

A symbol for the whole of Europe



Twelve stars for one flag

- The blue flag with the 12 golden stars now flies all over our continent.
- For over half a century it has been symbolic of Europe's ambition and its reality.
- the Council of Europe and its then
 14 member states in 1955, the European
 flag has been an expression of the will
 of a growing number of states and
 peoples to work together to build peace
 and prosperity in a continent where the
 common values of democracy, human
 rights and the rule of law prevail and
 where full advantage is taken of diversity.
- In 1986, the European Communities (now the European Union) also adopted the same flag, as they used their own political and institutional methods to pursue the same fundamental aim.



- Flying alongside national flags outside town halls and regional and national political institutions throughout Europe, the blue and gold flag not only marks the presence of European institutions in Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg, but is also a token of Europe's presence worldwide.
- With the consent of these institutions, it has become part of the image adopted to promote thousands of civil society initiatives and countless businesses.
- The European venture has of course recorded spectacular progress but has also encountered difficulties. Nevertheless the determination to continue making progress has not weakened. The long life of the flag clearly illustrates this.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TWELVE STARS

- After its foundation in 1949, the Council of Europe soon realised it needed clear symbols to show its commitment to European unity.
- Neither Count Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan-European Union flag, a yellow circle with a red cross on a blue background, nor the European Movement's green "E" on a white background gained much support.
- No serious attempt was made to promote the idea of a European flag until the Council of Europe became the continents's first official political organisation in 1949.
- At the beginning of the 1950s, various groups of experts, boards and committees looked long and hard at over a hundred suggestions from artists, heraldry experts and enthusiastic amateurs all over the world. But no decision was reached.



- In April 1955, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers shortlisted two designs. The first was by Arsène Heitz, a member of staff, and depicted a crown "of 12 five-pointed golden stars, their points not touching" and the second, a constellation of stars proposed by Salvador de Madariaga.
- In December 1955, following approval by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers finally adopted the first design. All European institutions were urged to adopt it.
- It was inaugurated by the Committee of Ministers at the Château de la Muette in Paris on 13 December 1955. The flag had become official.









Selection of proposed flags that were not chosen







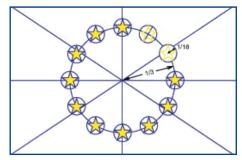




A JOINT FLAG

- In 1983 the European Parliament, the elected body of the European Union, adopted the flag devised by the Council of Europe and recommended that it become the emblem of the European Communities.
- Following the Council of Europe's consent, in June 1985 the European Council (EU Summit) gave its formal approval.
- Since 1986, both the Council of Europe and the European Community (which subsequently became the European Union) have been represented by the European flag and emblem. The flag with its 12 golden stars on a blue background has now become the symbol *par excellence* of European identity and a united Europe.
- The Council of Europe and the European Commission make sure that the European Flag is used in an appropriately dignified manner.
- The European institutions take any necessary measures to combat improper use of the European emblem.

THE FORCE OF A SYMBOL



- The circle of 12 stars on a blue background symbolises the ideals of unity and harmony between the peoples of Europe. It represents 700 million Europeans.
- The number of stars never changes and has nothing to do with the number of member states of the European Union or the Council of Europe. The figure 12 brings to mind perfection and completeness, or the months of the year and hours in the day.
- All the stars on the flag are upright with one branch pointing upwards and two others on the same invisible horizontal line. The circle is arranged so that the stars appear in the position of the hours on the face of a clock. They form an open circle and do not touch one another.







The Council of Europe and the European Union: two organisations which promote peace

- The Council of Europe works together with its 46 member states to strengthen human rights and democracy across the continent and beyond.
- The EU brings its 27 member states closer together both economically and politically by harmonising legislation and practices in certain policy areas.
- The Council of Europe and the European Union work together to strengthen democracy and human rights wherever necessary in Europe. Major programmes and substantial levels of financial resources are implemented jointly in these areas.



ACTIONS

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

- The Council of Europe drafts conventions and establishes legal standards for its member states.
- It verifies how they are implemented and develops programmes to help governments honour their commitments.
- The judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights are binding on the countries concerned. They have obliged governments to amend legislation and administrative practice in many fields.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

- The European Union drafts European laws, negotiates trade and provides funding for various projects.
- It has established an economic and monetary union, forming a free trade area with a single currency (the euro).
- The European Union has exclusive powers, in particular in the economic field, which means that states have delegated some of their sovereignty.

FUNCTIONING

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

- The Committee of Ministers is the executive body of the Council of Europe. It is made up of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of member states and approves the Organisation's budget and work programme. It oversees the execution of the judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights.
- The Parliamentary Assembly, which comprises elected representatives of the 46 national parliaments, is a forum for debate on proposals concerning pan-European social and political affairs. It initiated many of the Organisation's conventions, including the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The European Court of Human Rights sees to it that the 46 member states comply with the European Convention on Human Rights. Both individuals and states can bring cases before the Court.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

- is the executive body of the EU. It proposes European legislation and ensures it is correctly applied, manages the budget, monitors the implementation of treaties and oversees the daily management of the EU.
- The Council of Ministers of the EU represents the general interests of the member state's governments. It shares budgetary and legislative powers with the European Parliament.
- The European Parliament, which is elected by direct universal suffrage, shares legislative and budgetary powers with the EU Council of Ministers. It elects the President of the European Commission.
- The European Court of Justice ensures that EU law is correctly applied and the national courts may seek its opinion.



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This leaflet presents the history and the symbolism of the emblem. The flag is the common emblem of the European institutions.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treat designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

