

Alan Sked on the EU, part two: propaganda and pacifism from a toothless entity

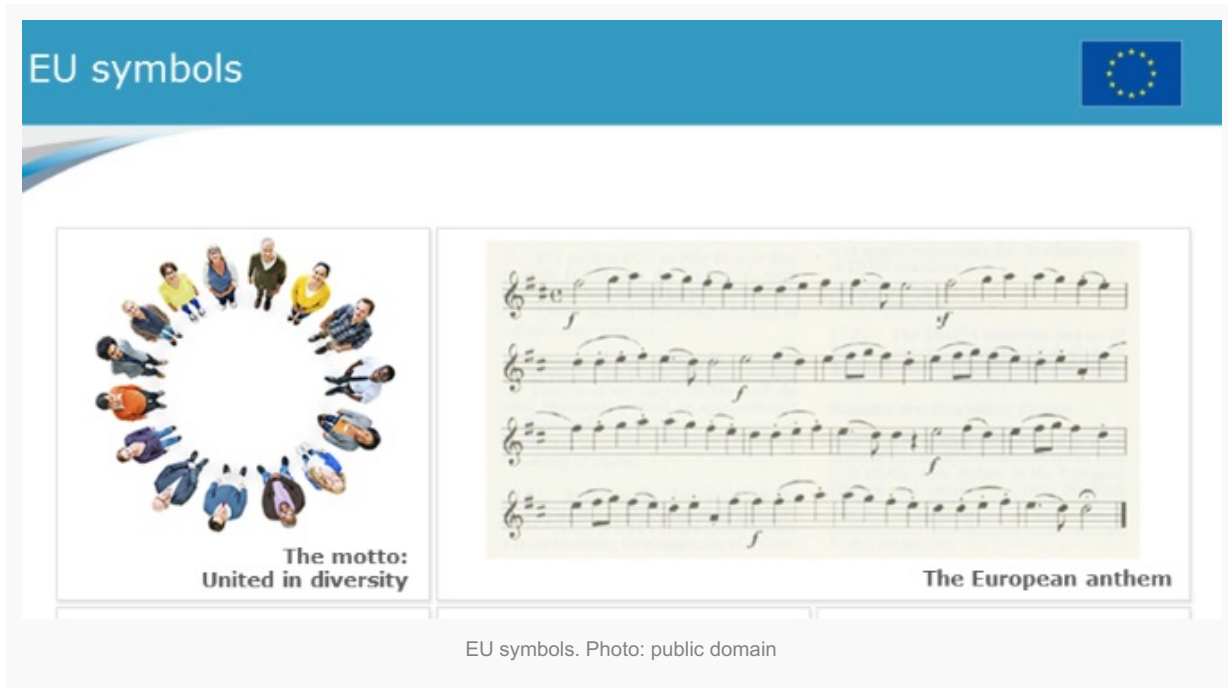
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Since its citizens feel no allegiance to the EU, argues **Alan Sked** in the second of two posts for LSE *BrexitVote*, it promotes an artificial European nationalism through its propaganda arm, DG Communications. This costly exercise – and the EU's pacifist stance – mask a fundamental impotence, which is revealed in the piteous state of the German and Dutch armies.



Despite the dreamers in the pro-European camp, the EU clearly has no notion of 'post-national' politics. It represents no vision of a new international order. It merely sees itself as a new, but – crucially – bigger nation state, desperate to promote an artificial European nationalism through symbols and especially propaganda. This is absolutely vital, for few if any people in Europe wave EU flags about at football matches or popular gatherings. There is no European nation or demos on which to base a European nation-state or democracy.



Hence the observations of that keenest of European commentators, Timothy Garton Ash of Oxford University and the Guardian, [writing last year](#):

'European democracy remains national, and behind that truth is an ever deeper fact: there is hardly any more of a European public sphere today than when I started studying Europe 40 years ago. There is a thin layer of publications that reach a small, educated audience across the continent, but most people still get the bulk of their news and views from national media—even when there is a shared language. In Vienna recently I was told how much of Austrian coverage of Greece differed in tone from that in Germany.'

He continued:

“Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages,” wrote John Stuart Mill, “the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist.” Europe has yet to prove him wrong. I have been in six European countries over the past six weeks, and the lack of fellow-feeling between them has been painful to observe.’

His comments explain the EU’s obsession with propaganda and self-promotion, not to mention its desperate, almost pathetic, yet constant attempts to justify itself. The more these attempts to manufacture an artificial European nationalism fail (*pace* Garton Ash) the more money it spends trying to succeed. Today the EU spends over £500m annually promoting itself and produces thousands of publications, videos, and information campaigns to do so. Its advertising budget is larger than Coca-Cola’s. The budget of the Commission’s [Directorate-General for Communications](#) is actually larger than that of its Directorate-General for the Budget, which employs less than half the staff of the former. The Directorate-General for Trade employs only two-thirds as many staff.



Europe Day in Moldova, 2011. Photo: [JEF Europe](#) via a [CC-BY-NC 2.0 licence](#)

Much of the EU’s propaganda, sadly, is directed at indoctrinating schoolchildren—no doubt on the Jesuit model. For example, the Official Publications Office publishes children’s comic books in order to extol the virtues of the EU in primary schools. According to the Brussels correspondent of the Daily Telegraph (10 August 2015), a comic published in 2000 to promote EU aid work cost £200,000. Another comic book, entitled [On the Road to Victory](#), was commissioned by the EU Directorate-General for the Budget and has a teacher tell a schoolboy: ‘What we must remember is that money that countries invest in the European Union is more useful to all its citizens than if each country spent it individually.’ It is available in 23 different languages.



On the Road to Victory. Photo: Public domain

EU propaganda reaches practically everywhere. For example, in the introduction to his latest work on the EU, *The European Union: An Obituary* (Verso, 2016), Professor John D. Gillingham III, now at the Centre for European Studies at Harvard University, states: 'Directly or indirectly the European Union has funded the bulk of the scholarly literature written about it... The many scholars, commentators, associated experts and like-minded journalists, who have spent careers doing EU research are nearly all devotees of the Euro-cult.'

According to the [Sunday Telegraph](#), even the BBC was discovered to have been the beneficiary of EU funds:

'BBC's Media Action (the broadcaster's charitable arm) was paid £9.3 million between 2011 and 2014, much of it to deliver the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy. As part of this work, BBC Media Action led a consortium of media companies under a three-year project which provided training for hundreds of journalists in 17 countries on the outskirts of Europe.'

Reporters in the scheme attended 'study tours to the EU in Brussels' during which they were able to interview 'top EU policy makers'. The federalist message is spread assiduously.

The EU clearly wants to unite a continent in the same way that 19th century Italian nationalists united a peninsula. And just as they wanted Italy to become a great power, the leaders of the EU would like Europe to become a superpower holding the balance between Russia, the USA and China. [Horst Teltschik](#), the chief foreign policy adviser to the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, used to argue that there should be a world balance of power and that maintaining this is the role of the EU, even though, rather pathetically, it is in relative economic decline, has no armed forces and has a pacifist outlook.

Certainly, its legacy in international affairs is pacifism not peace. According to the Pew Research Centre, for example, a majority of Germans would refuse to fight to defend Poland or the Baltic States. Nor do EU states seem interested in defence. In 2015 the *Scottish Daily Record* reported that 'soldiers are making their own "bang, bang" noises during training because they have no bullets. The Dutch army have been hit by an ammunition shortage and it is feared the playground-like situation could dent morale. Retired Major-General Harm de Jonge said the matter was "extremely serious".'

A Dutch government, it will be recalled, fell from power in 2002 as a result of a damning report into the failure of

Dutch troops to protect 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica from being massacred by Bosnian Serbs in 1995 in the worst single atrocity of the Bosnian war.

Continuing the theme of a lack of interest in defence, in September 2014 a German parliamentary report leaked to the German press and obtained by the Washington Post revealed that only one of Germany's four submarines was operational, that only 70 out of its 180 Boxer tanks were fit for deployment, and that just seven out of the navy's fleet of 43 helicopters were flightworthy. Operations in Africa and Afghanistan had also broken down due to helicopter malfunctions. Such, according to the report, was the shocking state of Germany's military hardware.

All in all, therefore, despite its size, the EU possesses neither international weight nor democratic institutional coherence. One is reminded of Bismarck's jibe about Italy: 'It has a large appetite but poor teeth.'

This is the second of a series of posts by Alan Sked for LSE BrexitVote. It represents the views of the author and not those of the BrexitVote blog, nor the LSE.

[*Alan Sked on the EU, part one: a superstate in the making*](#)

[*Alan Sked on the EU, part three: how Germany came to dominate the EU*](#)

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