Symbols of the European Union

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Image
EU flags at a European Parliament election rally (2014) - John MacDougall - AFP
EU flags at a European Parliament election rally 2014. John MacDougall - AFP

The 27-nation European Union has equipped itself with several symbols, which have been adopted over the years, from a flag to an anthem, and from a Europe Day to a motto.

- The flag -

The flag features a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue background. They stand for the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony among the peoples of Europe.

The number of stars has nothing to do with the number of member countries, though the circle is a symbol of unity.

In 1985 it was adopted by all the bloc's leaders as the official emblem of the European Communities, later to become the European Union.

- The anthem -

The melody used to symbolise the EU comes from the Ninth Symphony composed in 1823 by Ludwig Van Beethoven, when he set music to the "Ode to Joy", Friedrich von Schiller's lyrical verse from 1785.

The anthem, adopted by the bloc's leaders in 1985, symbolises not only the European Union but also Europe in a wider sense.

There are no words to the anthem; it consists of music only. It is played at official ceremonies involving the European Union.

- Europe Day -

This is on May 9 every year and marks the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.

At a speech in Paris in 1950, then French foreign minister Robert Schuman set out his idea for a new form of political cooperation in Europe, which would make war between Europe's nations unthinkable.

His vision was to create a European institution that would pool and manage coal and steel production. A treaty creating such a body was signed just under a year later. Schuman's proposal is considered to be the beginning of what is now the European Union.

- The motto -

First used in 2000, the EU motto is: "United in diversity".

It signifies how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages.

It has been translated into the 24 official languages in use in the bloc. In Estonian, for example, it reads "Uhinenud mitmekesisuses" while in Portuguese it is "Unida na diversidade" and in Irish "Aontaithe san eagsulacht".

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- ‹ EU institutions
- Up
- The euro: a turbulent 15 years ›