “cultural” accords’ were really designed ‘to group states into hostile blocs or to submit the independence of a small country to the subjection of a powerful neighbour’.⁸¹ In 1939 the young Belgian jurist (and future socialist politician and diplomat) Fernand Dehousse went further in his condemnation of the new treaty type, arguing that the League’s list of international intellectual accords should be purged of those “cultural” accords . . . where the political goal is evident’.⁸² While agreements of the type signed by France and Belgium promoted peace through intellectual exchange, ‘cultural’ treaties aimed at the ‘complete interpenetration of cultures’ and thereby threatened ‘the absorption of small states when, as is almost always the case, their partners are great intellectual and material powers’.⁸³ Referring back to Italy’s first treaties in this new genre, he warned that the reciprocity these treaties promised was bogus. The parts of the 1935 Italo–Hungarian treaty that referred to the expansion of Magyar culture in Italy, he wrote, made him break out in ‘a slight smile’: ‘but we take very seriously indeed the expansion of Italian culture in Hungary. The future will tell if this pessimistic impression is well founded.’⁸⁴ Nazi Germany’s use of the cultural treaty, at any rate, seemed to confirm Dehousse’s fears: having signed cultural treaties to solidify its alliances with Italy and Japan in 1938, the Nazis used similar agreements to dominate its satellite states during the war, including treaties with Bulgaria (1940), Romania (1942) and Slovakia (1942).⁸⁵

The ideological significance attributed to the two types of diplomatic agreement was somewhat overwrought. By the late 1930s France, too, had come to embrace elements of the cultural treaty model. The Franco–Austrian ‘*Accord relatif aux relations intellectuelles et artistiques*’ of 2 April 1936 was the first French agreement to include artistic as well as academic exchanges, France’s first to call for the creation of a permanent national institute, the first such agreement signed by a French ambassador and among the first to call for parliamentary ratification. This treaty did not embrace the language of ‘culture’ (the word ‘cultural’ appears exactly once), but it showed that France’s foreign ministry, seizing control of the matter from their colleagues at the ministry of public instruction, felt the need to offer the Austrians an agreement that was no less rich in content or diplomatic significance than the one Austria had signed with Italy.⁸⁶

Indeed, French diplomats paid close attention to the development of the new ‘cultural’ treaty type throughout the 1930s. In November 1937 the French ambassador to Vienna warned his superiors in Paris that the cultural treaty that Austria and Poland had signed in Warsaw late in October, the draft text of which he had seen, was ‘more complete and more detailed’ than France’s 1936 agreement with Austria.⁸⁷ France’s ambassador to Rome wrote a ten-page analysis of the 1938 Italo–German cultural accord and the press discussion of it, which was sent to the Foreign Ministry in Paris and to France’s embassies in London, Berlin, Moscow and Warsaw, as well as to the French delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva.⁸⁸

France’s responsiveness to the new treaty model was especially clear in the case of the Franco–Romanian accord of 31 March 1939.⁸⁹ Franco–Romanian university cooperation was already regulated

⁸¹ J. Mirwart, ‘Les accords intellectuels’, *Revue de droit international et de législation comparée*, 19 (1938), 134.

⁸² Fernand Dehousse, ‘Les accords intellectuels de la Belgique’, in *Mélanges économiques et sociaux: offerts à Emile Witmeur* (Paris: Sirey, 1939), 78.

⁸³ Dehousse, ‘Accords intellectuels’, 77–8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁵ Barbian, “‘Kulturwerte’”, 426–40.

⁸⁶ The treaty is published in IICI, *Recueil*, 53–8, and in *Bundesgesetzblatt Österreich*, 275 (1936), 717.

⁸⁷ French embassy, Vienna, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 16 Nov. 1937, Archives Diplomatiques, Paris (henceforth: AD), 80CPCOM/221.

⁸⁸ ‘Accord culturel italo-allemand’ (Telegram), 30 Nov. 1938, from French embassy, Rome, to Foreign Ministry, Paris, AD, 97CPCOM /358.

⁸⁹ *LNTS*, 199 (Geneva, 1939–1940), 213–8.

by the agreement signed by Romania's education minister and the rector of the University of Paris in 1919. But in the radically different political environment of 1939, the two states' foreign ministries negotiated a new accord that featured key elements of Italy's 'cultural' agreements, in particular as regards the powers of the state. Article 8 gave 'competent bodies' in the two countries the right to 'draw up annually . . . a list of the personalities in the world of letters, science and arts, who will be officially designated to visit the other country', and promised that the programme of any visits would be submitted to the approval of the 'competent organisations' in both countries, while article 10 called for 'exchanges of wireless broadcasts . . . under the supervision of both governments'. The goals behind this choice were hinted at in the treaty preamble. Striking an almost defensive tone, this insisted that 'the intellectual relations between Roumania and France are so profoundly rooted in tradition and so inevitably based on spiritual necessity that they could not really be further developed by the conclusion of an agreement to strengthen them'. Nonetheless, 'the course of events in recent years has, however, made it essential . . . to adapt and define the means they propose to employ to preserve unimpaired the common cultural heritage to which they are equally attached'. The 'events of recent years' evidently referred to Germany and Italy's increasingly dominant position in Romania, which challenged France's cultural and intellectual prestige there.⁹⁰

Cultural treaties, Rothbarth concluded in her 1938 book, rather than academic agreements of the older type, appeared to have 'the greater future ahead of them', and she seems to have been right.⁹¹ Liberal intellectuals could wring their hands, but a model of international cultural and intellectual relations focused on a nationally defined idea of culture and a strong role for state power, rather than on universalist civilisation and laissez-faire liberalism, evidently corresponded better to an age of economic protectionism and cultural nationalism.

Conclusion

The birth of the cultural treaty took place in a context marked by geopolitical competition in Central-Eastern Europe, a battle for hegemony over the region's intellectual and cultural life and a grand ideological struggle between liberalism and fascism, set against the background of unresolved conflicts over the shape of the interwar international system, all in the shadow of a global economic crisis. The cultural treaty was, in other words, very much a child of the 1930s. When fascist Italy was defeated in the Second World War it was reasonable to expect that its particular brand of cultural politics would die with it. But beginning in the late 1950s cultural treaties – negotiated and signed by foreign ministries, cast in national terms and addressing an ever wider set of cultural, educational, academic and scientific fields – became a major tool of Western European diplomacy, directed at post-colonial states in particular. Between 1960 and 1963 France signed thirty new 'cultural accords' with newly independent republics in sub-Saharan Africa; all told, between 1945 and 1969 France entered into some seventy-five bilateral cultural agreements.⁹² The United Kingdom, having adopted only one cultural treaty before the Second World War II, signed some thirty-four bilateral agreements explicitly devoted to 'cultural' matters between 1945 and 1968. Italy's post-war government signed more than forty such agreements during the same period.⁹³ The authoritarian origins of this treaty type were not totally forgotten: a 1971 article in UNESCO's historical journal noted that the Nazis' 'cultural treaties' were, 'from a technical point of view, still models of the genre'.⁹⁴ But the understanding of

⁹⁰ See the list of 'Manifestations italiennes et allemandes en Roumanie en 1938–39' sent by Ambassador Thierry to Foreign Ministry, Paris, with letter of 16 Mar. 1939, AD, 110CPCOM/238, 75–84.

⁹¹ IICI, *Recueil*, 6.

⁹² Guy Feuer, 'Les accords culturels passés par la France avec les nouveaux états d'Afrique noire et Madagascar', *Annuaire français de droit international*, 9, 1 (1963), 890; Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort*, 185.

⁹³ These figures come from my on-going analysis of data on cultural agreements available in the Electronic World Treaty Index. See Paul Poast, Michael James Bommarito and Daniel Martin Katz, 'The Electronic World Treaty Index: Collecting the Population of International Agreements in the 20th Century', SSRN Scholarly Paper, 15 Feb. 2010, available at <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2652760>, last visited 17 Apr. 2020.

⁹⁴ Marlise Dérobert, 'Des "relations culturelles" aux "politiques culturelles"', *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, 13, 4 (1971), 623.

culture as an essentially national feature and the substantial role granted to the state in effecting (and overseeing) bilateral exchanges in this realm – features of these treaties that had emerged in response to the realities of the 1930s – were evidently seen to respond well to the very different circumstances of the 1960s.⁹⁵

The post-war success of the cultural treaty suggests that it would be too simple to conclude that the interwar opposition between the cultural treaty and ‘intellectual accords’ was a conflict between nationalism and internationalism. Rather, as we have seen, France and Italy both used diplomatic agreements in order to steer international academic and cultural exchange in ways they perceived as likely to advance national goals. The more significant difference between the two models lies in the way they gave diplomatic form to distinct visions of what cross-border exchange can and should do, rooted in the conflicting values that intellectuals referred to through appeals to ‘civilisation’ or ‘culture’. This conclusion suggests the value of interpreting the history of treaty-making through the lens of intellectual and cultural history. It also points to the importance, today no less than in the interwar period, of the concepts on which international cultural and intellectual relations are based. The 1930s opposition between a liberal model of intellectual cooperation and what the fascist leader Pavolini called ‘cultural interaction . . . without spiritual degeneration’ was particular to its time.⁹⁶ But the broader set of conflicts it expressed is still with us.

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⁹⁵ Gisèle Sapiro discusses the ‘statist’ character of post-1945 international intellectual cooperation in ‘L’internationalisation’, 128–9.

⁹⁶ Pavolini, ‘Achse’, 8–9.