

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

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# Sweden

## 1. Flag

- Created in 1663  
and adopted in 1906

The Swedish flag with the Scandinavian Cross on a blue background was adopted in its present form in 1906. A legend informs us that, during the Swedish crusades in Finland, King Eric IX of Sweden (“Eric the Saint”) looked up at the blue sky and saw the sun take the shape of a cross, the occurrence prompting him to adopt a blue banner with a golden cross. There is, however, no written evidence to suggest that the Swedes ever crusaded in Finland, or indeed that the flag in question was ever used before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But having said that, there is a seal dated 1449 displaying a golden cross on a blue background...



The Swedish flag in the 14<sup>th</sup> century comprised a banner with three golden crowns on a royal blue background, but by the 16<sup>th</sup> century the crowns had been replaced by a golden cross, possibly a reference to the country’s throwing off the Danish yoke. Some scholars have suggested that King Johann III ordered the Scandinavian Cross to be applied to banners and flags in 1559, but be that as it may, a law in 1663 formalised the flag as we know it today. The use of the Scandinavian Cross, akin to that of the *Dannebrog* on the flag of Denmark, can be explained by Danish rule in Sweden at the time. Over the centuries the Scandinavian Cross was to appear on a number of Swedish flags, initially in gold but this was changed over the years to several different shades of yellow for practical purposes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the king of Sweden also ruled over Norway, a fact reflected in the kingdom’s flag which at the time comprised the national flags of both countries.

In 1906, a year after Norway won its independence from Sweden, the Swedish flag took on its present format. It is distinct from the Swedish naval jack, which is a triple-tailed variant on the theme. Sweden decreed in 2005 that 6 June would henceforth be official “Flag Day” in memory of the enthronement of Gustav Vasa, of the adoption of the Constitution, and of the law on freedom of speech approved in 1809. The flag is both a national symbol and an emblem of the royal family, which gives it dual importance and significance in the eyes of the Swedish people.

The flag is flown in both public and private venues from 8 o’clock in the morning until 9 o’clock in the evening from March to October, while for the rest of the year it is only raised at 9 o’clock in the morning.

## 2. Anthems

### 1. *Kungssången* (The King's Song)

- Written by C.W.A. Strandberg and composed by Otto Lindblad
- Composed in 1844 and adopted in 1893

### 2. *Sång till Norden*

(Song for the North)

- Written by Richard Dybeck and composed by Edvin Kallstenius
- Composed in 1844 and adopted in 1922

Sweden, like Denmark and Norway, has two official national anthems, one a national anthem proper and the other a royal anthem. The latter, written for the investiture of King Oscar I in 1844, is Sweden's main anthem and it pays tribute to the king of Sweden, the symbol of the nation. The melody, while not especially typical of Nordic music, is a rousing march that is both catchy and easy to sing, yet its popularity has waned down the years. Today it is still sung in the royal family's presence or at official state events such as, for instance, the opening of parliament. Only the first and fifth verses are sung, while the first is intoned only in the king's presence. Sweden formerly used other royal anthems such as *Bevare Gud vår kung*, written by Abraham Niclas Edelcrantz and sung to the tune of the British national anthem, or *Gustafs skål*, written by Carl Mickael Bellman during the reign of Swedish King Gustav III (1771-1792).

The anthem entitled *Du gamla, Du fria* or *Sång till Norden* was written by Richard Dybeck and sung for the first time in 1844, the same year as the royal anthem. Based on a popular Nordic melody which is also well-known in Finland and northern Germany, this song made its first appearance in a book of popular songs in 1845 and was rapidly adopted by the people both in schools and in their homes. During the 1850s the pan-Scandinavian movement, whose aim was to promote the unification of the Nordic countries, was going from strength to strength, and indeed the anthem's familiar name, "Song for the North", reflects a pan-Nordic rather than a specifically Swedish vision. The lyrics reaffirm at once both the store set by freedom (*fria* = free) and the desire to highlight a shared Scandinavian culture, referring as it does to numerous specifically Nordic details such as the mountains, the sky, the green fields, silence and so on.

#### **Kungssånge**

*Ur svenska hjärtans djup en gång  
en samfäll och en enkel sång,  
som går till kungen fram!  
Var honom trofast och hans ätt,  
gör kronan på hans hjässa lätt,  
och all din tro till honom sätt,  
du folk av frejdad stam!*

#### **Sång till Norden**

*Du gamla, du fria, du fjällhöga  
Nord,  
du tysta, du glädjerika sköna!  
Jag hälsar dig, vänaste land uppå  
jord,  
din sol, din himmel, dina ängder  
gröna (bis)  
  
Du tronar på minnen från  
fornstora dar,  
då ärat Ditt namn flög över  
jorden.  
Jag vet att Du är och Du blir vad  
Du var.  
Ja, jag vill leva jag vill dö i Norden.*

#### **The King's Song (Royal Anthem)**

Once from the depths of Swedish hearts,  
a joint and a simple song,  
which reaches forth to the King!  
Be faithful to Him and his House,  
make the Crown light upon his Head,  
and all your faith in Him invest,  
you, people of high renown!

#### **Song for the North**

Thou ancient, thou free, thou  
mountainous North  
Thou quiet, thou joyful and fair!  
I greet thee, most beautiful land upon  
earth,  
Thy sun, Thy sky, Thy meadows green  
(rpt).  
  
Thou art enthroned upon memories  
of great olden days,  
When honored thy name flew across the  
earth,  
I know that thou art and wilt remain  
what thou wast,  
Yes, I want to live I want to die in  
the North.

