


Introduction

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There are no ideals, however exalted in nature, which can afford to do without a symbol. These are the opening words of a memorandum on the European flag drawn up by the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe in 1951. Since the end of the First World War, private individuals and movements advocating the political organisation of Europe began to acquire emblems, as was the case for the Paneuropean Union founded by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and for the European Movement.

When the Council of Europe - the first European organisation with a political agenda - was established in 1949, the question of acquiring an official emblem soon arose. On a proposal from the Consultative Assembly, the Committee of Ministers approved the adoption of a flag in 1955 and an anthem in 1972.

These symbols, adopted by the organisation that represented 'Greater Europe', also became those of 'Small Europe'. For it was at the Milan European Council held in June 1985 that the Heads of State or Government of the Ten approved the adoption of these symbols as the official emblems of the European Communities. They also agreed to establish Europe Day. The adoption of a motto and a common currency came later. In 2004, the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe recognised all of these as official symbols of the European Union.

This Special File outlines the background to the adoption of the symbols of the European Union and explains their meaning. It has been compiled with the invaluable help and cooperation of **Carlo Curti Gialdino**, Professor of International Law at the University of Rome 'La Sapienza' and former Legal Secretary at the Court of Justice of the European Communities (1982–2000), whom we should like to thank most sincerely.