

# National symbols

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## The flag of Latvia



The flag of the Republic of Latvia is a carmine red with a white horizontal stripe.

The colour proportions of the flag of the Republic of Latvia is 2:1:2.

The ratio of the height of the flag to its width is fixed at 1:2.

The flag of Latvia has a long history, as it was first mentioned in the chapters of the Rhymed Chronicle of Livonian in the 13th century.

Having regard to that historical record, both patriotically minded individuals and organisations used the flag in the 19th century. In 1917, a red-white-red flag was used in several events aimed at uniting the regions of Latvia. Under the influence of those political processes, the issue of the appearance of the Latvian flag was raised. The debate resulted in a sketch prepared by artist Ansis Cirulis that gained the most popularity.

On 15 June 1921, the Constitutional Assembly adopted the Law on the Flag and Coat of Arms of the Republic of Latvia.

The distinctive (carmine) red colour of the flag was described in the government document for the first time in 1922 so that the flag could be more easily distinguished from the similarly coloured national flag of Austria.

Following the occupation of Latvia in 1940, the use or possession of this flag was considered punishable by law. The flag reappeared in the second half of the 1980's when it was widely used during the Awakening movement, and its status of the national flag was restored on 27 February 1990.

## The Coat of Arms of Latvia



The Great Coat of Arms of the Republic of Latvia was approved in 1921 and reapproved in 1993. The shield on the herald is divided into segments: half of a golden rising sun against a blue background is seen in one section, a red lion against a silver background to represent Kurzeme and Zemgale is in the second section, and a silver griffon with a blue tongue and a silver sword clutched in its right paw represents Vidzeme and Latgale in the third section. There are three golden stars above the shield. The shield is held by a red lion with a golden tongue on the right and a silver griffon with a golden tongue on the left. They stand on two green oak branches with a red-white-red ribbon that has the proportions of the Latvian national flag.

## Latvian National anthem

"*Dievs, sveti Latviju!*" ("God bless Latvia!") is the national anthem. The words and music were written by Karlis Baumanis (better known as Baumanu Karlis). The anthem first appeared in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Latvian people were beginning to openly exhibit a strong sense of national pride and identity. Karlis Baumanis was the first Latvian composer to use the word "Latvia" in a song lyric. The concept of "Latvia" had only begun to take shape in the minds of writers and activists and was used to describe all regions traditionally inhabited by Latvians. Although most Latvians did not yet dare to dream of a sovereign state totally independent of the Tsarist Russian Empire, the song "Dievs, sveti Latviju!" served as a powerful catalyst for the emerging national consciousness. The use of the word "Latvia" in the song was an open challenge to the Tsarist regime that had little sympathy for national movements.

Initially, Russian authorities forbid the use of the word "Latvia" in the title and text of the song and it was replaced by the word "Baltics". It was performed publicly in June of 1873 at the First Song Festival in Riga. It was first sung as a national anthem on November 18, 1918 at the proclamation of Latvia's independence. On June 7, 1920 "Dievs, sveti Latviju!" was officially proclaimed the national anthem of the Republic of Latvia.

When the communists annexed Latvia in June 1940 the national flag, coat of arms and anthem became illegal within Latvia itself for 50 years. Many people were persecuted simply for keeping and hiding the red-white-red flag or singing the national anthem. But the official symbols of Latvia were never forgotten and the struggle to bring the national red-white-red colours back into use marked the beginning of a renewed struggle for independence at the end of the 1980s.

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