

Law and Visual Jurisprudence 4

Series Editors: Sarah Marusek · Anne Wagner

Francesco Mangiapane  
Tiziana Migliore *Editors*

# Images of Europe

The Union between Federation and  
Separation

 Springer

# Law and Visual Jurisprudence

## Volume 4

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Francesco Mangiapane • Tiziana Migliore  
Editors

# Images of Europe

The Union between Federation and Separation

 Springer

*Editors*

Francesco Mangiapane  
University of Palermo  
Palermo, Italy

Tiziana Migliore  
University of Urbino  
Urbino, Italy

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The flag of Europe in a street artwork in Palermo (© Francesco Mangiapane)

*Dedicated to Paolo Fabbri*

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# Many Images for a Continent. An Introduction



Francesco Mangiapane and Tiziana Migliore

On 8 March 2020, little more than a month after the first case of COVID-19 in Rome and other Northern provinces, the Italian government extended the quarantine lockdown nationwide to cover all regions, approving new travel restrictions and a ban on public gatherings. Such a decision could never have been taken or even imagined within the framework of the European Union, where Member States acts independently of one another. So, while some European countries were closing bars, restaurants, schools and even borders (at least partially), others carried on as if nothing had happened, demonstrating how a real Union that has the capacity and means to act as one in many vital areas of political action does not yet exist.

Today, the pandemic shows how far Europe is from what *would*, *could* and *should* be a “European community”. Europeans’ actions and lives, their doing and being, are not particularly affected by the modalities of “wanting”, “being-able-to”, “having-to” and “knowing” to act and to be European. Why is this?

For too long, the European Union has presented itself as a haven for bureaucrats, united by a hegemonic will practiced through the hyper-standardization of every aspect of social life. The result of this representation, so often weaponised by political forces hostile to the European project, has also been the reason the many images (normative acts, community projects, cultural initiatives etc.) that constitute the European discourse struggle to be recognized and read into a basic everyday

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This introduction has been written by the Authors in close cooperation. Please consider paragraphs 1 and 2 as authored by Francesco Mangiapane and paragraphs 3 and 4 by Tiziana Migliore.

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F. Mangiapane (✉)  
University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy  
e-mail: [francesco.mangiapane@unipa.it](mailto:francesco.mangiapane@unipa.it)

T. Migliore  
University of Urbino, Urbino, Italy  
e-mail: [tiziana.migliore@uniurb.it](mailto:tiziana.migliore@uniurb.it)

narrative capable of shaping a European horizon of shared destinies (Chenal and Snelders 2012). What for too long appeared unclear is, in short, the symbolic dimension of European citizenship. In the absence of such symbolic readability, Europe appears to be soulless, “reduced” to a sort of Leviathan intent on deliberating over minor aspects such as the length of bananas (they must be more than 14 cm long) and on the curvature of cucumbers (which cannot exceed 10 mm), but indifferent to the fate and welfare of its citizens.

## 1 The Symbolic Dimension of Europe

### 1.1 *When a Symbol Becomes a Simulacrum*

The hypothesis of our book is closely tied to the disconnect between what Europe *would, could* and *should* be, and what it reveals itself to be. When we think about Europe, we always have the impression we are dealing with something whose mode of existence is not realized or actualized, but potential. A *simulacrum* of Europe. As everybody knows, unification is more a political issue than an economical matter. Its realization, which is hard to achieve, does not belong to the present. It is a *projection* into the future. However, it should not be forgotten that each *simulacrum* contains its opposite, represented in negative, with all the meaning-making interpretative use of associated symbols (Fornäs 2012), bringing its own vision of the enemy and forecasting their moves, starting with the cognitive, passionate and sensitive effects to which such a simulation gives rise. Thus, the “Great Mother” of Greek mythology praised in the unitary EU model becomes, in the definition of the “denialists”, a “Sanhedrin of technocrats”. However, the method of counterfactual explanation in history, answering “what if” questions, dispels the fog of delusion and confusion. The different Europe as narrated by Philip Dick in his novel *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) and recently adapted for the small screen, which features a Europe born from an hypothetical Axis victory in World War II and controlled by the Nazis, is thankfully not the one in which we live. The Phoenician princess Europa, raped by the Greeks in Tyre and taken through the Mediterranean Sea to Crete in retaliation for the Phoenician kidnapping of Io (the daughter of the king of the most powerful Greek city, Argos!), did not drown.

This book recognises the importance of the European discourse in its symbolic dimension and the need for it to be circulated via a wide-ranging narrative that is accessible to all citizens. As such, it explores the many images of Europe, or rather the many images through which European discourse is actually constituted in daily life, in search of their enunciative responsibility in today’s world for determining the current “State of the Union”. It goes without saying that focusing our attention on the symbolic aspects of being European lights the path to future scenarios, indicating new goals and prospects for development.

## 1.2 *Federation or Separation*

The identity of the European continent is based on an age-old tension between universalism and particularism: the images that Europe has projected of itself have in fact been inspired over the centuries by both a model of homogeneity (Roman and Carolingian imperial disposition) and a model of fragmentation (a Europe of city-states, municipalities, regions, small fatherlands). In the European Union as a political and economic organism, a dispute over identity has circled back around once more, so powerful and amplified to such a degree today that public debate on it has once more taken centre stage, with parties everywhere recognized for their being Pro or Anti Europe.

Founded in response to the atrocities unleashed by the nationalisms that resulted in the two World Wars, the Union has long been thought of euphorically as a bulwark of pacification, a prospect of liberation from ideological divisions (the collapse of Communism) and from old national rivalries (Franco-German first and foremost). Filled with good intentions for the new millennium and thanks to the Internet, which in parallel with the consolidation of the European institutions was forcing barriers and geographical boundaries to collapse, the Europeanist discourse quickly gained acceptance, constituting itself as an expanding work in progress, embodying a long sought-out post-political horizon, a transnational dream of cooperation and brotherhood, of identity beyond difference. At this point, European Citizenship, the European Parliament, the Maastricht and Schengen treaties and the Euro all presented themselves (and were likewise experienced) as tangible conquests, acquisitions that could even compensate for considerable collective deprivations. Sacrifices made lightly in the name of a certainly superior good.

## 1.3 *Two Mirror Images of Europe*

The current political scenario is marked by harsh criticism of the European Union, conducted by political groups explicitly averse to its institutions, and driven by the renewed influence of nationalism. Over the last decade, a narrative has gained ground that is antagonistic to that of the so-called *Eurozone*, opposing its ideals, values and initial interpretation. This new vision, which is advancing and enjoying electoral success, promotes the idea of an EU that is *elitist* and *globalist*, *imperial*, dedicated to its own non-transparent interests, to prioritising the profits of great capital over the interests of the “people”, to the supremacy and prevarication of some nations over others. This alternative image lies at the heart of major changes such as Brexit, the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

The ongoing clash therefore turns into a conflict between two mirror images: one aimed at strengthening the common institutions in the name of a common belonging, the other that is against them and wants to break those institutions down. On the one hand, we have those who, since Europe’s institutional beginning with the Maastricht

Treaty in 1992 and that fateful advent of the single currency in 2002, continue to cultivate the dream of unity, waiting patiently. On the other are those who instead exploit or adhere to the anti-European rhetoric of “It was better when it was worse” or of “Better some of a pudding than none of the pie”, not to mention the contradictory and complementary models to these binary positions.

## **2 An Internal View on Europe**

As noted above, the speeches by and about the European Union as a political body have too often been aimed at examining the organizational and bureaucratic aspect of common institutions, placing the question of value and its communication on hold indefinitely. We are convinced that such a “rationalist” disposition constitutes an obvious limitation of the European Union’s communication and the European Union in general, which ultimately has the effect of consolidating the idea, put forward by its detractors, that the Union can be only understood as a bureaucratic entity. The volume that we present here, on the contrary, delves into the merits of identity and the semiotic issues called into question by common European belonging.

### ***2.1 The Obviousness of Our European Customs***

The essays in the volume are points of view from within the European Union. While it is true that an external perspective, a view from ‘abroad’—defining Europe according to the perception other global players have of it—is fundamental for the construction and recognition of the continental identity, here we take another path. The scholars called to contribute to this volume on the subject of the *Images of Europe* are all residents in the European Union (including UK, which was still a member state when the call for contributions was made), so their point of view can be considered that of insiders who themselves wonder what meaning to give their European belonging, summarizing the many images of Europe that circulate in the European cultural scenario. The enquiries we present here are taken mostly from daily life and the real opportunities for citizens to enter into a conversation about identity with the European discourse. As an example of this approach, we might refer to the Euro (an issue discussed in the chapter by Monica Sassatelli). Every citizen of the European Union uses this currency for their own economic transactions but very few question the images of Europe, the meaning embodied by the banknotes and the message they carry. To do this, attention must be shifted from their concrete economic value to apparently secondary aspects and details such as their design, the figures they depict, and so on. In accordance with the precepts of semiotics, the essays in the volume focus on what is considered obvious, trying to clear the dust of habit from the objects and practices carried out daily by hundreds of millions of European citizens.

Such an approach is in some ways oriented towards a definition of being European in synchrony, which begins in the present, with the objects, documents and practices circulating in daily life, and slowly moves backwards as with geneology, in order to rediscover their significant and cultural aspects. This is done in the belief that the meaning of symbols can be profitably rediscovered through an interrogation of their moment of constitution. As shown in the reflection on the meaning of the European flag, it is by reconstructing the plot of discourses and alternative proposals through which a symbol is produced that something meaningful can be said about it. The symbols, in order to continue to exercise the function of emanators of value, require mediators entrusted with preserving their core, enriching it each time with new nuances.

## 2.2 *For a Missing Auto-Description*

Symmetrical to this approach of “reconstruction” of the symbolic value of the Union, through the explication of the significant dimension of objects, artefacts and practices, is the investigation into the ways in which these symbols are absorbed into common sense. It is here that the sociological investigation of citizens’ opinions on issues of European relevance (Gordy) on one hand, and the political rhetoric capable of “re-signifying” these same symbols on the other, are accounted for. The Spenglerian rhetoric of the decline of the West, for example, is criticized by Jacob, who recognizes the common thread that binds it to current events. The proliferation of this rhetoric, in fact, is intertextual, existing in the most varied texts (newspaper articles, journalistic reports, novels, political documents) that serve only to update its significant outcome.

Raising the problem of European affiliation and the meaning it takes today implies being aware of how such a discourse invests the classic categories of political discourse. If, as a *historical category*, “Europe” is well determined, it is because it has been defined in relational terms. In early modern times this was in terms of Christendom in contrast to the Islamic Ottoman Empire and later with the progressive secularization of European societies, in terms of the “West” in opposition to the “East”. Conversely, as a *geographical category*, the continent is unstable. Its borders are not limited by any clear demarcation line and it looks more like a Eurasian peninsula than a self-contained geographical entity. We are used to conceiving Europe as a “partitive totality”, a fragmented continent, rather than an “integral totality”, a unique whole.

### 3 Against Any Essentialism

The book, however, shows scepticism towards any essentialism in the representation of Europe—either as a product of the “three influences” of Rome, Jerusalem and Athens,<sup>1</sup> or with respect to the idea of a “strong” identity, the alleged outcome of a continental cultural homogeneity which is clearly lacking, being strived for rather than ever actually realized. On the other hand, isolating essential traits of European identity does a disservice to the complexity of Europe’s historical path, because the cultural and political evolution of Europe is characterized by contradictions. Equality and slavery, communism and liberalism, absolutism and democracy have found, over the centuries, equal citizenship in Europe. It is as if instead of any alleged essential trait, the dialectic, the possibility of criticizing current thinking and reversing its fate is actually the basis for European identity.

Moreover, it could be argued that the “European” contribution to civilization may be considered derivative of particular ways of life, languages and traditions that appear “European” only in a secondary way when observed from a more general perspective.

#### 3.1 *Universality and Duplicity of Europe*

But despite coming from particular models of citizenship, the project of Europe appears to be characterized by its generality. Indeed, its message aspires to be universal.

It is precisely around this tension towards universalism that the semiotic problem of delimiting Europe as a proper territory arises: a territory whose scope, although broad, continental, cannot help but appear situated within and limited by actual borders. The question then becomes: what meaning can European identity assume as a spatial connotation marked by precise geographical boundaries in the face of the universal vocation that its culture, its philosophy, its science, in a word its civilization, have brought to humanity? What specificity should we recognize in Europe as a territory that differentiates it from the rest of Western civilization? Immediately after the Second World War, in 1949, the philosopher Ortega Y Gasset held a conference in Berlin entitled “De Europa Meditatio Quaedam”. In the face of the ruins of the Second World War’s bombings, Ortega relaunched and promoted the idea of a political union of the continent, tracing the shape of a true European identity based on duplicity:

The multitude of European people, which took flight over the horizon of history, since the ruin of the ancient world, has always been marked by a double form of life. It happened that,

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<sup>1</sup>We consider such an idea (as Todorov (2019, pp. 18–20) and others remind us) as highly partial because it leaves out the contribution of other cultures and does not take into account the modelling role of the great European capitals in shaping European society.

as each of them gave life to their own peculiar genius, among them, and above them, a common repertoire of ideas, customs and enthusiasms grew. Even more: that destiny that led them to be progressively different must be understood as superlatively paradoxical. Because their homogeneity was not contrary to their diversity. (Ortega y Gasset 2014, p. 65. My translation).

This duplicity between “continental” belonging and local affiliation has constituted not only a form of life but a real political system, founded, according to Todorov (2019), on competition. The real characteristic of the European semiotic machine should be acknowledged as being fragmented, geographically, linguistically, politically and even from a religious point of view. It is precisely this fragmentation—made up of political entities characterised by not being powerful enough to overwhelm each other—that has more or less forced the people of the continent into coexistence on the one hand, and into favourable competition on the other. In such a fragmented scenario, ideas can always find a way to circulate due to the fact that they would have been taken into consideration by a multiplicity of subjects in rivalry with each other:

Let’s think about how Christopher Columbus managed to leave for his maiden voyage. Rejected by a first prince, that of Portugal, the Genoese goes to a second (the king of England), then a third (the king of France), and a fourth in Spain, before finding the patron of his expeditions in Queen Isabella of Castille. If Europe had been a unified empire, the rejection of the first and only prince would have meant the end of his projects (Todorov 2019, pp. 33–34).

This is the line that allows us to identify a specific feature of the European machine, a particular form of sign production capable of characterizing the continent regardless of the general attestations that come from its Civilization.<sup>2</sup> It is precisely this feature that will be later assumed by the European Union itself with the motto “Unity in Diversity” (investigated here by Sassatelli).

### 3.2 *Translating Each Other. A Cosmopolitical Europe*

So how is it possible to manage such fragmentation in order to exploit it as a progressive political asset? Marking the European Day of Languages, on September 26, 2008, during the General Assembly on Multilingualism (*Etats généraux du multilinguisme*) at the Sorbonne University, the semiotician Paolo Fabbri launched an appeal for a European policy on translation, signed by the most notable European intellectuals:

Europeans have to talk in their respective languages and find sources of mutual understanding. The European Union has ensured, within its provisional borders, the movement of goods, capital and men. It is time to set the goal of circulating knowledge, artworks and imaginaries, embracing the fruitful moments of historical Europe. Languages too have to

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<sup>2</sup>“Europe can no longer claim to dictate the world order, but it can offer an example of what it means to rediscover inhabitable ground” (Latour 2018, p. 101).

circulate and to be comprehended. By valuing all the different European languages, the plurality of languages, we will reconcile the citizens to the European project.<sup>3</sup>

Fabbri's conception can be compared with Gerard Delanty's idea of a cosmopolitan Europe defined in opposition to a "national Europe", on the one hand, and a "global Europe" on the other, where an internationalist EU-led Europe plays a major role on the global stage. According to Delanty (2007), a cosmopolitan Europe has a cosmopolitan identity based on a cultural logic of self-transformation rather than as a supranational or official EU identity that exists in contention with national identities. Its form is one of a self-understanding that expresses itself (as much as beyond) within national identities, and attempts to translate the languages of other European countries into its own and vice versa.

For Fabbri (2004) also, *cosmopolitics* is a fresh way to reformulate the problems of both *nationalism* and *globalisation*. Cosmopolitics is a "term-project" (*ibidem*), which finds its meaning through its practical combination with translation. Thus, European countries are "relative" systems potentially transformed by the act of translation, which does not transpose something identical but rather re-semanticises it (Fabbri and Migliore 2011). From the perspective of "many natures, a whole culture to come", the "in-between" European countries have to be inhabited through operations of translating each other.

## 4 Methodology and Contents

The proposed aim of these analyses is to reveal the *fundamental semantics* of the images of Europe, made up of values, mirror beliefs and affectivities. One bone of contention is how to shape the saliences of the European territory, interpreted either as "thresholds" to be overcome in the name of a model of a United Europe ("integral totality") or, on the contrary, regarded as the insurmountable obstacles of a Europe that is irreparably and perhaps happily fragmented ("partitive totality").

In terms of *narrativity*, then, Europe can be understood first as an object of value and then as a destinant judge or as an opposing subject and then as an anti-destinant sanctioner. The cognitive dimension within which it covers such actantial roles is conditioned by a variety of *passions*: admiration and contempt; hope and despair; exultation and discontent; solidarity and hostility; feelings of adhesion and belonging or, on the contrary, of rejection and detachment, etc. The images of Europe and over Europe also change according to the *point of view* assumed, depending on whether the focus is internal or external, the presumed means of involvement, how they assume the perspective of the other (see, for instance, the matter of migration), whether the narratives that feed these images are endogenous, produced by those living in Europe and in the Eurozone, or exogenous.

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<sup>3</sup>P. Fabbri, "Appeal for a European policy on translation", see Cassin (2012).

Finally, at the discursive level, the various social representations are translated into collective assemblages of *enunciation*: the “I” gets identified with a “we”, which assimilates it, and the “we” defines itself in relation to a “you” and a “they”. Maps, flags, myths, ceremonies, hymns, monuments all mark the boundaries of such a densely populated semiosphere of texts, within which they forcibly cohabit, clashing uncontrollably, pushed towards federation and separation.

The volume is organized into three main parts: I Perspectives and Destinies; II Borders and Limits; III Narratives and Representations.

## ***4.1 Perspectives and Destinies***

The first part investigates, theoretically and empirically, how the images of Europe have been constructed, how they are perceived and change. Europe is a value in which to invest and to strive towards or to deny and/or fight against.

An unexpected insight into the compact and apparently un-analysable shape of the European flag is offered in the first chapter which sums up Fabbri’s reflections. Showing that even a symbol can be described, he discusses the proposed projects submitted in the first half of the twentieth century and explains why so many versions were rejected by the members of the commission in favour of this particular one, which displayed those forms of expression that perfectly exemplified the forms of content to which they aspired. A long process of production obtained by *ratio difficilis* (Eco 1981). Significantly, it is pointed out that no Union existed in Europe until its symbol was created, conveying the essence of Europe. However, what has fuelled this concept over time? It would seem that such an ideal is the result of the “dream” of mediation between territories in conflict. The myth of the princess Europa, reread here by Tiziana Migliore who examines its literary and artistic translations over the centuries, should as such be considered a semantic model for a proper Europe: a seminal need to overcome borders and achieve unity through a love of diversity. No wonder, highlights Claudio Paolucci in his article, that Umberto Eco recognized a sort of modern-day myth of Europe, its very idea, in the Erasmus Programme. Thanks to Erasmus, in fact, young people often marry abroad, giving birth to a bilingual generation. These kinds of experiences support what Simona Chiodo calls the “European essence of Europe”, in her enquiry into the three essential epistemological mechanisms of the European way of thinking: analysis, abstraction and idealization. Here, the form of a shared rule and, most importantly, the positive result of a representative democracy lies in considering the other, in their difference to us, as equal. Still, Giuseppe Bettoni underlines, by means of cartographies, iconographies and representations of landscapes, the extent to which Europe is never an entity but a concept in progress, defined by the political actors involved. So, for instance, the “state” delimitation in place in Europe is largely erased and suppressed during the daily lives of its inhabitants. In opposition to this commonplace will to exceed the old national boundaries (but also because geopolitics deals with antagonisms), the article by Frank Jacob presents the argument of the

“Decline of the West” (Oswald Spengler) as a semiotic strategy exploited by Eurosceptics and anti-refugee movements across Europe to trigger fears of the Other. Pope Francis’s speeches, as studied by Paolo Peverini, counteract this trend and use the phrase “family of peoples” as a metaphor for Europe, whereby each contributes freely to the common home in accordance with his or her own abilities and gifts.

## **4.2 *Borders and Limits***

The second part delves into the topic of separation, shining a light on each culture’s own self-consciousness in its relationship with the outsiders’ point of view. Franciscu Sedda reflects on the independence referendums of Scotland and Catalonia, along with the referendums of Great Britain and New Caledonia, as a phenomenon of national self-determination for the so-called stateless nations. Independentism, while it emphasises the complex dynamism of the European construction, also reveals its limits. Equally important for this issue is Eric Gordy’s chapter about the official perceptions of Europe in the Balkan states, poised between two opposing sets of values. On the one hand, the promise of Europe—in terms of economic prosperity or guarantees of equality or protection of legal rights—endures. On the other, Europe (and the West) as a threat, associated with weakness, decadence, and the dilution of ethno-national identities. Additionally, despite the fact that the adhesion to European values by people from the EU member states is no stronger than that of people from the Balkans, the requirements of the *acquis communautaire* is endlessly open to political reinterpretation and renegotiation. In Valeria Burgio’s chapter we can see how a border and bilingual geographical area, such as the autonomous region of South Tyrol in Italy, can become a paradigmatic case for a multilingual and multicultural European Union facing many threats, first and foremost the restoration of internal borders and the multiplication of ethnic fragmentations. Here, the central concepts of Lotman’s semiotics of culture are used to analyse borders and peripheries as zones of increased and accelerated semiotic activity.

## **4.3 *Narratives and Representations***

The third part includes the contributions that are specifically focused on mainstream productions, on representations and media events about Europe. Lucio Spaziante examines the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), a music festival that constitutes a sort of parliament of European televisions, that redefines each year what is European and what is not. The author argues that the event is produced by a consortium of European public television broadcasters (EBU), but does not directly involve the national states or the EU. In the following chapter, Monica Sassatelli traces the alternating fortunes of the motto “unity in diversity”, both in official discourse and

scholarly interpretation, and goes on to develop a case study on the figures chosen to represent Europe on the common currency, the Euro. Maria Cristina Addis's research, drawing on Louis Marin, develops an analysis of city maps in order to better understand the cartographic devices of the so-called "Regional Cooperation Programs" and the European Agendas from which they hail. One of her main aims is to highlight a European utopia, a structurally aporic model in which the modern structure that has, for centuries, regulated the representation and auto-representation of Europe (Old World vs New World; USA vs USSR) is able to coexist without merging. Of course, it is also possible to shape a European community through traditional food products and wine. As such, Davide Puca reconstructs the complex system of place-based labels, the "Geographical Indications" (GI) with which the Union labels the food from its member states. He stresses in particular a *sui generis* legal-frame that, contrarily to most of the place-based labels conceived by other countries, is not based on brand ownership, but rather connects the European food to a *terroir* of origin, as community heritage.

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**Part I**  
**Perspectives and Destinies**

# The European Flag According to Paolo Fabbri



Francesco Mangiapane and Tiziana Migliore

## 1 The Semi-Symbolic Function of Symbols

According to Charles S. Peirce, symbols are, in semiotics, arbitrary signs, in the sense that there is no relationship of contiguity or similarity between *representamen* and object. Ferdinand de Saussure, however, believed symbols to be motivated, because of the existence of the “sensitive” relationship in the nexus between signifier and signified, which, however, is the result of social conventions, whilst signs are arbitrary: languages project their sub-divisions in signifiers (sounds) and signifieds (concepts) onto the “amorphous masses” of thought and reality. Louis Hjelmslev, however, adopted a point of view that was exclusively internal to language, distinguishing between *monoplanar* systems, those of symbols, in which there is conformity between the plane of expression and the plane of content and non-exchangeability between elements, and *biplanar* systems of signs that can be articulated on separate planes of expression and content. He then, however, located a third regime of the function of signs, which he defined *semi-symbolic*, in which the conformity and motivation of the sign are acquired through the homologisation not of single elements of two places (as in the case of the symbol, i.e. scales: justice, dove: peace) but of categories on two planes. The gestural system thus expresses affirmation and negation through the head’s movement along horizontal

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Paolo Fabbri unfortunately deceased before the publication of this volume which he strongly supported. This is the reason why the Editors are presenting his remarks on the European Flag summing up the considerations and materials which he shared with them.

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F. Mangiapane  
University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy  
e-mail: [francesco.mangiapane@unipa.it](mailto:francesco.mangiapane@unipa.it)

T. Migliore (✉)  
University of Urbino, Urbino, Italy  
e-mail: [tiziana.migliore@uniurb.it](mailto:tiziana.migliore@uniurb.it)

and vertical axes. It is therefore possible to institute the proportion vertical : horizontal = affirmation : negation. In visual semiotics, plastic language signifies in this way (Greimas 1984), locally correlating categories on the plane of expression and categories on the plane of content. Signifiers and signifieds, themselves arbitrary, when they contract an oppositional relationship that is structurally necessary, with other signifiers and signifieds within the same whole, achieve the same motivation and the same stability of symbols (Fabbri 2018).

Question: What if certain symbols also signified in a semi-symbolic way? Can we overcome the dichotomy of signs that can be analysed and articulated *versus* non-analysable, if not indescribable symbols deprived of any immediate referentiality, uniquely connoted and connotable? In the case of the European flag, as we will investigate, we know the generative paths of expressive figuration and content that led to its creation. A correlation between signifiers and signifieds was constantly at work, discarding some and introducing others until a “molar” grasp of this symbol was reached, meaning the recognition of a network within it of discrete units susceptible to categorial justification.

## 2 Procedures for the Invention and Symbolization of the European Flag

On 25 October 1955, the Assembly of the Council of Europe chooses the form the European standard would take. The mandate for the flag’s design coincides with the foundation of the Council itself, with a committee created in 1950 to find the “correct” form. It took five years of high-pressure discussions to decide upon the symbol we know today (Fig. 1).

The flag was only adopted by the European Community in April 1986, having been the official emblem of the EEC with the approval of the Council of Europe. The European Union has used it since its creation by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 1** The Chosen Pattern of the European Flag.  
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Historical archives of the Council of Europe,  
Strasbourg, F-67075  
Strasbourg Cedex



**Fig. 2** The European Flag.  
Photo by Waldemar Brandt  
on Unsplash. Public Domain



**Fig. 3** Count Richard Nikolaus of Coudenhove-Kalergi Flag Proposal (1922). © Archives historiques du Conseil de l'Europe—Historical archives of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex



## 2.1 *Early Hypotheses*

We are interested in attempting to understand the way in which the flag's form represents Europe, how it came to convince everyone that it was the greatest possible expression of the construction of our identity. One point that must be remembered is that Europe does not predate this symbol. We are Europe from the moment this representation of Europe comes into being. The flag is therefore both the symbol and the linguistic act of the creation of a European identity. In terms of its appearance, the crown of stars is the final result, the end point of a constellation of projects, with different isotopes, semantic traits and classes. The symbolism of the European flag subtends an authentic dossier that can be systematically reconstructed.

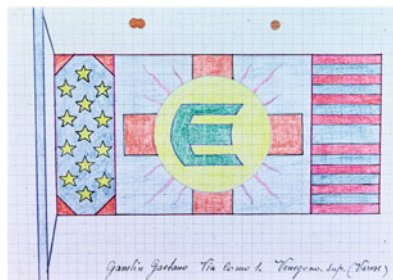
Among the first proposals put before the consulting committee it is worth remembering that of Count Richard Nikolaus of Coudenhove-Kalergi, Austrian politician and founder, in 1922, of the Paneuropean Union (Fig. 3). It featured a red cross inside a yellow circle on a blue background Coudenhove-Kalergi (1950). It was rejected because of its explicit reference to Christianity, which failed to recognise Turkey's presence, a country with a majority Muslim population, on the Council of Europe. It seems they were right to turn this proposal down, given that flags bearing crosses (particularly that of Denmark, which has one clearly in sight) are regularly burnt in Arab countries.

Many proposals utilised the triangle, the perfect shape, but this immediately brought to mind the masons (Fig. 4). And the sun in the centre could not work

**Fig. 4** Alwin Mondon Flag Proposal (1951). © Archives historiques du Conseil de l'Europe—Historical archives of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex



**Fig. 5** Gaetano Gambin Flag Proposal (1950). © Archives historiques du Conseil de l'Europe—Historical archives of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex



**Fig. 6** Robert Bichet Flag Proposal (1948). © Archives historiques du Conseil de l'Europe—Historical archives of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex



because the sun sets in Europe, it is known as the West or “Occident” for this very reason; the sun rises in the East, the Orient (Fig. 5). Other projects were rejected for aesthetic reasons. Frenchman Robert Bichet presented a white flag with fifteen green stars, the same number as the organisation’s members at that time (Fig. 6).

Also green was the large E on a white background that covered the entire surface of the flag belonging to the European Federalist Movement (Fig. 7). Many other drafts were already blue and carried a circular symbolism (Coudenhove-Kalergi, Konopath, Gambin & Neue).

Two minor drafts submitted in 1952 to the Council of Europe by Hanno F. Kanopath, Hamburg member of the Europa-Union organisation, were almost