

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

by Pierre-Robert Cloet, Bénédicte Legué and Kerstin Martel

Studies & Reports No 102, Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

1. Flag

- Created in 1789 and adopted in 1801



The two crossed red crosses bordered in white and standing out against a blue background are a combination of St. George's Cross representing England and Wales, St. Andrew's Cross or Saltire representing Scotland, and St. Patrick's Cross set in the centre of the Irish flag. They tell the story of three different stages in the country's territorial history.

A red cross on a white ground, mentioned for the first time in 1277, evokes the figure of George, a fifth century Roman soldier who was later canonised. Being adopted as the patron saint of England during the Hundred Years' War, this warrior saint sanctioned the bravery of the English knights in the Order of the Garter who came over to France with King Edward III to defend England's continental holdings against the French army.

The Scottish flag consists of the Saltire (or x-shaped Cross) of St. Andrew on a rectangular blue ground. Certain relics of this fisherman from Galilee, who was martyred on a x-shaped cross, are said to have been discovered in this region of the British Isles. Becoming the patron saint of Scotland, his cross came to symbolise his legendary intervention which, legend has it, allowed the king of the Picts and Gaëls to win the lands of *Engla Land* against the king of the Angles. This 11th century flag is omnipresent and is associated with dozens of pub signs, as well as appearing on the crest of the University of Edinburgh.

The visual unity of the British flag became properly structured after the succession to a throne left vacant following the death of Queen Elisabeth I, the last of the Tudors. Acceding to a plea from the late queen's ministers, King James VI of Scotland, a Stuart, united the two countries as personal possessions under a single flag and declared himself King James I of the new Kingdom of Great Britain in 1603. The two territorial banners were superimposed on one another to become known in 1606 as the Union Flag, which was flown by His Majesty's vessels in addition to the English or Scottish flag. That way the king avoided disputes among his subjects and, quite apart from forging their new identity, he also gave them an imposing Navy at the same time. The execution of King Charles I in 1649 brought the territorial union of England and Scotland to a end, thus eliminating the flag's very *raison d'être*. But when Queen Anne came to the throne in 1707, she revived both the territorial unity of the United Kingdom and its flag.

Ireland, which had previously been a separate kingdom, joined the territorial union in 1801, giving rise to the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Cross of St. Patrick was built into the Union Flag. The red saltire on a white ground was the symbol of the powerful Fitzgerald family, the family that was recognised at the time as embodying power in Ireland. The Union Flag, or Union Jack, came into full effect in 1801 and was henceforth to be seen on the emblems of the territorial possessions in what is now the Commonwealth. From coffee mugs to fashion colours, the Union Jack has become the symbol of a glamorous life-style with a sardonic tinge, but at the same time it is always a reliable pointer to the queen's presence in Buckingham Palace.

2. Anthem

- *God Save the Queen*
- Written by “anonymous”,
composed by Henry Carey
- Composed in 1743

This anthem today underscores the strength of the bonds between the people of the United Kingdom and the British royal family, one of the oldest surviving monarchies in the world. Elisabeth II’s long reign, celebrated in her Diamond Jubilee in

2012, has been marked by the dissemination through the worldwide media of the famous anthem *God Save the Queen*, the first couplet of which is always sung at formal gatherings. There have been numerous versions of this anthem, from the biblically inspired motet “God Save the King” to such celebrated interpretations as the controversial punk group “The Sex Pistols” version of it in 1977.

Two origins are often quoted for this royal anthem, though both of them on equally tenuous authority. The “French version” attributes the lyrics to the Marquise de Créquy, a French literary scholar who is said to have wished to give thanks for the survival of King Louis XIV of France after a particularly painful operation. The motet, set to music by Jean-Baptiste Lully who was the king’s composer at the time, enjoyed growing success in France. After Georg Friedrich Händel, the Hanoverian dynasty’s cantor, visited Versailles, he is said to have had Henry Carey translate the text, and to have then orchestrated the whole and submitted it to his mentor, King George II of England. The “English version”, on the other hand, attributes the composition to a 17th century tune taken from a keyboard piece for harpsichord by John Bull and subsequently adapted by Henry Purcell, who was the organist in the royal abbey of Westminster at the time.

The first recorded use of the anthem dates back to 1746, when it was sung to celebrate George II’s victory over the Jacobite insurgents at the Battle of Culloden, the battle that put paid once and for all to Stuart hopes of restoring their lineage to the thrones of Scotland and England. The United Kingdom has no official national anthem, but the victorious Hanoverians in 1746 were to turn this song into one of the factors imparting legitimacy to their claim to the crown, and it has been adopted by every government since.

It became a “national” anthem in the 19th century, although it has never been officially endorsed, and the tradition of singing only the first couplet dates back to that time. Expressing the loyalty of all of the sovereign’s subjects in the Commonwealth, it has been a source of inspiration for numerous national anthems around the world, including those of Liechtenstein and Switzerland, and it is still the royal anthem of Canada, New Zealand and Australia today.

• **God Save the Queen**

• *God save our gracious Queen,
• Long live our noble Queen,
• God save the Queen!
• Send her victorious,
• Happy and glorious,
• Long to reign over us;
• God save the Queen!*

• **God Save the Queen**

• God save our gracious Queen,
• Long live our noble Queen,
• God save the Queen!
• Send her victorious,
• Happy and glorious,
• Long to reign over us;
• God save the Queen!

