



THE EUROPEAN FLAG

A symbol
for the whole of Europe

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'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.

■ **Ever since being adopted by 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 continent'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





*All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.



**THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S
46 MEMBER STATES**

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

**THE EUROPEAN UNION'S
27 MEMBER STATES**

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

Council of Europe member states
 Member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union



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

■ **The European Commission** 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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www.coe.int

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 treaty 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.

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