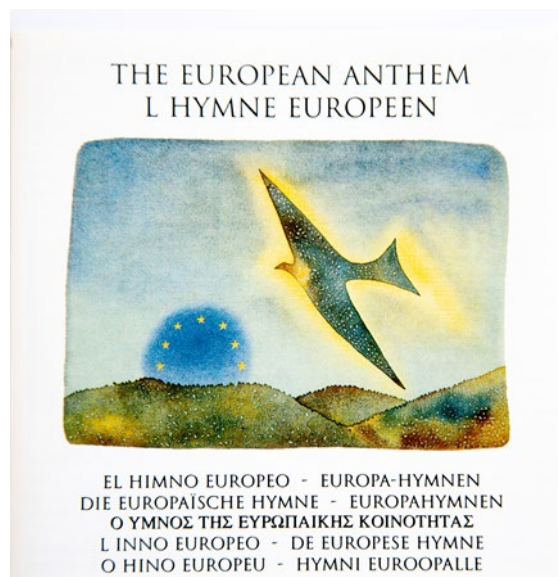


Story of the European Anthem

SUMMARY

In the inter-war years, advocates of European unity began pondering the choice of an anthem that would convey the feeling of sharing a common destiny and common values. The creation of the Council of Europe in 1949 spurred further calls to this end. Proposals for scores and lyrics for an anthem for Europe began appearing spontaneously. It was not until 1972, however, that the Council of Europe formally adopted the prelude of *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as the European anthem.

For their part, the institutions representing what would become the European Union chose the debates on a citizens' Europe held in the mid-1980s to adopt *Ode to Joy* as their anthem too. On 29 May 1986, the European flag and the European anthem were officially adopted at a ceremony held in Brussels. Although the version of the anthem chosen had no lyrics, it has come to symbolise the European Union. It is played at official ceremonies attended by the representatives and/or leaders of the European Union, and more generally at many events with a European theme.



IN THIS BRIEFING

- A united Europe and its symbols
- A host of proposals
- The pioneering role of the Council of Europe
- Herbert von Karajan's arrangement of the *Ode to Joy*
- An anthem for the European Communities?
- A Citizens' Europe and the choice of an anthem
- An anthem without words
- An anthem absent from the Treaties, but very prominent in Parliament

A united Europe and its symbols

Like any political construct, the European project required easily-recognisable emblems and symbols to address the need to embody a union – in this case between the countries of Europe – and shared values. These symbols (flag, motto, anthem, Europe Day and the euro, as the EU currency) were to serve to reinforce its identity. They therefore had to be distinctive and representative of Europeans. As such, they would serve to establish a sense of belonging and unity, but without replacing national symbols (with the exception of the currency). Today's European symbols are a means of political legitimisation and socialisation. They are designed to bring Europe closer to its citizens by encapsulating the feeling of belonging to the same community.¹

The idea of an anthem representing unity among nations was not a new one. At the Universal Exhibition sponsored by Emperor Napoleon III in Paris in 1867, a public competition had been organised to find a musical work 'worthy of use as an anthem at official international events in the future'.² In answer to the many questions from prospective composers (amateur and professional musicians and anonymous enquirers), the selection committee specified that this 'anthem for peace' was to be a song 'that will easily catch on as a universal anthem, and which everyone will remember – something akin to a *Marseillaise for peace*'. The response surpassed all expectations and compositions flooded in from France and abroad. None of them met with lasting approval, however, and many were criticised for being of poor musical quality. Until the turn of the 20th century, plans for an international anthem remained the preserve of pacifist movements, although an anthem was composed for the opening ceremony of the first Olympic Games of modern times, held in Athens in 1896.

During the inter-war period, advocates of European unity also began expressing the need to adopt an anthem that could be played at meetings and public events. In 1929, the Pan-Europa movement, founded in Vienna a few years before by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, decided to end its meetings with a rendition of the prelude to the *Ode to Joy* from the fourth movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.³ This did not stop several other pro-Europe groups from putting forward their own proposals for anthems that made fervent appeals for a United States of Europe. In the same period, the League of Nations in Geneva was also receiving a host of spontaneous compositions for it to use as an anthem for peace. These came from all over the world, though mainly from Europe. One of the proposals was an international anthem based on the 16 bars of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* which spoke of the universal nature of human brotherhood. However, the vast cultural and linguistic diversity of the countries making up the League of Nations meant that it was particularly difficult to achieve public consensus on which melody and which lyrics to choose.⁴

After the Second World War, the participants at the Congress of Europe organised by the International Coordination Committee of the Movements for European Unity and held in The Hague in May 1948 closed their meeting with the choral work *L'Europe unie!* to signal their commitment to peace and solidarity among the peoples of Europe. The score of *L'Europe unie!* was written specifically for the event by the Dutch musician Louis Noiret. It was based on a text by the poet Henrik Joosten and published in Dutch, French, English and Italian versions.

Image 1 – Score of *L'Europe Unie!* 1948



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A host of proposals

Given the high hopes generated by the creation of the Council of Europe in 1949, that organisation quickly became the focus for yet more compositions.⁵ In August 1949, as the Consultative Assembly was holding its opening session in Strasbourg, its President, Paul-Henri Spaak, received the words and music for *Chant de la paix*, composed by Jehane Louis Gaudet, a singing teacher. Gaudet had been a member of the French resistance, and described herself as 'a mother who had endured all kinds of difficulties during the war, including internment'. She saw her song as an anthem and 'an appeal to everyone across the world who wants peace – for its own sake – and who wants to come together to form a United States of Europe'. Scores of other proposals were to follow for official anthems, cantatas, oratorios and triumphal marches, including *L'hymne de l'Europe unifiée* (Carl Kahlfuss, 1949), *Invocata* (Hans Horben, 1950), *La marche de l'Europe unie* (Maurice Clavel, 1951), *An Europa* (E. Hohenfeldt and F. Schein, 1953), *La Marseillaise de la paix* (M. L. Guy, 1953), *Europa vacata* (Hanns Holenia, 1957), *Cantate de l'Europe* (Alfred Max and Jacques Porte, 1957), *Europa!* (P. Krüger), *Hymnus europeus*, *Vereintes Europa*, *Europe lève-toi!* (L. Alban, 1961), *PanEuropa* (C. Falk), *Inno all'Europa* (Ferdinando Durand and Adriana Autéri Sivori, 1961), *L'Européenne* (J. Lafont, 1960), *Sur un même chemin* (Jany Rogers, 1963), *l'Inno degli Europeisti* (Cosimo Distratis, 1963) and *L'hymne de la Confédération européenne des anciens combattants* (Jean Ledrut, 1967).

European movements in Italy used the European School Days there to ask young people to come up with an anthem for a united Europe. However, despite all the excitement, nothing concrete materialised and most of these disparate proposals and initiatives never got off the ground. Very few of the compositions were played in public, with the exception of *Cantate de l'Europe* which was performed in April 1957 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris and broadcast on radio in France.⁶ The Council of Europe's priority in terms of symbols at that time was to have a European flag. Besides this, while the idea of an anthem was not ruled out, many thought it preferable to adopt an existing classical work so as to avoid having to organise competitions or choose between the anthems that had already been proposed. No one was in favour of the European anthem being drawn from a contemporary piece of music.

Image 2 – Lyrics to *l'Inno degli Europeisti*, 1963



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The pioneering role of the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe was committed to promoting the European ideal and forging a genuine shared consciousness of Europe, so it took matters in hand to avoid the confusion that would arise were a variety of musical works to be used at European events across the continent.⁷ At the request of the Committee on General Affairs of the Consultative Assembly, Secretary-General Jacques-Camille Paris presented a report in August 1950 in which he proposed a set of measures aimed at raising public awareness of the 'reality of a European union'. Paraphrasing an article by the French essayist Daniel-Rops on creating a flag for Europe, he argued that 'on the day a European anthem rings out when a flag is hoisted, just as today national anthems are heard when the flags of different countries are raised, a great step will have been taken towards a much-needed union'. His enthusiastic words failed to hide the fact that there was still a long way to go before ambition

became reality. The challenge of conveying the values of the new Europe through music, and even through words, was a major one from both a political and an artistic standpoint.⁸

In 1955, the founder and main facilitator of the European Parliamentary Union, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, put forward his proposal to adopt Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* as the European anthem, even though it had already been put to other political uses in the past.⁹ This was also the work which the choir of Saint-Guillaume de Strasbourg performed at the ceremony on 20 April 1959 marking the 10th anniversary of the Council of Europe. Some commentators nevertheless felt that the final movement of *Music for the Royal Fireworks* should be used as an anthem for Europe instead. That work had been composed by Georg Friedrich Händel in 1749 to celebrate the Treaty of Aachen and peace in Europe after the War of Austrian Succession. Supporters of Händel's famous piece argued that it was already being used as a signature tune on the Council of Europe's radio programmes. Others had a preference for the prelude to the *Te Deum* in D major written by the French composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier, which the European Broadcasting Union had been using since 1954 as the opening theme for many Eurovision broadcasts.¹⁰

Image 3 – Score of *Chant Européen des Communes*, 1961

Source: Collection of the Institut d'histoire ouvrière, économique et sociale (IHOES), Seraing © All rights reserved.

After a hiatus, the Belgian section of the Council of European Municipalities adapted Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* as a '*Chant européen des communes*' and began using it regularly at official town-twinning ceremonies. In 1963, they contacted the Secretariat of the Committee of Local Authorities of the Council of Europe to ask whether it could be played alongside national anthems at public events with a European theme. The couplets used in the score were written for the occasion by F. Vande Brande, and were not taken from Schiller's text, which did not lend itself to literal translation. The following year, the Seventh States-General of the Council of European Municipalities adopted a resolution in Rome establishing that an anthem should be chosen jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Communities to reinforce the feeling of European belonging. In the meantime, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe had adopted the European flag of a circle of twelve stars on a blue background in 1955, and in 1964 they established 5 May (the day on which the Statute of the Council of Europe had been signed in London in 1949) as Europe Day.¹¹

In 1971, the Norwegian Kjell T. Evers, Chair of the Round Table for the relaunch of Europe Day and the European Conference of Local Authorities, notified the Council of Europe that the Round Table had concluded 'that it would be desirable for a European anthem to be instituted to symbolise the faith of our peoples in the cause of European unity'. The idea was for the anthem to be

performed on Europe Day in as many town halls, schools and events as possible. The timing was probably no accident as the poem 'Hymn for the United Nations' by the renowned Anglo-American author W. H. Auden was also published at this time. The Spanish cellist Pablo Casals drew inspiration from this strongly pacifist poem to compose an anthem that was then played in the UN General Assembly Hall in New York on 24 October 1971. However, the work was not adopted as the official UN anthem, despite the efforts made by UN Secretary-General U Thant to that effect. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had used part of the prelude to *Ode to Joy* as an anthem at the ceremony inaugurating the new Atlantic Alliance headquarters in Brussels in October 1967, but was no more successful in having it adopted on a permanent anthem.

René Radius, the French delegate to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, drew up a detailed report and several resolutions recommending that the governments of the member states of the Council of Europe make the *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony the European anthem.¹² This work was championed as being particularly representative of 'the European spirit'.¹³ However, there were objections to using the words of Friedrich

Image 4 – Record distributed by the Council of European Municipalities, 1971



Source: Private collection © All rights reserved.

von Schiller's poem written in 1785 and put to music by Beethoven in his symphony. It was pointed out that besides purely linguistic issues (the text only existed in German), this ode '*An die Freude*' celebrating and expressing the ideal of human brotherhood, was out of step with the sensitivities of the time and therefore unlikely to awaken a European awareness. In the end, it was judged preferable not to use the lyrics of *Ode to Joy* but to keep Beethoven's melody and rely on the universal language of music. On 12 January 1972, the proposal was finally adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. After efforts spanning more than two decades, the *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was enshrined as the official European anthem.¹⁴

Herbert von Karajan's arrangement of the *Ode to Joy*

This decision was then brought to the attention of the presidents and secretaries-general of the institutions of the European Communities and of the organisations with advisory status connected with the Council of Europe.¹⁵ The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Lujo Tončić-Sorinj, wasted no time in asking his fellow Austrian, the world-famous conductor Herbert von Karajan, to come up with a musical arrangement of Beethoven's piece that lent itself to orchestration and interpretation. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra set aside Schiller's verses and recorded the instrumental arrangement in D at a slower tempo, with Karajan conducting. The recording was released by *Deutsche Grammophon*, a major record company. The arrangement was finished just in time to be performed in public at the events held in Strasbourg to mark Europe Day on 5 May 1972.¹⁶ Just 10 days later, it was played again to mark the start of building work on the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe. The monthly part-sessions of the European Parliament were held in the building until 1999.

Published by Schott Music in Mainz – which has held Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in its catalogue since 1827 – there are three versions of Karajan's arrangement: one for symphony orchestra, one for wind instruments and one for solo piano. Two records – one at 45 rpm and one at 33 rpm – were released for sale on the *Deutsche Grammophon* and Polydor labels, depending on the country. Much to the Council of Europe's chagrin, Herbert von Karajan kept all the copyrights to the recording and distribution of his arrangement of the European anthem.¹⁷

An anthem for the European Communities?

Since the 1950s, the European Communities had also been keen to have an easily identifiable, rallying anthem to turn to on certain occasions. But there were so many tricky questions to be answered. What piece should be chosen? How would it be possible to draw on local and national traditions while also transcending them? What music could communicate effectively and form the basis of a tradition? Would a grand, solemn piece be better than a tune that was easy to remember?

Would it be best to organise a competition open to all, or to mine the rich seam of Europe's musical heritage? And what about the language challenges involved in any words to be put to the music, at a time when the European Communities had four official languages? What body should be called upon to make the choice and enforce a decision?

At the time, the departments responsible for information and protocol were divided as to what the answers to those questions might be. With no solution in sight, it was the participation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the Brussels Expo of 1958 that eventually provided the basis for an answer. The solution decided upon at the time was meant above all to be a pragmatic one. During the six months that the Expo ran, the ECSC pavilion hosted a series of events at which a workers' brass band sometimes played Michel Roveni's *Hymn of the United States of Europe*. It was played on European Community Day, 9 May 1958, to mark the eighth anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. Those present that day included Robert Schuman, the President of the European Parliamentary Assembly, Paul Finet, the President of the High Authority of the ECSC, and Walter Hallstein, who some months earlier had become President of the Commission of the new European Economic Community. Dedicated to all the founders of the united Europe, the piece sought to evoke the memory of the victims of war and to express the happy future of nations living peacefully side by side. The ECSC's information department did not have to look very far, however: Michel Roveni was actually a pseudonym used by Nadine Van Helmont, the wife of Jacques Van Helmont, a Frenchman and close colleague of Jean Monnet. Mr Van Helmont had helped Jean Monnet set up the Action Committee for the United States of Europe in Paris. But the leaders of the ECSC were careful not to paint the *Hymn of the United States of Europe* as the official anthem of the European Communities.

Image 5 – *Hymn of the United States of Europe* by Michel Roveni, 1958



Source: Private collection. © All rights reserved.

Nothing changed for some time. Between 1960 and 1970 the issue of the European anthem was not a real priority for the Community institutions. They were very busy trying to address institutional problems and deal with endless political crises, meaning that the issue of symbols had been placed on the back burner. Facing the failure of Euratom, disagreements over the intergovernmental or supranational nature of the Community system, frequent stalemates on the issue of the first enlargement, disputes on the deepening of some common policies, objections to budget contributions, international monetary turmoil and oil price shocks, and then the economic crisis, the European Community seemed to have reached a dead end. European integration was experiencing an extended period of stagnation, sometimes referred to as 'Eurosclerosis'. This did not go unnoticed by the people of Europe, among whom a certain amount of disaffection with the European project had set in.

Against that backdrop the elections to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage in 1979 were a real game-changer. The European Parliament stood as the guarantor of democracy in the process of European integration. It was keen to take advantage of its new electoral legitimacy to make its voice heard, especially on institutional issues. But Parliament was also thinking about how to give people a sense of community, and how to help shape an awareness of the European Community. In the early 1980s, via written questions put to the Commission, MEPs started calling for the adoption of a European flag and an anthem that could be played at official ceremonies. Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, which was already being used by the Council of Europe, seemed the obvious choice. The piece was also still being used in a range of initiatives at local level.

It is important to note that no one at the time seemed to be particularly bothered by some of the ways in which Beethoven's Ninth Symphony had been appropriated in the past. It had been used for propaganda purposes: it could be heard far and wide during the Third Reich, for example, including to mark Hitler's birthday in April 1942. It was also adopted (with the title *Voices of Rhodesia*) as the national anthem of Rhodesia, a country shunned by the international community between 1974 and 1980 on account of its racist apartheid regime.¹⁸

A Citizens' Europe and the choice of an anthem

The idea of an anthem that would bring people together resurfaced during the discussions on a citizens' Europe. The notion of European citizenship was first discussed in the mid-1970s, alongside the issues of a uniform passport and the abolition of internal border controls. But it was not until the Heads of State or Government of the 10 Member States met at the European Council in Fontainebleau in June 1984 that a formal declaration was made expressing a desire to strengthen Europe's identity and image among citizens and across the world. They followed up on their declaration straight away by setting up a 'Citizens' Europe' committee to make recommendations on strengthening the Community's identity and fostering the emergence of a European area without borders.¹⁹ The ad hoc committee was chaired by Pietro Adonnino, a lawyer and former MEP, and it started work in September 1984. It was made up of experts, diplomats and personal representatives of the Heads of State or Government of the 10 Member States. The committee submitted an interim report in spring 1985 which focused on citizens' rights (free movement, mutual recognition of qualifications, right of residence for workers, etc.). The Adonnino committee's final report was submitted to the Milan European Council in June 1985. The emphasis in the final report was placed on citizens' participation in the political process in the Community and the Member States. A raft of actions was proposed in the areas of culture and communications, alongside school exchanges and cooperation among universities. The committee's report also recommended that tools be used to draw attention to the Community's existence: the flag; Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*; and postage stamps depicting Europe. The European Council endorsed all the proposals and instructed the Commission and the Member States to do what was necessary to put the proposals into practice.

The decisions on symbols were those taken most quickly. In March 1986, the secretaries-general of the Commission, Parliament and the Council agreed to acknowledge that the anthem was already widely used by the Community institutions. A month later, it was decided at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council that from then on the Council, Parliament, the Commission and the Court of Justice of the European Communities would use the blue flag with the 12 golden stars and the *Ode to Joy* tune at European events.²⁰

Image 6 – First rendition of the *Ode to Joy* as the official European anthem and raising of the European flag in Brussels, 1986



Source: © European Union.

Once the Council of Europe's agreement had been sought, it was agreed that the flag and the anthem would be officially used as of 29 May 1986, when a public event was held in Brussels. The Commission and Parliament had initially wanted to use the flag and the anthem together three weeks earlier, for Europe Day on 9 May. Owing to scheduling clashes, however, that was not possible.²¹ And so it was that, on 29 May 1986, the *Ode to Joy* was performed in its original (German) version by the Choir of the European Communities at a flag-raising ceremony to mark the official adoption of both the flag and the anthem. The ceremony was attended by a delegation of 12 children – one representing each Member State – from the European Schools in Brussels. It took place in Brussels on the esplanade in front of the Berlaymont, the Commission's headquarters. Other attendees included Commission President Jacques Delors, the President of Parliament, Pierre Pflimlin, the Commissioner responsible for Citizens' Europe, Carlo Ripa di Meana, and Ambassador Charles Rutten, representing Hans Van Den Broek, President-in-Office of the Council. Since then, the prelude to the *Ode to Joy* has been played increasingly frequently at European events and celebrations, either on its own or in tandem with the national anthem of the country in which the event is taking place. MEPs have emphasised on a number of occasions the need to raise Europe's profile in schools, including by teaching the European anthem.

An anthem without words

There was one issue outstanding: would it be appropriate to add words to the European anthem which, when translated into all the official languages of the European Communities, would convey the message of a peaceful, free Europe based on solidarity?²² The European Parliament took the matter seriously enough for the President's office, in October 1986, to look into the possibility of organising a competition in the 12 Member States of the European Communities to provide lyrics for the European anthem. Behind the initiative lay a belief that an anthem is not just about music: it should also express 'an idea, a feeling relating to the grandeur and ideals of a people'. It was further specified that from the very first verse the anthem should 'extol the crucial theme of the union of the peoples of Europe, and it must include the words "all men shall be brothers" from Schiller's *Ode to Joy*'. A panel of judges including literary critics and MEPs covering each of the nine official languages was to be established as quickly as possible.²³

Image 7 – Ninth Symphony score annotated by Beethoven



Source: © Alamy.

Although ultimately unsuccessful, the plan did show that there was a certain degree of scepticism in some quarters about the European anthem's lack of words, and, in other quarters, about the option of using the German version alone. Members of the public sent in their suggestions for lyrics to Parliament and the Commission, but no real solution to the linguistic and literary problem could be found. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several MEPs put questions to the Commission on the matter, so calls were made for a competition to be held to make a final decision on words for the anthem – the idea being that the sentiments expressed therein would be another unifying factor and would strengthen the European spirit. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, British MEP Lyndon Harrison even suggested paying tribute to the efforts of the peoples of Europe to fight for freedom by going back to Schiller's original text, presented as a song denouncing all forms of despotism and dictatorship. Lyndon Harrison cited the famous concerts conducted by Leonard Bernstein at the Philharmonie in West Berlin on 23 December and at the Schauspielhaus in East Berlin on 25 December 1989. Leonard Bernstein had assembled musicians and vocalists from all over Europe to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with Schiller's text being renamed *Ode an die Freiheit* ('Ode to Freedom') to mark the occasion. But nothing changed: the European anthem was still a melody bereft of words. The text in Latin sent to Commission President Romano Prodi in 2004, and the Esperanto version written by the linguist Umberto Broccatelli in 2012 as part of a Citizens' Initiative recently introduced under the Lisbon Treaty, did not bring about any progress either.

Image 8 – The Commission press review's take, in 1990, on the problems of agreeing on a common set of lyrics for the European anthem



Source: Robert Pendville archives (ARP 6/1/70) © Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, Lausanne.

An anthem absent from the Treaties, but very prominent in Parliament

The recurring theme of the European anthem cropped up again in the early 2000s during the Convention on the Future of Europe, which did not overlook the subject of European symbols. In February 2003, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the Convention's President, pointed out that these symbols should feature in the future European Constitution, and he was quick to add that there was a need to 'think about a text that could be sung when the European anthem is played'. He went on to suggest that if the Convention's budget allowed, a competition could perhaps be held. Some members of the Convention disagreed, emphasising that the EU was not a state and that therefore it should not go about giving itself external symbols.²⁴ In the end, the draft treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe drawn up in 2004 did no more than recognise the anthem (the *Ode to Joy*) – along with the flag, the motto, the euro and Europe Day – as one of the symbols of the European Union.

The topic cropped up again most recently in the wake of the no votes in the referendums on the constitutional treaty held in France and the Netherlands in May and June 2005 respectively. This double rejection led to the drafting and signing of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007. But under pressure from some Member States, including the UK, the reference to symbols was removed from the text. In response to this, 16 Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia) signed a joint declaration annexed to the new Treaty stating that the symbols, including the anthem,

would, for them, continue as symbols to express the sense of community of the people in the European Union and their allegiance to it. France did the same in 2017. For its part, the European Parliament adopted a [decision on 9 October 2008](#) amending its Rules of Procedure to recognise and espouse the symbols of the Union, including 'the anthem based on the "Ode to Joy" from the Ninth Symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven'. Parliament stipulated that 'the anthem shall be performed at the opening of each constitutive sitting and at other solemn sittings, notably to welcome heads of State or government or to greet new Members following enlargements. In practice, therefore, it is still only the instrumental version of the European anthem that is in use.

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