

Address given by Terry Davis on the 50th anniversary of the European flag (Strasbourg, 16 November 2005)

Caption: On 16 November 2005, at the celebrations held to mark the 50th anniversary of the European flag, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Terry Davis, delivers an address in front of the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg.

Source: Speech by Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the occasion of the ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the European flag. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: Council of Europe, [21.02.2006]. Available on http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/Files/Events/2005-12-drapeau/disc_sg.asp.

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Address given by Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at the celebrations held to mark the 50th anniversary of the European flag (Strasbourg, 16 November 2005)

(To be checked against delivered speech)

A flag is a symbol. As a symbol, it does not have a value in itself. It draws its meaning from what it represents.

Fifty years ago, the decision by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to adopt the emblem of twelve gold stars on a blue background as our official flag provided Europeans with a powerful symbol which succeeded in capturing their hopes and expectations. The challenge for today's users of the European flag – the Council of Europe and the European Union – is to match the vision, the courage and the ingenuity of our predecessors and recapture that spirit. Europe can only work if it is built by Europeans– not built for them.

On 12 December 1955 when the European flag was hoisted for the first time, the honour went to Liam Cosgrave, then Irish Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers and later Prime Minister of Ireland. I think that the words he spoke at the time have not lost any of their relevance and merit to be quoted here today, in French, as they were spoken at the time.

"Le Conseil de l'Europe est représenté dans cet emblème sous la forme d'un cercle fermé d'étoiles. Ces étoiles ne représentent ni des pays, ni des états, ni des races. Leur nombre restera invariable : douze est le symbole de la perfection et de la plénitude, comme l'union de nos peuples devrait être".

In the protection of democracy and human rights "perfection and completeness" are objectives which can never be reached, but must never be surrendered. For the Council of Europe, the European flag is not only a symbol but a mandate as well.