

## The International Committee of the Movements for European Unity

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## The International Committee of the Movements for European Unity

The Liaison Committee of the Movements for European Unity was set up in Paris on 20 July 1947. It comprised the Independent League for European Cooperation (ILEC), led by Paul van Zeeland, the former Belgian Prime Minister, the Union of European Federalists (UEF), led by Henri Brugmans of the Netherlands, and Winston Churchill's United Europe Movement (UEM). The aim pursued by the Committee was to organise more effectively the efforts and activities of its constituent movements, although the latter retained their complete independence. The task was soon complicated, however, by personal and ideological differences. Thus the Movement for the Socialist United States of Europe refused to be associated with the Committee, which it believed to be too conservative and in favour of a capitalist approach to European integration. For its part, the European Parliamentary Union (EPU), a fiercely independent movement led by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, preferred to remain apart.

And yet the need for better coordination was becoming clearer by the day. Hence the decision, taken in Paris on 10 and 11 November 1947, to replace the Liaison Committee with an International Committee of the Movements for European Unity (ICMEU). Duncan Sandys, MP, a former Conservative Minister and son-in-law of Winston Churchill, was the Committee's President, while Joseph Retinger, the Polish co-founder of the ILEC in 1946, was appointed Secretary-General. The International Committee had its headquarters in London but maintained a Liaison Office in Paris, run by Georges Rebattet, the Deputy Secretary-General. The Committee's principal mission was to orchestrate and amplify the publicity campaign in support of European unity. It had now been joined by the French Council for a United Europe, the ILEC, the *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* (New International Teams — NEI), the UEF and the UEM. It was not until April 1948 that the EPU, after considerable hesitation, followed suit.

On its first day of existence, the ICMEU decided to convene, in spring 1948, a conference to be attended by Europeans representative of Europe's political parties and of the vital forces in European society. The idea was to recruit leading European figures capable of giving life to the concept of European unity and the joint exercise of national sovereignties. But, from the outset, the United Europe Movement effectively took the reins of the future Congress, a development which would not be without implications for the role played by federalist militants. For, as the federalist leaders saw matters, the Congress was to constitute a 'States-General' in the true sense of the term, enjoying the requisite legitimacy and authority to draw up a draft federal Constitution with no concession to the constraints of a 'possibilist' framework. The Hague having in the meantime been chosen as the venue for the Congress, the Dutch Catholic Senator and former Minister Pieter Kerstens, Vice-President of the ILEC, was appointed Chairman of the Organising Committee.

On 14 December, a Joint Committee was also set up in London; in practice, the Joint Committee dealt with all the organisational arrangements for the Congress of Europe to be held in The Hague. It issued and monitored the invitations to attend. The British hold over the organisation of the Congress immediately gave rise to mistrust among the federalists, who saw the threat of a political hijack. They tried, therefore, to secure the involvement of someone of sufficient stature to counterbalance Churchill. A discreet approach was made to Paul-Henri Spaak, at that time both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Belgium; however, he declined the federalists' request, pointing to the ministerial crisis which his country was suffering. The federalists, whose thinking had, since the inter-war years, been influenced by the personalist doctrine, were moreover mistrustful of political parties. But there was nothing for it; the International Committee could not escape the internal tensions arising out of the opposition between the British Conservative and Labour Parties.

The Congress was assigned three objectives: to demonstrate the existence, in all free countries of Europe, of a body of public opinion in support of European unity, to discuss the challenges posed by European unity and propose practical solutions to governments and to give new impetus to the international publicity campaign. To prevent the Congress from degenerating into a free-for-all producing nothing in the way of practical results, the International Committee set up three subsidiary committees. A Political Committee was chaired by Paul Ramadier, former President of the French Council of Ministers, an Economic and Social Committee was chaired by Paul van Zeeland, and a Cultural Committee had as its Chairman the Spanish writer and former Republican Ambassador Salvador de Madariaga, following the withdrawal of the Italian

writer Ignazio Silone, a member of the *Movimento Federalista Europeo*. The deliberations of each of the Committees were preceded by a series of preparatory meetings attended by hundreds of experts and political leaders.

The Congress for Europe met in the Hague from 7 to 10 May 1948. On completion of their deliberations, the participants issued an ambitious *Message to Europeans* and adopted three resolutions which the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity resolved to implement. To this end, on 25 October 1948 in Brussels, it created the European Movement.