

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

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Italy

1. Flag

- Created in 1797
and adopted in 1948

The origin of the Italian flag is linked to the Napoleonic era in the peninsula. The Republics of Northern Italy, set up after 1796, chose the current colours of green, white and red to compose their banner. At that time, the first Italian campaign launched from France by the Directoire in 1796 was conducted by General Bonaparte and resulted in such famous battles as Arcole or Rivoli. Two Republics founded in the north and called the Cispadanian and Transpadanian Republics were soon merged into a single Cisalpine Republic with Milan for capital.



The inspiration for the flag comes from France but green, the symbolic colour of the Emilia-Romagna region, took the place of blue for a number of reasons: it was the basic colour of the Lombard National Guard's uniform and also of the cockade that that militia group wore in its early days. Napoleon is also said to influence the change, some reports even claiming that he personally designed a crest to add to the banner.

The flag was updated during the uprising of 1848 and the years immediately thereafter. It was adopted by the new kingdom of Italy in conjunction with the coat of arms of the House of Savoy, which had reigned over Piedmont-Sardinia until that time but which now ruled the whole of Italy. The royal crest was to be removed only in 1946 when the royal family was exiled for having hobnobbed with Fascism, and the Italian flag acquired the republican form that it maintains to this day.

Several other explanations have been ventured regarding the choice of colours, based on different aspects of Italian culture. One is inspired by the *Divine Comedy*, where Dante calls green the colour of hope, white the colour of faith and red the colour of charity. The version peddled to schoolchildren, on the other hand, tells us that green is the colour of the plains, white that of the peaks of the Alps and Appenine mountains and red that of the blood shed for Italian independence and unity.

In a more anecdotic vein, the three colours are frequently seen together in such typical dishes as *spaghetti pomodoro e basilico* (with tomato sauce and basil) or *pizza margherita*, though such images have more to do with contemporary culture than with history.

Another colour symbolising Italy but not in the national flag is the national sports teams' blue. The origin of this choice of colour dates back to the House of Savoy, which reigned over Italy from 1861 to 1946. Blue framed a white cross on a red ground on the dynasty's crest and national sports teams have been donning the colour since 1911, maintaining it even after the monarchy was exiled.

2. Anthem

- *Il canto degli Italiani (Fratelli d'Italia)*
(The Song of the Italians)
- Written by Goffredo Mameli
- Composed by Michele Novarro
- Composed in 1847 and adopted in 1946

The Song of the Italians is associated with the troubled era of the *Risorgimento* which began with the first uprisings in 1820, when such figures as Giuseppe Mazzini, Camillo Cavour and Giuseppe Garibaldi (whose fighting ranks Goffredo Mameli was to join) set out from Victor Emmanuel II's kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia to pursue a struggle that was eventually to lead to the unity of the Italian peninsula. Italy at the time consisted of seven states, but only two of them were not subject to foreign rule.

Mameli imbues this song, with which the soldiers fighting for unity found it easy to identify, with all the passion and spontaneity of a young twenty-year-old combatant.

The lyrics, penned in Genoa in 1847, are filled with historical references from all ages exalting the spirit of unity, and are directed in particular against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Taking the place of the *Marcia Reale*, the anthem of the (erstwhile) reigning House of Savoy, the song was adopted as the country's national anthem in 1946 to mark the birth of the Italian Republic. The choice was not officially endorsed by parliament, however, until 2005, in the wake of a heated debate between the two ends of the political spectrum over the aggressiveness implicit in several of the couplets.

This anthem, however, has never caused the Italian people to forget their attachment to the work of composer Giuseppe Verdi, the letters of whose surname can be taken as an acronym for *Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia*. This symbolic association, in addition to the texts of Verdi's operas, makes it easy to understand the Italian people's love of such arias as the Slaves' Chorus *Va pensiero in the opera Nabucco*, or of such lesser-known operas as *I Lombardi*, *La Battaglia di Legnano* and *Attila*. In the latter opera the Roman general Ezio tells Attila: "You may have the entire universe as long as Italy remains to me!" Rousing stuff, almost tailor-made to stir the crowds, whether opera-lovers or otherwise, in those rebellious times.

Mazzini naturally wanted to involve Verdi in the creation of the Song of the Italians. And the composer himself wrote an "anthem of the nations" for the International Exhibition in London in 1862, combining passages from *God Save the Queen*, the *Marseillaise* and *Fratelli d'Italia*, thus *de facto* presenting Italy as a valuable member of the community of respectable nations. But the fact remains that it was penned by a young, committed and convinced patriot, and that despite occasionally being eclipsed or called into question, it is embraced by today's Italians as much as it was by their rebellious forebears a century and a half ago.

• *Fratelli d'Italia*

• *Fratelli d'Italia*
• *L'Italia s'è desta*
• *Dell'elmo di Scipio*
• *S'è cinta la testa*
• *Dov'è la vittoria?!*
• *Le porga la chioma*
• *Che schiava di Roma*
• *Iddio la creò,*
• *Iddio la creò.*

• *Stringiamci a coorte*
• *Siam pronti alla morte*
• *Siam pronti alla morte*
• *L'Italia chiamò.*
• *Stringiamci a coorte*
• *Siam pronti alla morte*
• *Siam pronti alla morte*
• *L'Italia chiamò!*

• *Song of the Italians*

Brothers of Italy,
Italy has woken,
Bound Scipio's helmet
Upon her head.
Where is Victory?
Let her bow down,
For God created her
Slave of Rome.

Let us join in a cohort,
We are ready to die.
We are ready to die,
Italy has called.
Let us join in a cohort,
We are ready to die.
We are ready to die,
Italy has called!

