

United in diversity:

ANTHEMS AND FLAGS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

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Studies & Reports No 102, Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013.

Estonia

1. Flag

- Created in 1881 and adopted in 1918, then in 1989

In 1881, the Estonian Students' Society of the University of Tartu, known as *Vironia*, adopted the blue, white and black as the colours of the association. These colours, which were extensively deployed during national song festivals, were soon considered as those of the nation and were chosen by the independent nation in 1920.



One is tempted to link these colours to those of the symbolically natural elements: blue being the colour of the sky, black that of the earth and white that of snow. References to the values of the Estonian culture and people are also often evoked: blue symbolising loyalty to the homeland, black representing dedication despite the sufferings endured (or sometimes the colour of the jackets worn by the farming forefathers), and lastly the white marking faith in the future and the desire for freedom.

It is useful to mention that the national bird is the swallow and the national flower is the cornflower. When the colours of these two symbols are united, the three national colours are formed. This allowed the Estonians to fly the colours of the flag from as far back as the 1960s, this flag being forbidden by the Soviet authorities. The flag was once again flown over the tower of Tallin Castle in 1989, thus substantiating the sovereignty regained by this republic.

Since the latest independence of 1990, several modification proposals have been made, including that of including the Nordic cross on the flag. The idea is undoubtedly linked to that of ridding oneself from the image of the former Soviet Union (three horizontal stripes) in order to take on that of a Nordic affinity, but these suggestions have not received popular support.

While the origin of the flag must be sought in the nationalist movement, it remains clear that the interpretation of the colours chosen reveals elements of cultural values in particular.

2. Anthem

- *Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm*
(My native land, my joy and delight)
- Written by Johann Voldemar Jannsen
- Composed by Friedrich Pacius
- Composed in 1869 and adopted in 1920, then in 1990

This song has a specific cosmopolitanism: on music composed by Friedrich Pacius, a German living in Helsinki, the melody is also that of the Finnish national anthem. Granted, the lyrics distinguish the anthems of these two countries, separated by the Baltic Sea and its Gulf of Finland but bestowed with strong historical ties. In addition to the common Finno-Ugric origins, both countries have undergone the same influences of Danish, German and especially Swedish and Russian domination. They are tied by strong tropism, despite rivalry between their two capital cities, Helsinki and Tallin, which face each other across the sea.

Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm

*Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm,
Kui kaunis oled sa!
Ei leia mina ial teal
See suure laia ilma peal,
Mis mul nii armas oleks ka
Kui sa, mu isamaa!*

*Sa oled mind ju sünnitand
Ja üles kasvatand;
Sind tänan mina alati
Ja jään sull' truuiks surmani,
Mul kõige armsam oled sa,
Mu kallis isamaa!*

*Su üle Jumal valvaku,
Mu armas isamaa!
Ta olgu sinu kaitseja
Ja võtku rohkest õnnista,
Mis ial ette võtad sa,
Mu kallis isamaa!*

My native land, my joy and delight

My native land, my joy and delight,
How fair thou art and bright!
And nowhere in the world all round
Can ever such a place be found
So well beloved as I love thee,
My native country dear!

My little cradle stood on ground soil,
Whose blessings ease my toil.
With my last breath my thanks to thee,
For true to death I'll ever be,
O worthy, most beloved and fine,
Thou, dearest country mine!

May God in Heaven watch over thee,
My best, my dearest land!
May He be guard, may He be shield,
For ever may He bless and wield
O graciously all deeds of thine,
Thou dearest country mine!

The poet Johann Jannsen was leader of a choral society which organised the first nationwide Song Festival in Tartu in 1869. This type of choral festival was extremely developed in the Baltic countries, where the people share a passion for group singing. Under the impetus of Jakob Hurt, collector of elements of Estonian folklore, the Tallin Festival of 1896 gathered almost one fifth of the total population. This love for singing and the national language was reflected more recently during the mass rally of 1988 when they sang forbidden nationalist anthems against the Soviet presence in their country. This period naturally became known as the 'singing revolution'.

During the Soviet era, this anthem had been banned. But radio access to the same melody coming from Finland allowed the Estonians to preserve this anthem, which had remained in people's minds. The replacement of this song with another more typically Estonian one has not yet happened.

