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# ‘Nationalists of All Countries, Unite!’: Hans Keller and Nazi Internationalism in the 1930s

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This paper presents a case study of German ‘Nazi internationalism’ as part of a broader, transnational counter-reaction to liberal and communist internationalism in the 1930s. It offers an analysis of the activities and main ideas of the Nationalist International (*Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten*; IAdN), headed by the German jurist Hans Keller and active from 1934 to 1941. The IAdN promoted concepts such as *Volk* nationalism and a *Third Europe* as a solution to the European crisis, and attempted to establish an alternative law of nations to replace the post-1919 liberal order. The IAdN illustrates an early attempt to reconcile *völkisch* ideas with international cooperation, thus foreshadowing ‘ethno-pluralist’ concepts of the New Right in the post-war period.

## Introduction

In recent years, a burgeoning body of research on the phenomenon of *fascist internationalism* enabled new perspectives on the complicated relationship between extreme nationalism, fascism and Nazism on the one side, and internationalism on the other. In a transnational perspective, these newer studies analysed international cooperation and outlook among fascist regimes, movements, organisations and agents.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, due to the extreme nationalist, *völkisch*, racist, expansionist, destructive and ultimately anti-internationalist nature of German Nazism, explicit histories of ‘Nazi internationalism’ are still largely eschewed as contradictory.<sup>2</sup> This article offers a new perspective on this paradoxical

<sup>1</sup> See for example the international workshop hosted at the Freie Universität Berlin, ‘Rethinking Practices and Notions of Fascist Internationalism 1919–1945’ (22–3 Oct. 2021). The recent literature addressing aspects of fascist internationalism includes Madeleine Herren, ‘Fascist Internationalism’, in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 191–212; Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Ana Antić, Johanna Conterio and Dora Vargha, ‘Conclusion: Beyond Liberal Internationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 25, 2 (2016), 359–71; Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, eds., *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017); Johannes Dalfinger and Dieter Pohl, eds., *A New Nationalist Europe under Hitler: Concepts of Europe and Transnational Networks in the National Socialist Sphere of Influence, 1933–1945* (London: Routledge, 2019); Daniel Hedinger, *Die Achse: Berlin, Rom, Tokio* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2021); Nathaniel Kunkeler and Martin Kristoffer Hamre, ‘Conceptions and Practices of International Fascism in Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, 1930–40’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 57, 1 (2022), 45–67.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘Nazi internationalism’ itself is rarely used in research. For two recent exceptions see Sandrine Kott and Kiran Klaus Patel, ‘Fascist Internationalism: Nazi Social Policy as an Imperial Project – An Introduction’, in Sandrine Kott and Kiran Klaus Patel, eds., *Nazism Across Borders: The Social Policies of the Third Reich and Their Global Appeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–28; Ana Antić, ‘Living in the Age of Axis Internationalism: Imagining Europe in Serbia Before and During the Second World War’, *European History Quarterly*, 48, 1 (2018), 61–91. However, studies on the international nature of Nazism reach back to Hannah Arendt’s article published in the immediate postwar period called ‘The Seeds of a Fascist International’, in Jerome Kohn, ed., *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and*

phenomenon by analysing the ideas and activities of the Nazi German organisation the Nationalist International (*Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten*; IAdN).

So far, the Nationalist International has received little attention in historical research. With its peculiar ‘internationalist’ outlook achieving limited reception and influence within the Third Reich, the IAdN seemingly constituted no more than a strange footnote in the long history of German Nazism. Especially when compared to its powerful competitor, the Communist International (which the IAdN attempted to mimic, for example, by using the slogan ‘Nationalists of all countries, unite!’ as an imitation of the Communist Manifesto), the organisation seems marginal.<sup>3</sup> However, I argue in line with the current research on fascist internationalism that the IAdN deserves attention not only because it reflects the ambiguous relationship between ultra-nationalism as a core element of fascist ideology and internationalism, defined here as an agenda to solve political issues through international cooperation.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the IAdN illustrates that a specific attempt of Nazi German internationalism had blossomed already in the mid-1930s, next to better-studied efforts and Nazi agencies involved in international propaganda and cooperation such as the immature vision of a White International, the anti-Semitic *Welt-Dienst* and the *Anti-Komintern*, as well as its international partner, the Geneva-based *Anticommunist Entente*.<sup>5</sup> I argue that the story of the IAdN shows, first, that Nazi concepts of European order circulated internationally long before the Second World War, in which Nazi understandings of a New European Order were forced upon occupied Europe and embraced by various collaborators. Second, I suggest that the IAdN potentially reveals the roots of contemporary right-wing internationalism by foreshadowing some ‘internationalist’ and ‘ethno-pluralist’ ideas of European post-war fascism and the New Right.

This paper builds on fresh archival material to offer an overview of the activities and ideas of the so-called Nationalist International. Furthermore, I outline the biography of the founder, Hans Keller (1908–70), a German legal scholar without whom the IAdN would never have come into existence. Keller’s organisational and networking skills emphasised the connection between the practices of fascist internationalism in a broad sense and the life of individual ‘agents or brokers beyond classic diplomatic channels’.<sup>6</sup> Keller evoked with his organisation a new, inegalitarian, racist, anti-Semitic, and hence *völkisch* nationalism, which was connected to a vague form of Europeanism and juxtaposed

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*Totalitarianism: Hannah Arendt* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 140–50. See also the publication by the former NSDAP member Werner Smoydzin, *Hitler lebt!: Vom internationalen Faschismus zur Internationale des Hakenkreuzes* (Pfaffenhofen a. d. Ilm: IImgau-Verlag, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> The slogan was suggested by the Polish delegate Zygmunt Cybichowski at the IAdN Berlin Congress in December 1934. Cf. *Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten, Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede: Sitzungsbericht der Berliner Tagung* (Zürich: Batschari, 1935), 69. This was not the first fascist copy of Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engel’s slogan. Franz Seldte from the German fascist veterans’ organisation Stahlhelm had claimed already in 1930: ‘Front soldiers of the world, unite’. Cf. Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 206–7.

<sup>4</sup> On ultra-, hyper- or extreme nationalism as a core of fascist ideology, see among others Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Newark: Polity Press, 2018), 40–5; Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 7, and Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13–14. On the relationship between the IAdN and the broader phenomenon of fascist internationalism, see my dissertation project on ‘Notions and Practices of Fascist Internationalism in the 1930s’ at the Freie Universität Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> On the White International, see Manfred Wichmann, ‘Die Konzeption einer Weißen Internationale bei Waldemar Pabst’, in Daniel Schmidt, Michael Sturm and Massimiliano Livi, eds., *Wegbereiter des Nationalsozialismus: Personen, Organisationen und Netzwerke der extremen Rechten zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2015), 125–40. On the *Welt-Dienst*, see Hanno Plass, ‘Der Welt-Dienst: International Anti-Semitic Propaganda’, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 103, 4 (2013), 503–22. On the *Anti-Komintern*, see Lorna L. Waddington, ‘The Anti-Komintern and Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda in the 1930s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 4 (2007), 573–94. On the *Anticommunist Entente*, see Michel Caillat, *L’Entente internationale anticommuniste de Théodore Aubert. Organisation interne, réseaux et action d’une internationale antimarxiste 1924–1950* (Lausanne: Société d’histoire de la Suisse romande, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Sven Reichardt, ‘Globalgeschichte des Faschismus. Neue Forschungen und Perspektiven’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 42–3 (2017), 10–16, 16.

with older, liberal, imperialist, inegalitarian state nationalism. Moreover, the IAdN attempted to establish a new *völkisch* ‘law of nations’, which would supersede traditional international law and allegedly enable a long-lasting international peace between different peoples instead of states.

Historians who have mentioned the IAdN so far have almost unanimously interpreted the undertaking as a Nazi German counterreaction to the Italian organisation Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (*Comitati d’Azione per l’Universalità di Roma*; CAUR), emphasising the ‘explicit intention of stonewalling’ its international efforts.<sup>7</sup> According to this interpretation, the emergence of the Nationalist International must be placed within the context of the Italo-German rivalry in the early 1930s. However, I will go beyond the traditional interpretation of the IAdN as merely a German backlash to Italian efforts. I argue that the antagonism of the IAdN towards three forms of internationalism – liberalism, communism and Italian fascism and their respective organisations (League of Nations, Communist International and CAUR) – were crucial to legitimise its specific nationalist internationalism.

Next to a first institutional history of the Nationalist International, this article contributes to two fields of historical research. First, it expands our knowledge of anti-democratic ideas of European and international order and the so-far neglected aspects of *illiberal* and *nationalist internationalism* in the early twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Nazi conceptualisations of European and international order during the Second World War, such as Carl Schmitt’s ‘*Großraumordnung*’ (Greater Space Order) as an ‘antithesis to liberal universalism’, have received some attention in recent research.<sup>9</sup> However, the story of the less-known Hans Keller reveals that a form of *völkisch* Europeanism existed already in the early 1930s. This was illustrated in Keller’s vision of a utopian *Drittes Europa* (Third Europe), conceptualised through a mythical-historical lens as a solution to the political, cultural and spiritual crisis of the European continent in need of palingenesis.<sup>10</sup> Keller drew heavily on *völkisch* concepts of *Volk* (people), *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community), *Reich* (empire) and *Rasse* (race) and attempted paradoxically to use these concepts not only as the base for German nationalism but also for other nationalisms, for whose particularities he preached ‘respect’. This illustrates that these concepts that were essential to German Nazism did not a priori preclude international cooperation.

Second, a transnational perspective on the Nationalist International beyond the German organiser illustrates that these *völkisch* ideas indeed circulated internationally and found enthusiastic supporters abroad, who utilised them for their own ends. Therefore, the article contributes to the recent ‘transnational turn’ within fascism studies inspired by transnational and global history, emphasising cross-border connections, transfers and entanglements between different fascist regimes, movements and

<sup>7</sup> For this line of interpretation, see Michael Arthur Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928–1936* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), 113; Hans Werner Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich: Einigungsbestrebungen im deutschen Machtbereich 1939–45* (Munich: Universitas-Verl., 1987), 23–4; Andrea Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf: Die Beziehungen zwischen ‘Drittem Reich’ und faschistischem Italien in den Bereichen Medien, Kunst, Wissenschaft und Rassenfragen* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1998), 396–7; Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Schulen des Hasses: Faschistische Systeme in Europa*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1999), 253; Arnd Bauerkämper, ‘Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939’, *East Central Europe*, 37, 2–3 (2010), 214–46, 227; Kevin Passmore, ‘Les Creux de feu et le Parti Social Français: Une perspective transnationale’, in Zeev Sternhell, ed., *L’histoire refoulée: La Rocque, les Croix de feu et la question du fascisme français* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2019), 181–224, 198–9. CAUR itself has been interpreted as an Italian reaction to the rise of German Nazism. Cf. Marco Cuzzi, *L’internazionale delle camicie nere: I CAUR, Comitati d’azione per l’universalità di Roma, 1933–1939* (Milano: Mursia, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> On the interplay between liberal and illiberal internationalism, see the special issue edited and introduced by Philippa Hetherington and Glenda Sluga, ‘Liberal and Illiberal Internationalisms’, *Journal of World History*, 31, 1 (2020), 1–9. On the broader history of nationalist internationalism, see David Motadel, ‘Nationalist Internationalism in the Modern Age’, *Contemporary European History*, 28, 1 (2019), 77–81.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Ebeling, *Geopolitik: Karl Haushofer und seine Raumwissenschaft 1919–1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 149. For an overview, see Oded Heilbrunner, ‘Großraum Europa: The Nazi Concept of “Greater European Space” in Recent Literature’, *The English Historical Review*, 136, 583, (2021), 1574–94.

<sup>10</sup> For the concept of palingenesis, defined as a revolutionary rebirth of a nation, race, state or Western civilisation in general, see Griffin, *Fascism*, 37–47.

individuals.<sup>11</sup> This approach enables a deeper understanding of fascist international networking practices, including three IAdN congresses between 1934 and 1936. Keller's organisation cooperated with representatives from several European fascist parties such as the Norwegian National Gathering (*Nasjonal Samling*), the Danish Nazi Party (*Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Arbejderparti*; DNSAP) and the Swiss National Front (*Nationale Front*). Furthermore, with its 'academic' and political activism, the IAdN attracted a broad spectrum of entirely male conservative, authoritarian, fascist and national socialist academics, intellectuals, journalists and politicians from mostly European countries. This analysis stresses the fluid character of interwar fascism as a political ideology and practice beyond narrow and static definitions, entangling proponents of fascism, the radical right and conservatism. All these forces were united in a common nationalist cause directed against the liberal order and the perceived Bolshevik threat.

### Hans Keller, the German-European Union and the Rockefeller Foundation

Hans Keller became one of the most tireless agents of Nazi internationalism in the interwar period, combining practical organisational skills with an intellectual outlook on how to reconcile Nazi ideology with international cooperation and a new, alternative international order. Nonetheless, his work and life have been mostly overlooked in historical research so far.<sup>12</sup> This is hardly surprising because he neither played an important role within the Nazi state apparatus (he was not even a member of the NSDAP) nor in German academia (he was, for example, refused a professorship in law). Except for the particular field of German *Völkerrecht* (international law), his 'internationalist' ideas received limited attention within the Third Reich.<sup>13</sup> However, his activities did not go entirely unnoticed. The German Foreign Ministry even opposed his activities, concluding in a report that Keller's international 'relationships indicated anything but a national socialist attitude'.<sup>14</sup> In stark contrast, Joseph Goebbels' Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*; RMVP) described Keller as 'a convinced supporter of the National Socialist world view' and financed his efforts for their own aims.<sup>15</sup>

Hans Karl Ernst Ludwig Keller was born on 2 January 1908 in Speyer (Rhineland), next to the Franco-German border, into a non-political and 'purely Aryan family of Protestant faith'.<sup>16</sup> Keller was thus affected by the First World War, and he despised the post-1919 order of Versailles from early on. After finishing school in Speyer and his studies in Munich with excellent marks, Keller

<sup>11</sup> On the transnational turn or consensus, see David D. Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and Its Era, 1919–1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 44–60; Constantin Iordachi, 'From "Generic" to "Real-Existing" Fascism: Towards a New Transnational and Historical-Comparative Agenda in Fascism Studies', in Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis, eds., *Beyond the Fascist Century: Essays in Honour of Roger Griffin* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 283–307; Ángel Alcalde, 'The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research', *Contemporary European History*, 29, 2 (2020), 243–52.

<sup>12</sup> For two exceptions, see Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*, 23–25; Judith Syga-Dubois, *Wissenschaftliche Philanthropie und transatlantischer Austausch in der Zwischenkriegszeit: Die sozialwissenschaftlichen Förderprogramme der Rockefeller Stiftungen in Deutschland* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2019), 613–19.

<sup>13</sup> Stolleis presents Keller as an 'outsider' within the broader field of *Völkerrecht* in interwar Germany, whereas Eberling describes him as part of a group of geopoliticians and jurists, such as Carl Schmitt and Karl Haushofer, serving Nazism. Cf. Michael Stolleis, *Geschichte des öffentlichen Rechts in Deutschland, Bd. 3: Staats- und Verwaltungsrechtswissenschaft in Republik und Diktatur, 1914–1945* (Munich: Beck, 2017), 383. Ebeling, *Geopolitik*, 159; 190.

<sup>14</sup> 'Seine Beziehungen deuten auf alles andere als auf nationalsozialistische Einstellung'. Report from German Embassy Rome to Federal Foreign Office, 19 Jun. 1936, PAAA RZ214 99289.

<sup>15</sup> 'Dr. Keller gilt hier als charakterlich einwandfrei und überzeugter Anhänger der nationalsozialistischen Weltauffassung'. Letter from RMVP to University of Munich, 22 Jan. 1937, BArch, R55/24256.

<sup>16</sup> As he claimed in an autobiographical sketch in late 1933: '... Aus rein arischer Familie evangelischen Glaubens stammend...'. Letter from Hans Keller to RMVP, 13 Dec. 1933, BArch, R55/24256. He presented himself as Hans K.E.L. Keller in his publications. For more biographical data see RAC, Hans Keller, Fellowship Card, RF, RG 10, F/S Recorder Cards, Social Sciences Germany; Personalakte Keller, Hans Karl Ernst Ludwig, BArch, R55/24256.

obtained three different doctoral titles between 1930 and 1932: in economics in Munich (Dr. oec. Publ.) and in law in Bordeaux (Doctor en droit) and Kiel (Dr. jur.). He specialised in international law and had ambitious dreams of establishing a new academic discipline that he defined as ‘Comparative International Law Ideology’.<sup>17</sup> During this period between 1930 and 1936, Keller enjoyed a cosmopolitan life, studying aspects of international law for brief periods in France, the United States, Italy and the United Kingdom before settling in Berlin.

From early on, Keller blended his interest in legal questions with a political agenda. He developed – in his own words – a ‘Germanic world-ideology’, defined as a ‘concept of supranationalism as opposite to the internationalism of the Western world’.<sup>18</sup> His combination of nationalism and Europeanism was reflected in the name of the first organisation that he founded in 1931 in Munich, the German-European Union (*Deutsch-Europäische Union*). The union was created for a German audience as a counterreaction to the liberal Paneuropean Movement.<sup>19</sup> Between 1932 and 1933, the German-European Union published four volumes of the journal *Deutscheuropa. Vierteljahresschrift für die Erneuerung Europas aus dem Reichsgedanken* (*German Europe. Quarterly for the Renewal of Europe based on the Imperial Idea*). In addition to Keller himself, German and Austrian writers from the conservative, authoritarian and later openly fascist spectrum published articles in the journal.<sup>20</sup>

Hans Keller’s research trips abroad from 1932 onward were funded by the philanthropic Rockefeller Foundation. This connection marks an interesting overlap of funding and personnel between liberal (in this case US-American philanthropical) and nationalist internationalism, underlining fascism’s ‘infiltration of liberal internationalist networks’ despite ideological antagonism in the interwar period.<sup>21</sup> Even though the Rockefeller Foundation was engaged in interwar liberal internationalism, for example by offering expertise and funding to the League of Nations, it still provided scholarships and a template for international exchange for upcoming Nazis. In addition to Keller, another prominent example was Georg Leibbrandt, who would become a leading member of the Foreign Policy Office of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) and a participant at the infamous Wannsee Conference.<sup>22</sup> When the Hitler regime was established in 1933 during Keller’s stay in the United States, an associate of the Rockefeller Foundation complained about Keller and other German scholarship holders and their ‘strong Nazi sympathies’, stating that ‘they were too occupied with the gruelling task of reconciling their early academic background with Nazi ideology to devote themselves seriously to their fellowship work’.<sup>23</sup> At that time, Keller presented his ideas on ‘the new Germany’ and its role within the world in the German-European Union’s journal while explicitly rejecting the hypocrisy of internationalism as un-German.<sup>24</sup> He argued that ‘Germany, in her revolutionary rebirth of racial nationalism, necessarily opposes Western rational nationalism as

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Letter from Hans Keller to August Wilhelm Fehling, 15 Apr. 1933, BArch, N 1106/58; letter from Hans Keller to Stacy May, 11 May 1933, BArch, N 1106/58.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Hans Keller to Stacy May, 1 Oct. 1933, BArch, N 1106/58.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Hans Keller to T. B. Kittredge, 20 Aug. 1935, BArch, N 1106/58.

<sup>20</sup> Including Nazi historian Eugen Wohlhaupter, philosopher and visionary of the ‘Conservative Revolution’ Leopold Ziegler, writer and head of the ‘Europäischer Kulturbund’ Karl Anton Rohan and philosopher Alois Dempf, who increasingly opposed Nazism from a Catholic point of view. See *Deutscheuropa. Vierteljahresschrift für die Erneuerung Europas aus dem Reichsgedanken*, Vols 1–4, 1932–1933.

<sup>21</sup> Herren, ‘Fascist Internationalism’, 192. Friedrich Berber, another German scholar of international law, also combined internationalist activism (in the form of the World Student Christian Federation) with Nazism by becoming Joachim von Ribbentrop’s propagandist. See Katharina Rietzler, ‘Counter-Imperial Orientalism: Friedrich Berber and the Politics of International Law in Germany and India, 1920s–1960s’, *Journal of Global History*, 11 (2016), 113–14.

<sup>22</sup> On the Rockefeller Foundation and the League of Nations, see Ludovic Tournès, ‘American Membership of the League of Nations: US Philanthropy and the Transformation of an Intergovernmental Organisation into a Think Tank’, *International Politics*, 55 (2018), 852–69. On Keller, Leibbrandt and the Rockefeller Foundation, see Syga-Dubois, *Wissenschaftliche Philanthropie und transatlantischer Austausch in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, 389, 613–9.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Stacy May to T. B. Kittredge, 4 Feb. 1935, RAC, F, RG 1.2, Series 100 ES, box 49, folder 377.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Deutscheuropa’, *Deutscheuropa. Vierteljahresschrift für die Erneuerung Europas aus dem Reichsgedanken*, 2, 3 (1933), 2.



well as its external counterpart, internationalism'.<sup>25</sup> He simultaneously stressed the allegedly peaceful international mission of Nazi Germany, for example by citing Hitler's famous 'Peace speech' from 17 May 1933. These early texts from Keller illustrate his emphasis on racist-*völkisch* ideas.

Keller was certainly ready to serve the national socialist cause, and in early 1934 he was employed by Joseph Goebbels' newly created RMVP as an expert on France, Switzerland and Northern Africa. When he quit the job after a few months to continue his research in Italy and Britain, he explained to his employer that he could serve Nazi Germany on the foreign front even more than in his present position.<sup>26</sup> During his research trips, Keller further developed his legal theories and antipathy toward Western 'liberal' internationalism, while still receiving a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation until 1935. He also used the trips as an opportunity to create a broad transnational network with like-minded people, resulting in the foundation of the IAdN. Through the help of the representative of the Rockefeller Foundation in Germany, August Wilhelm Fehling, Keller even mobilised a network of ex-fellow scholarship holders, who willingly made available their academic contacts and personal connections to nationalist and fascist circles, for example by suggesting he contact José Antonio Primo de Rivera from the Spanish Falange.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the help of the Rockefeller Foundation was crucial to set the IAdN in motion, as Keller himself admitted in a report.<sup>28</sup>

### The Activities of the Nationalist International and Its Congresses, 1934–1936

In April 1934, Hans Keller created the Nationalist International (*Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten*) in Zürich. Home to many international organisations in the interwar period, Switzerland was also used by Keller to emphasise his organisation's allegedly neutral and independent political position, obfuscating its real mission to promote Nazism internationally. That same year Keller was criticised by several Swiss newspapers for using an address in Zürich-Erlenbach as the official address of the organisation without actually living there, as well as for using the Swiss National Bank as letterhead, thus giving the organisation false legitimacy.<sup>29</sup> In the aftermath, the Swiss Federal Political Department suggested to the Federal Prosecutor that it should deny Keller, as an 'undesirable foreigner', further residence in Switzerland due to his 'unseemly behaviour', and in January 1935, a 'border barrier' was imposed on Keller.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the IAdN headquarters was moved to London in 1935, and finally to Berlin in 1936. Both sites were officially announced as new branch offices. Frequently, Keller acted as if the IAdN would run permanent offices in Zürich, London and Berlin, giving it the appearance of a professional international research association. In contrast to these exaggerations, Keller acted mostly alone. His staff consisted solely of a secretary, Käte Lüttgen, who remained the only woman directly associated with the Nationalist International.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Keller, 'Résumés – Abstracts – Riassunti', *Deutscheuropa. Vierteljahresschrift für die Erneuerung Europas aus dem Reichsgedanken*, 2, 3 (1933), 13–14.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Hans Keller to Ministerialrat Demann, 1 Mar. 1934, BArch, R55/24256. Keller had been employed in *Abteilung VII* at the RMVP from 22 Jan. 1934 to 31 Mar. 1934.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Syga-Dubois, *Wissenschaftliche Philanthropie und transatlantischer Austausch in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, 617. Keller claimed later that Falange member Ernesto Giménez Caballero joined the IAdN in 1934. Cf. Hans Keller and Akademie für die Rechte der Völker, eds., *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung: Forschungs- und Werbebericht der Akademie für die Rechte der Völker (Nationalistische Akademie) und der Internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten* (Berlin: Verlag Franz Vahlen, 1939), 196.

<sup>28</sup> As Keller stated in his concluding report to the Rockefeller Foundation: 'I am very indebted to the Rockefeller Foundation for the enrichment both through scientific research and personal acquaintances' which had enabled him to create the Nationalist International, arguing that it was built on 'a number of the professors and politicians, whom I met during my research under the Foundation's auspices . . .'. Letter from Hans Keller to T. B. Kittredge, 20 Aug 1935, BArch, N 1106/58.

<sup>29</sup> 'Das sind die Methoden der Nazis', *Volksrecht*, 20 Dec. 1934; 'Die "Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten" und die Schweizerische Nationalbank', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 20 Dec. 1934.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Letter from Swiss Federal Political Department to Swiss Federal Prosecutor, 10 Jan. 1935 and Swiss Federal Prosecutor to Swiss National Bank, 24 Jan. 1935, BAR Bern, E4320B#1968/195#60\*.

From the outset, hubris also marked the way Keller presented his organisation in letters, press statements and publications. Keller's exaggerations made it not only difficult for contemporaries but also for historians to distinguish between his utopian, far-reaching and megalomaniac plans and the often smaller practical outcomes of his ideas.

Thus, one could describe the Nationalist International as Hans Keller's one-man show, but embedded in a broader, international network. German *Gestapo* reported in June 1935 that the IAdN was more of 'a loose association of a relatively small group of people' than a comprehensive professional enterprise.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to estimate how many members the organisation actually attracted over the years.<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding, Keller was a diligent networker who found many ways to contact potential members while drawing on his numerous acquaintances from his research trips enabled by the Rockefeller Foundation. Hence, the IAdN became the institutional platform of an international network of political and academic partners. Being a network, defined here as a non-binding and informal form of communication and cooperation, characterised by individuals with similar but not necessarily fully coinciding political attitudes, gave the Nationalist International an ephemeral character.<sup>33</sup> Instead of being bound by a strictly defined organisation, some 'members' participated only at one event while others remained loyal to Keller's undertaking throughout the 1930s.

Why was the IAdN created in April 1934? The Italo-German rivalry on ideological supremacy among the new illiberal regimes and movements was paramount, leading to the internationalisation of Benito Mussolini's political outlook in a kind of meta-political battle against German Nazism.<sup>34</sup> The dispute centred on constructed differences between an Italian totalitarian 'spiritual' and universal mission based on corporatism and German biological racism and anti-Semitism. A particular outcome of the rivalry was the establishment of the Italian organisation CAUR in Rome (nine months before the creation of the IAdN), propagating the ideological supremacy of Italian fascism abroad through the concept of 'universal fascism' while drawing on a comprehensive network of foreign movements, agents and brokers. Keller personally experienced this ideological dispute during his research trip to Italy in early 1934. While there he met several figures connected to CAUR, including the ideological visionary of an Italian Fascist International, Asvero Gravelli.<sup>35</sup> According to Keller, in his own words, he realised through these personal encounters that CAUR was only 'posing as innocent cultural propaganda', while he became aware of 'the real purpose of these "Committees", 'namely to "fascistise" (*fascistizzare*) the whole of the world'. Italian fascism's universalism, interpreted as territorial expansionism, outraged Keller, who concluded in a letter that 'the "law of nations" advocated by Fascism would be based upon subordination to Italian leadership, an arrogance, which . . . is a danger to world peace'.<sup>36</sup>

All evidence indicates that this experience gave Hans Keller the impetus to create his own organisation to counter the Italian efforts to universalise the fascist ideology based on Italian leadership. He convinced his former employer, the German Propaganda Ministry, to finance his undertaking (for

<sup>31</sup> '[...] Noch losen Zusammenschluß eines verhältnismässig kleinen Personenkreises [...]'. Report from Gestapo to Federal Foreign Ministry, 30 Jun. 1935, PAAA, RZ214 99289.

<sup>32</sup> An official membership list could not be located in any archive and Keller tended to exaggerate his international network massively. It also remains unclear what a membership would actually entail apart from the reception of propaganda material, invitations to events organised by the Nationalist International and a membership fee (between 1 and 2 British pounds yearly).

<sup>33</sup> For a similar definition of a right-wing network, see Martin Finkenberger, 'Johann von Leers und die "faschistische Internationale" der fünfziger und sechziger Jahre in Argentinien und Ägypten', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 59, 6 (2011), 522–43.

<sup>34</sup> On the Italo-German rivalry, see Bauerkämper, 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939'; Salvatore Garau, 'The Internationalisation of Italian Fascism in the Face of German National Socialism, and its Impact on the British Union of Fascists', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 15, 1 (2014), 45–63.

<sup>35</sup> Others included Simon P. Ooms (Gravelli's colleague from the journal *Ottobre*), Sergio Pannunzio (a member of the CAUR Central Committee) and Francesco Coppola (a promotor of universal fascism at the Volta Congress in 1932).

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Hans Keller to T. B. Kittredge, 20 Aug. 1935, BArch, N 1106/58.

example, with 50,000 Reichsmark in 1935) connected to the concrete mission to combat CAUR and to promote German Nazism instead internationally.<sup>37</sup> Italian fascists themselves soon noted the ‘anti-fascist’ (in an Italian sense) and pro-Nazi stance of the allegedly independent organisation.<sup>38</sup> This aversion became apparent at the first congress organised by the IAdN, which took place from 5–7 December 1934 in Berlin at the luxury Hotel Kaiserhof next to the Reich Chancellery. According to the IAdN, more than 100 delegates from twenty mostly European countries participated.<sup>39</sup> The congress was marked by a dispute between two journalists from the major Italian fascist journal *Ottobre*, Asvero Gravelli and Simon Ooms, on one side and proponents of German Nazism on the other. While Ooms and Gravelli argued that Italian fascism belonged to the ‘new nationalisms’ which the Nationalist International intended to promote, Keller and other Germans criticised Italian fascism for its universalism and its aim to export its state doctrine to other nations.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the German delegation stressed the importance of racism and anti-Semitism for these new nationalisms. Asvero Gravelli was extremely disappointed and published an attack against the IAdN in the aftermath.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the Berlin congress foreshadowed the heated debates around the ‘Jewish question’ at the Montreux congress organised by CAUR. This congress, which took place only a few weeks later, was an attempt to unite more than a dozen European fascist movements under Italian leadership, tellingly without inviting any representative from Nazi Germany. Gravelli, the only delegate who participated at both competing congresses, used his speech in Montreux to outline his frustration over Keller’s undertaking and German racism in general, which he believed would only lead to war and international injustice in contrast to Italian fascism.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the Italo-German rivalry not only provided the impetus for the creation of the IAdN but also continued to impact its notions and activities in the following years.

Overall, the Nationalist International pursued two fields of activity: first, the IAdN organised large events, including conferences in Berlin (1934), London (1935) and Oslo (1936), as well as a lecture series in Berlin from 1937 to 1939. Second, the IAdN produced and distributed a publication series in German and French called *International Voices of the Nationalists*. The series included texts written by right-wing agents such as the Danish fascist Frits Clausen and the French publicist Gustave Hervé, a former anti-militarist who embraced Nazism in the early 1930s, promoting a Franco-German rapprochement and fascist veterans internationalist projects.<sup>43</sup> It also included conference proceedings and printed versions of speeches delivered at IAdN congresses. Keller maintained that the series had a total circulation of 50,000 copies, which is probably an exaggeration. However, the booklets

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Letter from Academy for the Right of Peoples to German Reich Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, 28 May 1938, PAAA, RZ214 99290.

<sup>38</sup> For example, an Italian envoy in Norway, Marcelo Rodollo, described the IAdN in a report to the Foreign Ministry in Rome as ‘similar to the CAUR but in a German, Nazi direction, and expressly anti-Latin in its aims’. Cited in Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Quisling: A Study in Treachery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 125.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten, *20 Nationen in Berlin: Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten* (Zürich: Batschari, 1934), 3.

<sup>40</sup> See IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 25–37.

<sup>41</sup> In Gravelli’s article, the IAdN was, among others, criticised for its lack of understanding concerning the term ‘nationalism’, for its ‘anti-fascist’ attitude, for choosing Berlin and not a more neutral city as a location for the congress, and for its promotion of German racism. ‘L’Azione Internazionale dei Nazionalisti all ricerca di un Nazionalismo’, *Ottobre*, 16 Dec. 1934.

<sup>42</sup> On the Montreux Congress, see Ledeen, *Universal Fascism*, 103–132. For Gravelli’s speech, see Comités d’Action pour l’Universalité de Rome, *Réunion de Montreux: 16–17 Décembre 1934, XIII* (Rome: Le Bureau de Presse des Comités d’Action pour l’Universalité de Rome, 1935), 89–90.

<sup>43</sup> Gustave Hervé, *Eine Stimme aus Frankreich* (Zürich: Batschari-Verlag, 1934); Frits Clausen, *Volk und Staat im Grenzland* (Zürich: Albert Nauck, 1936). The latter was a German translation from his Danish book: Frits Clausen, *Dansk-Tysk Nationalsocialistiske Tanker til Det slesvigske Spørgsmaal* (Copenhagen: Fredericia ‘Landsoldaten’, 1934).



were circulated among relevant readers including leaders of European fascist movements such as Vidkun Quisling from the National Gathering (*Nasjonal Samling*).<sup>44</sup>

The three successive congresses probably had a greater international impact than the publication series. The Berlin congress in December 1934 was followed by a second congress with delegates from fifteen to thirty different nations, held between 10–12 July 1935 in London at the German-friendly D'Abernon Club.<sup>45</sup> The third congress of the Nationalist International took place in Oslo from 25–29 July 1936 and was attended by delegates from thirty nations.<sup>46</sup> The venue was the famous Nobel Institute, which again helped to legitimise the alleged neutral undertaking. Shamelessly, Keller exploited the credibility and reputation of the world-famous and supposedly independent Nobel Institute for his own 'academic' purposes. In the aftermath, the Nobel Institute itself complained about the misuse of its name on official documents of the congress.<sup>47</sup> A fourth congress was planned to be held in Madrid but never took place due to the Spanish Civil War and lack of funding.

The social strata and background of the almost entirely male delegates reflected both the academic and the political aspirations of the IAdN. The vast majority were white Europeans, but the United States, China, the Union of South Africa, Mexico and Bolivia were represented too. Many delegates had an academic background, working as lawyers, journalists, novelists and professors in international law, political science or economics. Others were diplomats and politicians. Keller maintained in his opening speech at the Berlin congress that he had not been interested in inviting representatives of any governments or states, but rather only individuals who were chosen to speak on behalf of their peoples. This supposed aim was contradicted by the participation of an undersecretary of the German Interior Ministry as well as many other Nazi German delegates.<sup>48</sup> However, at least discursively, a key difference between the Nationalist International and its counterpart CAUR was that the latter emphasised the cooperation between political movements whereas the former foregrounded cooperation between individual 'nationalists' representing entire countries.

Nonetheless, some representatives from Northern and Western European fascist parties were among the delegates. One of the most active IAdN members was Keller's pen pal Herman Harris Aall, a Norwegian jurist and party ideologue of the National Gathering who became the co-host of the Oslo congress.<sup>49</sup> Another example was the leader of the Danish Nazi Party (DNSAP), Frits Clausen, who gave a lecture on 'Nation and Race' at the London congress. Only months earlier, Clausen had also lectured at a meeting of the CAUR executive committee in Amsterdam, making him the only fascist party leader who was actively involved in both competing groups.<sup>50</sup> In Switzerland, the IAdN cooperated with the pro-Nazi party National Front and its leaders Rolf Henne and Hans Oehler.<sup>51</sup> The Dutch National Socialist Workers Party (*Dutch Nationaal-Socialistische Nederlandsche Arbeiderspartij*; NSB) was represented at the London congress by its founding member and leading propagandist Herman van Houten, and the Swedish National

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hans Keller, 'Vorrede', in Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten, ed., *Die Wende auf dem Balkan / Hitler und Europa* (Zürich: Albert Nauck, 1936), 5–9; letter from Hans Keller to Vidkun Quisling, 3 Feb. 1935, RA Oslo, PA-0750 Gj L0001.

<sup>45</sup> According to a report from a fascist Danish journal, fifteen different nations were present, whereas Keller claimed that thirty nations had been represented. Cf. 'Kongressen i London', *Nationalsocialisten*, 20 Jul. 1935; Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten, ed., *Am Internationalismus gehen die Völker zugrunde/Warum 'Nationalistische Internationale'?* (Zürich: Albert Nauck, 1936), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. 'Nasjonalister fra over 30 land i Nobelinstituttet', *Fritt Folk*, 27 Jul. 1936.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. 'Fascistkongressen på Nobelinstituttet', *Dagbladet*, 28 Sep. 1936.

<sup>48</sup> IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 8. Cf. Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf*, 396.

<sup>49</sup> See the letter exchange between Keller and Aall in RA Oslo, PA 0756.

<sup>50</sup> In his autobiography, Clausen stated that it was hardly surprising that the Germans tried to establish a similar and yet competing organisation to the Italians. Cf. John T. Lauridsen, ed., 'Førereren har ordet!': *Frits Clausen om sig selv og DNSAP* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forl, 2003), 231.

<sup>51</sup> On Henne, Oehler and the Nationale Front, see Glaus Beat, *Die nationale Front: Eine Schweizer faschistische Bewegung: 1930–1940* (Zürich: Ex Libris, 1979).

Socialist Workers' Party (*Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet*; NSAP) sent two members to the Oslo congress.<sup>52</sup>

In all these cases, the character of the IAdN as a rather loose, ephemeral network with a supposedly academic purpose was helpful. Politicians from fascist parties such as Frits Clausen or Rolf Henne could make appearances at its congresses without fearing a backlash within their national movements for being too involved in an international organisation which would contradict the nationalist aims of their own parties. In addition to politicians, fascist intellectuals and writers participated as well. Many came from the Balkans, such as the poet Ion Sân-Giorgiu, a sympathiser of the Fascist Party Iron Guard, as well as Janko Janeff, a Bulgarian philosopher and follower of the *völkisch* intellectual Arthur Moeller van den Bruck.

However, beyond these 'fascist' politicians and intellectuals in a narrow sense, there were also delegates representing authoritarian, aristocratic and conservative political beliefs. For example, at the London congress, the large British section included Daniel Gerald Somerville, a member of parliament from the Conservative Party. The Catholic aristocratic Count Henry Carton de Wiart, a former prime minister of Belgium, also sent a long message to the congress (without being present himself).<sup>53</sup> France was represented by Louis Bertrand, a well-known conservative French novelist, historian and member of the *Académie française*. To conclude, an analysis of the international delegates of the IAdN illustrates the fluid entanglements between fascism, the radical right, conservatism and existing elites in the interwar period. All were united in their antagonism towards their internationalist enemies, as will be addressed in the following section.

### Countering Liberal, Communist and 'Fascist' Internationalism

From the outset, the Nationalist International encompassed the contradiction between nationalism and internationalism. On the one hand, the IAdN was directed against internationalism in its various forms, but on the other it was itself engaged in a form of internationalism through connecting nationalists from various countries. The delegates at the IAdN congresses were very aware of this contradiction, which was integral to the name of the organisation. For some delegates, even the term 'nationalist' as such constituted an issue.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, in Nazi vocabulary, the term *internationalism* was considered non-German and unpatriotic, being closely linked to the imagined arch-enemy of 'international Jewry'. In large parts of German academia, this led to a semantic accommodation when the notion of *internationale Verständigung* (international understanding) was substituted by *zwischenvölkisches Verstehen* (understanding between peoples).<sup>55</sup> Despite these objections, Keller continued to use Nationalist International as a self-description but emphasised in his opening address at the Berlin congress that he wanted 'an action for nationalism, not for internationalism'.<sup>56</sup>

A deep antipathy towards various forms of internationalism marked all IAdN publications and congresses. Dismissive views on liberal, communist, 'Jewish', and Catholic forms of internationalism were frequently juxtaposed with positive imaginations of international cooperation between the various nationalists. Paradigmatic was the lecture 'The Peoples Perish from Internationalism' by Louis

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Hans Keller and Akademie für die Rechte der Völker, eds., *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung: Forschungs- und Werbebericht der Akademie für die Rechte der Völker (Nationalistische Akademie) und der Internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten* (Berlin: Verlag Franz Vahlen, 1939), 145; 177.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> For example, the Belgian delegate Jacques Serruys raised critique against the use of the self-description 'Nationalists' in his speech at the London Congress. Cf. *ibid.*, 30–1.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2010), 322–5; Andrea Albrecht et al., 'Theory and Practice of Knowledge Transfer, 1933–1945', in Maria Björman et al., eds., *Intellectual Collaboration with the Third Reich: Treason or Reason?* (London: Routledge, 2019), 21–36.

<sup>56</sup> 'Es handelt sich nicht um eine Aktion für den Internationalismus, sondern für den Nationalismus'. IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 7.

Bertrand at the London congress, which was later published in the IAdN booklet series.<sup>57</sup> Bertrand criticised internationalism in general as an unnatural, war-mongering system, and ultimately as the worst enemy of every nationalist. Hans Keller frequently emphasised that three forms of internationalism in particular and their respective organisations should be confronted by the Nationalist International: first, the ‘utopian world peace order’ of liberal democracy as represented by the Paneuropean movement and the League of Nations; second, communism as represented by the Communist International; and third, Italian fascism as represented by CAUR.<sup>58</sup> These three enemies were attacked for their universalism, which was equated with the implementation of imperialism. Defined as territorial expansionism, imperialism was therefore negatively connoted and allegedly rejected by Nazism.<sup>59</sup>

Among the international delegates, liberal internationalism received most of the attention as an opponent to nationalism. In particular, the League of Nations was criticised frequently for being linked to the ‘failing’ and ‘unjust’ system of Versailles. It was despised as a multiplier of a wrong version of international law that emphasised ‘unnatural’ equality among states. However, the assessment of the League revealed inconsistencies between representatives from minor states such as Hans Oehler from the Swiss National Front, who wanted to replace ‘Geneva’ with a new organisation, and from major states such as the British M.P. Somerville, who suggested a reform to render the League more satisfactory and effective.<sup>60</sup> Overall, the discussions showed the persistent dissatisfaction among fascist and right-wing circles with the League of Nations, the post-1919 liberal-internationalist political order, and the legal system based on modern international law.

Communist internationalism was perceived as the other main enemy of the delegates. For example, Arnold Huber, the leader of the anti-communist Swiss Patriotic Federation (*Schweizerischer Vaterländischer Verband*), 1919–48, argued at one congress that the IAdN should take action against Bolshevism and its international activities.<sup>61</sup> The anti-communist stance was often blended with anti-Semitism in general and the ‘Jewish-Bolshevist’ myth in particular. This was most openly expressed by Ulrich Fleischhauer from the anti-Semitic organisation *Welt-Dienst* (World Service) at the Berlin congress. Fleischhauer argued that international Jewry would destroy all national development; hence, the Jewish question should not only be addressed by Germans but by all nationalists.<sup>62</sup> This demonstrates an overlap of interest between the IAdN and other interwar organisations such as the *Welt-Dienst* involved in anti-communist and anti-Semitic propaganda.

The presentation of Italian fascism as the third main ‘internationalist opponent’ was mostly a Nazi German project pursued by Keller himself, and less visible among the statements of the international delegates. After the Italo-German dispute at the Berlin congress, Keller only invited the Italian Julius Evola to the successive London congress, a pro-German fascist intellectual in favour of biological racism, whom he also had met during his previous trip to Italy.<sup>63</sup> In his own speech in London,

<sup>57</sup> Louis Bertrand, ‘Am Internationalismus gehen die Völker zugrunde’, in IAdN, ed., *Am Internationalismus gehen die Völker zugrunde*, 7–15.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> This line of interpretation was further developed when Keller published his own history of Western internationalism called *Gegenreich Frankreich* (Counter Empire France) in 1936. There, he even characterised French state nationalism, Italian fascism and Russian communism as ‘the Antichrist’ in juxtaposition to the Third Reich. Hans Keller, *Gegenreich Frankreich: Geschichte des westlichen Internationalismus* (Berlin: Batschari-Verlag, 1936), 176.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Keller envisioned a transformation of the League into a House of States and a House of Peoples that would guarantee the ‘natural differences’ between peoples. For the statements by Oehler and Somerville, see Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 88, 191. On Keller, see Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nationalisten, *Organic Nationalism: What the “Nationalist International” Means to the Anglo-Saxon World* (Zürich, 1935), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the IAdN was in contact with the Geneva-based anti-communist agency *Entente Internationale Contre la IIe Internationale* (International Anticommunist Entente). Cf. Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 191; 195.

<sup>62</sup> IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 51–3. On the Jewish-Bolshevist myth as a transnational phenomenon of the interwar period, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> Evola could not participate in person, but his speech on ‘Christian or Pagan Nationalism’ was read out. Cf. Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 126–9. On Evola’s pro-German and racist ideology, see Peter Staudenmaier, ‘Racial

Keller complained more openly about Italy's universal fascism and its tendency to promote the Italian state as a role model for other countries.<sup>64</sup> Keller was opposed to launching fascist parties all over the world, whose leaders degraded their fatherlands into provinces of an Imperium Romanum. For him, only state theories and state ideals could be implemented from one country to the other, whereas his central concept, the *Volk* (as will be discussed in the next section), would be non-transferable, hindered by the uniqueness of each people and restricted by nature. Furthermore, he attacked corporatism, Italy's main social promise, as a wrong materialist approach. He also combined Catholicism with fascism and referred now to the 'Vatican Fascist International' as one of the main enemies of the IAdN. Keller found an ally in Rolf Henne from the Swiss National Front, who in his speech at the Oslo congress used the assumed superiority of the Latin race as a counter-argument against Italian universal fascism.<sup>65</sup>

Overall, anti-universalism and even anti-imperialism played a decisive role when addressing the activities of the liberal, communist and Italian fascist opponents. Furthermore, for Keller and many of the international delegates, it was the very existence of these three nemeses, who allegedly even cooperated with each other, that legitimised the creation of a Nationalist International. As the IAdN argued in a publication from 1939: 'The unification of the nationalists of all countries is an indispensable necessity because of the united front of the internationalists against the empire of the peoples'.<sup>66</sup> Hence, 'hostile' internationalism justified nationalist internationalism as a necessary counter-weight, despite the inherent tension between ultra-nationalist ideology and international cooperation.

### The Main Ideas and Objectives of the Nationalist International

The main agenda of the IAdN combined three intertwined objectives: the first aim was to strengthen a new nationalism based on the inegalitarian Nazi concept of *Volk*, in contrast to the older, liberal and imperialist nationalism based on the egalitarian concept of state. The second aim was to create a new law of nations, mythically based on the right of peoples instead of states. This aim was reflected in the foundation of an Academy for the Right of Peoples (*Akademie für die Rechte der Völker*) at the Oslo congress in 1936. The third aim was to establish a new international peace order based on the new law of nations, which would supersede the existing liberal order and system of Versailles. The emergence of *Volk* nationalism in all European countries (and thus the first objective) was seen as a necessary precondition of this new international order. Overall, this threefold agenda was first and foremost Eurocentric and connected to the wish of a palingenesis of the European continent, as illustrated in Keller's concept of a Third Europe, which he presented in a kind of founding text of the IAdN.<sup>67</sup>

Keller elaborated on the Third Europe through a mythical-historical lens. For him, the German Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages had constituted a First Europe, harmoniously securing peace for all peoples united under its sphere of influence. Then, the concept of the (French) nation-

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Ideology between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Julius Evola and the Aryan Myth, 1933–43', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 55, 3 (2020), 473–91.

<sup>64</sup> The speech was reprinted in Hans Keller, 'Warum "Nationalistische Internationale"?', in IAdN, ed., *Am Internationalismus gehen die Völker zugrunde*, 17–35.

<sup>65</sup> Henne argued that the idea of the universality of Rome was unacceptable to him, because it contained the absolute claim of the Latin race to supremacy and assumed the self-evident superiority of the Latin race over all other races. For the entire speech, see ETH Zürich, AfZ, NL Rolf Henne/209.

<sup>66</sup> 'Die Einigung der Nationalisten aller Länder ist angesichts der Einheitsfront der Internationalisten gegen das Reich der Völker eine unabweisbare Notwendigkeit'. 'Nationalistische Inter-Nationale Aktion', in Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 295–9.

<sup>67</sup> Hans Keller, *Das Dritte Europa* (Zürich: Batschari, 1935). Keller's concept must not be confused with the concept of 'Third Europe' in interwar Poland to describe the wish to create a Polish-dominated bloc of states in Eastern Europe that would ensure the territorial status quo in that part of the continent. Cf. Hubert Leschnik, *Die Außenpolitik der Zweiten polnischen Republik: 'Intermarium' und 'Drittes Europa' als Konzepte der polnischen Außenpolitik unter Außenminister Oberst Józef Beck von 1932 bis 1939* (Zweibrücken: VDM Verlag, 2010).

state had been established, thus introducing a Second Europe as a system of the competing imperialist nation-states with its heyday in the nineteenth century. As an antithesis to the First Europe, Keller envisioned the Second Europe as imperialist nationalism recognising no territorial or power boundaries, standing in contrast to the hypocritical agenda of equality among all states as promoted by modern international law. Keller contrasted the Second Europe that was presented as the 'old' nationalism of the nineteenth century, with the 'new' nationalism of the twentieth century based on the concept of *Volk*, which would ultimately enable synthesis in a Hegelian logic: the Third Europe.<sup>68</sup> Keller clearly drew on a longer German tradition of juxtaposing the French nation-state with the German *Volk*.<sup>69</sup> Keller conceived of a Third Europe as a solution to the decay of the entire continent and the current chaos. There was no doubt about whom Keller considered as the leader of the Third Europe and the role model of the 'new nationalism': the Third Reich led by Adolf Hitler, whom Keller hailed as a 'people's doctor' (*Völker-Arzt*).<sup>70</sup>

The particularity of Hans Keller's ideology was to use the *völkisch* concept of *Volk* not only as the base for German nationalism but also for other nationalisms as well as Europeanism. Therefore, the promotion of 'Volk nationalism' became the first objective of the IAdN. Keller, who had only contempt for the universalism of his internationalist enemies, even argued in a text from 1936: 'The peace of Europe depends on whether the National Socialist concept of *Volk* gains the universal validity still conceded today to the Romanist concept of the state. This is our "universalism"'.<sup>71</sup> For proponents of Nazism, the spiritual-mythical concept of *Volk* was inextricably linked to the German past and present and could not simply be exported or transferred to other nations and peoples. Rather than actually universalising the concept, Keller stressed the importance of strengthening 'Volk consciousness' among nationalists in all countries and preached 'respect' for the patriotism and the 'ethnic peculiarity' (*völkliche Eigenart*) of all peoples.<sup>72</sup> Keller embraced the existence of other peoples but stressed their inequality and peculiarity. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a hierarchisation of peoples and a differentiation between 'cultural peoples' (*Kulturvölker*) and 'peoples in the making' (*Völker im Werden*, meaning indigenous and colonised peoples), the first being politically responsible for the destiny of the latter. This distinction was rooted in understandings of Imperial German anthropologists in the nineteenth century who differentiated between European 'civilised peoples' (*Kulturvölker*) and 'natural peoples' (*Naturvölker*), supposedly lacking history and culture.<sup>73</sup>

For the *völkisch* movement and German Nazism, the concept of race was inextricably linked to the concept of *Volk*. Thus, Keller stood in a longer German tradition of using race as an including and, more importantly, excluding factor of internationalism.<sup>74</sup> The Jewish people or race, in particular, was defined in Nazi ideology as the counterpart to the German *Volk*, and Keller echoed this assessment when he described Jews as a 'world people' incompatible with *Volk* nationalism.<sup>75</sup> However, Keller also embraced race as a positive element that could foster internationalism. He argued that a 'race consciousness'

<sup>68</sup> As also argued in Keller, *Gegenreich Frankreich*, 3.

<sup>69</sup> For the conceptual history of the German terms *Volk* and *Nation*, see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse', in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe 7, Verw – Z* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 141–431. *Volk* in the sense of the *völkisch* movement had strongly racial as well as spiritual connotations. See George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 92.

<sup>70</sup> Hans Keller, 'Leitwort des Herausgebers', in IAdN, ed., *Volk und Staat im Grenzland*, 5–10, 10.

<sup>71</sup> 'Der Friede Europas hängt davon ab, ob der nationalsozialistische Volksbegriff die universale Geltung gewinnt, die dem romanischen Staatsbegriffe heute noch eingeräumt wird. Das ist unser "Universalismus"'. Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. IAdN, *Organic Nationalism*, 3; IAdN, 'Nationalistische Inter-Nationale Aktion', 297.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 178. On the distinction between *Kulturvölker* and *Naturvölker*, see Angela Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2001), 20, 38, 198, 216.

<sup>74</sup> Already in the early 1920s, the German race researcher Fritz Lenz had outlined the idea of a so-called 'Blond International', a racially limited association of people representing the common interests of the so-called Nordic race. Cf. Fritz Lenz, *Menschliche Auslese und Rassenhygiene* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns, 1923), 183.

<sup>75</sup> Keller, 'Warum "Nationalistische Internationale"?', 18.



could bring racially related peoples in Europe closer together, claiming that ‘the myth of race proves to be a force that unites peoples and secures peace’.<sup>76</sup> Ideas of a ‘racial community’ of the ‘Nordic’, ‘European’ or ‘white’ race(s), which had to be protected from miscegenation and from other ‘black’ or ‘yellow’ races, featured prominently at the IAdN congresses. Examples were two speeches at the Oslo congress by the Norwegian racial researcher Jon Alfred Mjøen and by the South African Herman Dirk van Broekhuizen (of Dutch descent), who talked about the white race as a larger community of destiny.<sup>77</sup>

Keller’s idea to strengthen *Volk* nationalism in each country was problematic because the international delegates did not agree on clear definitions of *Volk* and other related terms such as *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community) and *Rasse* (race), which rather functioned as empty signifiers filled with different meanings. Even Keller switched his terminology constantly, talking about ‘*Volk*’ nationalism in the German context while preferring the less German-sounding term ‘organic’ nationalism in English publications. This issue hindered debates about these concepts internationally and constituted a clear obstacle for a sort of Nazi internationalism that was based on *völkisch* terminology. The terms also led to translation difficulties and misunderstandings at the congresses. As a German delegate complained, ‘this misunderstanding is particularly tragic in the case of the words that are dearest to us nationalists’.<sup>78</sup> Hence, key concepts of the Nationalist International could not easily be adopted in other national contexts where they differed in meaning or lacked sufficient translations.

Nonetheless, Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler were regarded very positively by most delegates, ranging from respect for their spiritual and political achievements to outright admiration as a role model for other countries. Therefore, the propaganda of the alleged ‘peaceful’ nature of Nazism was frequently foregrounded. German delegates fostered this picture, as illustrated by a speech at the London congress held by the NSDAP attorney Friedrich Grimm on ‘Hitler and Europe’. He presented Germany as a reliable partner on the international scene while downplaying the aggressive-expansionist sides of Nazi ideology.<sup>79</sup>

The second aim of the IAdN was to work out a legal language and a new law of nations for the new international order based on the concept of *Volk* instead of the power states and their alleged territorial and imperial aims.<sup>80</sup> At the London congress in 1935, Keller explained in detail why a new conception of international law was necessary. For him, the ‘old’ international law promoting equality of human beings rooted in ancient Roman and Catholic understandings had to be overcome by the Germanic idea of the *Reich* (empire), proceeding from the natural inequality of humans, peoples and races, thus recognising ‘God-willed inequality’.<sup>81</sup> For Keller, the division of races, as well as the inequality between peoples, were significant elements of a new law of nations. The quest to replace existing international law based on the concept of equal states with a law based on the inequality of peoples and Hitler’s *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community) was repeated in Keller’s third large monograph with the telling title *Abschied vom Völkerrecht (Farewell to International Law)*, published in 1938.<sup>82</sup>

The idea of self-determination of peoples, as it had been outlined in Woodrow Wilson’s fourteen-point programme after the First World War, played an ambivalent role in Keller’s vision. Even the NSDAP had demanded in its party programme from 1920 the unification of all Germans based on the right of self-determination of the peoples to a Greater Germany.<sup>83</sup> However, Adolf Hitler remained

<sup>76</sup> ‘Im einen wie im anderen Falle erweist sich der Rasse-Mythus als völkerverbindende, friedenssichernde Kraft’. Keller, *Das Dritte Europa*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 149–50; 197–200.

<sup>78</sup> Max Hildebert Boehm: ‘Ganz besonders tragisch ist dieses Mißverständnis bei den Worten, die uns Nationalisten am liebsten sind’. IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 60.

<sup>79</sup> Friedrich Grimm, ‘Hitler und Europa’, in IAdN, ed., *Die Wende auf dem Balkan*, 19–30.

<sup>80</sup> IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 7–9.

<sup>81</sup> ‘[...] Gottgewollte Ungleichheit’. Keller, ‘Warum “Nationalistische Internationale”?’, 28.

<sup>82</sup> Hans Keller, *Abschied vom Völkerrecht* (Berlin: Vahlen, 1938).

<sup>83</sup> ‘Das Programm der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiter-Partei vom 24. Februar 1920’, in Heinz Hürten, ed., *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung: Band 9, Weimarer Republik und Drittes Reich 1918–1945* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), 66–71.

throughout his reign a cynical detractor of the right of self-determination of peoples. He and other leading Nazis instrumentalised this idea to their own ends, legitimising among others the *Anschluss* (Annexation) of Austria and the expansionist policy of *Lebensraum* (living space).<sup>84</sup> Keller, in contrast, initially embraced the idea, and argued that only the Nationalist International would fight for a true *Völker-Recht* (law of nations) based on the right for self-determination of all peoples.<sup>85</sup>

However, in the course of the 1930s, the matter was complicated by Nazism's demands for a renewed German colonial empire. The fascist concept of *proletarian imperialism* that ought to legitimise the creation of a German respectively Italian colonial empire in the interwar period was deeply intertwined with 'anti-colonial' positions directed against the liberal, 'classical' forms of British and French imperialism.<sup>86</sup> In the case of Nazism, there had even been a minor anti-colonial strand in the 1920s around the Strasser brothers, who advocated the right of national self-determination in the colonial world.<sup>87</sup> From 1937 Hans Keller adjusted his position when referring to the question of potential German colonialism.<sup>88</sup> In a 1937 article he explicitly addressed the question of whether colonised peoples did have the right of self-determination and thus the right to create their own independent state. Keller negated this claim by arguing that states were a misleading Western invention. The new law of nations as promoted by the IAdN and Nazism would not guarantee the self-determination of peoples but a '*Selbstseinsrecht der Völker*' (the right of peoples to be themselves). Hence, instead of allowing the creation of their own state, indigenous colonised 'natural peoples' should have the right to express their own 'national lifestyle', because Nazi ideology would show 'respect for foreign peculiarities'.<sup>89</sup> Still, this 'respect' would not hinder Germany's 'rightful' claim to its own colonies. While imperialism was still presented as a negative phenomenon connected to the liberal enemies, colonialism was now neatly separated and legitimised within Keller's logic.

To work out a new law of nations, the IAdN created an Academy for the Right of Peoples at the Oslo congress in June 1936, headed by Keller as president. The aim was the restoration of a world peace order based on the rights of peoples, instead of the rights of states and their 'state imperialism'.<sup>90</sup> Keller attempted to set up national committees of the academy all around the world. The Norwegian committee was the first to be established, headed by Keller's loyal supporter Herman Harris Aall; according to one of the academy's letters from February 1937, twenty-two national committees had been set up.<sup>91</sup> In addition to many European committees, a few non-European countries such as Bolivia, Brazil and the Union of South Africa were listed. Keller even reached out to a professor based in Baghdad to discuss the creation of an Iraqi national committee.<sup>92</sup> In 1939, Keller published an extensive (and massively exaggerated) report about the work of the IAdN and the academy, falsely indicating that national committees existed in fifty-six countries including Haiti, Manchukuo and the Dutch East Indies.<sup>93</sup> Thus, the academy was an attempt to create a research centre with a global dimension, beyond the former narrow European focus of the IAdN.

However, the academy left very few traces outside Keller's inner circle. After its foundation at the Oslo congress, it received some attention among European fascist movements as well as in the German press, but the echo was relatively limited in the international press.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, a closer look at the

<sup>84</sup> See Jörg Fisch, 'Adolf Hitler und das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Völker', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 290, 1 (2010), 93–118.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Keller, 'Warum "Nationalistische Internationale"?', 34–5.

<sup>86</sup> Hedinger even suggested the term 'postcolonial imperialism' to describe the emergence of fascist imperialism. Cf. Hedinger, *Die Achse*, 164–9.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. David Motadel, 'The Global Authoritarian Moment and the Revolt against Empire', *The American Historical Review*, 124, 3 (2019), 843–77, 49.

<sup>88</sup> Hans Keller, 'Selbstbestimmungsrecht in Mandatsgebieten?', *Rassenpolitische Auslands-Korrespondenz*, 6 (1937), 2–3.

<sup>89</sup> '[...] Achtung vor fremdvölkischer Eigenart [...]'. Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. 'Gründung einer Nationalistischen Akademie für Völkerrecht', *Völkischer Beobachter*, 26 Jul. 1936; 'Für eine neue Weltordnung', *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*, 30 Jul. 1936.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Hans Keller to Legationsrat Hinrichs, German Foreign Ministry, 20 Nov. 1937, PAAA, RZ214 99290.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Hans Keller to Mahmoud Azmi, 23 May. 1938, PAAA, RZ214 99290.

<sup>93</sup> Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 122, 136, 147.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Report from German Legation in Oslo on the Oslo Congress, 5 Aug. 1936, PAAA, RZ214 99289.

above-mentioned working report reveals Keller's typical exaggerations. By deliberately using vague, obfuscating formulations such as 'friends' of the academy instead of members and falsely interpreting newspaper articles as official reports of (non-existing) national committees, Keller made it impossible to fathom how far both the IAdN and the academy were functioning organisations or whether they were his pompous phantasms.<sup>95</sup> Hence, there was a stark discrepancy between the insignificant reality and the megalomaniac myth around the activities of the academy.

The academy had been created to pave the way for the third objective of the IAdN, namely to establish, with the help of the new law of nations, a new peace order between peoples.<sup>96</sup> In a pamphlet published in February 1935, it was argued that 'if international relations are to be stabilised and a true and lasting peace is to be reached, international order must no longer be based exclusively upon treaties, which are merely legal expressions of temporary relations of power between states, but upon the peoples in their natural diversity . . .'.<sup>97</sup> In fact, many delegates expressed a general willingness to cooperate internationally to establish such a new, 'just peace', which was frequently juxtaposed with the 'unjust' Parisian Treaties after the First World War.

In general, cooperating internationally was mostly conceived of in European terms, and not in global terms, because, as Keller suggested at the Berlin congress, the unity of the nationalists was grounded in their common goal to create a new order of Europe.<sup>98</sup> Many of the European delegates regretted that a new order of power had emerged globally after the First World War with the rise of the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan. This change was contrasted with the loss of Europe's privileged position, leading to its 'provincialisation'.<sup>99</sup> Fears of being marginalised in an ever more quickly changing world were often mixed with grievance, resentment, and defiance. This was illustrated by the speech of the Swiss fascist leader Rolf Henne at the Oslo congress.<sup>100</sup> He invoked the idea of a European *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (community of destiny) directed against the rest of the world, resulting in the need to create a new European supranational organisation.

However, this focus on the destiny of the 'old' continental Europe did not preclude larger alliances and cooperation with non-European nationalists. For example, at the Oslo congress, non-European delegates from the Union of South Africa, the United States, Bolivia and Mexico were invited to share their own experiences on the emergence of a new nationalism in their respective countries. Furthermore, non-European examples were discussed as potential role models and solutions to the European crisis, such as a 'European Commonwealth' based on the British Commonwealth or the dismissed idea of a 'United States of Europe'.<sup>101</sup>

### The Demise of the Nationalist International, 1936–1941

The emergence of a political alliance between fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in 1936 changed the character of Nazi internationalism to the disadvantage of the IAdN because Keller's organisation was deprived of its former task of combatting Italian fascist internationalism.<sup>102</sup> Hence, the RMVP lost its interest in Keller's activities. Intriguingly, this coincided with the demise of the rival CAUR in Italy in the years 1936–9 after the failed attempt to organise an international 'Montreux Front'

<sup>95</sup> For example in the 'report' of the national committee of the Straits Settlements (a former British colony in Southeast Asia), there was only a quotation from a newspaper article of the *Penang Gazette* from 1935 on the Nationalist International. Keller, *Der Kampf um die Völkerordnung*, 197.

<sup>96</sup> IAdN, *Volksgemeinschaft und Völkerfriede*, 7–9.

<sup>97</sup> IAdN, *Organic Nationalism*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order, 1916–1931* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 6.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. footnote 65.

<sup>101</sup> This idea was discussed at the Oslo congress by the US professor of Norwegian descent, Charles E. Stangeland. Cf. 'Nasjonalister fra over 30 land i Nobelinstituttet', *Fritt Folk*, 27 Jul. 1936.

<sup>102</sup> On the Italo-German rapprochement, see also Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

of fascist movements.<sup>103</sup> Now, both organisations seemed fallen out of time, not only because of the end of the Italo-German hostility but also because a meta-political, cultural propaganda battle about ideological supremacy among ‘minor’ European fascist movements was superseded by realpolitik and actual military and political alliances such as the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936. This development gave momentum to the organisation *Anti-Komintern* involved in similar matters of international cooperation and propaganda.<sup>104</sup> While Keller struggled to find funding for another congress, the *Anti-Komintern* hosted a large ‘International Anti-communist Conference’ in November 1936 in Feldafing in Bavaria. Hence, from late 1936 on, Keller’s anti-Italian internationalism was side-lined within Nazi Germany and even superseded by the anti-Semitic agency *Welt-Dienst*, which hosted three international congresses of anti-Semites in Erfurt in the years 1936–8.<sup>105</sup> While anti-communist and anti-Semitic propaganda flourished as elements of Nazi internationalism in the years leading to the Second World War, the Nationalist International with its ‘anti-fascist’ attitude slowly entered into a phase of demise.

Keller’s personal frustration became evident in a letter from May 1938 sent to the Reich Education Ministry, when he complained that the RMVP had only financed his undertaking as a counter-measure against CAUR. Now, with the new Rome-Berlin axis, it had shown itself to be ‘completely disinterested’ in his organisation, which had therefore for over a year been financed by his private resources.<sup>106</sup> Keller looked for alternative funding and apparently even asked the Bulgarian king Boris III for a donation. After the Oslo congress (where no Italians had been invited) and Keller’s continuing attacks in IAdN publications against Nazi Germany’s new partner fascist Italy, a report from the Foreign Ministry stated that ‘there is absolutely no objective interest in this working group’ for the German state.<sup>107</sup> Also in April 1937 the formerly supportive RMVP ordered Keller to liquidate the entire organisation.<sup>108</sup> A year later, up to ten different German authorities agreed in a meeting that Keller’s international activities had to be stopped immediately.<sup>109</sup> However, at the same time, the IAdN stood under the patronage of the *Gestapo* and received some funding from the *Stiftung Deutsches Auslandswerk* (Foundation of German Works Abroad).<sup>110</sup> Thus, the ambiguous assessment of the IAdN among German authorities constitutes a good example of the competition and contradictory decisions of different institutions with partly overlapping competencies within the polycratic multi-level governance of the Nazi regime.<sup>111</sup>

Due to the lack of political support and funding from German authorities, the only output of the IAdN in the period from 1937 to 1940 was a lecture series in Berlin that included international speakers such as the French anti-Semitic historian Bernard Faÿ and the Norwegian fascist Herman Harris Aall. In a speech on ‘The Rights of Peoples in Czechoslovak Democracy’ in January 1938, Keller again used his concept of the ‘right of the peoples to be themselves’ to legitimise the forthcoming seizure of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany due to the alleged suffering of the ethnic

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Cuzzi, *L’internazionale delle camicie nere*, 296–388.

<sup>104</sup> The organisation had been founded in late 1933 as an integral division of Goebbels’ RMVP, and demonised Bolshevism through domestic and international propaganda throughout the 1930s. The *Anti-Komintern* cooperated globally with anti-communist agents, agencies and organisations abroad, including CAUR and IAE.

<sup>105</sup> See BArch R58/5992; R58/7424.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from Academy for the Right of Peoples to RMVP, 28 May 1938, PAAA RZ214 99290.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Nach meiner Ansicht besteht keinerlei sachliches Interesse an dieser Arbeitsgemeinschaft [...]’. File note from German Foreign Ministry, 3 Jul. 1936, PAAA, RZ214 99289.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Letter from Min. Rat. Hasenöhrle from RMVP to German Foreign Ministry, 6 Mar. 1937, PAAA, RZ214 99290.

<sup>109</sup> File note from German Foreign Ministry, 21 Feb. 1938, PAAA, RZ214 99290.

<sup>110</sup> The academy received monthly 1,200 Reichsmark from Jan. to Apr. 1939. Cf.: Letter from Springer to Hans Keller, 20 Jan. 1939, PAAA, RZ214 99290.

<sup>111</sup> On the multi-level governance of the Third Reich, see Thomas Schaarschmidt, ‘Multi-Level Governance in Hitler’s Germany: Reassessing the Political Structure of the National Socialist State’, *Historical Social Research*, 42, 2 (2017), 218–42.

German minority.<sup>112</sup> However, the Foreign Ministry hindered Keller's international efforts more actively: when the IAdN leader was invited to the DNSAP party convention in Kolding in Denmark in summer 1939, his participation was forbidden by German authorities. In September 1939, the Foreign Ministry even made sure that the German security police revoked Keller's passport to prevent him from travelling abroad. Thus, at a time when Nazi Germany was busy preparing and launching an imperialist war, the kind of Nazi internationalism preaching 'respect for other peoples' was not tolerated any longer. The Nationalist International was finally forced to terminate all its activities in September 1941.<sup>113</sup>

Still, Hans Keller's peculiar internationalist outlook was not deemed entirely useless for Nazi Germany's war efforts. The *Amt Ausland/Abwehr*, the German military intelligence service, exploited Keller's broad international network to gather information during the war.<sup>114</sup> Keller himself served as an interpreter for the *Luftwaffe*. After 1945, he continued to write about questions of international law and enjoyed a second career in West Germany, becoming an elected member of the Munich City Council in 1952. Six years later, he applied for compensation and subsequent civil service (so-called *Verbeamtung*), falsely arguing that he had been forced to resign from civil service in 1934 because of non-party affiliation and his Europeanist and internationalist attitude.<sup>115</sup> Unashamedly, the same man who had attempted to reconcile Nazism with internationalism in the 1930s now distanced himself from the Nazi regime through references to his international activities, again highlighting his typical tactics of obfuscation. Nonetheless, Keller, who died in Munich in 1970, never forgot his Nazi past. In 1965, he ran as a Bundestag candidate for the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), the ideological successor of the NSDAP.<sup>116</sup>

### Conclusion and Legacy

After this institutional history of the Nationalist International, I end with three broader conclusions, and a discussion of the legacy of Keller and his brainchild. First, even though the IAdN held a marginal and contested position within the Third Reich, I argued that there was a minor 'Europeanist' and 'internationalist' strand of Nazism before the war that attempted to reconcile ultra-nationalist and *völkisch* ideas based on exclusionary racism and German leadership with international cooperation and 'respect' for other peoples' patriotism. Particularly in the field of international law, there was a vague vision to cooperate internationally to establish a new 'just' law of nations directed against egalitarian concepts of the state as well as the 'unjust' system of Versailles. However, future research could, from a perspective of legal history, further examine the particularities of Keller's law of nations and its relation to other Nazi legal theories such as those developed by Carl Schmitt. While at first stressing peace propaganda in the mid-1930s, this 'internationalist' IAdN increasingly adjusted its ideas to German colonialism and expansionism through ambiguous concepts such as 'the right of peoples to be themselves'. Hence, it is possible to detect a kind of 'Nazi internationalism' that attracted followers abroad in the 1930s, despite the ultra-nationalist, racist and *völkisch* nature of national socialist ideology. I argue that it was not mainly the complicated and partly contradicting ideas about *Volk* nationalism in different countries, the idea of inequality of peoples or potential German leadership that led to the demise of the IAdN. There were enough foreign allies such as Hermann Harris Aall

<sup>112</sup> Hans Keller, 'Die Rechte der Völker in der Tschechoslowakei', *Jomsburg Völker und Staaten im Osten und Norden Europas*, 2 (1938), 151–7.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. file note from German Foreign Ministry, 9 May 1939, PAAA, RZ214 99290; John T. Lauridsen, *Dansk nazisme: 1930–45 – og derefter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2002), 255; letter from German Foreign Ministry to SS-Brigadenführer Jost, 16 May 1940, PAAA, RZ214 99290; file note from German Foreign Ministry, 5 Sep. 1941, PAAA, RZ214 101195.

<sup>114</sup> File note from German Foreign Ministry, 5 Sep. 1941, PAAA, RZ214 101195.

<sup>115</sup> See footnote 217 in Syga-Dubois, *Wissenschaftliche Philanthropie*, 615.

<sup>116</sup> 'Alter Kämpfer. Merkwürdiges aus der Truhe eines Wahlkandidaten', *Die Zeit*, 23 Jul. 1965, available at <https://www.zeit.de/1965/30/alter-kaempfer> (last visited 25 Apr. 2022).



or Rolf Henne ready to adopt those ideas that fitted to their own ideological fascist agenda. Instead, it was the fact that Keller was side-lined within Nazi Germany due to his anti-Italian stance, which from 1936 on seemed fallen out of time, that led to the end of the IAdN. From then on, German authorities such as the RMVP preferred other agencies involved in international cooperation and propaganda such as the *Anti-Komintern* and the *Welt-Dienst*. In the wake of the Second World War, the IAdN's 'anti-imperialist' sort of Nazi internationalism stressing 'respect for other peoples' patriotism' became ultimately irreconcilable with the aggressive geopolitics of the Third Reich.

Second, the Nationalist International must be viewed in the broader transnational context of anti-communist, authoritarian, and fascist internationalism. Hans Keller cooperated with nationalists not only from various countries but also from a wide range of political positions, ranging from conservatives to outspoken fascists. Thus, this case study illustrates the fluid entanglement between fascism, the radical right, conservatism, academia and elites in the interwar period, who were all united in their opposition to the liberal order and the communist threat. The philanthropic Rockefeller Foundation even fuelled this network through its funding, emphasising an important overlap between liberal and fascist internationalism. Furthermore, even though the IAdN emphasised a European pal-ingensis as expressed through the concept of the Third Europe, non-European nationalists were not entirely excluded from its activities, suggesting a potential global dimension.

Third, one must nonetheless underline the limited practical outcomes of the IAdN beyond mere discussions at pompous congresses. The Nationalist International and the Academy for the Right of Peoples never became the fully-fledged European or global organisations that Keller so desperately tried to form. The attempt of the IAdN to measure itself against the League of Nations and the Communist International illustrates the hubris around Keller's undertaking. The non-binding and informal character of the international network, which helped to attract many nationalist followers at a certain moment of time, constituted also a disadvantage. For example, several fascists such as Vidkun Quisling and Ernesto Giménez Caballero apparently promised in the mid-1930s to send contributions to the IAdN publication series, but, when the IAdN lost momentum, never kept their promise. Furthermore, misunderstandings and language barriers, for example, concerning *völkisch* terminology, which tended to be whitewashed in Keller's own sources, complicated matters. Moreover, instead of actually engaging with Keller's ideas such as a Third Europe, many delegates just used the network as a platform to present their own nationalist ideas and to promote their discontent with the liberal order and their communist enemies.

Finally, the question remains about the legacy of Keller's vision of international cooperation among European nationalists. During the Second World War, ideas of a new national socialist European order constituting different peoples under the leadership of Germany flourished not only within the Third Reich but also among collaborators in its occupied territories as well as among the political allies.<sup>117</sup> These fascist visions of Europe even survived the end of the fascist era in 1945, and the early 1950s experienced a number of international conferences mirroring IAdN's and CAUR's congresses in the 1930s. The delegates formed the so-called Malmö movement, officially founded at a congress Malmö in 1951 under the title European Social Movement (*Europäische soziale Bewegung*; ESB). This was a new international network of fascists that aimed to unite European national forces to build a new anti-liberal, anti-communist, anti-democratic, xenophobic and racist Europe.<sup>118</sup> The Malmö movement constituted a direct reaction to the European integration process and in particular to the signing of the contract for the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. Nonetheless, even though Keller and his closest allies took no part in this short-lived movement that soon split into different competing fractions, it is not difficult to detect intellectual continuities. The 'natural' leadership of Germany was now more questioned, but similar to Keller, Karl-Heinz Priester, the German leader

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Neulen, *Europa und das 3. Reich*; Kunkeler and Hamre, 'Conceptions and Practices', 18–20.

<sup>118</sup> On the Malmö movement and its legacy for the New Right, see Elisabeth Åsbrink, 'When Race Was Removed from Racism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 82, 1 (2021), 133–51; Janosch Steuer, 'Die andere Europäische Einigung', *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 46 (2011), 87–96.

of the ESB who had been an important member of the Hitler Youth, fantasised in a mystical-romanticist tone about the German *Reich* finding its ‘final shape and completion’ in the ‘Nation Europe’.<sup>119</sup> This was a concept developed by the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley, and it also became the title of a German journal originally affiliated with the Malmö movement. Next to these ideational continuities, there were also a few personnel continuities to the IAdN. The Swiss Nazi Hans Oehler, who had participated at two IAdN congresses in the 1930s, became an editorial board member of *Nation Europa*, and Julius Evola, IAdN’s only loyal partner in Italy, contributed to the journal.<sup>120</sup>

Even though the Malmö movement and the postwar ‘field of “nationalist internationalism” soon lay strewn with shattered hopes, futile efforts and broken organizations’, and similar projects such as Mosley’s National Party of Europe in the 1960s remained marginal, they paved the way for the European New Right and its concept of ethnopluralism.<sup>121</sup> Developed in the 1970s, the concept aims at preserving separate and bordered ‘ethno-cultural’ nations while discursively emphasising ‘mutual respect’ for other nations. And even though the New Right apparently did not engage directly with Keller’s work, it is striking how the IAdN anticipated this contemporary rightist discourse already in the 1930s, demanding ‘the development of a genuine and organic [*Volk*] nationalism’ in Europe, ‘based on the acceptance of the natural and cultural diversity of nations’.<sup>122</sup> Nowadays, similar ideas of the New Right such as an illiberal ‘Europe of sovereign nations’ are, for example, expressed in Identity and Democracy, the right-wing political group of the European Parliament. Furthermore, in the wake of Steve Bannon’s failed attempt to unite the European Far Right in 2017–19, several political observers warned about the upcoming of a new ‘Nationalist International’, as in a Brookings article called ‘Nationalists of the World, Unite?’<sup>123</sup> This paper has shown that the exact same phrases and slogans and strikingly similar ideas of Nazi internationalism had already been in play in the 1930s.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to thank Margrit Pernau and the members of her colloquium, as well as Daniel Hedinger, Friedrich Ammermann, Clare Richardson, Sebastian Conrad, Harald J. Hamre and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on this paper as well as Judith Syga-Dubois for sharing her source material from the Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>119</sup> Cited in Smoydzin, *Hitler lebt!*, 64.

<sup>120</sup> On the journal *Nation Europa*, see Thomas Pfeiffer, *Für Volk und Vaterland. Das Mediennetz der Rechten – Presse, Musik, Internet, Aufbau* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch 2002), 145–76.

<sup>121</sup> Kurt P. Tauber, ‘German Nationalists and European Union’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 74, 4 (1959), 564–89, 81. On the New Right and ethnopluralism, see Alberto Spektorowski, ‘The New Right: Ethno-regionalism, Ethno-pluralism and the Emergence of a Neo-fascist “Third Way”’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 8, 1 (2003), 111–30.

<sup>122</sup> IAdN, ed., *Volk und Staat im Grenzland*, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Kemal Derviş and Caroline Conroy, ‘Nationalists of the World, Unite?’, *brookings.edu*, 26 Nov. 2018, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/nationalists-of-the-world-unite/>. See also Andrea Mammone, ‘Europe’s Nationalist International’, *Aljazeera*, 28 Apr. 2017, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/4/28/europes-nationalist-international>; Miranda Green, ‘Opinion Today: The Nationalist International’, *Financial Times*, 26 Jun. 2018, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/a12c21e2-78f3-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d> (all last visited 25 Apr. 2022).

**Cite this article:** Hamre MK (2024). ‘Nationalists of All Countries, Unite!’: Hans Keller and Nazi Internationalism in the 1930s. *Contemporary European History* 33, 477–496. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000455>