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Cultural promotion and imperialism: the Dante Alighieri Society and the British Council contesting the Mediterranean in the 1930s

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CHAPTER 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN CULTURAL POLICY

Before concentrating on the Dante Alighieri Society and the British Council in the 1930s, it is necessary to reflect on the broader context wherein these organizations emerged. There is a transnational dimension to their creation that is most noticeable when we analyse all four similar initiatives to promote national culture abroad: the Deutscher Allgemeiner Schulverein/Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland, the Alliance Française, the Dante and the Council. When we trace the origins of these four, what can we say about the development of the idea of promoting national culture beyond the nation-state? Through these organizations we are inevitably also exploring how governments dealt with such cultural promotion. The four organizations can serve as 'litmus tests' to indicate what traits the large states to which this phenomenon appears to have restricted itself - Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain - have in common or are instead very nation-specific. Are there peculiarities in the foreign cultural policy developed by the two young states of Germany and Italy, both created in the nineteenth century, when compared to France and Great Britain? Can we identify particular attitudes to national culture that appear typical for each country? Furthermore, the timing would suggest that foreign cultural policy was taken seriously either as young nations sought recognition among the great powers of Europe or as old imperial powers began to lose military and political power. In this chapter an introduction into the histories of the above-mentioned organizations will be given, so as to show the general (transnational) processes that they are part of.

The Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein (1881) / Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (1908) and the Deutsche Akademie (1925)

Uniting the Volksdeutschen

Following the Napoleonic Wars, a mounting political movement known as Pan-Germanism (or the *Alldeutsche Bewegung*) called for the unification of all German-speaking people, defined as the ethnic group of *Volksdeutschen*. The Austrian Empire was keen to propose a 'Greater Germany' (*Grossdeutschland*) that would include Austria. The most powerful of the German states, the Kingdom of Prussia, was in favour of a 'Lesser Germany' (*Kleindeutschland*) that

would leave out the Austrian Germans. Eventually the Austro-Prussian War and the Franco-Prussian War enabled Prussia to push through a 'Lesser Germany': the German Empire created in 1871. However, within the Austrian Empire – in 1867 transformed into a dual monarchy known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire – the recognition of Hungarian independence reinforced the idea of a German ethnicity. In 1880 a Deutscher Schulverein was established in Vienna, with the intention to help set up German kindergartens, schools and libraries wherever German-speaking communities in the Empire were unable to finance such institutions themselves.¹ Underlying this non-governmental initiative was the desire to prevent the Magyarization introduced by Hungary from affecting the German-speaking communities on the border between the two now united territories. Because this Austrian association received considerable support from Germans as well, a year later it was decided to set up an Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein zur Erhaltung des Deutschtums im Auslande based in Berlin. Its founders, who included the renowned historians Heinrich von Treitschke and Theodor Mommsen, wished to strengthen the effort to maintain the *Deutschtum* of Germans living abroad and to this purpose also supported German kindergartens, schools and libraries.

Wholly in line with the still pervasive ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), language was seen as a vital expression of national identity and the emphasis was on keeping the German community united.² From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, apart from the Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein numerous minor organizations emerged that were concerned with maintaining the ties with Germans abroad. This was connected to the German idea of *Volk* as a community that stretched beyond the state, as opposed to the concept of *citoyen* that the French Revolution had introduced and that tended to see the nation as coinciding with the state. German 'traditionalists' were concerned with the intrinsic value of *Volkstum* and felt compelled to take care of the cultural 'Germanness' of other members of the *Volk* outside their state borders. This aim was made even clearer when in 1908 the name of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein changed to Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland. Nevertheless, before the First World War, representatives of *Bildungsbürgertum* questioned the efficacy of the aggressive Wilhelmine power politics, preferring to develop some form of cultural diplomacy.³ At the time, the German government did little more than sponsor a number of *Auslandsschulen*, schools abroad meant mainly for German-speaking communities, and, as of 1909, a

¹ M. Streitmann, *Der deutsche Schulverein vor dem Hintergrund der österreichischen Innenpolitik* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 1984).

² For more on Herder's ideas regarding language and national identity, see: Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke ed., *A companion to the works of Johann Gottfried Herder* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009).

³ Eckard Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache? Franz Thierfelder, the Deutsche Akademie in Munich and the Promotion of German Language Abroad, 1923-1945' in: *German History*, 22, 2 (2004) 206-228, 206.

number of *Propagandaschulen* that taught exclusively non-Germans. On the eve of the First World War, when the *Propagandaschulen* were closed down, only thirteen of them were operational and all of them were located either in China, Turkey or Persia.⁴

With the Treaty of Versailles new state borders were imposed on Germany, creating several German minorities in the countries surrounding Germany.⁵ With no longer a strong army and economy to rely on, attention for the *Volk* was recognized as an important factor to help bring about a desired revision of the borders, especially those with Poland. It was also thought that spreading knowledge about German culture could help win the sympathy of other European powers. For had the Great War not shown that the country was in part defeated because of the effective propaganda campaign its enemies had led?⁶ Hence the German government began to play a more active role in foreign cultural policy. In 1920 the *Abteilung für Deutschtum im Ausland und kulturelle Angelegenheiten* was formed within the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the *Auswärtiges Amt*. This new department, known simply as the *Kulturabteilung*, was not welcomed by all. The decision to shift the responsibility for *Deutschtumpflege* from the *Staatsministerium des Innern* to the *Auswärtiges Amt* was disputed by the former, leading to the agreement in 1923 that the *Staatsministerium des Innern* would remain involved in those areas that had only recently come to lie outside Germany. This clearly reflected the growing ambition fed by the despised Versailles *Diktat* to one day re-incorporate these 'stray' Germans within the national borders. To not raise the suspicion of neighbouring states, preference was given to financing private organizations such as the *Deutsche Stiftung*, created shortly after the Treaty of Versailles to support German schools and churches in Poland and in former Prussian areas. Government subsidy also went to the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*.⁷ The *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* now worked closely with the *Deutsche Schutzbund für das Grenz- und Ausland Deutschtum* (1919), which was more politically active and focussed on the rights of the German minorities. The emergence after the First World War of relatively new organizations like the *Stiftung* and the *Schutzbund* did not prevent the *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland* from further flourishing. By

⁴ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?' 212. See also Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 129.

⁵ Tammo Luther, *Volkstumpolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1933-1938. Die Auslandsdeutschen im Spannungsfeld zwischen Traditionalisten und Nationalsozialisten* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004) 27-30. Luther quotes the following figures: 1,700,000-1,900,000 Germans in Poland, about 60,000 in Eupen-Malmedy; 35,000-40,000 in Danish Schleswig-Holstein; 250,000 in South-Tirol; 3,3-3,5 million in Czechoslovakia; 550,000-600,000 in Hungary; 570,000 in Romania; about 650,000 in Yugoslavia; 88,000 in Baltic countries; in 1910 87,2 % of the population of Alsace-Lorraine was German.

⁶ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 206-207.

⁷ Luther, *Volkstumpolitik*, 38-39, 41-43.

1932 it had departments in all regions of Germany, 3200 local sections and 5500 school groups.⁸

Another private organization that was granted some government funding was a scientific society: the Deutsche Akademie zur Wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und Pflege des Deutschtums. Whereas the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland was specifically intended for the preservation of *Volksdeutschen*, the Deutsche Akademie became primarily concerned with promoting German language and culture among non-Germans.⁹ Primarily thanks to this shift towards the promotion of German culture among foreigners, the Akademie developed into what was the biggest cultural propaganda institution of the Reich during the Second World War.¹⁰ The founding fathers who started working on this organization in 1923 were all connected to higher education in Munich: a professor of Economics at the Technische Hochschule and four academics from the University of Munich, among whom Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), lecturer in political geography and the founding father of the German *geopolitik* school of thought. Together with the leader of the Bavarian People's Party, they sought a way to counter the French occupation of the Ruhr. Baron von Ritter, a Bavarian diplomat who during his years in Paris was inspired by the example set by the Alliance Française, also helped to promote the idea of creating a German equivalent.¹¹

At the official launch of the Deutsche Akademie in 1925, in the opening address mention was made of German cultural 'munition' that armies would use throughout the world and of making German language available to all world citizens.¹² In actual fact, the promotion of German as an international language was initially given little priority by the Akademie, probably because its founders had in mind that together with English, German was until the First World War the leading language in sciences. Furthermore, because of the territorial grievances and the German minorities resulting from the Treaty of Versailles, the Akademie paid far more attention to the *Auslandsdeutschen* than to the expansion of German culture abroad. Besides a scientific department assigned with research on the origins of place-names and settlements, the main activities were the sending of German professors to lecture abroad, the

⁸ Ibidem, 43-47.

⁹ See the illustrative description in the lemma 'Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland' in *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, alas without reference, "die Erhaltung des Einheitsgefühls in der ganzen Nation, gegründet auf die Gemeinschaft der deutsche Muttersprache und deutsche Bildung, Schutz der Muttersprache und Bildung, wo immer sie gefährdet erscheint". See: *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, 16, Vol. Unk-Zz (Wiesbaden 1957 – new revised edition) p. 99.

¹⁰ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 207.

¹¹ Ibidem, 208; Michels, *Von der Deutschen Akademie zum Goethe-Institut*, 11.

¹² Steffen R. Kathe, *Kulturpolitik um jeden Preis. Die Geschichte des Goethe-Instituts von 1951 bis 1990* (Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2005) 66-67.

dissemination of German literature and an improved care for foreign students in Germany.¹³

As a private organization concerned with supporting German minorities abroad, the Deutsche Akademie had a number of competitors, such as the aforementioned Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland and the Deutscher Schutzbund. But also in the pioneer field of German foreign cultural policy, it faced a rival. In the same year that saw the launch of the Deutsche Akademie, in Heidelberg the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) was founded. The Austauschdienst was initially set up as a student exchange programme with the United States of America but soon reciprocal agreements with other countries were made as well. This initiative received government support on the grounds that it served to increase German international prestige. By soon moving to Berlin the Austauschdienst had the advantage of being better situated to lobby for funding than other such organizations.¹⁴ The Akademie may well not have managed to distinguish itself, were it not for Franz Thierfelder (1896-1963). Through his efforts as Secretary General from 1926 to 1937 the Akademie changed course, chose to focus on non-Germans and won the support of the Auswärtiges Amt.¹⁵ Thierfelder saw great potential in the international expansion of the German language, especially in the Balkans. He was probably aware of the success French foreign cultural policy had obtained by being based on the diffusion of the French language. He initiated an investigation into the international potential of the German language and wrote articles on the matter. In his view, the use of French in Europe was declining and the political situation after Versailles pointed towards the ever more widespread use of German.

Thierfelder and German language and culture for non-Germans

Thierfelder, like many German intellectuals, sustained the 'Conservative Revolution' that had been fed by the war experience, which in part explains his optimism about the future of the German language. This movement embraced a *völkisch* concept of the nation and intended to realize an organic community as opposed to the individualism of liberalism. Hence Thierfelder could hope for a post-liberal Europe, wherein especially the many new states emerging from the

¹³ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 209-210; Luther, *Volkstumspolitik*, 55-56.

¹⁴ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 210-211; Volkard Laitenberger, *Akademischer Austausch und auswärtige Kulturpolitik* (Frankfurt: Musterschmidt, 1976); Peter Alter, Manfred Heinemann and Friedrich W. Hellmann ed., *Spuren in die Zukunft: Der Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst 1925-1945* (Bonn: Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst, 2000).

¹⁵ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 212-217.

former Tsarist and Austrian empires would seek a common ground in the German language rather than in the language of Anglo-Saxon parliamentarism or of French civilization.¹⁶ The French *civilisation* here referred to was taken to be a superficial layer of culture, based on the Enlightenment ideal of the *citoyen*, as opposed to German *Kultur* which since the Romantic period was thought to be an inward process of self-education and elevation.¹⁷ What also strengthened Thierfelder's arguments in favour of an ambitious language policy abroad was the Neo-Humboldtianer trend in Germanic linguistics, noticeable in the 1920s, which held language to be crucial in shaping the way people think. At the same time, a more practical approach to language teaching in Germany - aimed at being able to speak rather than at learning about the grammar - opened greater possibilities.¹⁸

Having gained the support of the Auswärtiges Amt for his line of thinking, at an annual meeting in October 1929 Thierfelder was able to convince the governing bodies of the Akademie to set aside the activities aimed at *Auslandsdeutschen* and to focus instead on the promotion of the German language abroad.¹⁹ Language schools for non-Germans were subsequently opened, starting with Sofia and Split. In the absence of any other German institution for this purpose, these schools also served as small cultural centres. Furthermore, the Akademie took on the development of language teaching material and the organization of training courses in Munich for foreign teachers of German. In 1932, on the occasion of the centenary of Goethe's death, this latter branch of activities was assigned to a newly created Goethe Institute. This Institute continued to function as part of the Akademie and by the outbreak of the Second World War was able to draw to its trainings some six- to eight-hundred foreign teachers of German per year.²⁰ By 1941 the Akademie had established one-hundred-and-forty lectureships of German at universities abroad.²¹

¹⁶ Ibidem, 213-214.

¹⁷ Pim den Boer, 'Vergelijkende begripsgeschiedenis' in: idem ed., *Beschaving. Een geschiedenis van de begrippen hoofsheid, heusheid, beschaving en cultuur* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001) 15-78, 60-65; Emily A. Vogt, 'Civilisation and Kultur: Keywords in the history of French and German Citizenship' in: *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1996) 125-145; John Rundell and Stephen Mennell, 'Introduction: Civilization, culture and the human self-image' in: Rendell and Mennell ed., *Classical Readings in Culture and Civilization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 1-38. The German sociologist Norbert Elias was the first to investigate this historic juxtaposition between German *Kultur* and French *civilisation*, in *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (The Civilizing Process), first published in 1939.

¹⁸ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 216.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 213-214.

²⁰ Ibidem, 218-219 and 223; Kathe, *Kulturpolitik um jeden Preis*, 66-67.

²¹ Kathe, *Kulturpolitik um jeden Preis*, 72-73.

Accommodating to Hitler's regime

The foreign policy makers recognized the value of this new orientation. This was shown by the presence of Julius Curtius, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Akademie's annual congress in 1930 and by the steadily growing annual subsidy that the Akademie received from 1931 onwards, beginning with 8,000 Reichsmark and reaching 65,000 Reichsmark in the mid-1930s, which was still only 25% of a budget that depended mainly on donations.²² Such government funding was so vital to the organization that after Hitler's rise to power good relations with the National Socialist officials were carefully cultivated. Although the Nazis conceived of *Volkstum* as a matter of race, not language, what helped make the cooperation mutually acceptable was that the Akademie had always been conservatively nationalist: members of trade unions or social democrats were kept out.²³ In order to secure its position in the regime, the Akademie purged its own top in accordance with the *Führerprinzip* and made Haushofer its president. Even content-wise some accommodations were reached. The language courses organized by the Goethe-Institute began to include subjects such as racial hygiene.²⁴

After a one-time grant from Joseph Goebbels' Propagandaministerium in 1934, the Akademie's precarious funding remained dependent on the contribution given by the Auswärtiges Amt.²⁵ Thierfelder, who was not a Nazi Party member, intended to keep cultural policy separate from political propaganda. This would better serve his ulterior mission to convince foreigners that Germany's leading role in Europe was based on its culture. He could count on approval of the Auswärtiges Amt and support from many within the Akademie. Nevertheless, by the end of 1937, Haushofer's concerns that Thierfelder stood in the way of closer ties with the Nazi government resulted in his removal from the organization.²⁶ Haushofer's geopolitics, with its organic view of the state as justification for the conquest of more *Lebensraum* for Germany, had considerable influence on Hitler and his following. This made it easier for Haushofer to maintain the goodwill of the regime but still his own objections to the politicization of the Akademie created tensions that forced him to step down as president by the end of 1937.²⁷ In the meantime growing

²² Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 218.

²³ Ibidem, 219.

²⁴ Kathe, *Kulturpolitik um jeden Preis*, 68-69.

²⁵ For more about the intergovernmental row between Joseph Goebbels and the Auswärtiges Amt regarding the control over foreign cultural policy, see: Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 220 and 222.

²⁶ Ibidem, 218 and 221-222.

²⁷ See Perry Wijnand Pierik, *Karl Haushofer en het Nationaal-Socialisme. Tijd, werk en invloed* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, 2006) 78. Haushofer became honorary member and representative of Rudolf Hess at the Akademie. As president he was succeeded by the geologist and national-socialist Leopold Kölbl.

attention was given to international cultural propaganda, as manifested in Hitler's *Kulturrede* at the Nuremberg party rally in September 1937, by the appointment of cultural attachés at German embassies and by a number of cultural agreements reached with other countries. This was explained as being a response to a greater international competition in the cultural field.²⁸ Still, because of the shortage of foreign currency, this did not noticeably increase the Akademie's subsidy, whilst by now it ran forty-five language schools and employed fifty-seven teachers for the teaching of about seven thousand pupils and teachers in training.²⁹

Under the pressure of Nazi party politics, the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland became a Volksbund but was still granted some degree of independence, so as not to put on guard foreign governments.³⁰ An unequivocal sign of the changing political significance of foreign cultural propaganda was the creation in 1937 of the Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, which worked closely with the SS. The Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle was intended to centralize the control over almost all organizations dealing with *Volkstum*. Both the Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland and the Deutsche Akademie, though officially independent, now fell under the authority of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle.³¹ Between 1939 and 1940, the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle was in charge of moving *Volksdeutschen* from bordering parts of Poland 'back' within the Reich. As for the cultural promotion among non-Germans, this remained the task of the Akademie, although it became restricted to those areas of Europe that were not occupied, annexed or populated by races deemed by Nazis to be unworthy of German culture. As the Second World War broke out, cultural foreign propaganda was seen as so useful contribution to the war effort that the subsidy for the Akademie soared in 1940 to one million Reichsmark.³²

Altogether, in Germany the promotion of national culture abroad can be said to have gone through a complex development. Starting at the turn of the century with several private initiatives to maintain the cultural unity of the German *Volk* that were in part financed by the government, after the First World War these organizations grew in number and in purpose, as they became a political instrument in the power game to obtain a revision of the Versailles Treaty borders and a tool to influence foreigners as well. Then the National-Socialist quest to provide a greater *Lebensraum* for the German *Volk*, finally to be

²⁸ Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 221, 223-224 and 227.

²⁹ Ibidem, 223.

³⁰ Luther, *Volkstumpolitik*, 65-76.

³¹ The historian Lumans gives the example of a the Deutsche Akademie being prevented from publishing a calendar, entitled *Aufbau des Reiches*, because the VDA had already produced one: *Deutsche in aller Welt*. See: Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 64.

³² Michels, 'Deutsch als Weltsprache?', 224-225.

united under one 'Great German Empire', gradually took over the *Volkstumpolitik*.³³ By the time the Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle emerged, the traditionalist intrinsic value attached to *Volkstum* was set aside for a more opportunistic and political use in the opportunistic foreign policy of the National-Socialist government.³⁴ *Volkstum* together with the national culture became part of an international power-struggle between states.

The Alliance Française (1883)

Mission civilisatrice and France's new orientation after 1870

According to the statutes of the Association for the Promotion of the French Language (Association pour la Propagation de la Langue Française), otherwise known as the Alliance Française, the aim of the organization was to spread the French language outside France, principally in the colonies and in the countries under its protectorate.³⁵ For this purpose it would set up and subsidize French schools abroad, offer training for teachers, award travel grants and prizes to the best pupils and encourage the production of publications that could serve the Alliance's purpose. Right from the start it was not only the colonies and the protectorates that were targeted, but the world at large. Besides offering education, the Alliance undertook the promotion of French literature by giving books to foreign libraries and organized theatre productions and conferences abroad.³⁶

Where did this desire to promote the French language originate from? Since the Enlightenment and the ensuing French Revolution, France had seen

³³ Luther, *Volkstumpolitik*, 149-157, 169.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 158-159.

³⁵ Until recently, a serious obstacle for historians was the disappearance of the Alliance's archive. This was stolen during the Second World War by the occupying German forces, then partially retrieved in Moscow and eventually repatriated to France, albeit far from complete. François Chaubet, author of the most recent study of the Alliance's history, admits this has been meagre archival material to work with. He had to rely on other sources: documents of the Quai d'Orsay, private and public archives, periodicals and dailies, and the rich monthly *Bulletin* of the Alliance. (Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 15-16) A commemorative publication was produced for the organization's centenary in 1983 (Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*). Other studies are very broad in scope or focus on French cultural action in a particular region of the world, for example: Albert Salon, *L'Action culturelle de la France dans le monde* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Paris I, 1981); Gilles Mathieu, *Une ambition sud-américaine, politique culturelle de la France (1918-1939)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991); Francis Berguin, *Le fonctionnaire expatrié: une construction méconnue. L'action culturelle extérieure de la France et ses personnels* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); Denis Rolland, *La crise du modèle français. Marianne et l'Amérique Latine. Culture, politique et identité* (Rennes: P.U.R., 2000); Alain Dubosclard, *L'action culturelle de la France aux Etats-Unis de la première guerre mondiale à la fin des années 1960* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Paris I, 2002).

³⁶ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 38 and 42.

for itself a *mission civilisatrice* aimed at the diffusion of its Enlightenment principles as formulated in the *Droits de l'homme et du citoyen*.³⁷ French was seen as a language that was particularly adept for the expression of abstract ideas and universal concepts. But in the second half of the nineteenth century the country was to witness a rise in status of the German language, which partly due to the advances in industry and science was increasingly regarded as the scientific language *par excellence*. The founding of the Alliance Française in July 1883 should be seen in the context of the new impulse given to French culture after the military defeat in the war against Prussia in 1870. Having suffered the humiliation of seeing Paris besieged and of losing important territories such as Alsace and parts of Lorraine to the victors, French society embarked on a general quest for moral and intellectual reform. Military loss would be compensated by a revitalized intellectual and artistic supremacy to be made manifest across the world.³⁸

A crucial moment for the creation of the Alliance came when France was able to solidify a part of its colonial control. The Al-Marsa Convention (9 June 1883) formally recognized the French protectorate in Tunisia, giving way to a full-fledged French educational policy in the country to counteract the influence of the large Italian presence there. The great pioneers in the spreading of the French language had been the various French Roman-Catholic orders and congregations that had set up schools abroad. Since 1822, when L'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi was founded in Lyons, the French Catholics were the main force behind faraway missionary enterprises. L'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi was a French association connected to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, founded in 1622 to spread Catholicism across the globe and to deal with ecclesiastical matters in non-Catholic countries. It has been estimated that there were about fifty thousand French missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, providing an extensive network and at a relatively low cost.³⁹ Even if official French cultural policy in the homeland was outspokenly secular, the French government was eager to accept and encourage this missionary activity abroad.⁴⁰ An impressive network of Catholic schools had been realized under Cardinal Lavignerie, made apostolic administrator in Tunisia by Pope Leo XIII in June 1881. Remarkably, these schools were meant to counter the spread of the Italian language that was brought about by the

³⁷ Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 29; Jacques Lafon, 'Langue et pouvoir: aux origines de l'exception française', *Revue Historique* 292 (1995) 393-419.

³⁸ An original approach to the issue of national regeneration after 1870 is presented by Bertrand Taithe in *Defeated Flesh: Medicine, Welfare, and Warfare in the Making of Modern France* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

³⁹ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 24-25, 30-34, 45. The well-organised Alliance israélite universelle, founded in 1860, had also established a number of schools. See: *Ibidem*, 30 and 32. See also: Aron Rodrigue, *De l'instruction à l'émancipation. Les enseignants de l'Alliance israélite universelle et les Juifs d'Orient 1860-1939* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1989); André Chouraqui, *L'Alliance israélite universelle et la renaissance juive contemporaine (1860-1960)* (Paris 1965).

existing Catholic schools in the Middle East, often run by Italian members of the Franciscan order. Paul Cambon, Plenipotentiary Minister in Tunisia, like the other French civil servants in Tunisia involved in the founding of the Alliance Française, saw this private organization as an ideal instrument to accelerate the growth of cultural influence in the protectorate. Rather like the missionaries, the Alliance could operate there where French government policy as well as budget did not yet provide the means to do so. Out of pragmatism the Alliance did not specify in its statutes what kind of French schools abroad it would support, allowing the inclusion of schools run by religious orders and congregations.

At the origins of the Alliance there was also a group less directly connected to French colonialism: the geographical societies. In France, these had been growing in popularity from the 1860s onwards and can be regarded as the breeding ground for the Alliance. Its members showed a keen interest for the colonial expansion and its activities brought together political ambitions as well as financial motives for finding new markets. Historians too were well represented among the active members.⁴¹ There appeared to be some possible connection between the Alliance Française and the Freemasonry. Although the Alliance – which was avowedly apolitical – managed in its governing bodies to bring together figures with different political or ideological backgrounds, from Republicans to members of the clergy, there were occasional accusations of the organization being anticlerical or even Freemason. Furthermore, there is evidence of Pierre Foncin – one of the founding fathers of the Alliance besides founder of the Société de Géographie Commerciale de Bordeaux (1874) – having been a Freemason.⁴² A lesser-known society that showed a personal overlap with the Alliance's membership was the Cercle Saint-Simon.⁴³

As the first Secretary General of the Alliance, Foncin, poignantly remarked in one of his speeches: "Tout client de la langue française est un client naturel des produits français."⁴⁴ The commercial sector that had the most obvious interest in the international promotion of French language and culture was the publishing business. German was surpassing French as scientific lingua franca and the export of French books was in noticeable decline. It is therefore not surprising that the Alliance would receive significant support from major French publishing houses, such as Delagrave, Delalain and Hachette. In 1884, Auguste Armand Colin, the most important publisher of educational books, became the President of the Central Propaganda Committee of the Alliance. Until his death in 1900 he remained closely involved in the affairs of the Alliance. Publishing houses donated books for distribution in libraries abroad, but also provided one sixth of the total capital that the Alliance needed when in

⁴¹ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 26-29 and 54-55.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 41 (footnote 3).

⁴³ Pim den Boer, 'Historische tijdschriften in Frankrijk (1876-1914)' in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 99 (1986) 530-546, 539.

⁴⁴ Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 20. See also 50-51.

early 1914 it bought a new central office at 101 Boulevard Raspail in Paris.⁴⁵ It proved harder to recruit members from other areas of commerce or from industry, as is illustrated by the fact that the Alliance failed to win support in financial cities such as Le Havre, Rouen or Lyons. Possibly these interest groups saw more usefulness in the French Chambers of Commerce that were in this same period being set up abroad and with which the Alliance would soon co-operate.⁴⁶

One of the great strengths of the Alliance was that it was able to attract and unite different parts of the French elite, though mainly those belonging to the higher ranks of civil service and to universities. That public authorities supported the activity of this private association was clear from the rapidity with which it was recognized as legal entity and granted the status of *association d'utilité publique*.⁴⁷ A senior diplomat, Charles Joseph Tissot, was made the first president and his successors, when they did not come from the diplomatic corps, were either from the army or the French Ministry of Education (Ministère de l'Instruction Publique).⁴⁸ Pierre Foncin, who started as Secretary General (1883-1897) and later became President (1899-1914), is illustrative in this respect. He was made professor of history in 1876. Subsequently he joined the civil service as inspector general of education (1882-1911), which enabled him to act as liaison between the Alliance and the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique. Through his pedagogical publications he was among the great educators of French youth.⁴⁹ The honorary presidents and honorary members were generally chosen out of the military, academic, religious or political top. One of the two central bodies of the organization, the Conseil d'Administration, had fifty members, including several members of parliament and ministers.⁵⁰ The other body was the Bureau du Conseil d'administration, which consisted of about fifteen members.

In the first years of its existence the Alliance witnessed an immediate growth in membership, reaching more than eleven thousand by the end of 1886. A Comité Général de Propagande with seven members was in charge of organising the establishment of local Committees, in France and abroad. For the setting up of the Committees abroad the cooperation of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères proved to be essential. A ministerial circular letter of 26 May 1884 encouraged such help by authorising all French diplomats to

⁴⁵ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 35-36, 42 and 57.

⁴⁶ Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 50-51. Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 29, 57 and 120.

⁴⁷ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 38 and 62.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 39 and 58.

⁴⁹ Numa Broc, 'Patriotisme, regionalisme et géographie: Pierre Foncin (1841-1910)' in: *L'information historique* 38 (1976) 130-132.

⁵⁰ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 40 and 59.

officially support the Alliance.⁵¹ The foreign Committees were formally independent from Paris, and although receiving subsidies from the Paris headquarters, they generated most of their own income through membership and donations.⁵² In terms of geographical spread, the focus was initially on the old spheres of influence in the Ottoman Empire and in the Middle East.⁵³ A slow but steady spread took place in South America, until 1914 mainly in Chile. The United States of America and Canada, both attractive expansion territories, showed similar results.⁵⁴ On the European continent, the Alliance was active in Belgium, Spain, Germany, Bohemia, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, England and Russia. In the French colonies and protectorates, the eagerness to offer education to the local population nevertheless did not lead to any expansion. The Alliance failed to grow in Algeria and in Indochina.⁵⁵ Whether a Committee abroad could be created and maintained depended on the qualities of the teachers and the members in the respective French colony. The decentralized structure of the Alliance permitted flexibility in the choice of approach and forms of action, and hence a great adaptability to the local realities.

As we have already seen in the development of foreign cultural policy in Germany, the organizations active in this field and the government intervention were in part triggered by the growing international competition. It has been suggested that a particular characteristic of the Alliance was that from the start it was aimed at foreigners as well, whereas the German and the Italian organizations were principally meant for their own national immigrants abroad.⁵⁶ It is clear that France with its longer history as a centralized state 'turning peasants into Frenchmen', could focus more on its universal ambitions than two new-born countries such as Germany and Italy, where 'Germans' and 'Italians' were in fact still in the make. Nevertheless, these countries were also trying to influence foreign opinion. For example, in Piedmont before the Italian unification, the priest, philosopher and politician Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852) envisaged a global civilizing mission for Italy. Gioberti argued that Italy had lead the world morally and politically in Roman and in mediaeval times, and should do so again as a federal union of states presided by the pope. The model

⁵¹ Ibidem, 38-42 and 44. The first local Committees abroad emerged in Algiers, Tunis, Saint-Louis of Senegal, Barcelona and Madrid (1884), followed by Copenhagen, Cairo and Alexandria (1885); Prague, Ile de Maurice, Thessaloniki and Syra (Cyclades) (1886); Constantinople and Smyrna (1888).

⁵² Between 1883 and 1917 the Alliance's Committees abroad paid 70% (5 million francs) of their total expenses (7,4 million francs) from their own means. [Ibidem, 73-74].

⁵³ Ibidem, 102. By 1914 there were twelve Committees in the Ottoman Empire and around forty subsidized schools were run by the Alliance in the Middle East.

⁵⁴ The main centres in the US were in New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia and Cincinnati; in Canada this was Montréal (ibidem, 104-106).

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 110.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 79, 123-126, 252 and 269.

he proposed was named neo-Guelfism.⁵⁷ Another example of Italian expansionist cultural ambitions is the strong competition between France and Italy to have cultural influence on local elites in the Mediterranean area (for example, in Thessaloniki, Smyrna and Bucharest) as well as in South-American cities.⁵⁸ But increasingly it was Germany that challenged France's cultural expansion. From around 1870 to 1914, a period that has been described as "la crise allemande de la pensée française", French society observed with concern the German university system, the advancing use of the German language in the world, and the success of the country's innovative commercial methods.⁵⁹ The latter also applied to the more efficient organization of German publishing. In North America there appeared to be more German professors and German book shops, just as their cultural presence in South America was being more felt. Furthermore, in the field of archaeology – especially in the Ottoman Empire – the Germans superseded the French.⁶⁰

The Ministère des Affaires Étrangères and the impulse of the Great War

As a private association, the Alliance trod the ground for the more official cultural foreign policy that the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères would gradually develop. Starting from 1908, with support of different French universities a number of so called Instituts Français were created in important capitals of Europe.⁶¹ In 1910 a governmental Bureau des Écoles et des Oeuvres Françaises à l'Étranger was created, but because of its very limited budget the Bureau had to rely on the cooperation with the Alliance and the missionary orders and congregations. In the meantime at the new central office on the boulevard Raspail the activities of the Alliance continued to expand, most importantly in the field of university exchanges. In Paris at the turn of the century the Alliance began offering summer courses in French language for foreign teachers and students. Similar courses were soon taking place in fifteen other centres outside Paris. Triggered by the competition with German

⁵⁷ Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato civile e morale degli italiani* (Brussels Meline: Cans & Compagnia, 1842-43).

⁵⁸ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 125 and 269-270.

⁵⁹ Claude Digeon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1940* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959). Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 126.

⁶⁰ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 104-106 and 127-128.

⁶¹ Notably in Florence (1908), Madrid (1909), Saint Petersburg (1911) and London (1913). Thereafter these Instituts were considered instrumental in the French policy aimed at containment of German cultural influence in the new Eastern European nation-states. By the mid-1930s, just over a quarter of the existing Instituts français were in Central and Eastern Europe (Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, Bucharest, Sofia, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade). See: Annie Guénard, 'Les Instituts français en Europe centrale dans les années 30' in: *Paris « capitale culturelle » de l'Europe centrale? Les échanges intellectuels entre la France et les pays de l'Europe médiane 1918-1939* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1997).

universities, from 1898 onwards the Alliance was also engaged in attracting American students with help from the local Committee of Chicago and the university there. The French government followed the trend by introducing an Office national des universités et écoles françaises (1910).⁶²

The outbreak of the First World War gave a further impulse to French cultural diplomacy. To help in the war effort, the Alliance produced a stream of propagandistic pamphlets, books and other print matter. Its patriotic *Bulletin de guerre* was translated into ten languages and in 1917-1918 more than 210,000 copies were distributed.⁶³ At Affaires Étrangères a newly devised Maison de la Presse was also promoting French culture abroad.⁶⁴ However, throughout the war the German cultural propaganda was perceived as being more effective. After the war, other external factors put pressure on the Quai d'Orsay to rethink its strategy. The Paris Treaties heralded an 'open diplomacy'; public opinion no longer accepted that secret dealings in international affairs should put countries at risk of landing in war and wanted to be informed of what agreements were made between states. The call for more information that came from a broader social participation in the democratic process and a growing role assigned to media went hand in hand with greater activity in international cultural politics. Complying with the American request, the negotiations in Paris were made in English as well as French, until then the main diplomatic language.⁶⁵ A new Service des Oeuvres Françaises à l'Étranger (January 1920) intensified government action in the field of cultural promotion abroad. Its tasks included the maintenance of schools and French sections at universities abroad, the creation of academic chairs, the promotion of literature or theatre performances, image-building, tourism, sports and giving subsidies to organizations such as the Alliance.⁶⁶

Even if Affaires Étrangères continued to encourage the creation of new Instituts français in foreign cities, these institutes do not appear to have been a threat to the position of the Alliance.⁶⁷ The Ministère des Affaires Étrangères

⁶² Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 34-35, 62, 74-78, 96-99.

⁶³ Ibidem, 139-148; Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 82.

⁶⁴ Georges Dethan, 'Le Quai D'Orsay de 1914 à 1939' in: *Opinion publique et politique extérieure*, II, 1915-1940 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1984) 157-163, 157 and 161.

⁶⁵ Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 153, 160-161; Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 87.

⁶⁶ This Service des oeuvres français à l'étranger had a budget of 17 million francs in 1920 and this gradually rose to 38 million francs in 1933. Thereafter, as was the case for the entire ministry, it had to cope with a constant shortage of funds (Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 162-164 and 177). See also: Antoine Marès, 'Puissance et présence culturelle de la France. L'exemple du Service des Œuvres françaises à l'Étranger dans les années trente' in: *Relations internationales* 33 (1983) 65-80.

⁶⁷ Bruézière hints at a possible reduced visibility of the Alliance because of the growing number of Instituts français, and at the internal competition coming from the Mission laïque, the Comité des Amitiés françaises, and the Alliance israélite universelle (Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 122-123). However, in 1920 the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères gave the central office of the Alliance in Paris a subsidy of 500 francs, 400 hundred francs in 1921 and 1922 and 250 francs in 1923. In addition, in 1922 the Services

still gave subsidies to the Alliance, and though the sum of the subsidy decreased the government involvement augmented. In former strongholds such as Turkey the Alliance was losing ground but in the new countries of Central and Eastern Europe - including the members of the Little Entente that France supported - the Alliance provided a valuable network for the government organizations.⁶⁸ The Alliance also remained well represented in Great Britain, The Netherlands and North America, as well as in the Scandinavian countries.⁶⁹

Decline and revival of the Alliance

In the inter-war period French writers became the most visible missionaries of French cultural diplomacy, reflecting a still strong confidence in French literary prestige. Various initiatives to improve the export position of French literature received financial support from the government. In these years university scholars too were instrumental; they were frequently asked by both the Office national des universités et des écoles françaises and the Alliance to give lectures abroad, especially in Central Europe and Latin America. Although they were not numerous in the Council of the Alliance, these academics were increasingly important motors and mediators for the foreign committees of the Alliance, rather like French diplomats had often been. Since they were frequently also connected to an Institut français or lectured at the local university, they ensured that the Alliance continued to be complementary to the French government initiatives. It is worth noting that the audience of the Alliance lectures abroad was mainly female: the emancipation of women in the 1920s led to their massive attendance, especially in Latin America.⁷⁰

At the beginning of the 1930s, the Alliance showed signs of decline. One of these signs was the aging of its membership, which revealed that it had failed to recruit a younger generation. Some components of the Alliance suffered from the worldwide economic malaise as well. Starting from October 1919, French language and culture courses for foreigners were given by the Alliance in Paris at the so-called *École Pratique de la langue française*. Whereas in 1930 these courses had attracted 4800 students, from then on the financial crisis significantly reduced the number of registrations.⁷¹ What made matters

des Oeuvres françaises gave different Committees abroad a total of 246 francs (Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 176).

⁶⁸ The Alliance had no less than seventy local Committees in Czechoslovakia and notable success in Poland and Bulgaria (13 and 10 committees respectively in 1931) [Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 181, 212 and 233; Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 105-106].

⁶⁹ Great Britain had 39 committees in 1931, The Netherlands 19 committees in the same year, and North America had 197 committees in 1922 (Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 228-229, and 233).

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 165-171, 187-188, 191-192, 196-202, 206 and 216.

⁷¹ Ibidem, 210 and 262; Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 91-93 and 117-119.

worse was that Italian and German cultural organizations made sure to exploit the potential of new mass media, whereas the Alliance went no further than sporadic use of radio. Italian and German books were massively distributed on the international market. In 1934 the creation of the British Council meant competition from that corner of Europe too. Yet the greatest threat to France's cultural sphere of influence came from the influence of American film since the First World War and the subsequent rise of American English. Philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation (1913) and the Carnegie Foundation (1905) offered study grants, subsidized lectures and exchange programmes, and recruited scientists. This rivalry of course also affected government policy. Hence the new and first predominantly socialist government of 1936-1937 reformed its instruments for foreign cultural diplomacy, introducing a Commission permanente de l'enseignement français à l'étranger, with joint forces from both the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale and the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, and a Commission interministérielle d'action et d'information françaises à l'étranger. With these measures and a raise in budget, there was indeed a resurgence of activity ranging from art exhibitions to new institutes and the distribution of films.⁷²

As of 1937, a new impulse was given to the Alliance by the presidency of Georges Duhamel (1884-1966), an enterprising man, an internationally renowned novelist and a member of the Académie française. The first sign of renewal was the rising number of students who came to the École Pratique: from 2606 in 1934 to 4200 in 1938 and 5000 in 1939. In this same period of flourishing activities a more systematic control on the part of Affaires Étrangères, mainly regarding the Alliance's educational responsibilities abroad, prefigured what would be the relationship between the two after the Second World War.⁷³

Besides its significance for the promotion of French language and culture abroad, the Alliance's historical role must be sought in the way it brought about a fusion between the interests of high-ranking civil servants and those of an intellectual elite, and in its creation of a model for cultural foreign policy that the French government would eventually emulate.⁷⁴ To some extent this conclusion 'normalizes' the history of similar private organizations in Germany and Italy. It was not just in countries where a totalitarian regime emerged that foreign cultural promotion developed by private initiatives

⁷² Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 245-251, 262, 271, 276-278.

⁷³ Ibidem, 282-283 and 287-296.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, 49, 82 and 133-134. Bruézière had already indicated this in explaining why the Alliance's activities in the colonies and the protectorates diminished between 1900-1914: "La raison est simple: l'Alliance, au début de la colonisation, avait tenté de suppléer à la carence des services officiels de l'Instruction publique dans les territoires nouvellement conquis; mais à mesure que ces services (...) vont prendre le relèvement, l'Alliance aura tendance à s'effacer et à ne plus jouer qu'un «rôle d'auxiliaire»" (Bruézière, *L'Alliance française*, 62).

gradually became one of the areas entrusted to the State. This appears to be connected to a reconfiguration of international relations during the inter-war years that called for the use of 'cultural export' as a tool in the battle for the greatest political and economic influence.

The Dante Alighieri Society (1889)

Italian irredentism, emigration and national expansion

The Dante Alighieri Society was established in 1889.⁷⁵ The structure of the organization resembled that of the Alliance Française, but it is misleading to see it as the most important model. The context in which it was created and its aims were more comparable to those of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein. The initial idea came from Giacomo Venezian, who together with a number of citizens of Trieste and Trentino was actively involved in the movement for a completion of the Italian unification. On linguistic, historical and geographical grounds, a number of territories were considered to be part of the Italian nation even if they had remained in Austrian hands after 1866: Trentino, Alto Adige, Venezia Giulia and Dalmatia. These were known as the *terre irredente*.⁷⁶ Venezian's letter to the nationally revered poet Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907), dated 21st of November 1888, wherein he suggested creating a Society for the maintenance and propagation of 'Italianness' (*italianità*), is considered the founding document of the Dante Alighieri Society.⁷⁷ The initial aim of the organization was to prevent the 'Germanification' and to keep alive the *italianità* of the communities living in the *terre irredente*. In these territories the Dante Society was involved in financing Italian libraries, Italian newspapers and pro-Italian parties' campaigns in local elections, as well as buying property for future initiatives. Just as in the case of the Allgemeiner Deutscher

⁷⁵ Until recently, the various existing histories of the Dante Alighieri Society were written by members of the Society's statutory bodies and based on personal experiences: Piero Barbera, *La «Dante Alighieri»* Relazione storica al XXV Congresso (Florence 1920); Enrico Scodnik, 'La Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri nei suoi primi anni di vita' in: *Rivista Dalmatica*, I, II, III, IV (1966); Filippo Caparelli, *La «Dante Alighieri»* (1920-1970) (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1985); idem, *La Dante Alighieri* (Rome 1987); idem, *Una vita nella Dante* (Rome 1997). In 1995, two scientific studies based on thorough archival research were published in the series '*I fatti della Storia*', directed by the eminent historian Renzo de Felice: Beatrice Pisa, *Nazione e politica nella Società «Dante Alighieri»* (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1995) and Patrizia Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale ed emigrazione nella Società «Dante Alighieri»* (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1995). These studies cover the period from the foundation to 1931.

⁷⁶ Richard J.B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960* (London: Routledge, 1996) 154-155.

⁷⁷ Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 32-33. Giacomo Venezian belonged to the irredentist Società Pro Patria (1885-1890), whose members were closely involved in the creation of the Dante (ibidem, 26).

Schulverein and to a lesser degree the Alliance Française, the apolitical nature of the Dante Alighieri Society was considered vital. Given the divisive discussions within the irredentist movement as to how and when the Italian unification launched by the Risorgimento would be complete, it was the Dante's function to unite the various factions in order to obtain concrete results through joint forces. The Dante was also marked by the Mazzinian ideal of a 'Europe of Nations', whereby Italy could serve as example in advocating a new, peaceful international community where each state was based on the principle of nationality.⁷⁸

In the *terre irredente* and elsewhere in the world where many Italians lived, a core activity of the Dante was to help create and maintain Italian schools. The Italian government was only just beginning to take on this task and in the case of the *terre irredente* it was easier for a private organization such as the Dante to run schools without being accused of foreign intrusion into local political affairs. The first Italian school abroad, which was located in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, dates back to 1862. Almost three decades later, on 8 December 1889, a law was passed that made the Italian government responsible for establishing and running Italian primary schools abroad, employing teachers and setting educational curricula. Where necessary the government would create secondary schools as well. An inspectorate of education within the Ministero degli Affari Esteri would ensure the quality of the teaching. Catholic schools that met the set standards and allowed official inspection were eligible for subsidy just as other Italian schools. Not surprisingly the law was proposed by Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, a politician known for having wanted an imperialist foreign policy for Italy.⁷⁹ In 1902, following a thorough reform of Affari Esteri, the policy regarding schools abroad was handed over to a full-fledged Direzione Generale delle Scuole all'Estero.⁸⁰ Even then, the Dante remained closely connected to educational enterprises abroad.

Dante Alighieri, the name chosen for the organization upon the instigation of the patriotic poet Giosuè Carducci, reflected the significance attached to language as expression of the national soul. It was Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) who had fathered the national language, the Tuscan-based Italian that was recognized throughout the peninsula as the common tongue. "What he [Dante Alighieri] embodied, every commentator agreed, was there in his

⁷⁸ Sergio Romano, 'La cultura della politica estera italiana' in: Richard Bosworth and Sergio Romano ed., *La politica estera italiana (1860-1985)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991) 17-34, 27-33.

⁷⁹ Giorgio Floriani, *Scuole italiane all'estero. Cento anni di storia* (Rome: Armando, 1974); Patrizia Salvetti, 'Scuole italiane all'estero' in: Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina ed., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana II Arrivi* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2002) 535-549; Stefano Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918-1943* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005) 52-53.

⁸⁰ Enrico Serra, 'La burocrazia della politica estera italiana' in: Richard Bosworth and Sergio Romano ed., *La politica estera italiana (1860-1985)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991) 68-89, 75-82.

pages. It was the Italian language; Dante incarnated Italian even more than Shakespeare did English.”⁸¹ The first public document issued by the organization, a *Manifesto agli Italiani* written by Giuseppe Chiarini and signed by 159 members of the cultural and political elite, spoke of the Italian language as carrier of Italian civilisation and as symbol of the *patria* extending beyond the material borders of the State.⁸² Ruggero Bonghi, President of the Society from 1889 to 1895, defended the name against arguments for a more explanatory name, considering it said enough without saying too much.⁸³ Connections with irredentism were not to be too apparent, nor could the Dante Alighieri Society too openly profess its mission to support Italian nationalist feelings in the *terre irredente* lest this should provoke Austrian suppression of its activities. Hence the emphasis on the apolitical, non-governmental nature of the Society is also explained. In actual fact, there were close personal ties with the government and the Society could with time count on more and more support from the Affari Esteri and the diplomatic corps.

The Dante was characterized by its fusion of three elements: the educational approach of the Pro Patria movement, which within the Austrian Empire was initiating Italian local schools mainly with an irredentist scope; the democratic inspiration contributed by the Freemason component, largely influenced by the Risorgimento; and the strictly apolitical stance emphasized by the Dante’s first President, Ruggero Bonghi. We have seen that the Alliance Française also appeared to have connections with Freemasonry but in the case of the Dante this relationship was a closer one. Right from the start, the Freemason members were an essential force within the Dante, determining its prevalently secular nature, shaping the guiding principles and providing funding. The root cause of many of the conflicts within the Dante was the disagreement between the secular Freemasons and members who were prepared to support religious groups that could help achieve the Society’s aims. Seeing the position of the Papal States in the new Italian nation had not yet been resolved and Catholicism was often presented as the antithesis of patriotism, this was a very divisive issue. One of the leading figures of the Dante was Ernesto Nathan (1845-1921), originally an English citizen of Jewish descent, Freemason and twice elected Grand Master of the Masonic organization Grand Orient of Italy, and Mayor of Rome (1907-1913). His death was to some extent a turning point, because he had been capable of mediating between the two opposing parts of the Dante membership and of reconciling their differences. Although Mussolini practically banned Freemasonry after 1925, the Masonic wing certainly remained influential until 1932.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, 154-155.

⁸² Caparelli, *La “Dante Alighieri”*, 11; Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 34.

⁸³ As quoted by Pisa: “dire tutto senza compromettere nulla” (Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 37).

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 31, 34, 176-177 and 202-218.

Although the main incentive for setting up the Dante Alighieri Society was the concern about the *terre irredente*, there was also the element of political prestige to be gained as a new nation among the major European states. Committees of the Dante did not only emerge in the *irredente* or in countries where many Italian emigrants resided, for instance in South America or around the Eastern Mediterranean. In European cities such as Bucharest (1896), Copenhagen (1911) and The Hague (1914), Committees with numerous non-Italian members were set up.⁸⁵ The Dante's activities clearly served an economic purpose as well, the reasoning behind it being that cultural influence and the spread of language determined also the choice of products and of business partners.⁸⁶ One such area where the Dante evidently took into consideration political and economic interests was Tunisia, a French Protectorate where the dominant European presence was that of the Italians. Here the rivalry between the Alliance Française and the Dante Alighieri Society to establish a cultural and economic sphere of influence was strong. Hence it was one of the first areas abroad that the Dante focussed on.⁸⁷ However, the Dante hardly had any personal connections with the commercial and industrial sector, other than the Italian publishing houses. Even if there was a great awareness of the role it could play for Italy's economic interests, especially in the Mediterranean area, its goals remained primarily literary and educational. Because of the secrecy required by its irredentist aims and the apolitical standpoint it projected outwards, the Dante was often accused of being too abstract in its purpose, guided by inconclusive idealism and having little awareness of the social reality.⁸⁸

In contrast to the Alliance Française, which was focussed on foreigners, and sharing more of the concern for co-nationals expressed by the Schulverein/VDA, the Dante would soon also be involved in the 'nationalisation' of its masses of emigrants abroad. Under the presidency of Pasquale Villari (from 1896 to 1903) the Society's attention for emigration as a national problem grew.⁸⁹ The many Italians who emigrated in the second half of

⁸⁵ Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale*, 193 en 253.

⁸⁶ A good illustration is Carducci's observation about the Alliance française's function: "La propagazione della lingua francese è un'opera patriottica al supremo grado. La nostra ricchezza vi è interessata. Chi sa francese diviene cliente della Francia. Il libro francese dà le abitudini francesi; le abitudini francesi conducono all'acquisto dei prodotti francesi" (Caparelli, *La "Dante Alighieri"*, 13).

⁸⁷ The Committee of Tunis was established in 1894. For more on the Dante in Tunisia, see: Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale*, 22, 24-25 and 45-49.

⁸⁸ Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 61 and 70-73.

⁸⁹ Villari's attention for emigration was triggered by the harsh working conditions of Italians working in Switzerland on the construction of the almost twenty kilometres long Simplon railway tunnel (built between 1898 and 1906). To improve these working conditions Villari mobilised his network, and the fact that he called for support especially from religious organizations was not accepted by all within the Dante. Eventually the aid that the Dante focussed on was given in the form of education, which was more congenial to the Society's regular activity (Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 267-270).

the nineteenth century because of hunger and unemployment, often hardly considered themselves Italian. They spoke only their local dialect and were attached to their local customs. Furthermore illiteracy was still widespread. Once Italy was made, it was clear that much remained to be done to “make the Italians”.⁹⁰ Italian schools were established by the Dante Alighieri Society in the Middle East, in Africa, in North and in South America to ensure that the Italian emigrants learnt their national language and identified themselves with the Italian state. Again, to some extent there was an economic interest in maintaining the ties with faraway, fortune-seeking Italians who might well one day contribute to the national economy. Attitudes towards this emigration did change with time. Under Pasquale Villari’s presidency it was regarded as a social issue and a shameful manifestation of Italy’s poverty. The improvement of the conditions of Italian emigrants was partly a paternalistic mission for the Dante but also an attempt to increase support, by reaching out to potential working-class members. Some within the Dante leadership were sceptical about opening the Society to the masses, arguing that the Risorgimento too had not been a popular movement. During the first decades of the twentieth century, with the increasing popularity of nationalist-expansionist thinking, a far more positive interpretation was given to Italian emigration. It began to be presented as a sign of Italy’s abundance, of the manpower, creativity and knowledge that it could offer to the rest of the world.⁹¹

In terms of organization, the Dante Alighieri Society had a centralized structure. The President and the Central Council were based in Rome, since 1870 the capital of Italy. The Committees within and outside the Italian state could elect Council members through their representatives at the annual congress. At these congresses policy discussions took place, but in actual fact the course of action was determined by the central board of governors, who insisted on the unity of the Society’s action. The Annual Congress was more an occasion to report on the activities that had taken place at the various Committees and to ask public attention for them. Ultimately, the central board of governors had only a limited control over the Local Committees, which often demanded a high degree of independence and did not comply with all the statutory prerequisites such as sending financial reports and lists of members.⁹² In 1899 there were 48 Committees in Italy and 22 abroad. By 1916 these had risen to 238 in Italy and 79 abroad. Because not all Local Committees provided reliable figures, if any at all, it is very hard to judge how many members the

⁹⁰ Referring to the famous words by Massimo D’Azeglio (1798-1866) spoken at the inaugural session of the new Italian parliament on the 18th of February 1861: “L’Italia è fatta, bisogna fare gli italiani” (Italy is done, we need to make the Italians).

⁹¹ Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 168-169; Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale*, 203 and 235.

⁹² For more details on the organizational structure, see: Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 174-201 and 256-257.

organization had as a whole.⁹³ Around the turn of the century, the Dante Alighieri Society co-operated with some of the other national associations that were emerging at that time, such as the Lega Navale, the Touring Club Italiano and the Società Geografica. Italy was relatively late among the Western European countries in developing such new organizations which illustrated the transition from a rather exclusive, co-opted group of local elite to a more open, accessible and mass-oriented kind of association.⁹⁴ The Dante was a good example of this trend. Most of its members belonged to the Italian middle class and it had particular following among lawyers, academics and teachers. With time secondary school teachers proved to be the driving force of the Local Committees in Italy, although not a very stable one due to their regular transfer to other locations.⁹⁵

Initially, it was of crucial importance that the Dante Alighieri Society presented itself as an autonomous, private organization. It could benefit from its well-established personal ties with high-ranking civil servants, members of parliament and senators but it also made sure that those who became members were of different political orientation, to maintain the apolitical imago. Government subsidies were – out of principle - not accepted, though there were some exceptions. The secrecy that was required to prevent the Austrian or any other government from accusing them of undesired political activity meant that income and expenses were never fully revealed. Generally the income was made up of membership fees, interest rates, donations from private persons and from a variety of organizations, with frequent contributions coming from Masonic lodges and also from the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Modest sums came also from the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione and Affari Esteri, but frequency of these was uncertain. In 1889, Paolo Boselli, who was then Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione and who later became President of the Dante, allowed for 1,000 lire to be transferred to the organization. This practice was continued by his successors at the Ministry. Bonaldo Stringher, director general of the Banca d'Italia and member of the Dante, was involved in yet another source of income. As of 1902, three tenths of the money raised by the state lottery would go to the Dante. However, until 1926 the Dante continued to have a non-declared fund, defined as *fondo isolato*, that did not appear in the financial report. This secret financing served the purposes that the President together with the Secretary personally decided upon, such as the spread of religious publications by the Sodalizio Cattolico Italiano, which maintained the Italian language of co-nationals abroad. The sources of this fund remain unknown.⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibidem, 151-152 and 185-186.

⁹⁴ Giovanni Montroni, *La società italiana dall'unificazione alla Grande Guerra*, 2nd ed. (Rome-Bari: Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 2007) 134-160, in particular 144.

⁹⁵ Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 151 and 169.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 39-41, 97, 101, 245-248, 256 and 416-417.

Where for political or financial reasons the Italian state could not take on responsibility, the Dante Alighieri Society was paving the way for what would eventually become recognized as an area of government policy to be managed by the state.

The (Dante Alighieri) Society partly acted as surrogate of the state and partly it invited the state to come into action, presenting itself from time to time as institutional reality and as fundamental reality, as state and as nation at the same time. These two aspects seemed destined to coincide in a big utopian project, which clearly alluded to a possible dismantling of the Society within a fully matured institutional reality.⁹⁷ [Translation TvK]

For now the Dante served as intermediary to procure secret ministerial funds to irredentist initiatives across the border without putting the Italian government in a compromising position.

Effects of the Italo-Turkish War and the First World War: Fascism and virulent nationalism

During the Italo-Turkish War (29 September 1911 - 18 October 1912), through which Italy obtained the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica that together formed Libya, the first signs of a change of spirit within the Dante Alighieri Society began to appear. The Libyan enterprise, although not automatically glorified as heroic act for the nation, did spark off among a number of members a desire for national expansionism and for a sacralisation of the nation. Dante supporters of the Libyan war tended to underline that this was not a brutal conquest, but one that brought civilization and well-being to the local inhabitants.⁹⁸ Upon the outbreak of the First World War, again it was clear that a part of the leading Dante members was in favour of a more aggressive and openly active position for the Society. After much discussion on the issue, the President made an appeal to unite in support of the Italian King, Victor Emanuel III, and declared that the war was morally necessary. During

⁹⁷ "La Società ['Dante Alighieri'] in parte surrogava lo stato, in parte lo sollecitava ad agire, ponendosi di volta in volta come realtà istituzionale e realtà di base, come stato e nazione allo stesso tempo. Due aspetti che sembrano destinati a coincidere in un grande utopistico progetto, che alludeva chiaramente ad un possibile scioglimento della Società all'interno di realtà istituzionali di raggiunta maturità" (ibidem, 97). This is in fact quite a different view than that exposed by the Dante historian Piero Barbera, who wrote in 1920 that the more the modern State had vast and numerous tasks, the more it would need the assistance and co-operation of private citizens united in strong and independent organizations, created to integrate, execute, encourage and if necessary syndicate the State's work. Barbera envisions a continuous interplay between State and private association (Piero Barbera, *La "Dante Alighieri"*. *Relazione storica al XXV Congresso* [Florence, 1920] quoted by Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale*, 17).

⁹⁸ Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 279, 283 and 286-289.

the war, from June 1916 to October 1917, the President of the Dante, Paolo Boselli, was also prime minister. In response to the need that was felt for an organization that would coordinate the war propaganda abroad, Boselli proposed to put the Dante Alighieri Society in charge of all activity in that field. The Central Council of the Dante unanimously opposed, preferring to maintain the Society's independence and to operate less in the forefront. The Dante did however contribute to the propaganda effort, joining forces with other initiatives and taking into account the government standpoints. After Italy's humiliating defeat at Caporetto (24 October 1917), the new government led by Victor Emmanuel Orlando created an Undersecretariat for Propaganda Abroad and Press (Sottosegretariato per la Propaganda all'Estero e per la Stampa).⁹⁹

Once the war was over, a part of the Dante's active members thought it wise to continue functioning somewhat covertly, cautiously positioning themselves as the Italian government negotiated at the Paris Treaties, whereas an opposing group led by the Committee of Milan lobbied for a more open engagement abroad. By the time the March on Rome took place (1922), a considerable part of the Dante Society welcomed Mussolini's subsequent accession to government and the new impulse this gave to the country. The nationalist elements that acted within the Dante could easily merge into the Italian Fascist movement, rather like the Associazione Nazionalisti Italiani could fuse with the National Fascist Party. Dante leaders spoke of the interests the Society shared with the new government, while however making clear that there was no question of subordination or political partisanship. At the Dante annual congress in Padua (September 1923), Boselli was given an honorary party membership card of the National Fascist Party by a thousand members of the party branch in Savona, Boselli's town of origin. In turn Boselli awarded medals to Mussolini and another symbol of Fascist revolutionary spirit, D'Annunzio, for their heroic actions in Fiume. Boselli was above all a fervent nationalist. There are some reasons to believe that he supported Italian Fascism, which is not surprising given the importance that Fascism gave to nationalism. Yet until his death in 1932 he remained eager to defend the Dante's autonomy, whatever his sympathies for the regime might have been.¹⁰⁰ There was a certain paradox in the Dante's still emphatic claim to be apolitical and to remain as

⁹⁹ Ibidem, 106-107, 307-314, 330-334, 340.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, 394. Pisa gives as evidence a quotation from a letter Boselli wrote to the vice-president of the Dante, Donato Sanminiati: "Io dico: oggi Mussolini è la necessità per la vita d'Italia dentro e fuori; fuori d'onde viene giù un vento malvaggio." (I say: today Mussolini is the necessity for Italy's life inside and outside: outside from where an evil wind is coming down.) Does this really say what Boselli thought of Fascism? The "evil wind" is presumably what Boselli perceived to be the threat of communism. In my opinion, Boselli's views on Fascism need further investigation and interpretation (Boselli to Sanminiati, 29 April 1924, Archivio della Società Dante Alighieri, fasc. 1924, B 2.).

always faithful to the nation above all when gradually the Italian state and nation were becoming synonymous with Fascism.¹⁰¹

A turning point was the meeting of Committee presidents of the Dante Society in June 1926. At this meeting the Dante top made an evaluation of activities and redefined the Society's aims and methodologies in order to be in line with the new political climate, which by early 1925 was shaped by the overt introduction of a single-party dictatorship. It was decided to support Mussolini's government in its imperial quest - a revived Roman Empire - and to embrace the broader mission of spreading Italian culture across the world. To some extent this was a strategic necessity. As the Italian government was gradually taking on more tasks related to irredentist issues, the Dante was more or less obliged to give more importance to its role as promoter of Italian language and culture abroad. Another effect of the changed political context that emerged at the 1926 meeting was the request of several participants to create a more centralized decisional power within the Dante, which would have more control over the Local Committees. There appears to have been a gradual process of ideological convergence between the Italian Fascist ideals and those of the Dante, both infused with nationalist sentiment. Admiration for Mussolini in speeches and publications of the Society was outspoken. Nevertheless, in the 1920s the modes of action and the managerial structure of the Dante remained largely unchanged, as did the very strong resistance to relinquishing the Society's autonomy. There were tentative government plans to fuse the Dante with other organizations or in some other way absorb it into the state apparatus, no doubt also because of the Society's considerable reserve funds. Until the end of Boselli's presidency in 1932, the financial state of affairs of the Dante Alighieri Society appears to have been solid. The Society owed its prosperity to a cautious maintenance of reserve funds, the real estate it owned, the inheritance it received from Achille Beltrami, and other well-invested reserves. The increasing number of *tesserine scolastiche*, Dante memberships for school children at the reduced price of 1 lira, was becoming an ever more important source of income, that was growing at a faster rate than the funds raised by Local Committees.¹⁰² Regardless of the internal and external pressure, the independence of action was defended for as long as possible, mainly thanks

¹⁰¹ According to the historian Beatrice Pisa it is difficult to reconstruct the process of diminishing autonomy of the Dante and greater subservience to the regime because the Dante's archive material for the period 1926 to 1930 (which is as far as her own study went) is scarce. Pisa partly attributes this to a growing use of telephone communication in those years, but also suspects an intentional destruction of compromising documents (Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 15 and footnote 86 on 422. See also: Salvetti, *Immagine nazionale*, 11-12). Rather than conscious destruction, it seems more likely that the inconsistent preservation of documents is related to the private character of the organization and the lack of resources for systematic archiving.

¹⁰² Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 258-259.

to the personal prestige and the delaying tactics of Boselli, the Dante's President from 1907 to 1932.

Competition with the Fasci italiani all'estero and the Istituti di Cultura Italiana

The Dante Committees abroad were competing with a growing number of other organizations for cultural penetration, such as the Fasci Italiani all'Estero and the Istituti di Cultura Italiana. Under Mussolini's increasingly totalitarian rule, the way the Italian government dealt with its cultural propaganda abroad was characterized by shifts of tasks between ministries and the existence of various (semi-)public organizations that rivalled each other in claiming this field of action for themselves. Even when attempts were made to centralize the control, changes in strategy seemed to favour different organizations at different times. One such organization was the Italian Fasci Abroad (Fasci Italiani all'Estero), a product of the revolutionary phase in the Italian Fascist movement. The phenomenon emerged in 1920 as a network of unofficial fascist groups, set up by veterans, intellectuals and journalists in communities of Italian emigrants in Europe and around the Mediterranean. Subsequent to the March on Rome, the Deputy Secretary of the National Fascist Party, Giuseppe Bastianini, was made head of the Fasci all'Estero. A more centralized structure was given to the organization, with local sections choosing their own leadership but a central General Secretariat in Rome that appointed state delegates. The Secretary General was responsible to Mussolini directly but also had a seat in the Grand Council of the National Fascist Party. From 1922 to 1925, with Mussolini's encouragement, the Fasci grew in number mainly in Europe and the Americas, and to a lesser extent in the Middle East, especially Egypt and Turkey. However, even when it had as many as 65,000 members, it represented merely a small minority of the nine million Italians living abroad.¹⁰³

Secretary General Bastianini was intent on making the Fasci all'Estero the sole institution in charge of Italians abroad, surpassing even the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero degli Affari Esteri). In 1925 Mussolini appointed Roberto Farinacci, a representative of the militant stream within Italian Fascism, as Secretary General of the National Fascist Party. This seemed to suggest that the more radical forces would have a say over the policy of the regime. In the same year Dino Grandi, a prominent party member, was made Undersecretary of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, a ministry that had been accused by the Fasci of conservatism and of obstructing their goals. Furthermore, some first discussions in the press about the possible universal

¹⁰³ D. Fabiano, 'La Lega Italiana per la tutela degli interessi nazionali e le origini dei Fasci all'estero (1920-1923)' in: *Storia contemporanea* (April 1985) 203; Luca de Caprariis, 'Fascism for Export? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all'Estero' in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, 2 (2000), 151-183, 152-159.

mission of Fascism were seen as an opportunity to present the Fasci as the ideal instrument to transfer the Italian Fascist model to the rest of the world. Presumably emboldened by these developments, at the annual congress of the Fasci held in Rome at the end of October 1925, Bastianini urged for a fascistization of the diplomatic corps and for a complete control over emigration by the Fasci all'Estero. Mussolini was subsequently unambiguous in his disapproval, issuing statements that excluded an international role for the Party or any meddling with foreign internal politics. The Fasci were meant solely to protect the *italianità* and the welfare of Italian emigrants. The signal being sent out was that Mussolini was not going to share his power with the National Fascist Party: his was a personal dictatorship.¹⁰⁴ In his cultural foreign policy as much as in other areas where he could exert his power, Mussolini used a 'divide and rule' strategy, securing allegiance from various groups in society but never giving any one group absolute preference and making them compete amongst themselves.

Thereafter, the Fasci – now basically just producing printed propaganda material – were gradually absorbed by Affari Esteri instead. Besides being poorly organized, the Fasci lacked firm ground in precisely that part of the world that Italian expansionism was focussed on: Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. Affari Esteri – including the diplomatic corps – was re-organized. In April 1927 all emigration affairs were handed over to a new Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero, with at its head a diplomat. When in 1928 the diplomat Piero Parini became Secretary General of the Fasci, the political demise of the Fasci was sealed. The membership was purged and its more than five hundred branches made directly responsible to the Secretariat in Rome. A year later Parini was also made director of the Direzione Generale Italiani all'Estero e Scuole, which resulted from the fusion between the department in charge of Italian emigrants and that of Italian schools abroad.¹⁰⁵

Another instrument that the Italian government developed together with its growing interest in cultural propaganda abroad was the establishment of Istituti di Cultura Italiana. These were cultural institutes comparable with the Instituts Français, aimed at the Italian community abroad and italoophile foreigners. Through its activities the Istituti were meant to spread the knowledge of Italian language and culture, as well as advertise the achievements of the Italian genius and stimulate intellectual relations with other countries. The Istituti were introduced at the end of 1926 following a law proposal by Mussolini, Giuseppe Volpi, Minister of Finance, and Pietro Fedele, Minister of Education. These Istituti were to be headed by scholars of repute and run by staff approved by Affari Esteri. Each year a report had to be sent to

¹⁰⁴ De Caprariis, 'Fascism for Export? The Rise and Eclipse', 166-172.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 172, 174, 178 and 180; Patrizia Salvetti, 'Scuole italiane all'estero', 535-549, 548; Benedetta Garzarelli, 'Parleremo al mondo intero', 15.

Affari Esteri.¹⁰⁶ Since June 1925 an organization with a confusingly similar name existed: the Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura (National Fascist Institute of Culture, renamed National Institute of Fascist Culture in 1937). This was created by the National Fascist Party to promote and coordinate the study of Italian Fascism, and to spread Fascist ideals and Italian culture both within Italy and abroad.¹⁰⁷

Other organizations concerned with spreading Italian culture abroad were financed by the Mussolini government, but these were generally poorly financed, rudimentary and with little chance of enduring through time.¹⁰⁸ As of 1923, a newly-created Istituto Interuniversitario Italiano - like the Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura headed by the philosopher and Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile - sought to make Italian culture and ways of thinking more known among foreign students and to promote university exchanges.¹⁰⁹ In 1924 this Istituto Interuniversitario together with another academic foundation formed the Italian National Committee on Intellectual Co-operation.¹¹⁰ This Committee represented Italy at the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, an advisory body of the League of Nations that was created in 1922 to promote peace by encouraging cultural and intellectual exchange between the member nations. Between 1924 and 1930, even Maria Montessori, creator of her own unconventional, internationally-renown educational method, could count on financial support from Mussolini. From the new headquarters - the Opera Nazionale Montessori - now symbolically based in Rome, Montessori would further diffuse Italy's spiritual contribution to mankind. Tellingly, this support from the government came to an end in the 1930s when Montessori proved to be too single-minded to be harnessed and her message insufficiently centred on the Italian nation.¹¹¹

Intensification of cultural propaganda in the 1930s

From 1922 to 1929 Mussolini himself was at the head of Affari Esteri, and yet in those years he appears to have left this ministry more or less unchanged. The emphasis in the 1920s was on establishing internal consensus. Cultural politics abroad gained far more importance in the changed context of the 1930s. Internally, having laid the bases for his personal dictatorship, Mussolini aimed

¹⁰⁶ Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, 58-60.

¹⁰⁷ Gisella Longo, *L'Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura. Da Giovanni Gentile a Camillo Pellizzi (1925-1943). Gli intellettuali tra partito e regime* (Rome: A. Pellicani, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ For example, the Fondazione Leonardo per la Cultura Italiana (1921), absorbed in 1925 by the Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista, and the Ente Nazionale Italica (1925).

¹⁰⁹ Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, 56-57.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 61-62.

¹¹¹ Marjan Schwegman, *Maria Montessori 1870-1952. Kind van haar tijd, vrouw van de wereld* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999) 200-211.

at solidifying his power through the further centralization of control and the construction of consensus in Italian society. As the Fascist ideology developed its conceptions of not only a new Italy but also a new Fascist man, a universal concept of Fascism began to fit within the objectives of the regime. Now that the backing of nationalists and the more conservative Italian establishment had been secured, restoring to some extent the revolutionary élan of the Italian Fascist movement was seen as a way to appeal to the youth. Furthermore, in 1929 the Lateran Accords between the Italian State and the Roman Catholic Church were signed, resolving the dispute over the papal territories lost during the Italian Unification. This reconciliation with the Pope made it easier for the Catholics in Italy and abroad to adhere to Fascism. At the same time, Fascism conceived of as universal value went hand in hand with a more aggressive, expansionist foreign policy that Mussolini was now driving towards with the reformed Ministero degli Affari Esteri.

Hence in the 1930s there was a great interest in promoting the Italian Fascist model abroad, with corporatism as Fascism's response to the social issues that Communism addressed. In a speech given in 1930, Mussolini officially spoke of the universal character of Italian Fascism and of a new Fascist Europe. The celebration in 1932 of the first ten years since the March on Rome, the so-called *Decennale Fascista*, further triggered the international ambitions of Italian Fascism. A year later, in July 1933, the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma - CAUR) were launched: a Fascist equivalent to the Communist Comintern, aimed at creating an international network of fascist parties.¹¹²

In addition, the German Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda set up in 1933 and led by Joseph Goebbels, presented a new challenge for Italy as well as a model to copy.¹¹³ The Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero e Scuole was not considered to be a sufficiently adequate structure to be responsible for a systematic cultural and political propaganda in foreign countries. Organizations such as the Dante Alighieri Society and the Istituti Fascista di Cultura were thought to be ineffective and guided by somewhat otherworldly men. It was decided to hand over Affari Esteri's responsibility for any propaganda abroad to the Ufficio Stampa (Press Office) of the Head of Government, where in early 1934 a specific Direzione per la

¹¹² Michael Ledeen, *Universal fascism. The theory and practice of the fascist international 1928-1936* (New York: H. Fertig, 1972); Bruno Wanrooij, 'Il fascismo come merce d'esportazione' in: *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome XLVI/11* (The Hague 1985) 155-163; Garzarelli, "Parleremo al mondo intero", 19-21; Marco Cuzzi, *L'internazionale delle camicie nere: i CAUR, Comitati d'azione per l'universalità di Roma, 1933-1939* (Milan: Mursia, 2005); Marco Cuzzi, *Antieuropa: il fascismo universale di Mussolini* (Milan: M&B, 2006).

¹¹³ The President of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Berlin, Giuseppe Renzetti, warned with some concern about how the Reich's government would soon start large-scale campaign to spread national-socialism abroad (Garzarelli, "Parleremo al mondo intero", 24 and 35).

propaganda was created. Mussolini's son-in-law, the former diplomat Galeazzo Ciano, was given the newly-created function of Undersecretary of Press and Propaganda. Until he was promoted to Minister of Foreign Affairs in June 1936 his personal vision in great part determined how the office was run. It remained a rather hybrid body, falling under the Ufficio Stampa but located within Affari Esteri. In June 1935 it became part of a separate Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda. Though it could use a variety of contacts outside Italy – such as secretaries of the Fasci all'estero or directors of local Italian newspapers¹¹⁴ – it relied mostly on Italian diplomatic representatives. All modern means of communication were to be used. The Direzione per la propaganda distributed films, mainly the documentaries of the Istituto Nazionale L.U.C.E., and until April 1937 transmitted radio broadcasts. Other services included the production and distribution of publications, the sending of articles and photographs, and the organization of art exhibitions.¹¹⁵

Ciano was not insensitive to the negative connotations that the word 'propaganda' had. Hence, on his instigation, the activity of the Direzione per la propaganda was repeatedly presented in the Italian press as being a matter of demonstration rather than persuasion. It was claimed that the intention was not to proselytize but to inform; to provide facts that would enable the public to make an objective judgement of Fascism. As we shall see, this emphasis on simply giving information can also be found in the self-portrayal of the British Council. In both cases it was meant to mitigate any accusations of spreading propaganda.¹¹⁶

During Italy's war on Abyssinia in 1935, which was much disputed within the League of Nations, the recently created Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda was at the forefront of the propaganda campaign to convince foreigners – not just the higher classes but also the broader public – of the legitimacy of Italy's invasion. This propaganda claimed that the conquest was not only Italy's right but also in the interest of civilization and of the local population that needed to be freed from age-old slavery. Once Ciano became Minister of Foreign Affairs, in June 1936, the importance of the Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda diminished. Propaganda abroad seemed to concentrate on the ideological war against Bolshevism and the defence of Roman or European civilization. In May 1937 the Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda was turned into the Ministero della Cultura Popolare. The government funding that the Direzione Generale per la propaganda then received was considerably

¹¹⁴ Garzarelli refers these contacts with Italian institutions and fascist organizations abroad as the fascist 'paradiplomacy', which engendered a duplicity in the Italian presence in foreign countries (Garzarelli, *"Parleremo al mondo intero"*, 3).

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 30-31, 41-43, 48, 50-52; Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa*, 172.

¹¹⁶ Garzarelli, *"Parleremo al mondo intero"*, 31 and 41-43.

lower than what was being put into the general “confidential expenses” of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare.¹¹⁷

Subsequently to Italy’s withdrawal from the League of Nations, yet another new entity was formed to deal with the promotion of Italy abroad. This was the Istituto per le Relazioni Culturali con l’Estero, which in December 1937 replaced the Italian National Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations. This new institute organized Italian language courses for foreigners, student exchanges, book exhibitions and the publication of the series *Opera del genio italiano all’estero*, besides sending out photographs and articles to the foreign press. In effect, the Istituto per le Relazioni Culturali con l’Estero was doing more or less what the Direzione Generale per la propaganda did, but with a greater emphasis on the cultural dimension. Significantly, the Istituto per le Relazioni Culturali had a mixed management board with representatives of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare and of Affari Esteri, but it was mainly responsible to the latter. This meant Affari Esteri was regaining control in this field of policy.¹¹⁸

In 1931, after Paolo Boselli had for several years managed to hold off the Dante’s incorporation by the Italian Fascist state, the remaining ‘old guard’ of the Dante Alighieri Society succumbed to the adoption of new statutes that placed the organization under direct control of the Duce. From now on Mussolini would choose the President of the Dante. The increasing number of Fascists among the Society’s members had argued that an organization of national interest could not remain outside the state structure and had to become part of the state’s instruments for cultural imperialism. Hence, a group within the Dante asked the intervention of the Prime Minister’s office to help reform the statutes. This resulted in the new statutes of 1931, of which the first article determined that the Dante Society acted according to the new spirit brought by the Great War and the Fascist Revolution. Henceforth the President would be chosen by Mussolini, as would the Directive Board. The annual congress would mainly have a promotional function: all agenda points were first to be approved by the directive board. On the 11th of March 1932, a few days after the new statutes were properly introduced, Boselli passed away. He had still been granted the freedom to appoint his successor: sixty-four-year-old Giovanni Celesia di Vegliasco, a Fascist but not connected to the party leadership. This was to no avail though: opposition from the Vice-Presidents made Celesia di Vegliasco step down within a year. He was replaced by the relatively young Felice Felicioni, since 1931 Vice-President, who in his early thirties was being given the new function of Commissario Straordinario (Extraordinary Commissioner) of the Dante. Felicioni had been leader of the Fascist squad of Perugia and as such had played a role in the March on Rome. Thereafter he

¹¹⁷ The government funding of the MinCulPop reached the 14,700,000 lire (ibidem, 57-60, 230 and 225-226).

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, 231-235.

became the National Fascist Party's Federal Secretary in Umbria and was member of the Party's *Direttorio Nazionale*. In other words, he was part of the Party hierarchy and was expected to be a faithful messenger of Fascist *italianità* across the world.¹¹⁹

The British Council (1934)

Cultural propaganda disavowed

During the interwar years, few people among the British general public could have expected that in 1934 a 'British Committee for Relations with Other Countries', soon to be known as the British Council, would be created. The British Foreign Office was well aware of the foreign cultural promotion the Germans, French and Italians were engaged in, and tried to obtain information about how much these foreign governments were spending in that field.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, government involvement in cultural propaganda had been deemed unnecessary in Britain and even rather disreputable, due to the propaganda techniques used by the British in the First World War. During the First World War the War Propaganda Bureau was in charge of an unprecedented, systematic propaganda campaign to win support for the Allies, especially in the United States of America. After the formation of a Ministry of Information in 1918, with as Minister the 'press baron' Lord Beaverbrook, the accent shifted towards mass propaganda and the War Propaganda Bureau disappeared in the background. Beaverbrook was the owner of the *Daily Express*. Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, and Robert Donald, the editor of the *Daily Mail*, were made directors of propaganda in enemy and allied territory.¹²¹ During that war the House of Commons had critically questioned these appointments. After the war, publications such as *Falsehood in War-time: Propaganda Lies of the First World War* (1928), by the British Member of Parliament Arthur Ponsonby, caused a commotion. That publication revealed how much false information had been spread in order to gain support

¹¹⁹ Pisa, *Nazione e politica*, 419, 436, 440-441; Editorial, 'Il Commissario straordinario della «Dante Alighieri»' in: *Pagine della Dante*, 2 (March-April 1933) 37-38.

¹²⁰ Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 135-139. In 1929 the Foreign Office estimated that the French government was devoting the equivalent of £ 500,000 to cultural propaganda, the German government £ 300,000 and the Italians slightly less than £ 300,000 (TNA, FO 431/1, Cultural propaganda, introductory memorandum).

¹²¹ Philip Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), in particular 'Targeting Elite Opinion: The War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House, 1914-1917' (33-48) and 'Targeting Mass Opinion: Crewe House, Psywar and British Propaganda against the Central Powers in 1918' (49-62).

for the British intervention and to incite hatred towards “the Hun” (as the German enemy was portrayed).¹²²

These propaganda institutions had a very short existence, being dismantled by the end of the war. In their place a News Department was formed within the Foreign Office, with a far more restricted communications task. Notably, in May 1919 the Treasury specifically warned the Foreign Office against “a general desire to spread British culture throughout the world.”¹²³ A decade later, in December 1928, the promotion of British culture took on the form of a Travel Association. This organization was meant to encourage foreign holidaymakers to visit Britain and, through the positive impression made on these visitors, stimulate the export trade.¹²⁴ Another post-war organization, which instead proved to be more durable, was the English-Speaking Union. This was a worldwide association created by Evelyn Wrench in 1918 to foster international friendship and communication through the common use of English. After five years as editor of the conservative weekly *The Spectator* (1925-1935), Evelyn Wrench went on to found another international association, this time supposedly having no intention to promote any particular language or culture: the All People’s Association (1930). Members of the All People’s Association were offered lectures, libraries and language courses. In 1934 it had branches in fourteen European countries and yet already two years later the Association went bankrupt. The English-Speaking Union continued to flourish. This may indicate that sharing a language had more binding power than the abstract goal of creating international friendships. In the educational field, British writers, schoolteachers, missionaries and governesses were already teaching in various parts of the world for decades and as of 1913 the Cambridge University Syndicate offered teachers of English abroad exams for an official Proficiency Certificate.¹²⁵ Privately funded British Institutes in Florence, Paris, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo offered English language courses and the Foreign Office regularly distributed English literature to foreign universities and schools.¹²⁶

Cultural affairs were on the whole seen as a matter of private initiative, and apparently among the British upper class and in the civil service there was no feeding ground for an organization specifically devoted to the promotion of British language and culture abroad. As the influential British diplomat Harold

¹²² Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-time: Propaganda Lies of the First World War* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928). See also: Garry S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Michael Sanders and Philip Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

¹²³ Donald S. Birn, ‘The war of words. The British Council and Cultural Propaganda in the 1930s’ in: *Peace & Change* 14, 2 (April 1989) 176-190, 180.

¹²⁴ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 14-16.

¹²⁵ Bernard Lott, ‘ELT and the British Council – the first fifty years’ in: *ELT Journal* Volume 38/4 (October 1984) 283-285, 283.

¹²⁶ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 35-36.

Nicolson remarked, the general opinion was that the “genius of England, unlike that of lesser countries, spoke for itself”.¹²⁷ Similarly deploring the British lack of interest in promoting their own cultural achievements, an official of the Foreign Office, Reginald (‘Rex’) Leeper, commented: “Good wine, we optimistically feel, needs no bush.”¹²⁸ Two documents showed the first signs of a gradual change in this attitude.

An investigation into British communities abroad, the Tilley Report (1920), was the first sign of a greater government interest in cultural promotion overseas. In 1919 Lord Curzon, Foreign Secretary, had appointed a committee to investigate how the government could stimulate more solidarity among British communities abroad and make British ideals known by foreign nations. The result was the Tilley Report of 1920, named after the Chairman of the Committee, Sir John Tilley. It recommended establishing British schools, Institutes and libraries abroad, as well as facilities for foreign students studying at British technical schools and universities.¹²⁹

Twelve years later, Stephen Tallents brought forward similar suggestions in his influential pamphlet on the ‘projection’ of England. Tallents was at that moment Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board (1926-1933), a governmental organization to stimulate trade within the British Empire through scientific research, economic analyses and advertisement campaigns promoting goods produced in the Empire. No doubt drawing from this experience, in *The Projection of England* Tallents argued in favour of a school for “national projection” that would find ways to make known to the world England’s “national institutions and virtues”. Speaking of England, he was however also addressing the other citizens of the United Kingdom of Britain: the Scottish, the Welsh and the Northern-Irish. ‘Projection’ as a term for cultural promotion was a particularly adequate innovation, given that Tallents expressly advocated the use of film as well as other modern communication technologies. He argued that such promotion was now necessary to defend Britain from the growing power of European fascism, the Soviet Union and – notably – the United States of America.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Harold Nicolson, ‘The British Council 1934-1955’, *Twenty-first Anniversary Report* (London: British Council, 1955) 4.

¹²⁸ Reginald A. Leeper, ‘British Culture Abroad’ in: *Contemporary Review* 148 (August 1935) 201.

¹²⁹ Donaldson refers to the Tilley Report as “a blue-print for the British Council” (Donaldson, *The British Council*, 15).

¹³⁰ Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932); Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain. Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

Counteraction to protect trade, territory and democratic tradition

However, all histories of the British Council concur in seeing economic interest as being the determining element that made the creation of the Council possible. It was only after three economic missions had shown that trade was being affected by a lack of cultural propaganda that sufficient political goodwill was found. These missions were the D'Abernon British Economic Mission to South America (1930), and to a lesser degree Ernest Thompson's British Economic Mission to the Far East (1930-31) as well as Sir Alan Anderson's Trade Mission to Scandinavia (1933). The D'Abernon Report revealed how British business in South America was stagnating and how Britain's lack of cultural policy translated itself into declining trade. Less and less South American students were going to British universities and schools, preferring those of other European countries instead. This plea for a greater British cultural influence could no longer be ignored when the Prince of Wales upon his return from a visit to South America in 1931 endorsed the Report's conclusions. A direct result of the Prince of Wales' tour was the Ibero-American Institute, established in London a year later, which was mainly responsible for bringing Argentinian scholars to Oxford with the aid of a Prince of Wales Scholarship and for the exchange of lecturers.¹³¹ Furthermore, the findings of all three missions triggered the bureaucratic machinery and the political will to put into practice the proposals for a proper foreign cultural policy, primarily formulated by the afore-mentioned Reginald Leeper.

Another crucial factor for the creation of the British Council was the emerging concern about control over the Empire. The Government of India Act (1919) had given Indians a slightly greater say over how their country was governed. This meagre reward for India's participation in the First World War could not prevent the movement for national independence from growing, leading to protests and even to violent clashes. In Egypt, constant revolts led by the Egyptian nationalist movement had forced the British to declare the country independent in 1922, though British control and political unrest continued. A safe passage through the Suez Canal as well as the airports and radio stations established in Egypt were essential for a good communication with India and the other British territories in Asia. On 28 November 1933, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Percy Loraine, communicated in a despatch to the Foreign Office his grave concern about Britain's weak cultural influence in Egypt and about the growing competition coming from France and Italy.¹³² As will be shown in Chapter Five, this document provided an essential stimulus for the creation of the British Council and further explains the attention that the

¹³¹ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 15-21.

¹³² British Council historian Donaldson states Loraine's paper was "one of the most important and famous papers in the history of cultural relations." (*ibidem*, 21).

Council gave to what it broadly called the Middle East. In the Far East, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 made the British aware of the threats to its interests there as well. Meanwhile Britain was militarily and financially at a low-point due to the drainage of resources brought about by the First World War.¹³³

Close connection to the Foreign Office

These circumstances would possibly not have led to an active cultural promotion abroad had there not been the driving force of Reginald Leeper, a man generally recognized as motor behind the creation of the British Council. During the First World War Leeper had served the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department. In the early 1930s he was working for the same ministry's News Department and was well acquainted with the government's policy towards foreign press. He was known to have an excellent relationship with Robert Vansittart, Permanent Undersecretary to the Foreign Office from 1930 to 1938, and Anthony Eden, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1931 to 1934, then Foreign Secretary until February 1938.¹³⁴ The support of such high-profile contacts was certainly necessary. The British Council's institutional framework was from the start different from that of similar organizations in France, Germany and Italy. The British Council was a private entity but under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with HRH The Prince of Wales as Patron. It began with a small grant from the Treasury of £ 5,000 and the assurance that it could rely on co-operation from the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Dominions Office, the Board of Education, the Department of Overseas Trade, the Scottish Education Department and the Board of Trade. There were government nominees on the Council's Executive Committee to represent these various departments and Leeper himself was the Foreign Office nominee.¹³⁵ In addition the British Council received three private donations¹³⁶ while "one or two leading industrial firms and publishers" offered

¹³³ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Abacus, 1994; 1998 ed, reprinted 2004) 386-427; Michael Hughes, *British Foreign Secretaries in an Uncertain World, 1919-1939* (London: Routledge, 2005) 86-123.

¹³⁴ Philip Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 28-31.

¹³⁵ *Report by The Rt. Hon. Lord Eustace Percy, MP of activities from 1st April 1936 to 15th July 1937*, BW 151, TNA. Regarding the Executive Committee in the 1930s and 1940s, Donaldson also mentions a nominee of the Chancellor of the Exchequer (only intermittently exercised) and of the Travel Association (Donaldson, 370- 372) whereas Eastment doesn't mention there being as many nominees of government departments for the 1939. Her total is nine (Eastment, *The policies and position*, 15).

¹³⁶ The donations came from Viscount Wakefield of Hythe, Sir Herbert Brent Grotrian and Mr William Graham. Charles Cheers Wakefield was founder of the Wakefield Oil Company (later named Castrol), former Lord Mayor of London (1915-1916) and involved in several charitable works in the City. Could his donation to the British

contributions and the Book and Music Publishers' association gave moral and material support.¹³⁷ It was expected that as a private organization the Council would in time be able to gather sufficient funds to not have to rely on government grants, but this did not happen and instead the Council remained fully dependent on the Treasury for its existence. The Government grant rose to 15,000 pounds in 1935-36 and was already double this amount in July 1937. Nevertheless, the British Council officials had to keep convincing the Chancellor of the Exchequer that despite the economic hardship it was worth investing in cultural policy.¹³⁸ From 1939 onwards, Lord Beaverbrook made life harder for the Council by leading negative campaigns against its alleged wasteful ineffectiveness through his major newspapers. This criticism was so enduring as to make Council staff produce a pamphlet in 1945 - at their own personal expense, without wasting any public funds - that could disprove the accusations.¹³⁹

The official objective of the Council was eventually agreed to be "[...] to promote a wider knowledge and appreciation of Great Britain and the English language abroad, and to develop closer cultural and commercial relations between Great Britain and other countries."¹⁴⁰ To this end, the Council encouraged the study of the English language and literature in foreign schools, technical colleges and universities. Instead of having local Committees, like the Dante and the Alliance Française, the Council helped establish British Institutes where English was taught and that in addition could function as British cultural centres. These British Institutes were modelled on those already existing in Paris, Florence and Buenos Aires, which the Council now supported. Furthermore, the Council closely co-operated with Anglo-foreign societies and other suitable bodies abroad, helping to arrange speakers, donating books, periodicals and newspapers, and in special cases providing financial support. Libraries with English literature or technical publications were established and the Council assisted the foundation of Chairs of English at foreign universities. Students from overseas who wished to study in the United Kingdom were assisted with scholarships or fellowships and temporary placing for training with British industrial firms could be arranged. The Council was eager to receive distinguished foreigners, whom it could put in touch with prominent individuals, public bodies, universities and other organizations to let these

Council be connected to his becoming Viscount on 28 June 1934? Sir Herbert Brent Grotian was a Conservative Member of Parliament (1924-1929), High Sheriff of Bedfordshire (1931-1932), and coincidentally was created a baronet in 1934 too.

¹³⁷ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 29. With reference to Lord Tyrell's opening speech at the inaugural meeting of the British Council in St. James's Palace, on the 2nd of July 1935.

¹³⁸ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 29, 32, 57-63.

¹³⁹ TNA, BW 2/112, British Council Staff Association, *The Beaverbrook Press & the British Council*, April 1945.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, FO 141/624, P 411/267/150, Confidential Memorandum 'The British Council for Relations with other Countries', News Department, Foreign Affairs, 8 February 1935.

visitors experience British life and institutions. Unlike the Deutsche Akademie, the Alliance Française and the Dante Alighieri Society, which far more gradually tightened relations with their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the British Council right away was closely connected to the Foreign Office. It expected advice from the British diplomats, even in the form of draft schemes of work, though it would try to relieve them as much as possible from routine correspondence. Most notably, all initiatives and proposals involving expenditure had to first be considered by the Foreign Office and subsequently transmitted to the Council.¹⁴¹

This is how a confidential Memorandum described the way in which the Council was expected to operate. The subsequent development of activities shows that this was indeed how it worked and that this was not just a plan on paper. Harold Nicolson has described the origins of the Council as follows: "Like so many of our institutions, the British Council began without any clear definition of its purpose, policy or scope. It developed, as all organizations develop, by processes of evolution: by processes, it might be said, of trial and error."¹⁴² Nicolson's view seems to be more an example of British self-perception underlining the organic and the practical, than a true reflection of how things went. There appears to be a distinct idea of what course the Council was meant to take, certainly in Leeper's mind. Initially the British Council 'risked' being dominated by commercial interests. The Board of Trade and the Department of Overseas Trade, both represented in the Council's Executive Committee, wanted more industrial representation. Leeper was opposed to this. He distrusted the vision of industrialists, whom he expected to be only focussed on commercial results and not on political ones. To this he preferred more involvement of the Foreign Office, where he could count on a better understanding of culture as a political instrument. For this reason the Council was not made too dependent on financing from industry.¹⁴³ On the other hand, justifying the public expenditure by pointing towards the Council's purpose in the context of international power politics required great caution. Among supporters of an active foreign cultural policy there was a conscious taboo on speaking of cultural propaganda, a remnant of the controversies around British propaganda in the First World War. At the same time it was clear to someone like Leeper that German and Italian antidemocratic and often anti-British propaganda made some form of British counter-offensive desirable and the Council made no secret of deploring the rise of totalitarian states in Europe.

The areas that the British Council chose to concentrate on reflected this defensive propagandistic function. It rapidly launched a Near East Committee

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴² Harold Nicolson, 'The British Council 1934-1955' in: *Twenty-First Anniversary Report* (London: The British Council, 1955) 4-30, 7.

¹⁴³ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 41; TNA, BW 82/5, transcript of Reginald Leeper to Robert Vansittart, 14 March 1935.

and began to organize activities in the areas bordering the Mediterranean Sea: Spain, Portugal, Malta, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and Egypt. When in 1937 Lord Lloyd, the former High Commissioner of Egypt, became Chairman of the Council, the emphasis on the Mediterranean and the Near East further increased, for it was here that he saw the greatest threat from Italian and German cultural propaganda coming.¹⁴⁴ South America, where the concerns about diminishing economic relations because of Italian and German cultural activity first arose as a result of the D'Abernon Report, of course also had a certain priority. Attention for Scandinavia and Finland was in part a matter of economic interests too. It was thought wise to engage in some kind of follow-up on the British trade exhibitions that had recently taken place and on a number of commercial treaties. Yet this choice was also made "in view of the energy with which Germany is at present endeavouring to influence opinion in Scandinavian countries."¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, a typical characteristic of the British Council was that it maintained at all times not to be involved in propaganda, but in providing information. The people involved in the council's activities preferred to speak of publicity or cultural diplomacy. In the words of Rex Leeper: "Publicity, as opposed to political propaganda, is the attempt to make known abroad the main features of our political, economic and cultural activities, to give an accurate picture of this country and to refrain from criticizing the activities of other countries."¹⁴⁶ Some of the guiding lines of the British Council can be traced back to the War Propaganda Bureau that operated during the First World War under supervision of the Foreign Office. Examples of this include the targeting of actions at the influential elite of a country and the use of printed material written by established writers that would seem as truthful and untainted as possible. Some of the texts concerned would even be distributed under the imprint of commercial publishing houses. This is no surprise, given the close relations with the Foreign Office and Leeper's own work experience. Yet time and again the British Council emphasized its mission to encourage a better mutual understanding between countries so as to promote global peace and stability. It was part of the British "fair play" image to never be anti-foreign in their statements and to limit itself to a pro-British stance.¹⁴⁷ The activities of

¹⁴⁴ A.J.S. White, *The British Council: The First Twenty-Five Years, 1934-1959* (London: British Council, 1965) 14.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, FO 141/624, P 411/267/150, Confidential Memorandum 'The British Council for Relations with other Countries', News Department, Foreign Affairs, 8 February 1935, page 3.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, FO 800/396, Memorandum by R.A. Leeper, 22 October 1938. Enclosed in Leeper to Cadogan, 22 October 1938, quoted in Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 7.

¹⁴⁷ This is an aspect encountered even today. Marshall and Martens describe how in their interview with Dr. Tom Craig-Cameron, Director of the British Council in Malaysia, the latter noted that the Council is "apolitical" and he "firmly rejected the notion that the British Council works with a fixed set of 'British values' which it is obliged to promote" (Martens and Marshall, 'International organisations', 266).

the British Council were to be mutual, allowing also the other country involved to present itself in Great Britain. As Lord Lloyd phrased it: "We do not force them to 'think British'; we offer them the opportunity to learn what the British think."¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

Increasing significance of cultural foreign policy

The Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein and the Dante Alighieri Society, with their emphasis on language and literature as expression of the national soul, can be regarded as typical products of Romantic, Herderian nationalism. As could be expected given the recent creation of the two nations they represented, both organizations were initially concerned with those compatriots who through emigration or 'incomplete' unification resided outside the national territory. The Alliance Française differed from the Schulverein and the Dante because from the start it had the ambition to promote French language and culture among foreigners. This was in part the heritage of the *mission civilisatrice* connected to the French Revolution and the universal value attached to Enlightenment principles. As long as French remained the diplomatic language and the nineteenth-century faith in progress based on Enlightenment principles prevailed, the Alliance Française could to some extent be seen as representing European civilization. Before the First World War, there still was among the European concert of nations a sense of shared supremacy vis à vis the rest of the world.

So far the organizations for the promotion of national language and culture abroad were private initiatives, generally led by writers, academics, civil servants and other groups in society who benefited from and helped shape the nation-state. They regularly received government funding but remained in principle non-governmental. We have seen that after the turn of the century, and especially following the First World War, the governments in Germany, France and Italy respectively began to see cultural foreign policy as a task for the state as well. The weight given to foreign cultural politics grew as a result of an interplay of factors that changed international relations: democratization processes leading to universal suffrage; the rise of aggressive, imperialist nationalism; the experience of the First World War and the resentment caused among the now politically empowered men who had served at the front; new communication technology, able to cross large distances and spread information among broader segments of society. All of these phenomena increased the potential political and economic power of cultural foreign policy.

¹⁴⁸ Colin Forbes Adam, *Life of Lord Lloyd* (London: Macmillan, 1948) 283.

Universal ideologies and state control

What further enhanced the significance of promoting ones culture abroad was the emergence of all-encompassing political ideologies. These made use of culture and modern communication tools to spread their conceptions of society, thereby displaying international ambitions as well. The Second International (1889-1916) dissolved when it was unable to unite socialist and labour parties in the refusal to support the First World War. Once the October Revolution in Russia brought the Bolsheviks to power there, the Communist Third International (1919-1943) was launched in Moscow to rally worldwide support for an international Soviet Republic. In Italy the March on Rome (1922) brought to power Mussolini and the National Fascist Party. From the mid-twenties onwards this government turned into dictatorship, with concurrent propaganda strategies. Germany too came in the hands of a dictators when in 1933 the National-Socialist Party leader Hitler became Chancellor and began to realize his plans for a Third Reich. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) would show to what extent the clash of ideologies in one country would involve the entire international community. It is in this changed political climate that the British Council was created. The Council was also meant to improve trade relations and promote British cultural products abroad but, more so than the Schulverein, the Dante or the Alliance, originated with a clear political function in mind: the mission to defend the British concept of democracy in Europe.

It could be argued that cultural promotion of the kind exercised by the Alliance Française and other such organizations was the symptom of a declining political power that needed to be compensated in the form of aggrandized cultural prestige. The activities of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein were intensified after Germany lost the First World War, the Alliance Française was founded partly in response to its military defeat in 1870 and its weakening position on the international political arena. Similarly, the Dante Alighieri Society was initially hoping to gain the territories it had not been able to claim militarily, its *terre irredente*, and to prove that the young nation was equal to the other major European powers. The relatively late creation of the British Council could from this perspective be explained as a reaction to, if not symptom of a decline that was beginning to make itself felt in the British Empire. However, for such cultural politics to have a compensating effect for countries in military or political decline there needed to be a widespread sense that cultural domination mattered in the first place.

An aspect that is often ignored in studies on foreign cultural propaganda in the interwar years is the emerging influence in Europe of

American culture.¹⁴⁹ We have already mentioned that English at the Paris Treaties was for the first time recognized as diplomatic language besides French. This was demanded by the American delegation, not by the British. Woodrow Wilson spoke no foreign languages. A concrete example of how American culture challenged European models is the American film, widely popular and therefore making it less easy for organizations such as the Dante Alighieri Society and the British Council to impress audiences with their own promotional films. Mass consumerism, epitomized by the production processes and social ideas of Henry Ford, was regarded by the established elite in Europe as a threat to their cultural norms and socio-political position. In both democratic and totalitarian states ways were sought to integrate elements of American culture in the political landscape. At the same time, the United States of America too were being drawn into the cultural rivalry of the interwar years. Like Britain it had a tradition of voluntarism, permitting its government to assume in matters concerning the arts and culture that any worthwhile initiative could count on private backing and should not be dependent on the state. Yet in 1938 a Division of Cultural Relations was introduced in the Department of State and from then on the Americans embarked on a promotion of internationalism steeped in a belief in the universality of ideas that shows some similarities with the assumptions we encounter in the British Council.¹⁵⁰

As has been concluded in a particularly balanced and perspicacious analysis of the ‘war of words’ during the interwar years, the activity of the British Council “shows that fascist or communist states were not the only ones to press culture into the service of political objectives.”¹⁵¹ This also demonstrates that to make a distinction between cultural politics and cultural propaganda is highly questionable¹⁵² and that a greater involvement or even control by the state was part of a general historical trend in the tense international climate between the two World Wars.

¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, Chaubet – perhaps sensitized by the Gaullist tradition of anti-Americanism - does mention American competition on the field of cultural propaganda. (Chaubet, *La politique culturelle française*, 245-251.) Donaldson, Pisa and Salvetti do not.

¹⁵⁰ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Donald S. Birn, ‘The war of words. The British Council and Cultural Propaganda in the 1930s’, 181; Frank A. Ninkovich, *The diplomacy of ideas. U.S. foreign policy and cultural relations, 1938-1950* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁵¹ Birn, ‘The war of words’, 189.

¹⁵² As proposed by Chaubet by assigning *politique culturelle* to democratic states and *propagande culturelle* to authoritarian states.