Symbols of the Union to be adopted by Parliament

The European Union flag, anthem and motto have been formally recognised by the European Parliament. A proposal to amend Parliament's Rules of Procedure so as to formalise its use of these symbols was approved by the Chamber by a large majority. The flag, a circle of twelve golden stars on a blue background, will be displayed in all EP meeting rooms and at EP official events, says the report approved by 503 votes in favour 96 against and 15 abstentions.

During the debate preceding the vote, Mr. Carnier said this decision is "a political message to our citizens: the symbols of the union are alive in the institution that represents 500 million inhabitants".

The anthem, based on the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, is to be performed at the opening ceremony following each European election and at formal sittings.

The motto, "United in diversity", will be reproduced on all Parliament's official documents.

Finally, the celebration of Europe Day on 9 May is also to be formally recognised in Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

Any amendment to the rules of procedure needs an absolute majority of MEPs (i.e. at least 393 votes in favour) to be approved.

**UK and Irish speakers who participated in the debate preceding the vote**

Jim ALLISTER (NI, UK) said that he was not going to trade his anthem and flag for the "tawdry baubles of Eurofederalism.". "Ode to Joy which we are going to purloin may be a very nice tune, but so is Jingle Bells and like Jingle Bells it heralds a fantasy, the fantasy that the EU is good for you. But unlike Jingle Bells, it will damage your national sovereignty and the right to control your own destiny. More, like code to destroy, than Ode to Joy."

Mr Allister said that his constituents do not want an EU flag and an EU anthem. What they do want, he said, is the right to say yes or no to the Lisbon Treaty.

Richard CORBETT (PSE, UK) expressed surprise "at the storm in a teacup" that this change to Parliament’s Rules of Procedure has provoked in some quarters. We know, he said, that the Member States decided some time ago not to elevate the European flag and anthem to treaty status. They decided not to give it such an elevated status but to leave it with its current status. While it has been given recognition by the institutions, we, the European Parliament, have never actually recognised it in our rules. Mr Corbett thought it quite logical that this anomaly be tidied up and a reference to the flag put in
the Rules of Procedure.

Geoffrey VAN ORDEN (EPP-ED, UK) said that while there is constant reassurance that the European Union has no ambition to become a state, yet every resolution and piece of legislation through this Parliament takes us further in that direction. In order to try and sell the Treaty of Lisbon, he said, national negotiators decided that parts of the constitution that could be interpreted as impinging on statehood such as the flag and the hymn should be removed.

Concluding, Mr Van Orden said that his constituents in the east of England "do not want a constitution, they do not want the Treaty of Lisbon and they certainly do not want a state called Europe and I think it is an affront to them to try and introduce or give official character to these symbols."

Andrew DUFF (ALDE, UK) found it strange – tragic even – that the symbols are attacked by people who were formerly from the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. He recalled the flags being waved in the crowds in Tallinn, East Berlin and Budapest, as well as the anthem being played at the Brandenburg Gate. These things, he said, were not imposed or prescribed by parliamentary rules of procedure but were inspired by the hearts and emotions of the citizens. The symbols represent our dignified values of peace and solidarity, he concluded.

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