

“A project of continental peace”: over 150 rejected flags for Europe published 65 years after creation

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Although an extremely specific piece of design, flags have the tendency to raise the heart rates of creatives. A beloved craft for its ability to distil a location and its history into graphic symbolism, it's also very rare we see a new design. Denmark, for instance, holds the title of the oldest flag design, dating back to 1625, whereas the newest on record is held by Mauritania which received an update in 2017. Our very own in the United Kingdom is a symbol we've hoisted up, both unified and divided, since the Act of Union in 1801.

Despite often being regarded as a piece of history, as recently as 2006 Ted Kaye – secretary at the North American Vexillological Association (vexillography is the scientific and scholarly study of flags) – wrote and published *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, a primer for any hopeful vexillographer. Written around five specific rules, the title advocates for simplicity, “so simple that a child can draw it from memory,” and the use of meaningful symbolism in the designer's choice of images, colours or patterns. Ted also warns designers away from using no more than two or three basic colours, and never any kind of lettering or seal. Lastly, each flag should be distinctive and “avoid duplicating other flags” but when not possible, the creative should utilise similarities “to show connections”.

A handy guide for all, it's only a shame *Good Flag, Bad Flag* wasn't available in 1949, as the Council of Europe not only grappled with upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law across the continent, but struggled to choose a flag to represent it.

An international organisation founded in the wake of World War II, the Council of Europe presented a hopeful future advocating for international justice. The task of designing a symbolic flag, however – which would represent both Europe's turbulent history, a hopeful future, and the many countries which make it – proved a difficult design brief to answer. In fact, it took the council's founding members until 1955 to choose its 12-starred symbol of unity, due to an issue of too much choice. In the six years from its formation to the final decision, the council found itself with over 150 unsolicited flag designs. There was no brief, no open call, no ask at all, but proposals regularly turned up from individuals who'd read about the need for the flag in the paper, or heard about it on the radio.

Each imbued with the creative hope the Council of Europe presented, these one-off pieces of optimistic design were filed away until recently published in *Rejected: Designs for the European Flag* by researcher and publisher, Jonas von Lenthe.