

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

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Lithuania

1. Flag

- Created in 1918
and adopted in 1988

The flag in its present form was designed by a state commission and officially approved in 1918, shortly after Lithuania won its independence from its powerful neighbours. Banned during subsequent periods of domination, first under the Germans and then under the Soviets, it was legalised again in 1988.



When it was first designed, the colours chosen were yellow to symbolise the sun, light and prosperity, green to symbolise the beauty of nature, freedom and hope, and red to recall the earth, the courage and the blood spilt for the homeland. Naturally, the yellow symbolising the sun was set at the top of the flag.

It was updated by the Sajūdis, the movement for the independence of Lithuania, in 1988. The Lithuanian people earned the right to display their flag, to sing their national anthem and to wear their traditional costumes, none of which were perceived by the Lithuanians as merely authorised folklore but as fully-fledged rights, symbols laden with substance embodying the liberation of the people and a common heritage on which to build the nation's unity. Over the following years the Lithuanians were to witness an alternation of nationalist protests and Russia reaction, at a time when the Soviet Union was itself being rocked by the collapse of its allied bloc in central and Eastern Europe. After the bloody but abortive grab for power in Vilnius attempted by Mikhail Gorbachev, the then president of the USSR, in January 1991, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin recognized the Baltic states' independence and it was officially accepted a few months later. The last Russian troops departed Lithuanian soil in August 1993.

While Lithuanian national day on 16 February marks the date of the country's declaration of independence in 1918, "Flag Day" on 1 January commemorates the day when the flag was first raised on a tower in Vilnius in 1919.

In addition to the official flag, the Lithuanian state officially uses also a crest adorned with a *Vytis*, a mounted knight, recalling the coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania when the land shared with the Poles stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

2. Anthem

- *Tautiška giesmė* (National Song)
- Written and composed by Vincas Kudirka
- Composed in 1898 and adopted in 1992

A doctor, writer and polemicist, Vincas Kudirka was one of the leaders of the Lithuanian national reawakening. His numerous articles, in particular in the clandestine newspaper *La Cloche*, called on his compatriots to resist “Russification” and to avoid yielding to the temptation to simply go into exile. He wrote the words and music for this song in 1898, although it was only played in public for the first time in 1905.

1905 marked the start of an uprising against Russian authority in the Balkan countries. People in Lithuania demonstrated in favour of independence and of official recognition for their spoken language. Literature, numerous initiatives designed to promote the use of the Lithuanian language in public and frequent clandestine publications often from Prussia, which was only too happy to goad its Russian rival, played a crucial role. Despite eventually resulting in the czar taking the situation in hand again, these events served to trigger an emancipation movement calling for the right to teach the Lithuanian language, the right to associate freely, freedom of the press, and to a lesser degree, also freedom of worship.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, established in the 13th century, was for a long time one of the leading powers in Europe, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea by the time it merged with Poland through the marriage of its Grand Duke Jagiełło. It then entered its neighbours’ orbit, and when Poland was dismantled, Lithuania fell to the Soviet empire in 1940. The country has experienced independence only temporarily, from 1920 to 1940 and then again in 1990.

The anthem of the independent Republic between the wars was banned and repressed during the Soviet occupation, and it returned to favour only under *glasnost* in 1988. Its peaceful lyrics dwell on virtue, truth and prosperity, highlighting the role of literature and language in the European peoples’ emancipation process in the 19th century.

Tautiška giesmė

*Lietuva, Tėvyne mūsų,
Tu didvyrių žeme,
Iš praeities Tavo sūnūs
Te stiprybę semia.*

*Tegul Tavo vaikai eina
Vien takais dorybės,
Tegul dirba Tavo naudai
Ir žmonių gėrybei.*

*Tegul saulė Lietuvoj
Tamsumas prašalina,
Ir šviesa, ir tiesa
Mūs žingsnius telydi.*

*Tegul meilė Lietuvos
Dega mūsų širdyse,
Vardan tos Lietuvos
Vienybė težydi!*

National Song

Lithuania, our homeland,
Land of heroes!
Let your sons draw their strength
From our past experience.

Let your children always follow
Only roads of virtue,
May your own, mankind’s well-
being
Be the goals they work for.

May the sun above our land
Banish darkening clouds around
Light and truth all along
Guide our steps forever.

May the love of Lithuania
Brightly burn in our hearts.
For the sake of this land,
Let unity blossom!

