

The Hague

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Between 7 and 10 May 1948, a great International Congress of Europe took place in The Hague, under the honorary chairmanship of Winston Churchill. The International Committee of the Movements for European Unity had invited nearly 800 eminent persons from most Western European countries: politicians (Members of Parliament and Ministers), leaders of employers' organisations and of trade unions, journalists, intellectuals, etc. Seventeen countries were represented, and observers from Eastern Europe and the USA also attended. The largest delegations came from France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany.

Most of the plenary sessions of these European 'States General' were chaired by Anthony Eden and Paul van Zeeland. The work was shared among three Committees: the Economic and Social Committee, the Political Committee and the Cultural Committee. Throughout the debates, two different ideological trends were evident: the French, Belgians, Italians, the Dutch and most of the trade union activists took the federalist line, whereas the British and the Scandinavians declared themselves unionists, in favour of European rapprochement administered by governments and parliaments.

The Economic and Social Committee called for the progressive abolition of quantitative barriers to trade, currency convertibility, resource planning, labour mobility, coordination of economic policies, and the promotion of full employment. The Political Committee spent much time discussing the creation of a European Assembly elected by universal suffrage. It called on the European States to pool some of their sovereign rights and their resources and made the case for a united Europe open to Germany. The Cultural Committee demanded the adoption of a Charter of Fundamental Rights, a Supreme Court, and the creation of a European centre for children, youth and culture. Several aspirations voiced at the Hague Congress became reality in the following months: the European Centre for Culture (ECC), the College of Europe, the Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Congress of Europe in The Hague is the focus of an ENA Special File. With more than 350 documents, this Special File looks in detail at the origins, work and practical impact of the Congress, which was held in May 1948.