

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

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# Greece

## 1. Flag

- Created in 1822  
and adopted in 1978

The Greeks call their national flag *galanolefki*, which means “blue and white”. It is made up of 9 equal horizontal white and blue stripes with a white cross on a blue background in the upper hoist-side corner. The blue represents the sky and the sea and the white represents purity, symbol of the struggle for independence. The cross bears witness to the Orthodox Christian tradition of Greece. The nine stripes represent the nine syllables of the motto used during the wars of liberation of 1821 (“Freedom or Death”), stemming from the revolutionary movements of the Orthodox Christians against Ottoman domination.



The colours of the national flag have evolved very little since 1822, the date on which the National Assembly decreed, some two years after Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire, that the new emblem would be made up of a white cross on a blue background. Established in 1828, the flag with nine stripes was reserved for use abroad until 1970, and it coexisted with the blue flag with the white cross which was used only in Greece.

The proclamation of the Greek State was ratified by the British, French and Russian representatives during the London Conference of 1830, and authorised by Prussia and Austria. However, France and Russia kept a certain influence over the new State and imposed the Bavarian King Otto I on the young republic. He was replaced by George I in 1863 who reigned until 1913. During the reign of Otto I, the blue shade of the flag was coordinated with that of the Bavarian coat of arms of the House of Wittelsbach. Before the definitive abolition of the monarchy in 1974, the flag was sometimes decorated with a crown.

Between 1967 and 1974, during the “Regime of the Colonels”, the military junta used a much darker blue. Following the reestablishment of the parliamentary republic in 1975, the banner, which is still used today, was established in 1978.

In order to pay tribute to Ancient Greece, the flag is traditionally flown with that of the host country of the upcoming Olympic Games, during the closing ceremony. This is why at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, two Greek flags were flown side by side to announce the Athens Games in 2004.

## 2. Anthem

- *Ύμνος εις την Ελευθερίαν*  
(Hymn to Liberty)
- Written by Dionysios Solomos  
and composed by Nikolaos Mantzaros
- Created in 1823 and adopted in 1865

With some 158 stanzas and 576 verses, the “Hymn to Liberty” by Dionysios Solomos is the longest anthem in the world. It was written in 1823 and then later associated with the composition by Nikolaos Mantzaros. Only the first four stanzas were decreed as national anthem in 1865, several years after the death of Solomos.

### • *Ύμνος εις την Ελευθερίαν*

• Σε γνωρίζω από την κόψη,  
• Του σπαθιού την τρομερή,  
• Σε γνωρίζω από την όψη,  
• Που με βια μετράει τη γη.

• Απ’ τα κόκαλα βγαλμένη,  
• των Ελλήνων τα ιερά,  
• Και σαν πρώτα ανδρειωμένη,  
• Χαίρε, ω χαίρε Ελευθεριά.

### • Hymn to Liberty

I shall always recognise you  
By the dreadful sword you hold  
as the Earth with searching vision  
You survey with spirit bold.

From the Greeks of old whose dying  
Brought to life and spirit free,  
Now with ancient valour rising,  
Let us hail you, oh Liberty! (x3)

The poem is full of images and metaphors, such as “the Spanish lion”, “the British leopard” or even the “Italian eagle”. It recalls a multitude of historic events, and not necessarily in chronological order. As a witness of a eventful historic times, Solomos, in his poem, calls into question the acts of the powerful, who were above all interested in preserving their privileges. In this way, the anthem reflects the events of the Greek Revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire.

Born on the Ionian island of Zakynthos, which was then under British control, Solomos’ native language was modern Greek, as opposed the ancient Greek spoken by the government, religious ministers and all the administrative nobility. The poet considered the popular language (*demotika*) as representative of the nation and wrote his poems in this form. His work was not limited to the “Hymn to Liberty”. He also established the “Heptanesian School” where he imposed modern Greek to all of Greece, despite much resistance, thus contributing to national unity.

The almost musical verses of this poem are enhanced by Mantzaros’s melody. This composer, who was a great admirer of Solomos’ work, met the poet in 1827, when he was settling in Corfu, the Ionian town that had become the refuge of Greek intellectuals. Many of his European counterparts also admired his poetry. Goethe, Manzoni and even Victor Hugo praised the rhythmic and harmonic qualities of this “Hymn to Liberty”. Mantzaros, who had been taught at the Conservatory of Naples, remained attached to the Italian musical style and composed the melody in 1844. He composed six versions of it, before the third one, with a lively, light military rhythm was chosen as the official version.

Used for the first time in 1845 during social meetings in Athens, this song thus became patriotic. George I liked the melody and declared it national anthem of Greece in 1864. An 1865 decree made it official.

Since 1966, this anthem is also sung by the Greek population of the Republic of Cyprus. Nowadays, it is not only used on festive Greek occasions, but it is also used during the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, thus paying tribute to Ancient Greece, the birthplace of the Games.

