

United in diversity:

ANTHEMS AND FLAGS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

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Czech Republic

1. Flag

- Created and adopted in 1920, then in 1993



Bohemia, the most important region in the Czech Republic, has had a white and red coat of arms, similar to those of numerous central European countries such as Austria and Poland, for centuries.

A flag comprising two horizontal bands, one red and one white, made its appearance during the “Springtime of the Peoples” that rocked the established order in Europe in 1848, embodying a claim to autonomy in the heart of the vast Habsburg domains, although only the region’s Hungarian neighbours were to benefit from it.

At the end of the First World War, central Europe, with its borders redrawn, saw the birth of a Czechoslovak state embracing Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. The Czechoslovak state’s independence was proclaimed on Wenceslaus Square on 28 October 1918. Tomáš Masaryk was one of the leading players involved in building this state, along with Edvard Beneš and with Milan Rastislav Štefánik from Slovakia, after an intense lobbying campaign with the Allies. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk became Czechoslovakia’s first president, holding office from 1918 to 1935.

Following the work of a special committee, a tricolour flag was chosen, and blue, representing Slovakia, appeared in the form of a triangle along the shaft. Thus the three colours together evoked the concept of pan-Slavism.

The flag remained in common use until the partition on 1 January 1993, which gave birth to two separate countries: the Czech Republic (including Moravia) and Slovakia. In the meantime, however, the image of the flag had become known around the world on account of its being spattered with blood during the “Prague Spring” in 1968 when Alexander Dubček sought to lead his country towards “socialism with a human face”. Russia responded harshly to this attempt in August 1968, triggering a rapid “normalisation” process under the aegis of Gustáv Husák. A student named Jan Palach set fire to himself on Wenceslaus Square in January 1969 in protest against this return to Soviet standards.

The flag became a symbol of purity once again in 1989, during the “Velvet Revolution” which was to bring full independence. Writer and philosopher Vaclav Havel embodied the period that put paid to communist power in the country. He was elected president of the Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1989, and subsequently of the Czech Republic in 1993. The Czech Republic kept the common flag, with blue now representing the region of Moravia.

The colour white sits at the top of the flag, reminding us that the froth on a glass of beer, the national beverage *par excellence*, always sits at the top of the glass.

2. Anthem

- *Kde domov můj?*
(Where Is My Homeland?)
- Written by Josef Kajetán Tyl
- Composed by Frantisek Jan Škroup
- Composed in 1834 and adopted in 1918, then in 1993

Although the Czech language existed as long ago as the 14th century, its development proper owes a huge debt to John Amos Comenius, a Moravian philosopher charged with educating the young Protestants, including girls, in the religious community founded around the figure of Jan Hus. Both Hus and Comenius were staunchly in favour of education for boys and girls. Prague was a culturally lively capital in the 18th century, as we can see from the reception that it afforded to Mozart's operas. In the following century, Johann Gottfried von Herder's ideas regarding the development of national identities found favour with the intellectuals struggling against "Germanisation".

In 1834, Josef Kajetán Tyl and František Ján Skroup became fully-fledged educators, using popular theatre to foster patriotism. Their play entitled *Fidlovačka* (The Shoemakers' Festival) was hugely popular and one of its pieces, *Kde domov můj?*, became the national song. With its melancholy sobriety and picturesque imagery, it embodies the character of a nation. It was immediately taken up by the people and became so popular with them that its author resisted all attempts to replace it.

The composer Bedrich Smetana refused to make any further changes. Widely known and appreciated for his celebrated music in "The Bartered Bride" and for his symphonic poem entitled "Vltava" (or "The Moldau"), it is three of this celebrated musician's operas that illustrate the history of the Czech lands: "Dalibor" evokes the cause of the people against royal authority; "The Brandenburgers in Bohemia" evokes the poverty that took hold of Bohemia when it was enslaved, pillaged and "protected" by the Margrave of Brandenburg's troops; and "Libuše" tells of a princess who, when seeking a husband, allowed her white horse to make the choice for her, and he led her to the farmer Přemysl (whose dynasty proudly included "Good King" Wenceslaus).

The legend of Libuše is mentioned as early as the 12th century by the chronicler Cosmas, who tells the story of a Slav chieftain named Cech, Libuše's supposed ancestor, settling his people in Bohemia well before the Germanic tribes!

Kde domov můj?

*Kde domov můj?
Kde domov můj?
Voda hučí po lučinách,
Bory šumí po skalínách,
V sadě skví se jara květ,
Zemský ráj to na pohled!
A to je ta krásná země,
Země česká domov můj,
Země česká domov můj!*

Where Is My Homeland?

Where is my home,
where is my home?
Water roars across the meadows,
Pinewoods rustle among crags,
Bloom of spring shines in the orchard,
Paradise on earth it is to see.
And this is that beautiful land,
The Czech land, my home,
The Czech land, my home.

