

Report by the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on a European anthem (10 June 1971)

Caption: This report by the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, dated 10 June 1971, presents the draft resolution of the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities on the adoption, as the European anthem, of the prelude to the 'Ode to Joy', the fourth movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It also outlines, in its explanatory note, the adoption of the other European symbols.

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European anthem. Documents. [EN LIGNE]. [s.l.]: Council of Europe, Library and Archives, [19.09.2005]. Disponible sur <http://info.coe.int/archives/hist/hymn/default.asp>.

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Report by the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on a European anthem 1 (10 June 1971)

Rapporteur: Mr. RADIUS

I. Draft resolution

presented by the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities 2

The Assembly,

1. Having regard to the adoption in 1955 by the Committee of Ministers of the European flag, and the creation of Europe Day in 1964;
2. Considering that it is now time to choose an anthem for the Europe we are building in addition to the emblem and Europe Day thus following the pattern set by the symbols of our national States;
3. Being of the opinion that it would be preferable to select a musical work representative of European genius and whose use on European occasions is already becoming something of a tradition;
4. Recalling that initiatives for the creation of European symbols have already originated in the Consultative Assembly and the European Conference of Local Authorities representing the local authorities of Europe;
5. Resolves:
 - (a) to propose the acceptance by member countries as a European anthem of the Prelude to the Ode to Joy in the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony;
 - (b) to recommend its use on all European occasions if desired in conjunction with the national anthem;
 - (c) requests the Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations, the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities and the European Conference of Local Authorities to take all necessary steps to implement this resolution.

II. Explanatory note

by Mr. Radius

Introduction

On 26 August 1949 a letter was sent to Mr. Paul-Henri Spaak, "First President of Europe", which began thus: "May I, as a mother who suffered all kinds of trouble during the last war, including internment (by the Germans) send you my 917th song. This song, or hymn, is an appeal to everyone in the world who desires peace unreservedly and aspires to join forces to bring about the United States of Europe".

This letter was accompanied by the words and tune of the "Chant de la Paix" by Mrs. Jehanne-Louis Gaudet, and is the first document in a bulky file on the European anthem. Proposals and pleas for such an anthem have come from the peoples of Europe in still larger numbers, perhaps than for the European flag. Tunes, scores, orchestral arrangements and words, often in three, four or even twelve languages, have come pouring in and the authors have often been impatient to know what fate attended their projects in the Chambers of the Council of Europe.

Some mention the progress towards union as the reason for their proposals: there was the Parisian who wrote to the Secretary General in May 1955: "After the various ratifications of the Paris Agreements, I think the time has come to publish the European anthem", and in 1955 Mr Coudenhove-Kalergi said on the question of the anthem: "I should like to propose the hymn from Beethoven's 9th Symphony as a European anthem, but I fear that I may discredit this suggestion by taking the initiative myself now that the proposal to

institute a Europe Day has been rejected”.

In 1962 the Director of Information, replying to a question by a member of the Assembly, said that in his opinion a well-known existing work should be taken so as to avoid having to choose between the anthems proposed.

After the adoption of the European emblem, some more urgent promptings came from municipal organisations. In 1963 the Secretary General of the Belgian section of the Council of European Municipalities wrote to the Secretariat of the Committee on Local Authorities saying that in 1962 it had published a score and a record of a “European song” based on Beethoven’s music, adding that “the numerous pairing ceremonies ... the large-scale participation of Belgian municipalities in Europe Day, European Schools Day and the campaign for use of the European flag [had] shown the need for a European anthem which could be performed together with the various national anthems”. He continued: “The choice of Beethoven’s setting of the Ode to Joy has enabled us to avoid the pitfalls of a competition, in which it would no doubt have been very difficult to agree unanimously on the winner. Moreover, the tune is one which was taught in schools long before the Council of Europe was ever thought of”.

The April 1963 issue of the bulletin of the Netherlands section of the European Movement contained an article on the subject of a European anthem. The writer considered that scepticism was no longer justified, considering the numerous functions of a European nature, and in particular Europe Day, which would be highlighted by the European flag and a European anthem. As the choice of such an anthem, the writer had doubts about the wisdom of composing new music and stated his preference for the last movement of Handel’s Royal Fireworks Music, referring specifically to apt use made of it by the Directorate of Information of the Council of Europe to introduce its radio broadcasts. It is perhaps regrettable that this tradition has been abandoned. The same writer thought that the question of the words would be more difficult to settle.

The most substantial demand came from the 7th Etats Généraux of the Council of European Municipalities, held in Rome in 1964. In a resolution adopted at the closing sitting, the wish was expressed that a European anthem should be adopted by the Council of Europe and the European Communities. The movers of the resolution thought that public symbols and ceremonies were needed to create and strengthen European-mindedness.

In January 1965 the President of the Consultative Assembly, replying to a public figure who had made proposals in favour of a European anthem, wrote: “The problem of the European anthem is present in our minds and the Committee on Local Authorities of the Consultative Assembly has been occupied with it for some time”.

Then again, I was approached recently by a number of people prominent in French cultural life who were interested in the institution of a European anthem. I informed the members of my Committee, and several of them said they would be glad if the Committee would do something. Some reported spontaneous moves on the part of local authorities to have some musical work or other (usually Beethoven’s setting of the Ode to Joy) performed as a European anthem for the purpose of giving greater solemnity to functions of a European nature. Such action reveals, without any possible doubt, that a profound need is felt by an increasing number of Europeans to give musical expression to their feeling of belonging to a single community sharing the same destiny.

Quite recently, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities, I received a letter from Mr. Evers, Chairman of the Round Table for Europe Day and President of the European Conference of Local Authorities. This letter, dated 11 March 1971, explains the purpose of the meeting of the Round Table held in Paris in February 1971 which was attended by representatives of European governmental and non-governmental organisations. The arrangements for the celebration of Europe Day on 5 May 1971 were then settled and preparations were made for Europe Day 1972.

“One of the unanimous conclusions of the Round Table was that it would be desirable for a European

anthem to be instituted to symbolise the faith of our peoples in the cause of European unity.

In the knowledge that the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities has already considered the possibility of a European anthem, such as is urgently called for by local authorities, the Round Table would be most grateful to your Committee if it could again include this matter in its deliberations with a view to adopting in due course a recommendation to the Consultative Assembly and the Committee of Ministers recommending the official institution of such an anthem.”

The Round Table’s appeal was discussed at length by the Committee at its meeting in Paris on 22 April 1971. The unanimous conclusion of the debate in which most members took part was that the time had come to initiate a move, at least in the Consultative Assembly, in favour of the progressive introduction of a genuine European anthem.

All members were against the idea of a competition for the purpose of “producing” an anthem; on the other hand, it was agreed unanimously that Beethoven’s music was representative of the European genius and was capable of uniting the hearts and minds of all Europeans, including the younger generation. Also, bearing in mind that the tune of the Ode to Joy, from the last movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, had frequently been performed as a European anthem by local communities in particular, the Committee considered it preferable to give official approval to this incipient tradition and to propose the prelude to the Ode to Joy.

An arrangement of the work was in fact made for the Belgian section of the Council of European Municipalities in 1961 and published by Schott Frères of Brussels; this could be used for reference purposes.

As regards the words for an anthem some doubt was felt, mainly with regard to the words of the Ode to Joy, which were in the nature of a universal expression of faith rather than a specifically European one.

Members also wondered whether any words acknowledged as “European” could ever be translated into another language and accepted as such by the other linguistic groups of the European family.

The Committee therefore preferred, for the time being, to propose only the tune for a European anthem, without words, and to allow some time to pass. One day perhaps some words will be adopted by the citizens of Europe with the same spontaneity as Beethoven’s eternal melody has been.

Some people may argue that to propose a European anthem is too bold an undertaking for politicians. I disagree entirely and the second part of this memorandum will attempt to show that such a move is consistent with a line of action by the Consultative Assembly, dating right back to the first hours of its existence, which can be called “spreading the European idea”. From the very start, the Assembly has been working in this field and has taken the initiative on numerous occasions. It may be that the Assembly has not always worked at the task with the same enthusiasm; it may be that it has sometimes hoped to win more spectacular victories in other fields. But today at a time when the medium-term task of the Council of Europe is under discussion there is talk of an enlargement of the European Communities, we should do well to recall that the Council of Europe is required by its Statute to propagate the ideal of European unity and thus to prepare the citizens of Europe to live together in a spirit of solidarity and fraternity.

No one can claim that this task has been accomplished; on the contrary, in this time of calculated self-interest, when discussion on the subject of Europe is dominated by figures, tariffs and contribution levels, it is more than ever necessary that the Assembly should try to raise the debate to its high level of twenty-five years ago.

Moreover, in discussing the future of the Council of Europe, the Assembly and the Council’s other organs should not lose sight of what is an urgent and all-important task: to inspire the peoples of Europe, who are still divided in more than one respect, with a genuinely European spirit, compounded of generosity, of faith and of fellowship.

Spreading the European idea: one of the Assembly's supreme tasks

As early as its first session in 1949, the Consultative Assembly, faithful to the Statute of the Council of Europe, considered that one of the most urgent and noble of tasks was to spread the European idea and to awaken a genuine European consciousness among the peoples.

At its sitting on 6 September 1949, the Assembly referred to the Standing Committee, “with a recommendation for their favourable consideration”, a resolution 3 proposing “to the governments of Members of the Council of Europe that they should systematically organise the instruction of the great mass of the people, pointing out to them the undeniable advantages of union for Europe ...”

The proposal continued: “The members of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe should be requested to give their governments every assistance in their power in this great work ...”

Several committees then examined the problem, which was considered very important.

At the request of the Assembly's Committee on General Affairs, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe presented a report in August 1950 on “the practical steps which might be taken to make public opinion directly aware of the reality of European Union ...”

The first such step proposed was the adoption of a European flag for which the following reason was given: “It seems advisable that the idea of union between the States of Europe be given concrete form by a symbol”. The Secretary General recalled that Count Coudenhove-Kalergi had laid before the Secretariat a proposal that the Consultative Assembly should adopt the flag of the Pan-European Movement. The Bureau of the Assembly had considered that the Assembly itself should give an opinion.

It is interesting to note that the other practical steps proposed included a European stamp, European broadcasts and European television.

To lend weight to his proposals, the Secretary General quoted an article by the French writer Daniel Rops, which included the following passage: “A flag is only a symbol: agreed. It is only the expression of a myth. But, even before Georges Sorel it was constantly being borne out that it is the great myths that lead the world and that symbols have a profound effect on men. The day that a European Hymn salutes the European flag, as today the national Hymn salutes the national flag in various countries, a great step will have been made along the road towards this essential union. That is why the Volunteers are right to continue their crusade for all the great towns of France to be decked with flags on 14 July; on this day, when we celebrate both liberty and fraternity, such a manifestation would have its full effect.”

The European Flag

It was then that the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privileges undertook to examine the question.

“Considering that the peoples of Europe should have a common emblem symbolising their unity”: this was the motive stated by Mr. Bichet and a number of his colleagues in a request dated 18 September 1953 that the choice of an emblem for the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe be included in the agenda of the session.

A week later, on 25 September 1953, Mr. Bichet, on behalf of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privileges, submitted a report on the question, after which the Assembly adopted Resolution 41, deciding “to take as its emblem an azure flag bearing a circle of fifteen stars ...”

The report stated: “The complete circle symbolises unity, whereas the stars shining in the firmament symbolise the hope of our nations”.

At the same time, Recommendation 56 was adopted by the Assembly, asking the Committee of Ministers to:

“adopt the same emblem as the symbol of the Council of Europe as a whole” and “instruct the Secretary General to enter into negotiations with the other European institutions to ensure that the emblems adopted by them [should] have features similar to that adopted by the Council of Europe”.

The idea behind this project was that each of the European institutions should later insert a symbol of its own in the centre of the circle. For the Committee, the main consideration was that agreement should be reached upon an emblem for the Assembly which might be adopted for the Council of Europe as a whole and also serve as a common denominator for all existing or future European institutions. The Committee also considered that it might be unwise to embark upon a lengthy procedure before the emblem could be put into effective use. For that reason, it submitted a draft resolution to the effect that the emblem should be adopted by the Assembly within the limits of its competence (in particular, for use during Assembly sessions) and a draft recommendation to the Committee of Ministers to adopt the same emblem as the symbol of the Council of Europe as a whole.

The discussion in the Assembly showed that there was general agreement as to the need for such an emblem, but doubts were expressed as to the wisdom of selecting fifteen stars; the case of the Saar was mentioned, and also possible future increases in the membership of the Council of Europe. Forty-nine members voted in favour of the draft, 17 voted against and there were 7 abstentions (Resolution 41).

The matter was referred to the Committee of Ministers by Recommendation 56. The political objections to the number of stars finally led to the proposal that “there should be a purely symbolic number of stars or preferably a symbol which was indivisible”.

The Ministers’ Deputies were instructed to co-operate with the representatives of the Assembly (in the Joint Committee) in seeking a solution, taking account of the need to adopt a common emblem.

The Assembly agreed to postpone the implementation of Resolution 41, but hoped that the discussions would soon end in a satisfactory solution being found. However, discussions at various levels and the proceedings of an ad hoc committee continued throughout 1954, and it was only in June 1955 that the Committee of Ministers was able to submit to the Assembly “two designs for an emblem which it [considered] acceptable”.

On 25 October 1955 the Assembly chose between the two projects and adopted unanimously Recommendation 88 recommending the Committee of Ministers “to adopt as Council of Europe emblem the azure flag bearing a circle of twelve stars ...”.

On 8 December 1955, the Committee of Ministers, by Resolution (55) 32, adopted the emblem officially for the Council of Europe. During a public sitting of the Committee of Ministers on 13 December 1955, the emblem was presented by the Chairman.

The Assembly took up this question again in 1956 in its debate on “the role of the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe in the field of information”, and, in Recommendation 94, asked the Committee of Ministers to instruct the Secretary General to request the other European organisations to adopt emblems bearing a close resemblance to the Council’s emblem. In Resolution 93, adopted on the same occasion, the Assembly resolved, among other measures, that the emblem would be displayed both inside and outside premises where the Consultative Assembly or its committees were sitting, and that representatives to the Consultative Assembly would be authorised to carry a plate bearing the emblem on their motor-cars.

It is striking to see how insistently the Assembly sought to bring the emblem into common use among European institutions and to make all Europeans aware of it.

The debate in the Assembly in April 1956 showed very clearly the importance which its members attached to the “popularisation” of the emblem, considering it a powerful factor for the crystallisation of the European idea.

The Europe Prize

The Committee on Cultural and Scientific Questions also considered the matter of the propagation of the European idea, and in December 1951 submitted a report concerning the institution of a “Council of Europe Prize” to be awarded “for the best, and most inspired, literary work and film of the year, outstanding in form and furthering the idea of European unity” 5.

In Recommendation 20 the Consultative Assembly submitted this proposal to the Committee of Ministers, which considered it as “premature” 6 and took no further action.

The project was, however, taken up again in 1953 in a different form by the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs set up in 1952. In September 1953, on a proposal by that Committee, the Assembly adopted Recommendation 53 “on the best means whereby the national or international bodies connected with local government and the local authorities themselves may help in the propagation of the European idea”.

Besides giving encouragement to “pairings”, the Assembly recommended “the annual award of a European Prize to the municipality which [had] done most to propagate the ideal of European unity”.

(It should be noted that the report of the Special Committee had stressed the wide variety of possibilities which local authorities possessed for the propagation of the European idea and which should therefore be used to further this ideal.)

Thanks to the tenacity of the Assembly, the objections of the Committee of Ministers, which continued to regard the idea of the Prize as “premature”, were finally removed in 1955 and the institution of the Prize was hailed as an important step forward by the Assembly in the propagation of the European idea.

Europe Day

The Committee of Ministers then raised the question of a “Europe Day” as a means of spreading the European idea; in Resolution (54) 7, on multilateral co-operation in the cultural field, the Committee of Ministers recommended that member States should organise such a day in their respective countries 7.

In January 1955, a motion for a recommendation 8 calling for the institution of a day of European fellowship was submitted by Mrs. Von Finckenstein.

In the same year a proposal by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, President of the Pan-Europa Union, was referred to the Committee of Ministers. It recommended the institution of a Europe Day for the purpose of strengthening the feelings of fellowship among Europeans.

Before taking a decision, the Committee of Ministers submitted a request for an opinion to the Assembly 9.

Opinion No. 15, prepared by the Committee on Cultural and Scientific Questions and adopted by the Consultative Assembly on 7 July 1955, concluded: “It is not appropriate at present to organise a special ‘Europe Day’ on 21 March of each year.”

One of the considerations mentioned in Opinion No. 15 was that “public opinion in the various member countries [did] not appear to support everywhere, to the same degree, the celebration of a ‘Europe Day’”.

The debate was not resumed until January 1960, when the European Conference of Local Authorities adopted a resolution 10 on the celebration of a “Europe Day”.

The intention of the members of the Conference was to take immediate, practical action on an “Education for Europe” programme initiated by the representatives of municipal authorities, in particular the International Union of Local Authorities.

In this resolution the Conference decided “to give its support to the proclamation of the first Wednesday in March as ‘Europe Day’ ...”.

The Conference resolutions were referred to the Committee on Local Authorities, which in 1961 presented a report on the celebration of a “Europe Day” 11. In this, the Committee recalled the adoption of Opinion No. 15 (1955), stressed the need to re-examine the question in the light of the progress that had been made towards European unity, and set out the arguments in favour of a “Europe Day” the objectives of which were “primarily of a psychological and educational nature”.

The Rapporteur continued: “The psychological and educational effectiveness of ‘Europe Day’, however, will essentially depend on the assistance of the local authorities ...” In his opinion “town councils and the like [were] easily in the best position to awaken that mass movement which [was] one of the aims of ‘Europe Day’”.

Conscious of the need, first and foremost, to obtain the support of local authorities, the Rapporteur of the Committee, Mr. Muller, presented a report on the celebration of Europe Day to the 4th session of the European Conference on Local Authorities in March 1962. Before the session opened the Standing Committee of the Conference had appointed a working party to establish a programme of action for the local celebration of Europe Day. The Conference again advocated the institution of a Europe Day in its Resolution 34 (1962), recalling that it had been celebrated in many towns and villages as early as 1961.

It recommended “that the Consultative Assembly and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe should officially proclaim a fixed date for the celebration of Europe Day in all member countries” and “that, until a final decision [was] taken ... Europe Day should be celebrated at a provisional date ...”.

In its opinion, given in Recommendation 328 (1962), the Consultative Assembly fully agreed “that the date chosen must have ‘a symbolic and historical significance’”, stressed “the significance, in this connection, of the European flag” and suggested “that governments and local authorities might use the same colours in public decorations for Europe Day”.

The Assembly invited the Committee of Ministers “to make every effort to reach an affirmative decision as soon as possible” and to take into consideration the suggestions made by the Working Party which had met under the auspices of the Standing Committee of the European Conference of Local Authorities to the effect that “the date chosen should be 1 May or any other day in the first week of that month”.

In October 1964 the Committee of Ministers, “considering that the celebration of a Europe Day by all European countries [was] likely to unite those countries even more closely”, resolved to institute a “Europe Day” and recommended that governments of member countries should “arrange for Europe Day to be celebrated, if possible, on 5 May”, should celebrate it “with appropriate functions” and should “decorate public buildings on that day with the colours of the European flag”.

Following the official institution of Europe Day, the Secretary General took a number of steps to ensure that the resolution would be implemented: he sent a letter to the Foreign Ministers of member States, requesting them to give their support to all those wishing to be associated with this celebration. A memorandum enclosed with the letter gave practical suggestions on the way in which Europe Day might be celebrated.

A further letter was sent to the Secretary General of the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations, suggesting that EUROPA stamps should be circulated at a date close to 5 May rather than in September, which was the normal date for such issues.

The President of the European Conference of Local Authorities requested the members of the Conference and of national associations of local authorities to celebrate Europe Day and arrange for its celebration by others.

The permanent Working Party on relations with national parliaments requested presidents of national legislative assemblies to mark the occasion of Europe Day with speeches.

At the same time, brochures were distributed widely by the Secretariat: there was a brochure on the European flag, a brochure specially intended for municipalities and a general brochure about Europe Day.

A report published in 1965 by the Directorate of Information stated that, although relatively little time had elapsed between the decision of the Committee of Ministers and the date of 5 May, member States had succeeded in celebrating Europe Day quite effectively.

It is not the purpose of this report to assess the success of Europe Day. But it is perhaps worthwhile to recall that each year since 1965 renewed efforts have been made to have it established once and for all; these efforts have taken the form of circular letters and messages from the President of the European Conference of Local Authorities and the President of the Consultative Assembly. In 1970 a European Committee for Europe Day was set up under the chairmanship of Mr. Jacques Chaban-Delmas, in his capacity as former President of the European Conference of European Authorities and Mayor of Bordeaux; the Committee consisted of the directors of the major European local, governmental and private organisations.

In 1970 and 1971, this Committee sent out an “urgent appeal to the national, regional and local authorities to do all they can to organise in the week of 5 May great demonstrations of popular support for the European cause”.

In his message on the occasion of Europe Day 1971, Mr. Jacques Chaban-Delmas, as Chairman of the European Committee, told the people of Europe that the significance of Europe Day lay in the opportunity it gave them to stop for a moment “to think of their common heritage, of their joint interests, their shared hopes and destiny”.

At its meeting on 7 May 1971 in Strasbourg, the Committee of Ministers adopted a solemn declaration on Europe Day, reiterating its resolve “to pursue its efforts so that the celebration of Europe Day [became] a major event in the lives of the peoples of Europe”.

Plea for a European anthem

“To think of their common heritage ... their shared hopes”: that is the significance which the French Prime Minister attributed to Europe Day, and it is also the inspiration of all those who, ever since the moves towards European unity began, have been demanding and proposing an anthem for a United Europe.

True, it can be argued that the final objective, a united Europe, has not yet become reality, but we already have the “shared hopes”, those which inspired the Assembly in its untiring efforts to endow this nascent Europe with her Emblem, its Flag and its Day.

At this crucial hour in Europe’s search for her identity, the time has perhaps come to provide her with what she still lacks in the trilogy of symbols by which our States identify themselves: like them, she needs her Flag, her Day and her Anthem. These will give her the new impetus she needs in order to advance on the road to unity, and she will find therein a resounding expression of her driving force and of her faith.

1. See Doc. 2957 and Order No. 872 of 14 May 1971.

2. Adopted unanimously by the Committee on 7 June 1971. Members of the Committee: MM. Radiu (Chairman); Cravatte, Kranzlmayr (Alternate: Leitner) (Vice-Chairman); Ahrens, Alemyr, Berghuis, De Grauw, Dögerli, (Alternate. Baytürk), van Hall, Hansen Ove, Hegtun, Hösl, Jones, Jonsson, Kenneally, Lenze, Mammi, Minnocci, Molloy, Nothomb, Pica, Primborgne, Reichl, Sjönell, Valleix, Dame Joan Vickers, MM. Weber J., Weber P., Zaloglu.
N.B. The names of those who took part in the vote are underlined.

Secretary of the Committee: Mr. Larcher.

3. Doc. 87, section A, ch. III, para. 4.

4. See Doc. 85 (1950) Appendix II.

5. See Doc. 101 (1951).

6. See the report of the Committee of Ministers, September 1952, Doc. 42.
7. Resolution CM (54) 7 (Appendix II to Doc. 238).
8. Doc. 333 of 31 January 1955.
9. See Doc. 338 of 7 April 1955.
10. Resolution CEPL 17 (1960) of 27 January 1960.
11. See Doc. 1311 of 7 July 1961.