

# Conference interpreting in the Third Reich

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## Abstract

*The present study examines the actual working conditions of professional interpreters in National Socialist Germany. By using authentic historical material, the recruitment, preparation and general organisation of interpreter assignments at the Eleventh International Penal and Penitentiary Congress (IPPC) in Berlin in August 1935 will be reconstructed. The study sheds light on how strongly the regime influenced the actual work of conference interpreters. To the Nazi leadership, the IPPC was a welcome propaganda opportunity to promote parts of their political agenda. The IPPC's language staff also became a means to this end. At the same time, the study shows how professional the approach to conference interpreter assignments was in Germany as early as the 1930s.*

## Keywords

Conference interpreting, interpreting in the Third Reich, legal interpreting.

## Introduction

Historical research on the interpreting profession under the National Socialist regime has experienced an upward trend in recent years, most prominently illustrated recently by the impressive range of research projects presented at the Conference "Translation and the Third Reich" in Berlin in December 2014 (Andres *et*

al. 2016). Early publications touching upon interpreting in the Third Reich, such as Ruth Roland's historical overview (1999), focus either on interpreters working for the government or the diplomatic service and are based on autobiographical accounts such as those of Paul Schmidt (1949/1984), "Hitler's interpreter", or SS interpreter Eugen Dollmann (1963). The important work of Jesus Baigorri-Jalón (2004a, 2004b) also includes a portrait of what he established to be an interpreter type *sui generis*, the interpreters of the dictators (2004a), thereby also focusing on the political realm. As of 2010, some articles have been published on interpreting within the context of the Holocaust (Tryuk 2010; Wolf 2014) as well as studies focusing on aspects of control and ideological indoctrination of interpreters (Andres 2016; Werner 2014; Winter 2012).

Winter and Andres inform us, among other things, about the existence of an interpreter and translator association which went by the name of *Reichsfachschaft für das Dolmetscherwesen* (RfD, in English *Reich Association of Interpreters*) and the work of a department at the Ministry of Propaganda in charge of organising every international gathering in National Socialist Germany, the *Deutsche Kongress-Zentrale* (DKZ, in English *German Congress Centre*). These institutions were but little cogs in the Nazi leadership's greater organisational machinery intended to register – and control – every member of their propagated new 'national community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*). For the National Socialists, 'national community' "was conceived as the collective body of 'valuable Aryan' Germans who would live and work in harmony together under the leadership of the Nazi Party" (Stephenson 2008: 99) and were ready "to sacrifice 'selfish' individual desires for the common good" (ibid.: 100).<sup>1</sup> The creation of this 'national community' was at the centre of Nazi propaganda and policy. In the course of their 'policy of coordination' (*Gleichschaltung*), political parties and organisations opposed to the new regime were outlawed, while the leadership of those groups "that were not inherently objectionable" (Stephenson 2008: 107) was replaced by 'politically reliable' people or the organisations in question were dissolved and then re-established as National Socialist organisations. *Gleichschaltung* applied to all political, social, cultural and organisational levels and, thus, "to all kinds of organizations, from occupational and professional associations to tennis clubs and music societies" (Stephenson 2008: 107). Therefore, the actions of the RfD and DKZ can be assumed to have had profound influence on the interpreting profession and every day work of interpreters.

The present study examines the actual working conditions of professional interpreters at the Eleventh International Penal and Penitentiary Congress (IPPC) in Berlin in August 1935. By using authentic historical material from the Reich's

1 Their concept was one of racial unity based on ethnic and biological criteria and held the promises of overcoming class divisions, creating social and political unity as well as national glory for those Germans the regime sought to include. However, at the core of this rhetoric of equality were also the creation of inequality and the increasingly radical exclusion of those not wanted by the Nazis for racist and anti-Semitic reasons (but also including groups such as political opponents and people deemed social outcasts by the Nazis such as criminals, homosexuals or alcoholics). For further details, see e.g. Bajohr/Wildt (2012), Stephenson (2008), Wachsmann (2008).

Ministry of Justice (RJM) collected at the Federal Archives (BArch) in Berlin, the recruitment, preparation and general organisation of interpreter assignments will be reconstructed. Although the present historical investigation is limited to only one international conference, the study is the first of its kind and its close-up perspective provides valuable information on how professional the interpreting was (or was not) at the time. Moreover, it can shed light on how strongly the regime influenced the actual work of conference interpreters.

## 1. The International Penal and Penitentiary Congress (IPPC)

### 1.1 General historical background

The International Penal and Penitentiary Commission was an international organisation founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to promote the exchange between its member states on important issues in the fields of criminal law and penitentiary systems. The initial idea of creating an international forum like this came from no one less than U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant who appointed an American representative in 1870 to bring the project forward (BArch R 901/32436, p. 127). The first Congress took place in 1872<sup>2</sup> and a permanent Committee (the Commission's forerunner) was founded, with subsequent conferences held every five years in major cities such as Stockholm, Rome, Paris and St. Petersburg. The Commission's activities were temporarily interrupted after the last Congress in 1910 due to the outbreak of the First World War. The first post-war IPPC, attended by over 40 states, was held in London in 1925, which was also the year Germany joined the Commission as an official member (cf. BArch R 901/32434, p. 53, p. 173, p. 194; BArch R 901/32435, p. 99; BArch R 901/32436, p. 127). The other members, besides the U.S.A., the U.K. and Germany, included not only European states such as Spain, France, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece or Hungary, but also countries such as Argentina, Chile, Egypt, British India, Japan and the Union of South Africa, which made the IPPC an organisation of truly international nature (cf. BArch R 901/32434, p. 173).

The Commission's main office was in Bern, where General Secretary Simon van der Aa, a Dutch university professor of criminal law, was in charge of overseeing the Commission's activities (cf. BArch R 901/32434, p. 173). The organisation's main objective was to promote the fight against high crime rates in the individual member states by means of striving for more approximation of laws, debates on current issues in criminal law as well as discussing individual experience with different penal measures. Against this backdrop the General Assembly was able to adopt resolutions in the hope of having more effective tools to exercise influence on domestic legislation. However, this instrument was legally non-binding in order to respect the member states' sovereignty (cf. BArch R 3001/20955, p. 154-155).

2 In 1846, an international prison congress convened in Frankfurt am Main, but this seems to have been a different conference (Federal Archives, BArch R 3001/20955, p. 151).

## 1.2 The 1935 IPPC in Berlin

The IPPC was traditionally a conference held upon invitation of the given country's government. Germany, still a democratic state in the form of the Weimar Republic at this point, officially announced its invitation at the 1930 IPPC in Prague. Preceding the announcement there had been long, protracted discussions between the ministries involved on whether Germany would be able to afford and organise such an event. Moreover, Germany wanted an assurance that an absolute majority of the members would vote for Berlin (BArch R 901/32434, p. 2-26). They did so and the Italian government drew the short straw and cancelled its invitation. It was Erwin Bumke, the President of the German Reich's Supreme Court, who urged the RJM to invite the IPPC to Berlin in 1935. As a consequence, its presidency fell to Germany and thereby to Bumke after the invitation had been accepted by vote.

After Hitler came to power in Germany in January 1933, the question arose of whether the new regime should hold on to hosting the 1935 IPPC (BArch R 901/32434, p. 42, 48-51). In the end the RJM and the Reich's Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*, AA) agreed that the political advantages clearly outweighed worries about uncomfortable situations for the German delegation, should their foreign guests address issues such as the Nazi's aggressive 'protective custody' scheme (*Schutzhaft*)<sup>3</sup>. One of the winning arguments was that the IPPC could be used as an opportunity to invite as many foreign guests as possible in order to show them the "real New Germany" and dispel any concerns or prejudices against the Nazi regime. The ministries feared that cancelling the IPPC might present the Reich in an unfavourable light, so that critics might argue Germany was denying experts insights into its ways (BArch R 901/32434, p. 50, 116). In order to cultivate the image the Nazis were trying to project of themselves, the Ministry of Propaganda was now also involved in the IPPC's organisation, notably so with respect to advertising the congress in Germany and abroad (BArch R 901/32434, p. 56). How highly the event was valued by the Nazi leadership is also shown by the fact that the Minister of Propaganda himself, Joseph Goebbels, seized the opportunity to give a speech. However, many critics were not fooled, neither before nor after the congress, so that the 1935 IPPC received largely negative press.

Another matter of great importance was the IPPC's official languages. As German was not one of them, President Bumke would have had to open this public congress in French, which, according to National Socialist reasoning, was unacceptable. Bumke's mission was thus to push the Commission into accepting German as the third official working language for the 1935 IPPC, which he succeeded in doing at a preliminary meeting in Bern, where the IPPC's rules of procedure were changed accordingly (BArch R 901/32434, p. 49-51, 92). The use of other lan-

3 The euphemistic term 'protective custody' meant that the police arrested political opponents and other 'community aliens', who, according to Nazi ideology, did not belong to the 'national community' (see footnote 1) without any judicial proceedings whatsoever. This practice formed part of the basis on which the Nazis were to persecute hundreds of thousands of people during their reign and hold their victims in prisons and concentration camps (Wachsmann 2008: 124, 126).

guages was also possible but the delegation concerned had to provide their own interpreter.

As regards the IPPC's programme, the conference proceedings were divided into General Assembly meetings and four different expert "Sections" (Section I: Legislation, Section II: Administration, Section III: Prevention, Section IV: Juvenile crime). Each Section dealt with two particular questions and for each of the questions there was one leading expert who prepared an opinion in writing on the given topic as a basis for discussions. The results from the four Sections were then reported back during the plenary meetings. One of the conference days was reserved for visits to different German prisons in order to show state-of-the-art German penitentiary facilities to the delegations. After the IPPC had officially ended on August 24<sup>th</sup>, selected guests were invited to a trip through Germany to visit some tourist attractions.

## 2. Interpreting at the Eleventh IPPC

Since the Ministry of Justice was primarily responsible for organising the IPPC, it was Dr. Lehmann, one of the Ministry's Deputy Assistant Under-Secretaries (*Ministerialrat*, MR), who was in charge of all interpreting and translation matters. In this capacity, he was supported by the Foreign Office (AA) regarding questions of general organisation, recruitment, payment and also preparatory material, first and foremost by Paul Gautier<sup>4</sup>, Head of the AA's interpreting and translation department.

Given the fact that Germany had officially extended its invitation to host the 1935 IPPC as early as 1930 and had successfully pushed the Commission into accepting German as an official working language, it seems rather surprising that the issue of interpreting was apparently not addressed until April 1935. In a letter to the AA, the RJM first enquired about the possible use of the "Siemens transmission system" (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 12, author's translation<sup>5</sup>) which would allow for direct, i.e. simultaneous, interpretation into all needed languages via earphones. In a preparatory meeting, however, Gautier and another *Ministerialrat* by the name of Gaus highlighted the particular and unique difficulty that comes with legal interpreting and, therefore, ventured that the traditional consecutive mode would be much more impressive in this particular context. The protocol of this meeting states:

The question of whether the so called Siemens transmission system (earphones at every seat, immediate speech translation into the other two conference languages

- 4 It was Gautier who, more than ten years before the Nazis seized power, had written a memorandum on setting up a proper language unit within the Foreign Ministry. The latter heeded his advice and, in 1921, made Gautier the first Head of the newly established language department (*Sprachendienst*) (Wilss 2005/1999: 62).
- 5 As the organisers were not familiar with the system, they simply called it "Siemens transmission system" (*Siemensübertragungsanlage*) without noting down the official name in the protocol.

sentence by sentence) should be used has been discussed in detail with Mr. Ministerialrat Gaus as well as Mr. Gautier. Both gentlemen have warned against using this system, especially so Mr. Gaus. [They said] the system had certain advantages where it is essential to conclude one's business under any circumstances within a very limited period of time. However, the system also has considerable disadvantages. Translating legal analyses sentence by sentence or word by word is exceptionally difficult. If really good interpreters such as Mr. Krauss or Mr. Graham are available, interpretation delivered as a whole speech is much more impressive. Under these circumstances, the idea of using the Siemens transmission system will not be further pursued. (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 12, author's translation)

Though time saving was a factor, the organisers were clearly in favour of what they deemed the more prestigious mode of delivery, i.e. consecutive interpreting. Unfortunately, the protocol does neither reveal why consecutive was considered to be more impressive nor what made legal interpreting so difficult in the eyes of Mr. Gautier and Mr. Gaus. It can only be speculated that since the inter-war period of the 1920s and 1930s marked the heyday of consecutive interpreting, the organisers did not want to engage in anything experimental due to the propagandistic effect they hoped to achieve (see above), perhaps also because the League of Nations had rejected the simultaneous mode after having tested it in 1931 for different reasons, among them the reservation of many of the seasoned consecutive interpreters (Baigorri-Jalòn 2004a: 106-108, 154-167).

## 2.1 Recruitment

Regarding the question of recruiting capable interpreters, the RJM was again supported by Paul Gautier, Head of the language department at the Reich's Foreign Office. Interestingly enough, the RJM was looking for one very gifted interpreter for both English and French respectively and other additional, presumably "average" interpreters. (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 11). Unfortunately, the material consulted does not provide any information as to what characterised an especially skilled interpreter. It only states that the two highly skilled ones were to be assigned to the General Assembly and Sections on very important issues, the rest were to interpret during the other Section sessions. It can only be assumed that the organisers wanted to make sure that the most qualified interpreters were assigned the speeches they considered most important. However, this plan was dropped later on and the interpreters were assigned to the various General Assembly meetings according to the subject matter (see below 2.2).

In early July, Gautier recommended interpreters with sufficient professional experience who were personally known to him and submitted a list of twelve interpreters, six for English and six for French<sup>6</sup>. The RJM files unfortunately do not

6 Assigned to the English team were Mr. Graham, Mr. Schumacher, Mr. Büchner, Mr. Horstmann, Mr. Wallau and Mr. Meckel, to the French team Mr. Burckhardt, Mr. Gropp, Mr. Koch, Mr. Dürselen, Mr. Vermassen and Mr. Krauss who was later replaced by Mr. Koch for the conference and Mr. Thiele for the prison visit (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 19-20, 25, 68).

provide information on the hired interpreters' backgrounds<sup>7</sup>, with the exception that some were lawyers or had studied economics.

Additionally, the RJM received several applications from freelance interpreters who offered their services to the IPPC but did not get hired. One of them was J. E. Franksen from Bremen, the son of a German consul general in New York who had been raised in the United States and Canada (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 32-36). He worked as a freelance private teacher, interpreter and translator in Bremen, was certified to do court interpreting and legal translations and was a member of the RfD. Prior assignments included, inter alia, interpreting and translations for the prosecution in trials and the British and U.S. consulates. In addition, he had interpreted at the Seventh International Congress on Road Construction (*VII Internationaler Straßenbaukongress*) in 1934 in Munich for which he had received letters of recommendation from a Northern Irish government delegate. Another interpreter, J. Hein from Berlin, had worked as "microphone interpreter", i.e. simultaneous interpreter (Winter 2012: 43), at the International Film Congress (*Internationaler Filmkongress*) in April 1935 as well as the 1934 Road Construction Congress (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 45-47). Moreover, his letters of recommendation included one from the U.S. embassy confirming that he had acted as legal adviser for patent and trademark law until 1933. It seems rather striking that the RJM rejected these and other applications from, to all appearances, professional and competent interpreters, especially since one of the IPPC-interpreters, Mr. Dürselen, had a permanent position at the Nazi organisation *German Labour Front* (DAF). The Ministry of Justice, accordingly, had to ask the DAF to release this interpreter from work for the IPPC<sup>8</sup> (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 37, 56). The Ministry insisted on hiring this particular interpreter and did not choose Mr. Franksen or Mr. Hein instead because all positions had already been filled by interpreters recommended and recruited by the interpreting and translation department of the Foreign Office, Mr. Dürselen being one of them.

7 Hans R. Burckhardt was a full-time freelance interpreter and translator and a member of the RfD (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 232). Moreover, his fate as a victim of denunciation is well documented in Andres (2016). When he gave translation assignments to a French colleague in 1937, his loyalty to National Socialism was called into question. As a consequence, the Reich's Ministry of Propaganda forbade him to continue his work at international conferences and informed all other Ministries and departments of the incident, which led the organisers of the XII International Homoeopathic Congress to withdraw his assignment as an interpreter. In order to justify the Propaganda Ministry's harsh actions, it started to collect incriminatory material on Burckhardt, reaching from his political opinions to homosexual conduct of which he was accused by a fellow interpreting colleague. Although it does not seem as though he was arrested at any point, the Propaganda Ministry continued its efforts to prevent him from working at least until 1942.

8 The DAF replied that the interpreter in question had handed in his notice effective as of July 31<sup>st</sup> 1935. Nonetheless this fact had been unknown to the organisers before.

## 2.2 Preparation

The interpreters were able to get a first and general idea of their potential assignment through the letters asking them whether they were interested in working at the 1935 IPPC as these contained information on the date, duration, location, general setting (congress upon invitation of the Reich's government), working languages, the conference's division into General Assembly and Sections and payment (according to the AA's standards<sup>9</sup>) (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 26). Furthermore, the letters informed the interpreters that the IPPC would revolve around issues from the entire field of criminal law.

As regards the preparation for the IPPC, Gautier and Lehmann had already agreed during a preparatory meeting that, prior to their assignment, the interpreters were to receive all available manuscripts and reports by IPPC-speakers, English books on correctional systems as well as the English translation of the *Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring* (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*), i.e. the Reich's legislation on compulsory sterilisation (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 12). The RJM kept its promise when it assumed responsibility for collecting relevant preparatory material, the first comprehensive batch of which was made available to the interpreters on July 19<sup>th</sup>, exactly one month before their assignment. The material was deposited at the AA's language unit which was in charge of distributing the documents and books to the interpreters as well as ensuring a timely exchange of the limited number of copies (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 27). At this point, the interpreters received relevant English books and final versions of French speeches were soon to follow, whereas the English texts were still in the possession of the Commission's main office in Bern. The RJM had already requested in writing that the documents be made temporarily available to the interpreters. General Secretary van der Aa reacted within two days and had the British and American delegates' manuscripts delivered to Berlin as express items (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 24-27, p. 58). Where matters of great importance to the German delegation were concerned, the interpreters were supplied with additional material, as was the case with the French interpreters for Section III who were given copies of a special issue of *Recueil de documents en matière pénale et pénitentiaire* (in English *Compilation of documents in criminal and prison law*, author's translation) featuring a paper on the German compulsory sterilisation law that the organisers considered recommendable (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 82). As commendable as these efforts were even from today's point of view, without regard to the content of the material, the German organisers had difficulties with providing the complete set of written manuscripts (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 56, 72). Still, as regards content, the IPPC-interpreters received a quite remarkable amount of preparatory material to provide them with background knowledge and enable them to familiarise themselves with the relevant legal terminology – a challenge requiring a lot of time and effort in pre-digital days.

9 Unfortunately, the material does not provide any information on what these standards looked like. Other sources such as the 1941 guidelines on interpreter assignments by the DKZ do not contain information on payment either (for further details see Winter 2012: 41-47).

As the copies of the written manuscripts were limited in number, the organisers had worked out an efficient system of temporary distribution and then passing the documents on: first, the interpreters were sent half of the documents in order to work on them for ten days and send them back before receiving the second half. In the case of the French interpreters, this procedure took place between two to three weeks prior to the IPPC (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 70). The English interpreters were handed out their texts during the preliminary meeting on July 25<sup>th</sup> (see below) and had to return them to the RJM within one week (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 72). Reliability was essential insofar as the interpreters were divided into teams of two, interpreter A working on the first half of the documents while interpreter B was working on the second half. If either of them failed to finish their preparation on time, the other would also be affected.

Roughly one month prior to their IPPC-assignment, on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1935, the interpreters were invited to attend a preliminary meeting at the RJM (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 72). Almost the entire team was present and received information on the general course of the congress, including a printed programme and estimates on which Sections were expected to be the best attended. Moreover, organisers and interpreters developed a detailed working schedule covering all sessions (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 41, 71). Contrary to the initial plan (to assign the two highly skilled interpreters to the IPPC plenary meetings, see above), the team members whose Section subjects were at the centre of a General Assembly meeting interpreted during this General Assembly meeting. In addition to this congress-related information, the interpreters also had the opportunity to go on an excursion to the prisons prior to the conference. After the meeting, the interpreters were sent summaries of the main aspects discussed, overviews, lists and schedules of all the assignments (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 64-68).

On August 14<sup>th</sup> 1935, five days prior to the official opening of the IPPC, a final meeting took place of the interpreters, stenographers, the RJM's employees in charge, Gautier and General Secretary van der Aa (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 71, 118-119). It was held to resolve final questions that had been left open, such as who would be in charge of translating the daily congress bulletin, as well as to make some final adjustments regarding the interpreting schedule. In addition, the interpreters received their congress badges and invitations to the reception on Monday evening. Finally, one day prior to the official IPPC launch, the interpreters were provided with a list of all participants and a specific information sheet for interpreters and stenographers on the time schedule, rooms, overall organisation, special responsibilities etc. (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 161).

An entirely different, yet very effective opportunity to prepare the 1935 IPPC was the fact that the interpreters also had to translate all the speeches to be delivered by the Reich's ministers attending the conference, the essential contents of the remaining speeches and the welcoming speech by the director of Brandenburg prison (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 41, 132-137).

### 2.3 Working conditions and challenges during the IPPC

The interpreters' assignment at the IPPC began on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1935 at 9:45 a.m.. The interpreters had their own common room, where they were to meet every morning and every afternoon before the beginning of each session (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 118, 161). During sessions of the IPPC's General Assembly all interpreters had to be present irrespective of whether they were interpreting or not.

The welcoming speech was given by Erwin Bumke. It had been partly translated beforehand and was then read out loud by the French and English interpreters respectively (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 119). It remains unclear why the translation of this major speech had been limited to selected passages only, whereas other speeches by the Reich's ministers had been translated entirely (see above). The speeches of "normal" participants had been translated partly in order to leave enough time for the German original rendition (BArch R 3002/21296, p. 131). However, it remains unclear whether the foreign guests who gave speeches were treated with the same courtesy. In principle, translating entire speeches beforehand was not that uncommon at the time. Paul Schmidt and Hans Jacob, for instance, both tell their readers about how their interpreting team would translate speeches given by German delegates to the League of Nations in their entirety and revise them for hours on end (Jacob 1962: 124-126; Schmidt 1949/1984: 113-114). These translations were then used as a basis for their interpreting performances.

As thorough as the interpreters' preparation for their assignment might have been, it could not compensate for the enormous strain of reality, as the following retrospective assessment clearly shows:

Right at the outset of the Congress, it became clear that the number of interpreters assigned to plenary and Section sessions was insufficient. The difficulty of the subject matter and the very long duration of some of the Section sessions required the immediate assignment of additional interpreters. Moreover, French was used much more frequently than anticipated, so that Section sessions needed more than one interpreter. (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 186, author's translation)

Besides the fact that interpreters were supposed to work alone during Section sessions, the overall situation described in this quote is rather unfortunate. Additional workload generated by the required translation of any number of motions, resolutions, statements etc. aggravated the interpreters' situation. Translations, of course, had to be done parallel to the Section sessions and produced as fast as possible (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 186). Furthermore, the interpreters were to assist Sections with formulating suggestions or proposed resolutions, a task which also required additional personnel. Finally, the translation and revision of the daily IPPC bulletin constantly required three to four people as opposed to two in the organiser's initial plan. Only by doing repeated night shifts were the interpreters able to compensate for this shortage of staff and ensure the daily availability of the bulletin in three languages. Yet, the IPPC organisers did in fact try to exercise damage control by hiring two additional interpreters – one for French and one for English – who were sent by the Foreign Office. As this did

clearly not suffice, trainee lawyers with language skills were used as well. Given the conference's subject, this solution could probably have been implemented without much further ado, particularly as the National Socialist association of lawyers had informed the organisers that some young members had excellent language skills and could be used if need be (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 13). Interestingly enough, it seems that the organisers did not contact those interpreters who had submitted speculative applications, which is difficult to understand, particularly with regard to Mr. Hein who not only lived in Berlin where the IPPC took place, but also seemed to be a qualified interpreter judging from his letters of recommendation and prior assignments (see above).

After the official closing of the IPPC and the subsequent trip through Germany, the interpreters received letters of recommendation upon request. As the conference interpreting profession was still in its infancy at the time, it can be assumed that such letters were essential for professional success as they testified to the proficiency of the interpreters in writing. If the interpreter's overall performance had been satisfactory, these letters did indeed reflect gratitude and appreciation:

During his assignment as an English interpreter, Mr. Schumacher fulfilled all his tasks with great skill. It has to be emphasised that he was extremely capable when it came to grasping the very difficult and lively discussions of Section II of the conference. His performance in plenary meetings and during the excursion also demonstrated that he is more than qualified to handle the difficult task of being an interpreter at a major international conference. Furthermore, I would like to mention that his outstanding performance was also greatly appreciated by the members of the English delegation. (BArch R3001/20955, p. 146, author's translation)

A comparison with other letters of recommendation shows that although there were standard phrases, the authors of such letters did indeed distinguish between different levels of quality. One of the trainee lawyers hired as an emergency solution was merely "fairly capable" (BArch R 3001/20955, p. 201, author's translation) of fulfilling his tasks. Although he had also demonstrated great skill as regards the subject matter of Section II, there was no mention of any appreciation by congress participants. Likewise, the poor lawyer read for superlatives in vain.

### 3. Discussion and conclusion

The Eleventh International Penal and Penitentiary Congress (IPPC) was an international forum with some tradition, the first of its kind being held in 1872. Germany had already invited the 1935 IPPC to Berlin in 1930. After the National Socialists seized power in January 1933, the IPPC became a welcome propaganda opportunity in the eyes of the Nazi leadership to promote parts of their political agenda. Therefore, the IPPC's language staff also became a means to this end by enabling the Nazis to communicate their agenda to an international audience. This foreshadows the way in which the Nazis sought to monopolise the congress industry by using the *Deutsche Kongress-Zentrale* (DKZ) which was still in

the process of being developed in 1935, by putting the DKZ, which was part of the Propaganda Ministry, in charge of every aspect of every single conference held in Germany (for further details see Andres 2016).

With respect to the interpreting profession, the present study first of all demonstrates that professional full-time freelance conference interpreters did exist in the Third Reich. It can be assumed that in order to earn their livelihood they also had to work as translators and/or court interpreters/translators. What remains unclear is in which capacity the interpreters worked most and on how many occasions they were able to do actual conference interpreting. The material consulted for the present examination names four events which took place in the years 1934/35, whereas the annual report of the DKZ names 32 international congresses in 1937 (DKZ 1937). Only if one were to assume that the IPPC interpreters were hired for each of these events – which they were not – would conference assignments, including preparation, have been the rule for them rather than the exception.

Neither of the interpreting-related Nazi organisations, the *Reichsfachschaft für das Dolmetscherwesen* (RfD) and the DKZ, were involved in planning the congress and the interpreter assignments. Some of the interpreters were RfD members, but the association had zero influence on the proceedings, although it had been founded in 1933 and was initially focused on certified legal interpreters<sup>10</sup>. The DKZ was not mentioned once, but it had only been established with semi-official status in December 1934. Moreover, it focused at the outset on medical conferences and only shifted its focus to other kinds of conferences later (Andres 2016, Winter 2012: 41, 47). Therefore, one possible explanation is that these institutions were simply not sufficiently developed at the time. Another reason might be the fact that the congress was such a high-profile event that any control to be exercised by the RfD or the DKZ was superfluous: all the interpreters had been hand-picked by the Head of the language unit of the Foreign Office and the entire preparatory material had been provided by the Reich's Ministry of Justice. What could be of interest to future research is whether the RfD's grip on the interpreting community tightened as much as the DKZ's did in the course of the Third Reich (Andres 2016).

Lastly, the interpreters' preparation for the 1935 IPPC needs to be highlighted. The amount, organisation and comprehensiveness of the material, as well as various preparatory meetings and prior visits to the prisons, allow a twofold conclusion to be drawn. On the one hand, this is evidence of how professional the approach to conference interpreter assignments was in Germany as early as in the 1930s, even though the actual working conditions could be, as the study also shows, chaotic and extremely taxing to say the least. On the other hand, the re-

10 The RfD was one of the Nazi organisations which was established during the regime's policy of coordination (*Gleichschaltung*, see above 1.) after prior existing court interpreter associations, the names of which remain unknown so far, had been dissolved. The RfD's primary task was to register and control all 'Aryan' court interpreters, and then interpreters in general. Later on, its focus shifted to the training of military interpreters (for further details see Winter 2012: 47-54). As to the certified legal interpreters, it is only known that they existed but not how they were trained, certified etc.

gime's perfidious exploitation of international conferences comes to light. To the Nazi leadership, the IPPC became a tool to promote the Reich's policies and secure the semblance of international consensus on their compulsory sterilisation agenda. The interpreters, who were indispensable to the smooth functioning of the proceedings, played their part. Accordingly, the preparatory material on compulsory sterilisation was more detailed than that on other aspects and their renditions of German speeches certainly had to be delivered in a way that would cast a favourable light on the "New Germany". Although the material conducted for this study does not entail any instructions as to the pragmatic effect the Nazis wished to achieve, interpreting was deemed a highly political profession under National Socialism. The regime demanded unconditional loyalty from its interpreters and expected them to not only represent but also actively advocate Nazi ideology (Andres 2016; Winter 2012: 55).

The present study only examines one international conference, so it certainly cannot be claimed that its findings are representative. Nevertheless, it provides detailed information on one conference in Nazi Germany. It shows how the professionalism with which the interpreters were treated, if one were inclined to attribute such credit to the IPPC organisers, was dominated by National Socialist ideology and agenda.

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