

Practical organisation and symbols

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No sooner had the idea been mooted of arranging a major congress for Europe than the Dutch Catholic Senator, Pieter A. Kerstens, a former Minister for Economic Affairs and Vice-President of the Independent League for European Cooperation (ILEC), proposed that the Congress be held in The Hague. Having been appointed Chairman of the Organising Committee, he was responsible for overseeing the logistical aspects of the event. This particularly involved collecting within the country the sums needed to welcome, transport and accommodate hundreds of delegates arriving from most of the countries of Western Europe. In view of the shortage of hotel accommodation in The Hague, many participants were put up in private homes. The organisational effort also included providing participants with passes, arranging the translation of Congress material into French and English, duplicating amendments to the draft resolutions and setting up a press room.

With the support of the local and national authorities, Kerstens secured permission to occupy the *Binnenhof*, formerly a palace of the Counts of Holland and now the seat of the Netherlands Government, with its famous *Ridderzaal* (Knights' Hall). Every year, this Hall adjacent to the Netherlands Parliament accommodates the States-General of the Netherlands, before which the Queen pronounces the Speech from the Throne. The Dutch royal family was, in fact, very actively involved in the proceedings. On 7 May 1948, in the presence of the diplomatic corps, the Crown Princess Juliana and her husband, Prince Bernhard, attended the inaugural plenary session; Congress delegates were invited by the Netherlands Government to attend an official reception at the Wassenaar royal palace, and receptions were also held at a number of embassies.

The Organising Committee and the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity (ICMEU) were determined that the Hague Congress should leave its mark on public opinion. Hence the decision that the town and all official buildings should fly a white flag bearing, in red, the letter 'E', meant to symbolise in all its languages the future united Europe. It was not until a few months later, following its formal creation in Brussels, that the European Movement definitively chose as its emblem a green 'E' on a white background. In the same vein, a rally was organised on the afternoon of 9 May on the Dam, outside the Amsterdam royal palace. More than 10 000 people gathered to hear various addresses, including enthusiastically received speeches by Winston Churchill, the former British Prime Minister and Honorary Chairman of the Hague Congress. He was followed on the rostrum by Paul Ramadier, former President of the French Council of Ministers, the former Belgian Minister, Julius Hoste, Henri Brugmans, the Dutch President of the Union of European Federalists (UEF), and Georges Bohy, the Belgian Socialist Member of Parliament speaking on behalf of the European Parliamentary Union (EPU). At the end of the meeting, the participants — accompanied by the municipal brass band — sang in chorus, in several languages, an anthem entitled 'Europa Één', written for the occasion by the Dutch composer, Louis Noiret.

The Hague Congress, covered by almost 250 journalists, was a genuine media success. It was the subject of innumerable articles in the general and specialist press. The power of the event made a lasting impression on the participants and ensured it a prominent place among the symbols of the initial efforts made after the Second World War to unify Europe on a new basis.