

# REJECTED DESIGNS FOR THE EUROPEAN FLAG

## What do discarded European flags tell us about the present state of the "old continent"?



Source: Council of Europe, Published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020, Hanno F Konopath, Hamburg, 1952

In December 1955, when the Council of Europe selected the design for the European flag consisting of twelve yellow stars arranged in a circle on a blue background, it simultaneously rejected over 150 designs that had been submitted since founding of the Council of Europe in 1949. The design drafts came from all over the world; however, most of them were submitted by men from West Germany and France. All the proposals were based on the assumption that European unity was the model for the future, though opinions differed as to which symbols might best unite Europe. The proposals ranged from the Swiss cross (Switzerland serving as a model for Europe here due to its peaceful multilingualism), to Strasbourg's coat of arms (a symbol of Franco-German reconciliation and European post-war achievements), to the star (a popular flag symbol and US reference), all the way to the abstract map (an attempt to situate Europe territorially). The proposals are not without their share of imperialist fantasies: in many cases – as evidenced by the letters accompanying the design drafts -- the flag becomes a symbol of the continent's cultural superiority over the rest of the world, and thus a testimony to the colonialist society of Europe of that time.

The angles and motives for pursuing the idea of a united Europe differed drastically from one another: it was to be found both in the socialist-dominated resistance movements in fascist Italy, as well as in conservative and decidedly Eurocentric circles of the time. While the former had the liberation of the working classes in mind, the latter were concerned about the dwindling importance of Europe in world affairs. The only point on which they agreed was that European nationalisms could only be kept in check by joining together to form a union, and that this was the only way to prevent another war.

The European flag was therefore both a project of continental peace and a means of

establishing a boundary to the outside world – an aspect also characteristic of Europe today, where the dismantling of internal borders goes hand in hand with an increasing number of barricades against foreigners and migrants. On a symbolic level too, the flag is used to delineate: as an early form of branding “Europe”, it made the idea of a united Europe visually distinguishable and competitive vis-à-vis a national order for the first time, marking the beginning of a campaign of persuasion and advertising for its own cause that continues to this day.

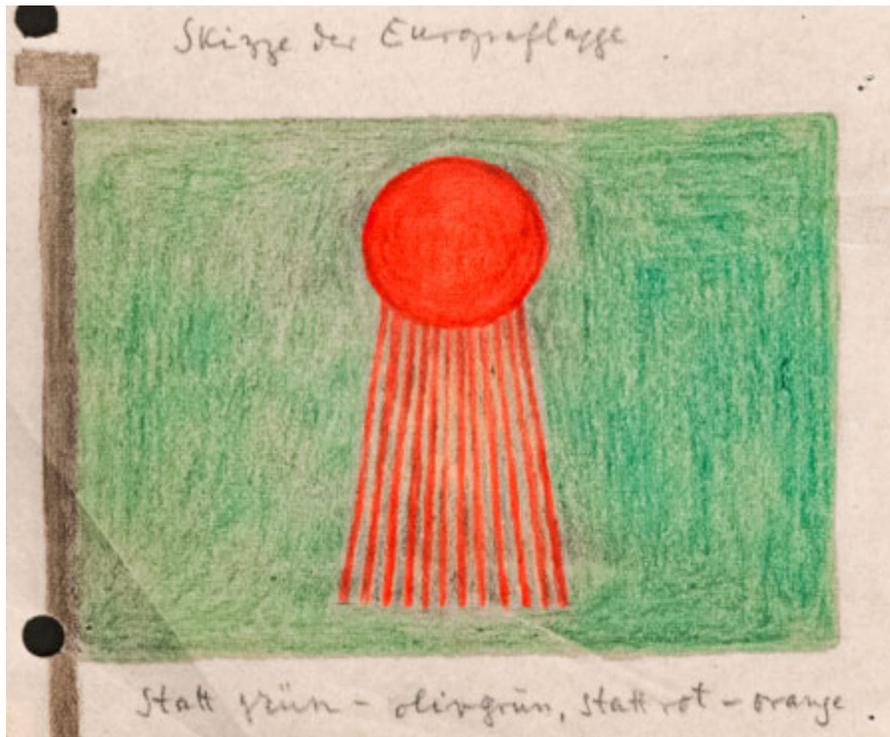
The rejected designs for the European flag will be published for the first time this October by the Berlin-based publishing house Wirklichkeit Books. The book features an essay by the poet and writer Marie Rotkopf alongside the flag drawings and rather than being a bourgeois hymn of praise for Europe, it is intended above all to reveal the ambivalences and continuities of so-called European unity. Finally, the heterogeneous archive material illustrates the historical constructedness of the present situation and highlights the potential to participate in shaping it.



Source: Council of Europe, published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020

### **Alvin Mondon, Bad Godesberg, 1951**

*"In general, the enemy should be confronted with a special cultural symbol, ideally the culture triangle, or – to speak in heraldic terms – the Fleur-de-lis, as used in coats of arms. Both symbols are only applicable for Europe."*



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### **Mirko Svetkov, Novi Sad, 1951**

*“In the above draft, the following is expressed both factually and symbolically: 1) the homage to the Egyptian, Hellenic and Roman civilizations that preceded our civilization – An Ancient Egyptian stylization of the sun, the colors olive green and orange so characteristic for the soil of Hellas and Rome 2) the communality and equality of the United States of Europe 3) the affinity to the flag of the United States of America – here the number of sun rays, there the number of stars.”*



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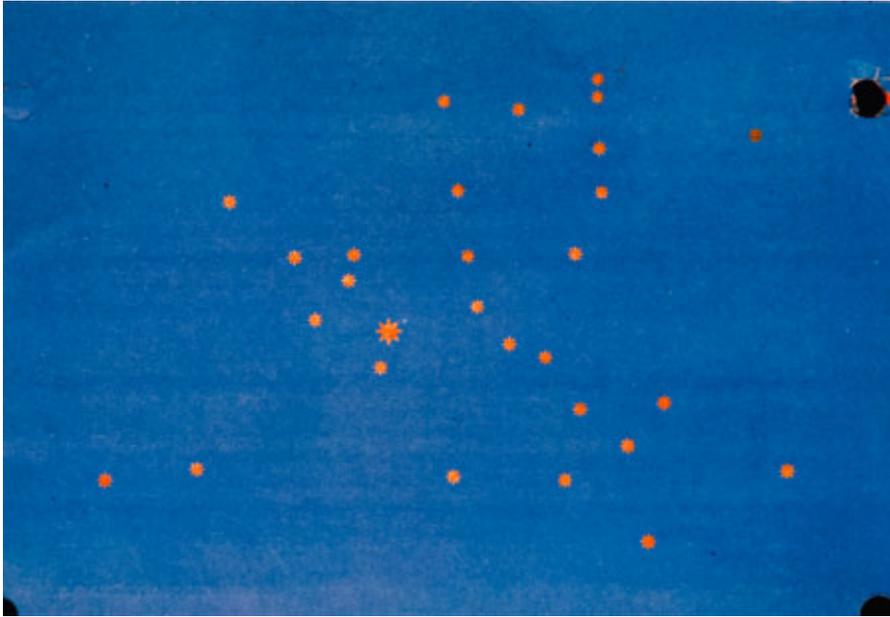
**G.A Bornemann, Málaga, 1952**

*“Das Mittelstück wird von der Schweizer Flagge gebildet, da die Schweiz im Zentrum Europas liegend und stets neutral, in ihren Grenzen das friedliche Zusammenleben europäischer Menschen verschiedener Abstammung und Sprache seit langem schon verwirklicht hat.”*



Source: Council of Europe, published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020

Unidentified, Undated



Source: Council of Europe, published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020

**Salvador de Madariaga, Oxford, 1952**

*"It should both express the unity and the variety of the continent... On a blue background, the European nations that were fully sovereign in 1938 will be represented each by a golden star on the spot occupied by its capital city on the map. Strasbourg will also be represented by a slightly bigger golden star."*

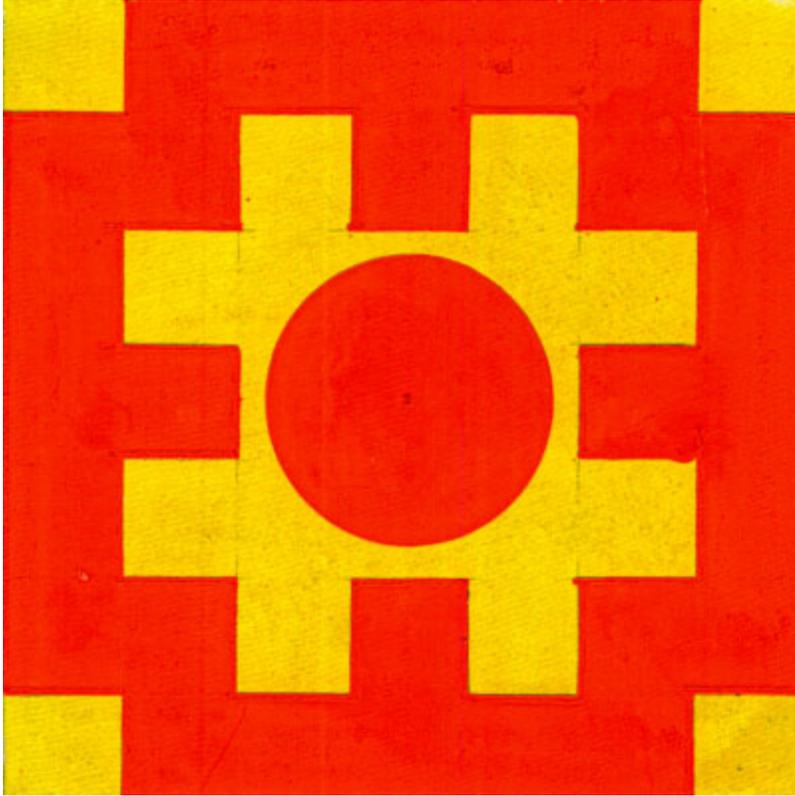


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**August Vincent, Monte Carlo, 1950**

*"The flag that I envisage has a white cross in the middle to emphasise the fact that*

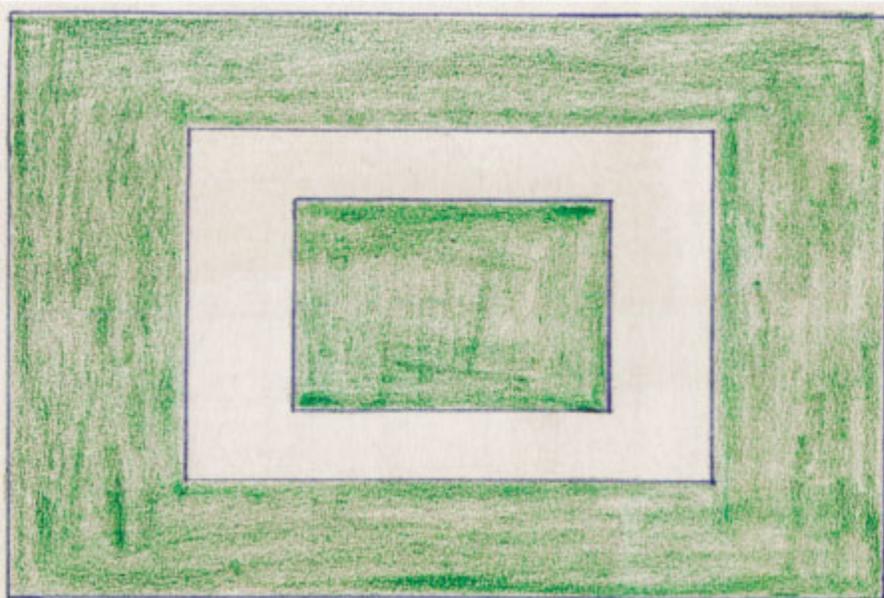
*Europe is a Christian continent. The colours red, blue, green and orange are to be found in most European flags."*



Source: Council of Europe, published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020

### **Wolfram Neue, Bad Ems, 1951**

*"I hereby take the liberty of presenting you with some colorful frats for a European flag. Since I am doing this of my own volition, I do not lay claim to any fee."*



Source: Council of Europe, published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020

### **Walther Timm, Bad Nauheim, 1951**

*"I am a participant in World War I. As an ensign in a Prussian infantry regiment, I was seriously wounded in May 1915. I lost my eyesight and my right hand. For this personal reason, I became a follower of the European Movement, so that the centuries-old Franco-German conflict would finally be buried."*



Source: Council of Europe, published by Wirklichkeit Books, Berlin, 2020

### **Hanno F Konopath, Hamburg, 1952**

*"After all, I have been working on this wonderful task for many years, I came up with this artistic idea, which I continue to take great pleasure in, as does everyone I talk to about it, and now I would like this copyright to be recognized and protected just like any other."*

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*"Rejected. Designs for the European Flag" was published in print issue 13, "Eurothanasia"*

*The complete collection "Rejected. Designs for the European Flag." is an upcoming publication from Wirklichkeit Books. For more information see [Wirklichkeit Books](#).*