

United in diversity:

## ANTHEMS AND FLAGS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

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# Slovakia

## 1. Flag

- Appeared in 1848,  
adopted in 1993

The colours white, blue and red on the Slovak flag are typical of countries that found inspiration in pan-Slavism, a romantic movement which argued that the Slavs, all being chips off a single block, were destined eventually to found a united community. Most of the movement's adepts thought that the union would firm up around the Russian "big brother". Thus the Slovaks began to use these three colours in the popular uprisings of 1848.



Pan-Slav colours being insufficient to characterise a nation, and even less to differentiate it from its Slav neighbours who use the same colour codes, however, the distinctive national shield added to the flag after partition from the Czech Republic in 1993 hosts two historical and geographical symbols: the white patriarchal cross and its setting, the country's three legendary mountain tops. The mountains in question are the Tatra, Fatra and Mátra mountains, although we should note that the last of these is now in Hungarian territory.

The emblem of a cross on mountain tops first appeared in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a symbol of Upper Hungary, because Slovakia was under Hungarian control at the time, and indeed had been so since the 10<sup>th</sup> century. An integral part of the Habsburg Empire, but not of the Holy Roman Empire the way Bohemia and Moravia both were, present-day Slovakia was given to the Hungarian crown after the historic compromise of 1867 that led to the partition of the empire between the Austrians and the Hungarians. Equivalent symbols are to be found on the Hungarian flag, bearing witness to the two countries' long shared history.

The country also shared a common history with its Czech neighbour which began in 1918, was interrupted by the Second World War, and was restored under communism. After Soviet "normalisation" in 1968, a pseudo-federation was set up allowing the Slovaks a greater degree of autonomy. The state became binational and bilingual, but this was really nothing more than a façade because real power remained firmly in the hands of the Communist Party. The Czechs and the Slovaks separated again in 1993, yet they rediscovered their shared history once again when they joined the European Union on 2004.

## 2. Anthem

- *Nad Tatrou sa blýska* – (Lightning Over the Tatras)
- Written by Janko Matúška – Folk tune
- Composed in 1844 and adopted in 1993

The Slovakian national anthem comprises the two first verses of the song *Nad Tatrou sa blýska*, written by a poet named Janko Matúška in 1844. The verses became famous during the uprising of 1848 against the Hungarians, but they did not make their official appearance until 1851. The author was a pupil

of Ľudovít Štúr, a famous sponsor of the Slovakian literary and political movement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and well-known for his codification of the Slovak language. He spread the concept of nationhood, taking his inspiration from the work of German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder who based his vision of the nation on shared soil and a shared language.

The poem maps out Slovakia's geographical boundaries by evoking the nature and beauty of the Slovakian mountains, the Tatras chain, to symbolise the country as a whole. It also has a combative, warlike character appropriate to the Slovakian mood and a tragic tension between doubt and hope that is amplified by the stormy landscape. At the time the poem was originally composed, the term *Slovensko* had a dual meaning, shifting between the land and the people.

These two verses were to be supplemented by the second part of the Czechoslovak anthem in 1918. The defeat of the Austro-Hungarian armies having led to the breakup of the empire, the new Republic was proclaimed on 28 October 1918, while the borders of Slovakia were officially established for the very first time by the Treaty of Trianon signed in 1920. They are based on ethnic, economic and strategic rather than historical criteria. Ruthenia was later to be assigned to Ukraine.

When the Republic split in 1993, the Slovaks took back their part of the shared anthem and declared it their own national anthem that same year.

### • *Nad Tatrou sa blýska*

*Nad Tatrou sa blýska, hromy  
divo bijú  
zastavme ich bratia,  
veď sa oni stratia,  
Slováci ožijú.*

*To Slovensko naše posiaľ tvrdo  
spalo.  
ale blesky hromu  
vzbudzujú ho k tomu,  
aby sa prebralo*

### • **Lightning Over the Tatras**

There is lightning over the Tatras, thunders loudly sound.

Let us stop them, brothers,  
After all they will disappear,  
The Slovaks will revive.

That Slovakia of ours had been sleeping till now.

But the thunder's lightnings  
Are rousing the land,  
To awaken it.

