

Hosting Europe

Local Organisation of the Congress of Europe, The Hague

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In May 1948, the Congress of Europe took place in the city of The Hague in the Netherlands. This paper, based on local Dutch sources, describes the local organisation of the congress, which was an ambitious enterprise. More than 700 guests had to be provided with accommodation, food and local transport in a period of reconstruction in the aftermath of the Second World War. Moreover, the organisers had to search for sponsors, as participants only paid for their transport ticket to The Hague.

Staging the congress was further challenged by the late start to the preparations, only three months before the guests arrived. The archival sources do not give an exact starting point, but the first date mentioned is 31st January, when, apparently, a written offer had been made by the stenography company which would report the congressional meetings¹. A first overview of aspects of the organisation is given in a document which is dated in pencil as "February '48"². But most correspondence and minutes of meetings are from a later date. The bulk of preparations seem to have started only at the beginning of March.

This paper will first concentrate on the organisational team and the financial resources. An interesting question is for example whether this team and the financial donors were mainly of Dutch origin or more international. This short analysis will be followed by a focus on four complex issues: the allocation of visas to the German delegation, the arrangement of restaurants in the post-war context of governmental

¹ This letter is mentioned in a letter of 5th May 1948 from Haremaker to Van Broekhuizen. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Tweede Afdeling (ARA-II), Archief van Europese beweging (EBN), lijstnummer 93.

² "Het congres van Europa", ARA-II, Archief EBN, No. 93.

economising measures, the search for accommodation in a city with a widespread housing shortage, and the discussions about the European flag. Thereafter, an impression will be given of the congress outside its meetings from the moment the delegates arrived. The last section concentrates on the efforts to transmit the "European message" to the large public in the Netherlands.

I. The Dutch Organisational Team

The organising committee in The Hague was chaired by Dutch senator Pieter Adriaan Kerstens. From January 1942 until May 1944, he had been part of the Dutch government in exile in London as minister for trade, industry and navigation. Kerstens was not unfamiliar within the circles of supporters of European cooperation: he was vice-president of the Independent League for European Cooperation (ILEC), chair of the Dutch Committee for a United Europe, and member of the Dutch Beweging van Europese Federalisten. He was also a member of the International Committee for the Movements for European Unity, chaired by Duncan Sandys. Shown by several expense claims, Kerstens travelled frequently to this committee in London to discuss the progress of the preparations³.

The other members of the organising committee were Mr J. C. van Broekhuizen, in charge of press, radio and propaganda, Secretary P. van Stam and Treasurer Ir J. C. Kaars Sijpesteyn. They were assisted by an executive committee or secretariat composed of three members whose names frequently occur in the local organisational correspondence. Notably Miss C. P. Haremaker seems to have played a central role. Her name appears at the bottom of much of the correspondence, and during the congress she coordinated the secretariat, including contracted stenographers. The other secretaries, much less apparent in the sources, were Mr H. W. Pirang and Mr W. B. Vreugdenhil⁴.

A third group of organisers was the so-called "Comité van ontvangst" (reception committee) or "Dames-comité" (ladies' committee). It was founded on 9th March. At the first meeting, only five ladies were present. But soon the committee expanded to over twenty members. Six of them were assembled in an executive branch of the committee. The

president was Miss Anna Carolien Schippers, head of the National Women's Council. The "ladies" frequently came together, mainly to plan the accommodation of the guests⁵.

The organisational team was thus composed of Dutch members only. At the beginning of April, Georges Rebattet, the French representative of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, suggested he came, accompanied by his secretary Miss R. M. Ford. But Kerstens reacted reluctantly to this offer. In his meeting with the Dutch organising committee, he admits being afraid that the arrival of Rebattet would create an intermediary between Duncan Sandys and the organisation in the Netherlands⁶. Indeed, the sources give the impression that eventually, Mr Rebattet and Miss Ford did not come over at this stage.

II. Finances

Probably Kerstens' major occupation was the collection of financial resources. For reasons of currency problems, delegates participated without paying an entrance fee. Participants were at liberty to donate to the organisation through an international campaign fund which was opened in each country⁷. But no sources mention the transfer of this fund to the central account in the Netherlands.

Expenses like hotels, restaurants, conference halls and salaries of staff and translators had to be met through private or business donations. Kerstens therefore contacted the Dutch business world in the second half of March and seems to have been fairly successful. Within a few weeks, the organisation had received letters and financial transfers from 24 donors and a total sum of 172,000 Dutch guilders. His contacts with the director of Philips, H.F. van Walssem, seem to have been particularly profitable. Philips contributed financially with a sum of fl 25,000 and offered the arrangement of loudspeakers for the event in Amsterdam on the Sunday afternoon. Van Walssem also organised a lunch for Kerstens to meet nine potential financiers. Indeed, at least one of these guests (Brennikmeyer) donated a large sum of fl 10,000. The list of sponsors also included companies such as Koninklijke Nederlandse Hoogovens en Staalfabrieken, Unilever, Nederlandse Handelsmaatschappij, Stork and several banks. The financiers were subsequently invited to the plenary session in the Ridderzaal on 7th May⁸.

³ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (NL-HaNA), Collectie 378 P. A. Kerstens, 1915-1956

(Kerstens), nummer toegang 2.21.183.43, inventarisnummer (inv. N.) 55 and its inventory, "Inventaris van het archief van P. A. Kerstens, [levensjaren 1896-1956], 1915-1956", p. 3; Van Heerikhuisen, A., "Pioniers van een verenigd Europa" doctorate dissertation Universiteit van Amsterdam 1998, DBNL website http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/heetr038pton01_01.p.41.

⁴ For chart of organisation and many correspondences, see ARA-II, Archief EBN, N. 93.

⁵ During the congress, Miss Schippers was absent. Her deputy was Mrs Van Anrooy-de Kempenaer, ARA-II, Archief EBN, No. 93.

⁶ Meeting of 2nd April 1948, NL-HaNA, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 55.

⁷ "Programme and arrangements", ARA-II, Archief EBN, No. 96.

⁸ NL-HaNA, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 53 and 55; ARA-II, Archief EBN, No. 93.

Just after the congress, the event seemed to have been a large financial success. On 2nd June, the first statement of revenues and expenditures gives a surplus: the sum of donations easily exceeded the costs by fl 23,056. But this view proved to be too optimistic when later statements include costs which had escaped the first statement. On 15th July, the overview shows a deficit of fl 9,444. A month and a half later, the shortage had even risen to fl 17,800. The increase of costs in the statements was due to additional costs for the congress itself, but also to expenses for the congress booklet, which was edited afterwards⁹.

The three statements of revenue and expenditures give the impression that the bulk of financial funding was secured in the Netherlands. Nearly all contributors are of Dutch origin, as the long list of donors in the first statement shows. Only the third and final statement of 31st August includes claimed revenues from a foreign account: the Joint Committee Office in London. At least a portion of this amount of fl 13,000 was to cover the specific expenditure of the members of the Joint Committee during their stay for the congress (fl 5,075.65). At the same time, there was also an opposite money flow from the central account to Paris and London, to cover translator costs (fl 10,966.73)¹⁰.

III. Challenging Issues

According to sources, it seems that some arrangements were rather complex to organise. The challenges were often related to the historical context of the post-war situation, and the local context of the city of The Hague. These issues concern the allocation of visas for the German delegation, the arrangements of a reasonably comfortable welcome for the guests, and the search for accommodation. Moreover, the European flag was still a disputed subject within European circles.

A. The Dutch Government and Visas for the German Delegation

Most participants who needed a visa for the Netherlands seem to have been granted one quite easily. They came from countries such as Spain, Austria, Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria. To ensure that the presence of these participants would not harm Dutch foreign policy,

⁹ "Globaal overzicht van inkomsten en uitgaven" 2nd June; "Begroting verdere onkosten gebaseerd op ontwikkeling tot 15/7/1948 bij zelfde bezetting"; "Estimate of the financial situation per 31st August 1948"; NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 57.

¹⁰ *I.d.* NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 55; "Onbeaalde rekeningen der tolken" NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 57; "Aantekening voor heer Kerstens, rekeningen 'Joint Committee'".

Kerstens received a letter from the Ministry of Justice. In this letter Minister Mr J. H. van Maarseveen emphasised the necessity to avoid disturbing events, such as statements on foreign governments¹¹.

The allocation of visas to the German delegation, however, was apparently less straightforward. The demand was made by the British organisers. On 29th April, in a telephone conversation with the Dutch ambassador in London, Hamilton Kerr expressed the wish to obtain visas for a group of nearly 60 German participants in the congress. A day later, Kerr repeated his call in a letter to the same ambassador, Jonker van Karnebeek. The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Baron van Boetelaer van Oosterhout, raised the issue at the Council of Ministers of 3rd May. Notably the cocktail party for all participants on the first evening of the congress led to hesitation regarding these visas. This party would be hosted by the Dutch government, and would include a welcome by Prime Minister L.J.M. Beel. But after a short discussion they concluded that the request could not be declined. In particular, van Boetelaer's remark that Winston Churchill threatened to interfere personally if the visas were to be refused, clearly seems to have been the incentive¹².

B. Measures of Austerity

The presence of over 700 mouths to feed was reason for contacting the Central Distribution Office (*Centraal Distributie Kantoor*, CDK). This office was entrusted with the coordination and technical execution of the governmental distribution measures. That is, after May 1945, a large number of goods were only available with vouchers distributed by the CDK. The list of these products gradually subsided until its complete abolition in 1950. But during the congress, cigarettes were still listed, and restaurants had to receive assignments to purchase products¹³.

In a letter of 16th April to the CDK, the organisation committee clearly tried to avoid a major impact of the austerity measures on the congress. "However any show of a lavish scale of life would be undesirable [...], we must avoid the impression of destitution"¹⁴. The committee requested more assignments for local restaurants. They also asked permission to distribute cigarettes at the congress, and the possibility for

¹¹ 5th May 1948, reference vM/vR.2656, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague (BZ), 2.07.117.16861.

¹² BZ, 2.07.117, 16861; NL-HaNa, Council of Ministers 1823-1977, 2.02.05.02, inv. No. 390.

¹³ NL-HaNa, "2.06.037 Inventaris van het archief van het Centraal Distributiekantoor, (1937) 1939-1950 (1955)", pp. 9-16.

¹⁴ Translated from the Dutch, "Ter attentie van den heer Pilot", ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 93, 16th April 1948.

participants to obtain Dutch vouchers for cigarettes on presentation of their passport. The organisers seem to have been horrified by the idea of not receiving the guests properly. The letter ends with "We hope therefore, that you would be helpful, in the current circumstances, in welcoming the eminent visitors, in a dignified, austere manner"¹⁵.

The archives do not include the response of the CDK, but every day lunch and dinner were arranged for all participants. Moreover, on arrival in The Hague, all participants received a voucher to buy 60 cigarettes.¹⁶

C. *The Housing Shortage in The Hague and the Search for Accommodation*

Reservations for accommodation had been made in no less than 22 hotels scattered throughout The Hague, the seaside resort Scheveningen and the adjacent village of Noordwijk. Since the beginning of March, the ladies' committee had been very much occupied with the arrangements. But it had not been easy. For instance, to their frustration they did not know the number of guests. No list of participants was handed over before 12th April, and it is probable that the organisers did not know the exact number of participants until the beginning of the congress itself¹⁷.

But the main problem for hotel arrangements was related to the serious housing shortage in The Hague in the aftermath of the war. Inhabitants of areas such as Scheveningen, Zorgvliet and Clingendael had been evacuated in 1942 to make place for the so-called Atlantik Wall. Three years later, most of these houses had been damaged by the occupying force or wracked for firewood by citizens during the extreme cold winter of 1944-1945. Moreover, in March 1945 the Bezuidenhout area in the centre of the city had been severely bombed by the allied forces who had accidentally missed their German targets. In total, 8,373 houses had been completely demolished and 19,703 houses damaged¹⁸.

After May 1945, large municipal projects began restoration and rebuilding, but they could not rapidly meet the population increase, which was relatively very high in The Hague. In January 1948, the city num-

bered 542,025 inhabitants, a growth of 90,000 since the end of the war¹⁹. At the time of the congress, the housing shortage was still greater than in Amsterdam or even Rotterdam. In that year, 38% of households lived together²⁰.

Numerous hotels, notably those situated in the seaside resort of Scheveningen, had been damaged. The Oranje Hotel, for example, had been totally wrecked by bombings. The Palace Hotel had encountered two direct bomb hits in its Northern wing. Also the Savoy and the Rauch were in a crumbling state. In a letter to all participants, the organising committee wrote that around 50% of the hotels had been ruined. But this number might have been a little exaggerated. The Hague, traditionally a city with much domestic and foreign tourism, reopened its doors rapidly. In 1946 the tourist season was launched again, and already one year later the number of visitors exceeded the results of 1938. The Savoy and Rauch hotels recovered rapidly and hosted a portion of the participants in 1948. In the same year, the restoration works in the Palace Hotel finished. For the occasion of the Congress of Europe, these works were accelerated. At the explicit request of the organisers, the opening of the Palace Hotel was rescheduled to an earlier date, before the congress²¹.

A portion of the participants nevertheless had to be lodged in private houses. The ladies' committee, which organised accommodation, appealed to members of diverse female groups in the Netherlands to host participants²². The number of guests concerned however is not clear, neither is there any source on the details of these lodgings.

D. *The European Flag only for the Congress of Europe*

A number of European flags had been produced for the Congress. These flags were white in colour with a large red "E"²³. Apparently, the creation of this flag had not been without discussion.

In a letter dated 15th March, Van Broekhuizen writes enthusiastically to the international committee in London that "the European flag will be made in hundreds and hundreds and we hope to see the old town of The

¹⁵ "De geschiedenis van de bevolking der residentie" in Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *'s Gravenhage 1948*, The Hague, pp. 129-137.

¹⁶ "Woningtekort en woningruimte te 's Gravenhage volgens de uitkomsten der woning- en gezinstelling van 31 mei 1947", in *'s Gravenhage 1949, op. cit.*, pp. 137-169.

¹⁷ ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 93 and 96; Adama Zijlstra, A., *Het Karhuus van badhuis tot levend monument. Een kroniek van 160 jaren*, The Hague, J.N. Voorhoeve, 1979, p. 72.

¹⁸ ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 93.

¹⁹ ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 96.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Vouchers, in ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 96.

¹⁷ NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 53; ARA-II, Archief EBN, No. 93.

¹⁸ "De woningvoorraad te 's-Gravenhage; Beschouwingen over de aan de woningen gegeven bestemming, de voorziening der woningen met water, gas en electriciteit en de huurwaarde der woningen" in Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *'s Gravenhage 1949*, The Hague, pp. 275-287.

Hague and all of Holland flying the new European colours during the Congress of Europe²⁴. He was not only referring to large flags, but also to small ones which were destined to ornament public buildings, trams and bicycles in The Hague. Just a few days before, he had received an offer from the company Stihel BV to produce no less than 1,200 of these flags²⁵.

But two weeks later, the Dutch committee received a letter from Lady Rhy's Williams, Honorary Secretary of the United Europe Movement. She stated that Churchill was opposed to the project of a European flag. Moreover, Duncan Sandys said to Van Broekhuizen that the creation of a European flag was too premature. He added however that the flag could be considered a flag for the Congress of Europe only, and therefore might receive the approval of everybody²⁶.

At the meeting of the organising committee in The Netherlands on 13th April, it still seemed that the whole project had to be cancelled and postponed for a future European event. But eventually, the red European flag was created and flown at several locations, such as at the Binnenhof, next to the Dutch flag, and at the Dam in Amsterdam during the mass event on May 9th. The idea of the small flags, however, never materialised²⁷.

IV. An Impression of the Congress Outside its Meetings

The organisers had endeavoured to prepare the congress down to the smallest detail. With the exception of the voyage to the Netherlands, all arrangements had been taken care of. On arrival by boat, train or airplane, the delegates were welcomed by a committee who accompanied them to the reception centre in The Hague. Transport of their luggage was taken care of. The welcome committee on arrival was wearing white brassards with "Congress of Europe" written in black. During the congress, members of the organisation were recognisable by this kind of brassard: the organising committee was marked by a blue rosette in their buttonhole; young assistants had brassards in red-white-and-blue²⁸.

The participants first went to the Zoo of The Hague, where the reception centre of the congress was seated. Located in the heart of the city, the Zoo was within walking distance of the main congress buildings. In spite of its name, it did not house animals any more. In 1943 the cages

had been replaced by bunkers and anti-aircraft artillery. Only the main building had been spared. This edifice was a large and rather interesting richly decorated "Moorish Palace" of 1893. The designer was the architect H. Westra, who had created several buildings in this lush style in The Hague. After the Second World War the construction had been given a short face-lift to make it the scene of various festivities. In May 1948, the participants were welcomed here by the ladies' committee, who distributed orange files with programmes, name badges and vouchers for hotels and restaurants. Indeed, on Thursday 6th May a crowd of participants had been noticed by local journalists²⁹.

The delegates received vouchers for their hotel, lunches, dinners and cigarettes. Among the hotels, we recognise certain very smart establishments such as the Hotel des Indes in the centre of the city. Ten rooms were rented to host the most distinguished delegates. Other hotels were part of the splendid facade at the beach of Scheveningen: the Kurhaus, the Grand Hotel and the Palace Hotel. The guests in these hotels stayed in a glamorous 19th century entourage with a splendid view. A portion of the British delegation had the good fortune to be hosted in the Kurhaus. The hotels were assigned by nationality. There had been some discussions within the international coordinating committee for the congress regarding the spread of participants over the hotels. Duncan Sandys preferred division by nation. Kerstens disagreed, fearing "isolation of nationalities". But Duncan Sandys' opinion was evidently conclusive³⁰.

Unfortunately, the organisational team had not been able to answer Duncan Sandys' wish of arranging lunch for the entire group together. Serving lunch for over 700 people had been impossible for the local catering industry at this period of the year, before the start of the tourist season. However, providing dinner was apparently no problem since all participants gathered every evening for dinner in the majestic Kurhaus hotel³¹. Lunches were organised in several restaurants in the neighbourhood of the congress. The participants were each told where to go.

All arrangements notwithstanding, participants were not prevented from developing private activities, quite the contrary. Members of the The Hague tourist office had been given an office in the basement of the

²⁴ "For the attention of Mr Martin", reference VB/CH, ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 93.

²⁵ RA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 93.

²⁶ NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 55.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 93, 94 and 96.

²⁹ Den Hollander, J., *Ooit gestloopt Nederland*, Amsterdam, De Bezige Bij, 1985, pp. 40-43; the building would be demolished in 1968; "Dierentuin: gevestigd het secretariat en het bureau van Congres van Europa" in *Nieuwe Courant*, Den Haag, 7th May 1948; "Congres van Europa heden geopend. Churchill: 'Een beweging van volken, niet van partijen'", *Haagsche Courant*, Den Haag, 7th May 1948.

³⁰ Den Hollander *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47; NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 55.

³¹ Letter from Van Stam to Duncan Sandys, 28th April 1948, ARA-II, Archief EBN, No. 93, Programme, ARA-II, Archief E.B.N., No. 94.

main building of the congress. Here, there was also a currency exchange, an office of the airline company KLM, an inquiry office, a refreshment room and a telegraph office. Members of the ladies' committee were also present, to give advice on small tourist trips to partners of participants who had come along. The organisation had also arranged accommodation for partners, although they had to bear their own costs and were not allowed to participate in the congress.³²

With the exception of the sessions of the political section, the congress took place in a few halls of the so-called Binnenhof ("Inner Court"): a court in the centre of the city, circled with a collection of historic buildings from the origins of The Hague in the 13th century. This is the centre of the Dutch government residing in parliament, the senate, and the offices of ministers. The sessions of the economic and cultural sections were in the so-called "count's halls", Rolzaal and Weeskamer. All plenary sessions were held in the large, solemn Ridderzaal ("Knights' Hall"). This hall of gothic architecture is the location for the official state opening of the parliamentary year. That is, on the third Tuesday in September, the Queen delivers here a speech from the throne, outlining the government's agenda for the coming year. Otherwise, the hall is often let out for conferences.

In May 1948, the Ridderzaal had been transformed for the occasion of the Congress of Europe. The hall became European as it was decorated with the flags of 22 countries. For the press, a stand had been constructed. The fountain at the entrance of the Ridderzaal was adorned with a large floral decoration. The organisers had made sure that the secretariat office could remain open in the building until late. Moreover, they had even been able to temporarily raise the smoking ban, for, as they explained, "we can't imagine Churchill without a cigar."³³

V. Spreading the Message of a United Europe

Publicity was one of the main focus points of the organisation. On the one hand, the Dutch organisational committee facilitated the visit of the national and international press. During the congress, as we have seen, a stand was constructed at the Ridderzaal. Telex connections to abroad and booths for broadcasting were also installed. A dinner was given for the journalists. Moreover, before the congress, the organisers

sent documentation on the sessions to the local, national and foreign press and radio³⁴.

On the other hand, the organising committee endeavoured to excite the Dutch public at large about the idea of Europe. At their meeting on 13th April they agreed that "the congress should resonate throughout the entire country"³⁵. But apparently, publicity until mid-April had been sparse in spite of multiple efforts by Van Broekhuizen since 3rd March onwards. He had contacted national newspapers such as the NRC, sent communiqué to the national newsagent ANP for distribution, requested filmmakers to produce a "Polygoon" news film for the cinema, and had held discussions with broadcasting radio companies such as the Radi Nederland Wereldroep. At their meeting, his colleagues nevertheless imputed the disappointing results of Van Broekhuizen's performance. Kerstens and Van Stam complained that he did not confine himself to his own responsibilities, and interfered with other aspects of the organisation³⁶.

Although the degree of publicity might have been disappointing for the organising committee, the congress was reported in various local and national newspapers, on radio and in films. The question remains however whether indeed the congress resonated throughout the Netherlands. The first newspaper headlines seem to have put the event only in the shade of its honorary chairman, Winston Churchill: "Churchill again in our Country: the Congress of Europe started today"; "Churchill: movement of people and not of parties"; "Churchill again in our country". The same article ended with: "Churchill will be the heart of the congress"³⁷.

Churchill was a major crowd-puller. He arrived on 6th May at the Valkenburg airport, a small military airport 30 km to the north of The Hague. On his way to The Hague, he was welcomed by thousands of people standing on the side of the road. When he arrived at the British Embassy, many were waiting for him. He answered their cheers and hurrahs with a V-sign³⁸. His arrival coincided with the annual liberation festivities: 5th May is the national Liberation Day. Apparently, the citizens of The Hague had revelled enthusiastically, for example in the

³⁴ ARA-II Archief EBN, No. 93.

³⁵ Translated from the Dutch: "Het hele land moet meertillen", NL-HaNa, Kerstens 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 55.

³⁶ *Id.*, ARA-II Archief EBN, No. 93.

³⁷ Translated from the Dutch: "Churchill wederom in ons land [...]", *op. cit.*, "Churchill: een beweging van volken. [...]", *op. cit.*; "Churchill kwam weer in ons land *Het Binnenhof*, 7th May 1948.

³⁸ Churchill wederom in ons land [...]", *op. cit.*; "Churchill kwam weer in ons land *op. cit.*

³² ARA-II Archief EBN, No. 93 and 96 (programme).

³³ Diverse arrangements and list for flags in ARA-II Archief EBN, No. 93 and 94; NL-HaNa, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv. No. 55; Letter from Hartemakker to the service governmental building 'Rijksgebouwendienst' 23rd April 1948, reference P/L0/550, ARA-II Archief EBN, No. 93.

Kunhaus, where a large party had been organised³⁹. The festival ambience was still present on 6th May, which happened to be a holiday, Ascension Day. Moreover, in The Hague, this ambience was probably further intensified by the many celebrations during the whole year of 1948 for the 700th anniversary of the city.

The general public did not see much of the congress, apart from the badges and the orange files which the participants carried. It was mainly a closed event. Or, in a newspaper article headline, "The congress does not dance"⁴⁰, no, the congress worked hard. Yet a mass event was organised to spread the message of a united Europe⁴¹. It took place on the central Dam Square in Amsterdam on the Sunday afternoon. The event had been meticulously prepared: a special train was rented to bring the delegates from The Hague to the capital. Each participant had a voucher for a seated or a standing place on the Dam. The rest of the square and the adjacent streets were open for all interested. A podium was constructed for the speakers and loudspeakers were installed; Dutch and European flags were flying. Moreover, a choir was hired to illuminate the event with the song "Europe unite!" in three languages (English, French, and Dutch). Scores of the song were distributed among the crowd⁴².

All these arrangements had not been labour lost. On the contrary, the rally was a success: an estimated audience of no less than 40,000 people. In order to reach even a larger public, the event had been recorded on film. It shows a square filled with an audience listening to eminent speakers and the choir. And of course, we see Winston Churchill taking a turn through one of the adjacent streets, the pavements black with cheering people⁴³.

VI. Concluding Remarks

Hosting the Congress of Europe in The Hague was a success. In a few months, the organisational team had managed to prepare facilities for the sessions and for the visit of more than 700 guests. They had arranged a pleasant setting for the congress from the moment the delegates arrived. Often the delegates assembled in beautiful historic places. Some had the chance to stay in smart hotels.

³⁹ "Den Haag vierde opgewekt bevrijdingsfeest", *Haagsche Courant*, 7th May 1948.

⁴⁰ "Het Congres danst niet", *Haagsche Courant*, 10th May 1948. Also: "Hagenaars kregen glimp van Congres te zien", *Het Binnenhof*, 10th May 1948.

⁴¹ Letter from Kerstens to the council of mayor and Elderman of Amsterdam, 13th April 1948, reference PK/v/B/204, ARA-II ArchiefEBN, No. 93.

⁴² ARA-II ArchiefEBN, N. 93, 94, 96 ; NL-HaNA, Kerstens, 2.21.183.43, inv.No. 53.

⁴³ This film is available at European Navigator (<http://www.ena.lu>).

The organisational committee in The Hague consisted only of Dutch members, but it was in direct contact with the International Organisation Committee. Sources seem to show that the organisation was broadly planned by the latter. The Dutch team managed very well to make ideas materialise in spite of challenging circumstances. The Netherlands were still in a period of reconstruction which was perceptible at different levels, such as the economising austerity measures taken by the government or the housing shortage. Furthermore, the Dutch organisational committee was able to collect the necessary financial resources to meet most of the congress costs. Financiers were mainly from the Dutch business world. The organisational team endeavoured to give the delegates a warm welcome. Indeed, the conditions were perfect for a successful congress.

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LE « CONGRÈS DE L'EUROPE » À LA HAYE (1948-2008)

Jean-Michel Guieu & Christophe Le Dréau (dir.)

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