

United in diversity:

ANTHEMS AND FLAGS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

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Republic of Finland

1. Flag

- Created in 1870
and adopted in 1918

The Finnish flag, as its name indicates *Siniristilippu* (blue cross flag), shows a blue Scandinavian cross on a white background. In 1870, the Finnish poet Zacharias Topelius drew a flag that resembled today's flag. He said at that time that the blue reflected the lakes of Finland and the white represented the snow of Finnish winters. The Scandinavian cross, with its vertical part shifted to the hoist side, is based on the *Dannebrog*, the oldest Nordic flag. This cross, is the common element of the flags of the Nordic countries, and also appears on the flags of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland.



In 1917, when Finland claimed its independence from Russia, a competition was launched to create a new flag. The Finnish artists, Eero Snellman and Bruno Tuukkanen designed the flag as we know it today. It was adopted in 1918. The official flags, for example the President's flag, the flag of the embassies or that of the army all bear the national crest at the intersection of the branches of the cross. It is a crest from the 16th century, a period when Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden under king Gustav Vasa. This crest shows a crowned lion, walking on a saber and brandishing a sword. On the red background, nine roses can be seen, representing the nine historical provinces of Finland. This crest was reintroduced in 1917.

A 1978 law determined the use of the flag. Custom has it that as the flag should never be damaged or dirtied, it must be burned immediately if it touches the ground.

On 23 June, day of the feast of Saint John (*Juhannus*), is also the feast day of the flag of Finland. It is the only day in the year when it is authorised to fly the Finnish flag during the night, which is of course short at this time of the year, or even absent in the Great North.

2. Anthem

- *Maamme* (Our Land)
- Written by Johan Ludvig Runeberg
- Composed by Friedrich Pacius
- Created in 1846 and adopted in 1917

The text of the anthem was written by the Finnish poet Runeberg in Swedish in 1846, as at that time Finnish was only authorised for religious and economic works. Between 1239 and 1809, Finland was closely linked to the Kingdom of Sweden, which played a dominant role so much so that Swedish was the official language.

Vårt land, later called *Maamme* in Finnish, is the opening poem of a collection of stories by Runeberg entitled “The Tales of Ensign Stål”. In these, the author tells of the misery and courage of the Finnish soldiers mobilised in the army of the Kingdom of Sweden during the war against the Russian Empire, which ended in defeat for Sweden. Nature and landscapes are the setting for Runeberg’s tales. After the turbulent period of history that had an impact on Finland, the reference to nature became a central point of Finnish identity in the making. Some theories suggest that Runeberg’s text is modelled on the Hungarian national anthem. This is possible, as the Hungarian anthem was published in a Helsinki newspaper, shortly before Runeberg wrote the Finnish anthem.

Many of Runeberg’s poems were taken up by Finnish patriotic and nationalistic movements. *Vårt land* was sung for the first time in 1848 by a group of students to the air of Friedrich Pacius, conductor and composer of German origin who spent most of his life in Finland. But it was only some 20 years later, once the song had become established as national, that Julius Krohn developed an adaptation of the anthem in the Finnish language, which was henceforth called *Maamme*.

In 1917, with the end of Russian domination (1809 to 1917), the song became the country’s national anthem. However, the traditional use of the song since the mid-19th century, made it the Finnish anthem without its ever becoming official. Today, the first and last verses of the anthem are usually sung. From time to time, there is debate on replacing the anthem with the song *Finlandia* by Jean Sibelius. The symphonic poem of this composer, himself extremely attached to the Finnish identity, is the unofficial Finnish anthem of sorts, or at least the Finnish people have a deep attachment to it.

Maamme

*Oi maamme, Suomi, synnyinmaa!
Soi, sana kultainen!
Ei laaksoa, ei kukkula,
ei vettä rantaa rakkaampaa
kuin kotimaa tä’ä pohjoinen.
Maa kallis isien.*

...

*Sun kukoistukses’ kuorestaan,
kerrankin puhkeaa.
Viel’ lempemme saa nousemaan,
sun toivos’, riemus’ loistossaan.
Ja kerran laulus’, synnyinmaa,
korkeimman kaiun saa.*

Our Land

Our land, Finland, land of our birth,
Sound loud, O name of worth!
No mount that meets the heaven’s band,
No hidden vale, no wave-washed strand
Is loved, as is our native North,
Our own forefathers’ earth.

...

Your blossom, in the bud laid low,
Yet ripened shall upspring.
See! From our love once more shall grow
Your light, your joy, your hope, your glow
And clearer yet one day shall ring
The song our land shall sing.

