Haus der Niederlande, 31 March 2015

Book presentation *Louis Raemaekers 'Armed with pen and pencil': How a Dutch cartoonist became world famous during the First World War.* Roermond 2014.

On this day, exactly one hundred years ago, the largest newspaper in neutral Holland *The Telegraph*, features a small article under the heading 'War news'. It says: "Today we – again – had a visit by a detective of the Amsterdam police, who came to seek information on a plate by Louis Raemaekers, depicting the German Emperor, the King of Italy and the Emperor of Austria. It seems the Austrian envoy has complained about the publication of this plate as being offensive to his Monarch."
This is de political cartoon referred to; I won't go into the details of the plate, or the content of the image. The subject of my introduction is the artist: Louis Raemaekers, a man born in the Limburg city of Roermond – his mother was German – who in his youth visited the neighbouring country frequently. He is also the man who from the outbreak of the First World War takes sides against 'the barbarous Hun' and in favour of 'poor little Belgium'. The reaction to his plates is inevitable. The Netherlands are indeed a neutral country and the government had urged the Dutch dailies and weeklies to respect the rules of neutrality and refrain from insulting heads of state and armed forces of the countries in war.

Louis Raemaekers doesn't support that policy; he is afraid the Netherlands awaits the same fate as Belgium and he insists the Dutch army is employed. Quite a naive premise, we can say with hindsight. From the moment this plate appears, in which Raemaekers points for the first time – and literally – to Germany as the aggressor in this war, the belligerent countries are watching him. Early in the war the German envoy in The Hague as well as his Dutch colleague in Berlin, utter their

complaints: "the attitude of the newspaper does more harm than we realise; in Germany they will not tolerate that such actions remain unanswered". The Minister of Interior Affairs does what he can to keep *The Telegraph* and Raemaekers short and he reprimands Raemaekers on several occasions since the start of the war. In order to be better informed about the situation, the Dutch government even taps the phones of the newspaper and learns that the allies do influence the content of its articles. In the following months the bad reputation of Raemaekers in Germany effects him in different ways: German friends turn away from him, unknown citizens send him hate-mail and even Hans Sachs, an important collector and the founder of 'das Verein der Plakatfreunde' excludes him from future membership.

There are many more similar issues to mention; I can continue for quite some time. All this data I acquired during my many years of research. But how did my interest in this political cartoonist started?
Thirty years ago the daughter of Louis Raemaekers approached me to compose a nice, large, complete book on her father. I had never heard about him, but was immediately interested by his work and his impressive career.

- Who is this man, from half-German descent, who was so outspoken about the political situation in Europe during the First World War?
- How could he, illustrator of the children's book my grandmother read to me when I was little, some forty years prior had been one of the most talked about political cartoonists in the world?
- Why did he make those sharp cartoons friend and foe looked forward to seeing in the newspaper every day?
- How is it possible that he, less than a year later in London, became the talk of the town – 'trending topic' – because of an exhibition of his work in an upscale art gallery? ... And shortly afterwards, at a large manifestation in his honour in Paris,

got pinned on his suit the medal of Officer of the French League of Honour?

- Who published all these albums, the magnificent *The Great War* and the small but not less impressive *Raemaekers Cartoons*, translated in eighteen languages and spread all over the world?
- What brought him to travel in 1917 to the United States of America, where he was hailed as *The Greatest Cartoonist of the World*? and was said to have influenced public opinion to accept the American intervention in the war?
- And – last but not least – how is it possible that you and I – and many people with us – had never heard of this man?

All these questions brought me in the nineteen-eighties to sift through Dutch, French and English archives and subsequently to do research for six months in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University in the United States. The Raemaekers Collection in the Hoover Archives holds letters with more than six hundred correspondents, among them world leaders like Roosevelt, Wilson, Poincaré, Churchill and Mussolini as well as countless personal documents and photographs, political cartoons, hundreds of drawings and sketches from the Western Front and then: a dozen or more albums with newspaper clippings, postcards and stamps with his drawings. Recently, the Foundation Louis Raemaekers has photographed and scanned several hundreds of those documents to use as illustrations, exhibit material and for further research.

After defending my dissertation at the University of Amsterdam in 1989, I put Raemaekers aside. Many years I was active for the Foundation Press & Print and was welcomed by the Haus der Niederlande with the yearly exhibit *Politics in Print* – some of you may remember. And then, a few years ago, Koos Hussem approaches me, the founder & CEO of X-CAGO – a technology company based in Raemaekers' hometown Roermond, that – among several activities – digitizes

archives worldwide. He asks me to transform my dissertation about Louis Raemaekers into a book on his life and work: a long-term wish and a fulfilment of my promise to his daughter. The Louis Raemaekers Foundation, the construction of a website about the cartoonist with many artworks and archive documents, a large retrospective in the Museum of the province of Limburg in Venlo (the Netherlands) and this exhibition on his life and work are the result.

The object of the foundation, to bring to the attention of a broad public the life of Louis Raemaekers and the significance of his work, is largely achieved in the Netherlands. Now it is time Louis Raemaekers and his impressive work, 'conquers' other countries in Europe.

It is to me an honour the Haus der Niederlande is the first location outside the Netherlands to welcome this exhibition. The first copy of the Dutch version of this book was presented to the ambassadors of Belgium and Germany (Herr Franz Josef Kremp) in The Netherlands. Herman van Rompuy, Belgian citizen and the former president of the European Council, accepted the first copy of the English version. Today – in this impressive location – I present with great pleasure this book – where I give answers to all above questions – to the German public.

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Münster, 31 March 2015