

United in diversity:**ANTHEMS AND FLAGS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,**

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Belgium

1. Flag

- Created in 1830 and adopted in 1831



The multiplication of flags, just like the breakdown of Belgian institutional competences, is often disconcerting for the non-expert. In fact, Belgium, which has been a constitutional monarchy since 1830, is today governed jointly by the Federal State, the communities and the regions, each one having its own legislative and executive powers. Brussels-Capital holds the federal parliament (Senate and Chamber of Representatives) as well as the government. The three communities, organised according to language; Dutch, French and German, and the three regions (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels-Capital) have specific institutions. The ten provinces, each one with its own flag, come under the governance of the regions, which also have their own banner.

Lastly, the Belgian monarch, head of State and of the armed forces, is one of the only European kings to participate parsimoniously in some of the executive powers of each entity, including the federal power. The Lion, associated with the motto “United we stand, divided we fall”, and the official flag, allow Belgium to be visible in international fora.

The Belgian flag, which defines the country, is indivisible from the creation of the State. The black-yellow-red vertical bands, with the black at the flagstaff, were made official in 1831.

Legend has it, that these three colours drew their inspiration from the banners displayed during the Brabantian revolution of 1787 and 1790, even though no flag of this type was mentioned at the time in the spoils of war taken from the Dutch armies.

During the summer of 1830, several revolutionary flags blazed in the Brussels sky, thus marking the desire for independence by the Southern provinces in relation to the Dutch possessions. Between 25 and 28 August, a series of banners appeared on the roof of the City Hall. The first flag, inspired by that of France, was quickly replaced by another one with the colours of Brabant, decorated with the iron cross.

Two days later, this was replaced by three horizontal bands of black-yellow-red, made by Marie Abts, who had a fabric shop where she sold canvases and sheets, just a few metres from Grand Place. The yellow (gold) and the red (gules), representing the Golden Lion, and the black bottom (sable) were the colours taken from the coat of arms of the Duchy of Brabant. These three colours, placed horizontally at the time, would be displayed all throughout Brussels by the 1st company of the bourgeois guard which, during the Revolution, maintained order throughout all the country’s main cities. On 30 September, the tricolour flag was instituted by the provisional government and the national congress. The vertical position of the colours was only adopted in 1831, by decree, and the black was then placed at the flagstaff. Today, the flag is always raised on the roof of the City Hall of Brussels. Associated with various celebrations, including the commemoration of the deceased, events in the life of the royal family and some military victories, it is the emblem of the national holiday of 21 July and marks the accession of the first King of Belgium. On 21 July 2013, Brussels was covered in black, yellow and red to celebrate the beginning of the reign of King Philippe, 7th king of Belgium, who succeeded his father King Albert II.

2. Anthem

- *De Brabançonne/Die Brabançonne/Li Braibaçone/La Brabançonne* (The Brabantian)
- Written by Jenneval
- Composed by François Van Campenhout
- Composed in 1830 and adopted in 1921

Belgium is less than 200 years old and a place where Walloons, Flemish and German-speakers rub shoulders. It is through the linguistic diversity and the strong link with the city of Brussels, both strong symbols of the federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy, that the notion of Belgian identity established in 1830 becomes apparent. The *Chant de la Bruxelloise*, composed during the 1830 revolt, would be reworked several times to become the Belgian national anthem, called *La Brabançonne*. This title was given in memory of the former province of Brabant, situated around Brussels.

In 1815, the fall of Napoleon I redefined the contours of Europe, during the Congress of Vienna. Belgium was assigned a Dutch Protestant monarch, William I of Orange. Through his authoritarianism, his meddling in religious affairs and his will to impose his language, he aroused the recriminations of the Catholic bourgeoisie, those of free thinkers and the working classes.

In 1830, at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, the federal building so dear to Belgians, the performance of

the central scene of *La Muette de Portici*, an opera by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber glorifying the revolt of the people of Naples against Spanish domination, provoked the spectators who brought their own revolt onto the street. The final air of *Amour sacré de la patrie* (sacred love for the homeland) drove a yelling crowd onto the streets of Brussels. Further to the anger of the revolters, booing inequalities and taxes, the buildings connected to the House of Orange were ransacked.

La Brabançonne, written by an actor from Lyon, Hippolyte-Louis-Alexandre Dechez, nicknamed Jenneval, and set to music by an inhabitant of Brussels, François Van Campenhout, was sung in French on the Belgian barricades. It was in keeping with the revolutionary rationale that was spreading throughout early 19th-century Europe. The first version, which was strongly pro-Orangist, was quickly modified by the author after the intervention of the Dutch armed forces who were forced to retreat from the Belgian militia and the Volunteer Movement which had gathered the masses from all over the country. The second version openly criticised the armed intervention of the King of the Batavians; the third version of the anthem unequivocally glorified “the holy flag set in Brussels at the foot of the archangel”. The provisional government declared Belgian independence on 4 October 1830. Then, appointed by the National Congress, King Leopold of Saxe-Coburg became the first king of the Belgians on 21 July, a date that became the national holiday.

This version against the Orangists was once again modified, and in 1921 it was officially centred around the fourth and less dissident verse, written by Charles Rogier. The frequently modified score was adopted by official decree in 1873 using the version written by Constantin Bender, in charge of the grenadiers’ music. This fourth verse was sung for the inauguration of the monument to *La Brabançonne*, at Belgium’s centenary celebrations in Brussels. Nowadays, it is played during international ceremonies or for the victory of Belgian athletes. On 21 July 2013, Philippe, the new Belgian King gave the speech for his investiture to the throne in the three national languages. Orchestrations of *La Brabançonne* and the European anthem will be played during various official ceremonies in the future.

De Brabançonne

*O dierbaar België, o heilig land der vaad’ren,
Onze ziel en ons hart zijn U gewijd,
Aanvaard ons kracht en het bloed van ons
aad’ren,
Wees ons doel in arbeid en in strijd,
Bloeï, o land, in eendracht niet te breken,
Wees immer u zelf, en ongeknecht,
Het woord getrouw dat g’ onbevreesd moogt
spreken.
Voor Vorst, voor Vrijheid en voor Recht.
Het woord getrouw dat g’ onbevreesd moogt
spreken.
Voor Vorst, voor Vrijheid en voor Recht,
[Voor Vorst, voor Vrijheid en voor Recht. (Bis)]*

Die Brabançonne

*O liebes Land, o Belgiens Erde,
Dir unser Herz, Dir unsere Hand,
Dir unser Blut, dem Heimatherde,
Wir schwören’s Dir, o Vaterland!
So blühe froh in voller Schöne,
Zu der die Freiheit Dich erzog,
Und fortan singen Deine Söhne;
Gesetz und König und die Freiheit hoch!
Und fortan singen Deine Söhne;
Gesetz und König und die Freiheit hoch!
Gesetz und König und die Freiheit hoch!
(bis)*

La Brabançonne

*Ô Belgique! Ô Mère chérie!
À toi nos cœurs, à toi nos
bras
À toi notre sang, ô Patrie
Nous le jurons, tous, tu vivras
Tu vivras, toujours grande et
belle
Et ton invincible unité
Aura pour devise immortelle
Le Roi, la Loi, la Liberté
Aura pour devise immortelle
Le Roi, la Loi, la Liberté
Le Roi, la Loi, la Liberté (Bis)*

The Brabantian

O Belgium, O mother dear
To you we stretch our hearts and
arms,
With blood to spill for you, O
motherland!
We all swear it, you shall live!
You shall live, so great and beautiful,
And your invincible unity
Shall have for immortal motto
The King, Law, and Liberty!
Shall have for immortal motto
The King, Law, and Liberty!
The King, Law, and Liberty!
The King, Law, and Liberty!

