

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

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# Poland

## 1. Flag

- Created and adopted in 1919

Poland has two official flags. One consists of two horizontal bands, one white, one red, while the other is similar but it has the national coat of arms in its centre. According to the law governing the use of coats of arms, anyone can use the Polish flag at national or cultural events on condition that it is used in a respectful manner. This new freedom of use of the national colours dates back only to 2004. The application of the coat of arms to the national flag is theoretically reserved for specific circumstances (in embassies, consulates and so on). We should remember that the communist authorities severely curtailed people's use of the various national symbols: the flag thus acquired strong symbolism as an element of rebellion and identity, particularly through its use by the oppositionist trade union movement *Solidarność*, which built it into its logo. In effect, it is more indicative of patriotism than of nationalism.



The two colours, which have symbolised the Polish nation since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, are the same as those on a shield displaying a white eagle on a red ground that was the banner raised by King Władysław Jagiełło at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410 which sanctioned his victory over the Teutonic Knights. People frequently associate the colours today with other meanings such as purity and courage, or snow and spilled blood.

During the Middle Ages the Polish flag followed the vicissitudes of the country, whose strategic position in the heart of Europe was to cause it to pay a heavy tribute to Sweden, Russia, Prussia, Germany and Austria, even to the point where it actually disappeared from the map in 1795, and again in 1815 after a series of "partitions" orchestrated by its neighbours. The flag appeared, disappeared and reappeared, but always with its two colours, sometimes accompanied by the coat of arms and at other times without it.

The Polish state established a national "Flag Day" on 2 May 2004 in honour of its flag and in memory of 2 May 1945, when the Polish troops in the Red Army are alleged to have raised the white-and-red flag on the column of victory in Berlin.

## 2. Anthem

- *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*  
(Dąbrowski's Mazurka)
- Written by Joseph Wybicki  
and composed by  
Michel-Cléophas Oginski
- Created in 1797  
and adopted in 1927

The Polish Legion led by officer Dąbrowski was comprised of Polish troops serving in the French army during the revolutionary and imperial wars to fight alongside the French against their common enemies. The unit included some of the erstwhile legionaries who fomented the Polish insurrection against the Russian invader in 1794 under the command of the heroic patriot Tadeusz Kościuszko. After the third partition of Poland in 1795, this foreign military unit hoped to find a way, through its support for the fighting in Italy, of reconquering its own country with Napoleon's assistance. Joseph Wybicki, who drafted this Polish song, gave voice right from the very first verse ("Poland has not yet perished") to his compatriots' expectations and to their will to rebuild a nation that had been carved up by its powerful Prussian, Austrian and Russian neighbours. The melody is a dance, or *mazurka*, inspired by a folk tune attributed to Prince Oginski, who played a major role in the exploits of Dąbrowski's armies.

The text provides a detailed account of the promise to return from Italy to Poland and its rivers, thus highlighting the Polish people's rejection of any fatalist sense of inevitability, and underscoring the permanence of a nation which continued to possess the political conditions for its existence despite the many attacks and mutilations that it had suffered.

This march was an inspiration for numerous movements, particularly of the pan-Slavic kind, in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The words or the music were at least partly appropriated by the Hungarians, the Croats, the Serbs, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Ukrainians and even the Italians. For these people it would seem that the anthem is better suited to their national claims than the French national anthem, which is sometimes considered to be excessively aggressive.

The march was adopted as the national song in 1831 and recognised as the official anthem of the Republic of Poland in 1927. No alternative anthem has ever replaced this march, not even under communism.

### **Mazurek Dąbrowskiego**

*Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła,  
Kiedy my żyjemy.  
Co nam obca przemoc wzięła,  
Szablą odbierzemy.*

*Refren:*

*Marsz, marsz, Dąbrowski,  
Z ziemi włoskiej do Polski:  
Za twoim przewodem,  
Złączym się z narodem.*

*Przejdziem Wisłę, przejdziem Wartę,  
Będziem Polakami.  
Dał nam przykład Bonaparte,  
Jak zwyciężać mamy.*

*Jak Czarniecki do Poznania  
Po szwedzkim zaborze,  
Dla Ojczyzny ratowania,  
Wrócił się przez morze.*

*Już tam ojciec do swej Basi  
mówi zapłakany:  
" Słuchaj jeno, pono nasi  
Biją w tarabany".*

### **Dąbrowski's Mazurka**

Poland has not yet perished,  
So long as we still live.  
What the alien force has taken from us,  
We shall retrieve with a sabre

Refrain:

March, march, Dąbrowski,  
From the Italian land to Poland.  
Under your command  
We shall rejoin the nation.

We'll cross the Vistula and the Warta,  
We shall be Polish.  
Bonaparte has given us the example  
Of how we should prevail

Like Czarniecki to Poznań  
After the Swedish occupation,  
To save our homeland,  
We shall return across the sea.

A father, in tears,  
Says to his Basia:  
"Listen, our boys are reported  
To be beating the tarabans".

