

Memorandum by Duncan Sandys on the Hague Congress (1948)

Caption: In summer 1948, Duncan Sandys, British Conservative MP and President of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity, gives an initial assessment of the Congress of Europe in The Hague and identifies the areas which are not entirely satisfactory.

Source: Archives historiques de l'Union européenne, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Dépôts, DEP. Mouvement européen. ME 1183.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/memorandum_by_duncan_sandys_on_the_hague_congress_1948-en-f15ddb58-c635-45f2-9d60-cfea73e52707.html

Publication date: 07/09/2012

Memo on the Congress

1. I had a feeling that the work of the Commissions was not adequately prepared, and could not help contrasting the preparation with that now being made for the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. That Council meets in August. Already I have the papers, and in the intervening months there will be frequent meetings of the British representatives on the separate Commissions.

2. Procedure stifled discussion. I refer only to the Cultural Group. We had too many set speeches. The same speakers spoke at each Session. They had no definite proposals to make. Amendments in French were submitted without notice or text. No decision on them was taken. The result is the gathering up of some of them by a Drafting Committee (page 12 of the Resolutions). The fate of the others is quite unknown.

3. More disturbing was the apparent cleavage of approach to the whole question on the part of the British (and some Continentals) and a vocal section of the Continental representatives on the following points:

(a) the idea that one should forthwith set up a constituent Assembly, an Economic Council, and a Cultural Centre, and all would be well. The harder task of getting an informed public opinion, securing the adhesion of existing organisations, and promoting intercourse between them was ignored.

There was a whole world of conflict to get the limitation "consider inter alia the nature and constitution of a European Centre of Culture" introduced in place of a decision to set it up forthwith.

(b) the insistence not on principles but on particular applications of them, and the ignoring of Mr. Churchill's salutary warning that the applications must be worked out in the separate countries in their own way.

(c) the failure to recognise that our civilisation has broken down because our standards and values have been too low, and an unwillingness to recognise that we must draw fresh inspiration from those spiritual resources which we, each in our own way, consider adequate and valid.

Two disquieting consequences followed from this.

(i) the belief that all that is needed is to apply the same ideals, seek the same goal, and work the same machinery on a bigger scale, and all will be well.

(ii) an indifference and insensibility to Christian values and convictions. Here I speak with restrained but deep concern. The strain put upon some of us was heavy and at times almost unbearable. The to us almost blasphemous use of the "Annunciation" and "the Nativity" in the Report of the Political Commission was almost intolerable. In private I was informed that it was not the report of the Commission but a personal statement of M. Ramadier, but it was never publicly stated to be such. And this did not stand alone. In the Cultural Commission there was a definite resistance to the inclusion of the very word Christian, and the dialectics of the Chairman as to its use added to the tension under which some of us laboured.

(d) There seems to be a confusion or lack of clarity in setting out what we expect the Governments to set up, and there was a lack of enthusiasm for putting the resources of the various organisations represented at the Congress behind such things as Governmental action for Western Union may devise e.g. the Brussels Pact. It was not their plan or their pet hobby and they were not interested.

(e) Where a French text is the original, the English text needs careful revision. This was admitted in the Cultural Section, and probably applies elsewhere.

These criticisms are made not to discredit the Movement or disparage the real advance made at the Congress. They are set out to indicate some things that may need careful watching in our future actions, lest we create in some quarters a great unease of mind and a disappointment of hope.

With diffidence I suggest three points at which future action needs careful consideration.

- (i) I understand from the Press that the various Governments are to be approached, and I suggest that while all the Resolutions may be submitted the pressure at the moment should be on the points which Governments alone can set up action.
- (ii) It appears that Commissions are to be set up by the Congress. The United Europe Movement will have a big responsibility in this, and should secure
- (a) that the terms of reference are carefully drawn;
 - (b) that not only are their representatives carefully chosen but also that they have a consultative body of experts with which they can confer.
- (iii) The continuation of the Political, Economic, and Cultural representatives - with the addition of others who could not attend the Hague but would be available at home - to form United Europe Commissions to work out the implications of what has been decided, and to suggest future lines of action seems to me a desirable thing.