

Memorandum from the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe on the European flag (Strasbourg, 16 July 1951)

Caption: In this memorandum, dated 16 July 1951, the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe outlines the various proposals for emblems for the organisation on which the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privileges is required to make a choice and to draw up a report to be submitted to the Consultative Assembly.

Source: Council of Europe. Memorandum of the Secretariat General on the European Flag, AS/RPP II (3) 2. Strasbourg: Consultative Assembly, Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privileges, Sub-Committee on Immunities, 16 July 1951.

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Confidential

1. The purpose of an Emblem

There are no ideals, however exalted in nature, which can afford to do without a symbol.

Symbols play a vital part in the ideological struggles of today. Ever since there first arose the question of European organisation, a large number of suggestions have more particularly been produced in its connection, some of which, despite their shortcomings, have for want of anything better been employed by various organisations and private individuals. A number of writers have pointed out how urgent and important it is that a symbol should be adopted, and the Secretariat-General has repeatedly been asked to provide a description of the official emblem of the Council of Europe and has been forced to admit that no such emblem exists.

Realising the importance of the matter, a number of French Members of Parliament (1) have proposed in the National Assembly that the symbol of the European Movement be flown together with the national flag on public buildings. Private movements such as the Volunteers of Europe have also been agitating for the flying of the European Movement colours on the occasion of certain French national celebrations.

In Belgium the emblem of the European Movement was used during the "European Seminar of 1950" by a number of individuals, private organisations and even public institutions. Certain newspapers criticised the use of this emblem and expressed their regret that the Council of Europe had adopted it which is untrue.

At Strasbourg the "E" flag has been widely used during Sessions, but to the surprise of the public, although it has been hoisted on private houses it has never been flown from French official buildings or buildings of the Council of Europe. On the other hand, a considerable amount of rivalry has manifested itself at the Seat of the Council inasmuch as the blue flag with the golden sun and red cross of the European Parliamentary Union has also made an appearance there.

This latter emblem, created by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi in 1923, is still used by him. The green "E" emblem dates from the early days of the European Movement. Both, however, are private emblems which do not affect the problem of a Council of Europe flag and its official use.

In August 1950, the Assembly examined the Report drawn up by the Secretariat-General at the request of the Committee on General Affairs on practical measures designed to make the peoples of Europe more directly aware of their unity. The Assembly referred the various chapters of this Report to the Committees qualified to deal with them. One of the measures advocated was the adoption of a flag. This proposal is a matter for the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privileges to decide (AS/AG (50) 85).

2. Design of the emblem of the Council of Europe and its use

The Assembly must reach a decision as to the principle of adopting an emblem, as to its design and the use to which it is to be put. This last point will briefly be dealt with here, partly on the basis of procedure and regulations established by the United Nations in a similar connection.

The text to be submitted to the Assembly for later recommendation to the Committee of Ministers might read as follows:

"The Consultative Assembly recommends to the Committee of Ministers:

Article 1: That the emblem of the Council of Europe shall be (description).

Article 2: That the Governments of Member States shall use the emblem of the Council of Europe conjointly with the national flag on all official buildings and on all occasions when flags are officially required to be flown, including the 5th May of each year, the anniversary date of the signing of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

In cases where it is flown together with a national flag, that of the Council of Europe shall be placed to the right of the national flag.

Article 3: The emblem of the Council of Europe shall be flown:

- (a) On all buildings of the Council of Europe;
- (b) On the official residence of the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretaries-General;
- (c) On all vehicles used by the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, the President and Vice-Presidents of the Consultative Assembly, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretaries-General, whenever these personages are riding in the vehicles.

Article 4: The specialised authorities established within the Council of Europe and the non-governmental organisations recognised by the latter shall be entitled to use the Council flag subject to conditions to be laid down by order of the Secretary-General.

Article 5: The flag of the Council of Europe may be used by individuals of the Member States provided it is at all times treated with respect.

Article 6: The Secretary-General shall be responsible for the carrying out of these provisions."

3. Design of the Emblem

It would seem wiser not to adopt any flag already existing. Some are already employed by certain organisations, which should continue to use them. A completely new flag must be designed; on the other hand, any proposals submitted to this effect should fulfil the following requirements:

- (a) Sufficient symbolical significance;
- (b) Simplicity;
- (c) Legibility;
- (d) Harmony;
- (e) Pleasing appearance;
- (f) Orthodox heraldic design.

A. Symbols proposed

A very large number of symbols have been suggested. Those most frequently mentioned may be classified as follows:

- A cross - symbol of Christian civilisation, of Europe's crossroads (North - South, East - West), of command; reminiscent of the Crusades; the only symbol common to half the flags of Member States (Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Saar, Sweden, United Kingdom). Sometimes, as a variant, the Cross of St. Andrew, symbol of the Grand Duke of Burgundy, which appears historically the most appropriate.

- An "E" - Used by the European Movement, sometimes improved by being detached from the border of the flag, but criticized by experts in heraldry as being "more of a signpost than a flag".

- A white star in a circle - used in 1944-45 by the armies of liberation.

- Multiple stars - equivalent to the number of Member States in the Council of Europe and appearing either in the form of green stars on a white ground, white stars on a red ground, or silver stars for the Associate Members and golden stars for full Members.

- The coat-of-arms of the Town of Strasbourg - Argent, a bend gules, symbolising the official Seat of the Council of Europe.

- A sun - representing dawning hope.

- A triangle - representing culture.

B. Colours proposed

Some have suggested a combination of all the colours already used for the various flags of Europe. One of the earliest proposals sent in by a Strasbourg citizen was even accompanied by a statistical study of the colours employed, and was designed in blue, green, yellow, black, white and red in proportion to the extent these colours occur in the national flags. Green and white, the colours of the European Movement, are more often suggested; it should perhaps be pointed out in this respect that the original motive indulging the choice of green by Mr. Duncan Sandys was the use of the complementary colour to red; this has, however, been generally overlooked and green is advocated rather as symbolising youth and hope. On the other hand, some people have held that the true heraldic colour for Europe is blue (just as black is the colour for Africa, yellow for Asia and green for Australia); it has not been possible to trace the origin of this theory.

C. While it is true that an orthodox heraldic device and adequate symbolic significance are of some importance, good visual recognition, attraction to the eye, and facility of reproduction are even more essential. When first examining the proposals received, it therefore appeared wiser straight away to reject:

(a) All intricate designs bearing symbols difficult to draw or particularly complicated to reproduce;

(b) Clashing colour combinations, however ingenious.

(c) Multicoloured emblems on the diagonal - such as the Cross of Burgundy - too reminiscent of the house flags of shipping companies.

The reasons militating against the use of emblems of existing Movements (European Parliamentary Union and European Movement) have already been given above.

D. Main proposals advanced

All proposals have been submitted to the members of the Committee. It is, however, in practice impossible to describe them all. Below will be found those proposals which appeared most worthy of the Committee's attention:

(a) The Manné proposal: This is the above-mentioned Strasbourg proposal based on the statistical distribution of the various colours on the European flags. Its design is in the form of four horizontal stripes - blue, green, yellow and black (secondary colours) - a triangle in red and white, the dominant colours, being placed adjacent to the pole. These colours (red and white) are not only those most frequently found on European flags, but also constitute the colours of the Town of Strasbourg. Every European will find in this composite flag the colours with which he himself is familiar.

(b) The Martin-Levy proposal: Designed by one of the curators of the Strasbourg Museum and a member of the Secretariat-General. White silk ground with a green cross bearing in the centre the coat-of-arms of the Town of Strasbourg. This flag resembles the colours of the European Movement and thus pays tribute to the founders of the Council of Europe; the cross, symbol of Christianity, is also the symbol of Europe's highways (North, South, East and West) at the converging point of which stands Strasbourg (the city of crossroads). This design is easily copied and is particularly harmonious to the eye, especially if the cross is shifted slightly towards the pole in the manner of Scandinavian flags.

This design met with considerable approval, but also with some criticism for the following reasons:

- (i) White is easily soiled. It is therefore better not to have a flag with a white ground;
- (ii) No federal flag has so far borne the coat-of-arms of the capital as its central motif.
- (iii) Exception can be taken to the cross.

(c) The Coudenhove proposal: Count Coudenhove-Kalergi favours the white flag bearing a red cross whose four branches extend to the edges of the flag - i.e. the flag of St. George.

(d) The Prince de Schwarzenberg proposal: The latter proposes that the "first European symbol" - the labarum of Constantine - be adopted; that is, a red flag with a yellow cross.

(e) The Lucien Philippe proposal: Fifteen green stars in three rows on a white ground.

(f) The Wirion proposals: Monsieur Wirion, the Luxembourg expert in heraldry, considers that green and white should in all events be retained. He proposes various combinations (a star with eight forked points, the Burgundy Cross, a white sun on a field of green, etc.) but prefers a design based on the Martin-Levy proposal, reversing the colours (field of green and white cross) and doing away with the Strasbourg coat-of-arms. M. Wirion, however, at the beginning of March 1950, said he agreed that the white ground should be left, even though it is easily soiled. He was willing to accept the white ground with a green cross provided the Strasbourg coat-of-arms at the centre was only used for the pennants of Council personages and flags flown on Council buildings. In all other cases the coat-of-arms should be omitted.

(g) The Sommier proposal: Monsieur Sommier of Neuilly suggests that the aesthetic shortcomings of the "E" of the European Movement be remedied by detaching it from the edges of the flag and creating a neat geometrical design; this design he has studied in detail.

(h) Mondon proposals: Monsieur Mondon, a cartographer of Bad Godesberg, has proposed a white triangle, symbol of culture, on various fields.

(i) Muller proposal: Monsieur Muller of Wiesbaden proposes a red flag bearing the word "Europa" in gold lettering, with a golden sun and a white hand making the sign of the oath.

(j) Harmignies proposal: Suggests the creation of a new heraldic device - a Cross of Europe on similar lines to the Cross of Lorraine, Toulouse, Malta, Jerusalem, etc. The Cross of Europe would consist of four "E"s backed on to a square. This proposal was accompanied by a series of designs demonstrating its effect on coats-of-arms, flags, pennants, medals, etc.

(k) Poucher proposal: As far back as 1939, Monsieur Poucher proposed a federal banner which was virtually the reverse of the flag of the United States of America, with blue bands and a red quarter in one corner.

(l) H. C. proposal: A European flag decorated with the international code sign of the letter "E". This flag would be divided horizontally into two halves, the upper blue and the lower red. These two colours also

correspond to those generally adopted by the right and left wing parties respectively. The flag would be distinguishable from the flag of the City of Paris, which is also blue and red, by being divided horizontally.

It will be for the Committee to choose between these various proposals and to prepare a Report explaining its choice to the Assembly.

(1) Proposal submitted by M. Bichet and colleagues.