



Safeguarding the added value of the postage stamp within the UPU’s “single postal territory”

Maria Libera (Worldwide Philatelic Observatory, Progress Market Research, Tunisia)

As the UPU prepares to celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding, it is necessary to consider safeguarding the added value of the postage stamp within the UPU’s “single postal territory” as an integral part of the continuation of the history of the UPU. Since its creation by Great Britain in 1840, the postage stamp has been playing, for almost 200 years now, a crucial role as a facilitator of communications in developing postal services among the 192 UPU member countries that constitute the world’s most extensive distribution network.

Indeed, the postage stamp is not a “simple small piece of gummed paper” with a limited “shelf life”. Rather, it is a powerful tool, a “miniature ambassador”, for promoting the issuing country’s unique and sovereign cultural heritage and identity and transporting it to the farthest corners of the earth. The history of the world has been immortalized through the postage stamps produced in the names of the issuing countries, as can be seen in philatelic exhibitions on display in communications museums. Furthermore, certain countries have even legislated that their tourism sector partner with the Posts to promote the country’s heritage and tourist attractions through relevant stamps and related products.

It is vital to recognize that the postage stamp continues to be at the heart of an extensive stamp industry and network that is active in every UPU member country. Numerous added-value business, cultural, economic, historical, postal, social and tourist activities, among others, revolve around the postage stamp, involving tens of millions of people and stakeholders around the world of all professions and walks of life – museums; philatelists; postal historians and writers; postal services; stamp auction houses, collectors and dealers; stamp security printers, and more.

The combined turnover of the postage stamp industry, amounting to billions of dollars, contradicts the assumption that postage stamps are becoming obsolete in today’s 21st century, owing to their diminishing use on physical postal mail, against the growing popularity of digital and electronic stamps. If postage stamps were truly “becoming obsolete”, we would not be witnessing ongoing stamp industry abuses that have been generating considerable revenues for the private sector for more than 30 years. The most damaging of these are the thousands of “illegal, bogus and fantasy stamps” produced on many alien and unethical topics in the names of mostly developing countries, without their knowledge and to their detriment. Not counting the previous years, during the year 2023 alone, over 40 UPU member countries were found to be in this situation. Such revenues earned illegally have been associated with money laundering, and undermine, in particular, the integrity of the postage stamp and the sovereignty of the countries concerned.

In summary, such a situation requires constant monitoring, followed by appropriate and urgent corrective measures, namely, strengthening the impact of existing tools such as the UPU circulars and the WNS database, as well as encouraging more concerted actions by all the stakeholders of the World Association for the Development of Philately.