

## **The First World War: European (dis)integration**

Today, it is well established that the process of European integration was not initiated in the aftermath of the Second World War, but is deeply rooted in the decades preceding the First World War, particularly in terms of its economic and technical aspects. One of the recent insights into this dynamic concerns infrastructure. In various sectors, cooperation has been structured around communities of knowledge and expertise in depth since the middle of the 19th century. This cooperation is developing at the same time as the contemporary “first wave of globalization” which, by intensifying trade, is pushing for the harmonization of means of communication and transport, as well as of units of measurement. The creation of the “Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM)”, the “Comité International des Poids et Mesures (CIPM)” and the “Conférence Générale des Poids et Mesures (CGPM)” (1875) testify to this.

The First World War marked a break in this dynamic. Infrastructure that is supposed to build peace became a weapon of war. International trade contracted sharply. Traffic across borders faces multiple frontlines. At the same time, the role of States in the economy is considerably strengthened. After the war, the return to normalcy was rendered difficult by destruction and inflation. This return finally broke up over the 1929 crisis. If experts resume their cooperative work, they must deal with a totally renewed landscape, although they often were more determined than ever to make the networks they weave into nets holding countries and societies together. Basically, they were pushing their “internationalist technocratic” agenda in the face of what they perceive as the failure of political leaders to preserve peace and security. The borders of European countries are being profoundly transformed and their crossing is becoming much more bureaucratic. In Central and Eastern Europe new countries have emerged such as Poland, the successors of Austria-Hungary and the Baltic States. For these countries, building an integrated infrastructure as soon as possible is a crucial element for national survival. But they also need to be integrated into international flows. Therefore, compliance with European rules and standards is crucial for them.

The objective of this workshop is to question this narrative of European disintegration in 1914-1918, of war as a simple negative of integration, by questioning what links war, at the moment and afterwards, to processes that are or will be forms of European integration. The very concept of integration can usefully be discussed, though it will probably not be possible to shed light on all situations. For this reason, it will also be necessary to specify the phenomenon of disintegration, which has been attributed to the post-war period. For which fields can it be confirmed? Is it measurable? And if so, to what extent and in what ways was the post-war period prepared during the war in these areas? Has technical cooperation not been continued, in a different light, in each of the warring camps? Has the transformation of the economic role of States affected these dynamics? In what sense? How have the international technical organizations founded in previous decades coped with these years of conflict? Did post-war states play a special role in the inter-war period in terms of technical and economic cooperation?