



# Flags as Symbols of Socio-political Integration



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## Vexillology = scientific study of flags

Whitney Smith: *Flags through the Ages and Across the World*, 1975

- **flag - a strong symbol of visual identification in various social movements (nation, class, political, subcultures, peace movements, gay rights...)**



- **Origin / Function: identification of rallying point/leader**
- **Modern national flags emerge with the formation of national states**
- **Flags inherently symbolize unity – national, social, group, political etc.**

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The most of vexillologists consider the emergence of flags to have been in the pre-historical era. Whitney Smith, the sociologist who invented the name vexillology for this study recounts in his major work of 1975 that it might have been that an ancient victorious warrior dumped a piece of cloth in his defeated enemy's blood and stuck it on a pole for all his comrades to see it. Flags and flag-like symbols (these being called vexilloids) are found in all cultures around the world on all levels of social development. Certainly, these flags first become symbols of the leadership and authority and served as rallying point and identification of the leader, especially in armed conflicts, but then also ceremonially.

The ancient flags are preserved but rarely, only if they were made from persistent materials - metal flags are known from Iran from some 5000 ago - or if they are shown in preserved drawings like Egyptian vexilloids from about 32 c. BCE.

So, as symbols of authority the vexilloids and flags become symbols of military leaders, warlords and military units, and they have retained that function for ages to come, especially on land.

On the seas, the ships found useful to show the symbols of their origin, initially of the king under whose protection they sailed, but these soon became symbols of the states and the oldest national flags we know today. Their use on land came relatively late.



For the position of honor of the oldest national flag still in use are fighting several national flags [Smith, 1982], some of the contenders are shown here. However, its is of course the matter of which criteria we set

- some of these claims base on use of certain element that is used still today, but the form may vary much,
- many of these examples confirm the use of the symbol but it was not used in form of flag,
- or the flag was used to represent the ruler, rather than the collective,
- or it goes about the modern reintroduction of the ancient flag without continuity and so on.

Some vexillologists propose the criteria of the latest regulation/legislation (that is the last change) of the flag, but it does not help us much – some of the flags were recently only slightly changed or the change involve regulations of minor details and change in the official shed of a colour and so on.

While each of these examples provide a fascinating and interesting story that would easily take us hours to recount them all, this is out of the scope of this lecture

- However all these claims are suffering from the same problem – the flags predates the formation of the nations
- these old flags might have been in existence, but they had no function of symbolizing the nation
- modern national flags, of course, emerge only with the formation of the national states.



In the civic movements and revolutions starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a flag becomes a symbol of the people, of the ideas of the liberal revolutions.

This famous painting by Delacroix picturing proverbial Liberty leading the masses behind a flag is probably best depiction of the Napoleon's saying that it is with such baubles - trinkets - toys that men are lead.



For the most part of Europe the national flags emerged in the revolutionary movements in the year 1848.

The ideals from the French revolution spread, and as we see in this picture, even the vertical stripes of the French pattern were yet popular, although horizontal stripes prevailed.



**Frany Kollar (1825-1848)**  
**Die Slavische Barricade**  
1848  
Hrvatski povijesni muzej Zagreb

In that same year many European nations devised their flags – among others most of the Slavic nations whose nations states, in some cases, shall have to wait for over 150 years to be established.

The Croatian tricolour on the Baricade held by Dragojlo Kušlan is among the first recorded although the same tricolours appeared in Zagreb about the same time. [Borošak Marijanović, 1996]



Of course, the change of meaning of the flag from that representing the ruler to that belonging to the people took time.

This handsome painting by Tissot shows a number of European flags, most notably that of Austria and that of Germany.

Those with keener vexillologic eyes shall recognize other notable flags – the British Union Jack in the foreground,

but in this case I would draw your attention to the “Herring salad” in the very base, I shall come to it very soon.

Also, I would like to point out that there is nothing militaristic in this painting - the flags are here mere decoration - playthings with which the young ladies are playing in an idyllic garden.



Henri Julien-Félix Rousseau – Douanier (1844-1910)  
A Centennial of Independence  
1892  
Getty Trust, Los Angeles

The point is, the flags become removed from authorities and things military – the now belong to the people and are to be found in festivities and whenever people wanted to show their identification.

This painting of a famous French naïve painter Rousseau shows a festivity celebration in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris.

I am sure that this may easily remind you on Croatian wedding ceremonies where the national flag plays an important part in the merry making.





**Claude Monet**  
**Terrace at Saint-Adresse**  
1867  
Oil on canvas  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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Anyway, flag were, apparently, a favorite object of the impressionists as well – possibly providing an interesting contrast with the otherwise peaceful and calm contents of their paintings, like in this Monet’s scene at the sea side resort.



... or adding to the general fuss of the National Festivities in Paris on this other painting of his.



The Monet's painting we just saw reminds me always to this other important Croatian painting by Babić showing the 1<sup>st</sup> May procession with the red flags.



Photo: Yevgeny Khaldei (1917-1997)  
Soldiers raising the flag of Soviet Union on  
the roof of Reichstag building in Berlin,  
Germany  
May, 1945

And before we go on, let us take a look at several photos of flags that made the history - like this photo taken in Berlin, signifying the end of the World War II...



... or the one of the same importance taken on the other side of the globe.

This is also a good example on how the flags play important role in propaganda - the actual event photo was taken by Sergeant Lowery in the corner, but the one that became famous was staged a few days latter by professional photographer Joe Rosenthal.



Photo: Dave Scott salutes the flag on the Moon  
20 July 1969  
NASA

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And the one depicting the achievement of the mankind even if the flag is a particular one, needs no further comment.

As we have seen, the flags are designed and used to show the unity of a nation, or for that matter an other social group, but the issue that I would like to address here is what happens when the group is not homogenous to start with – and that is often a case.



The issue is how the flag are designed to show the goal of unification of plural societies – in case of the national flag that would mean of joined states of various kinds.

There are of course, numerous ways to achieve this, and an attempt to systemize the process is shown here.

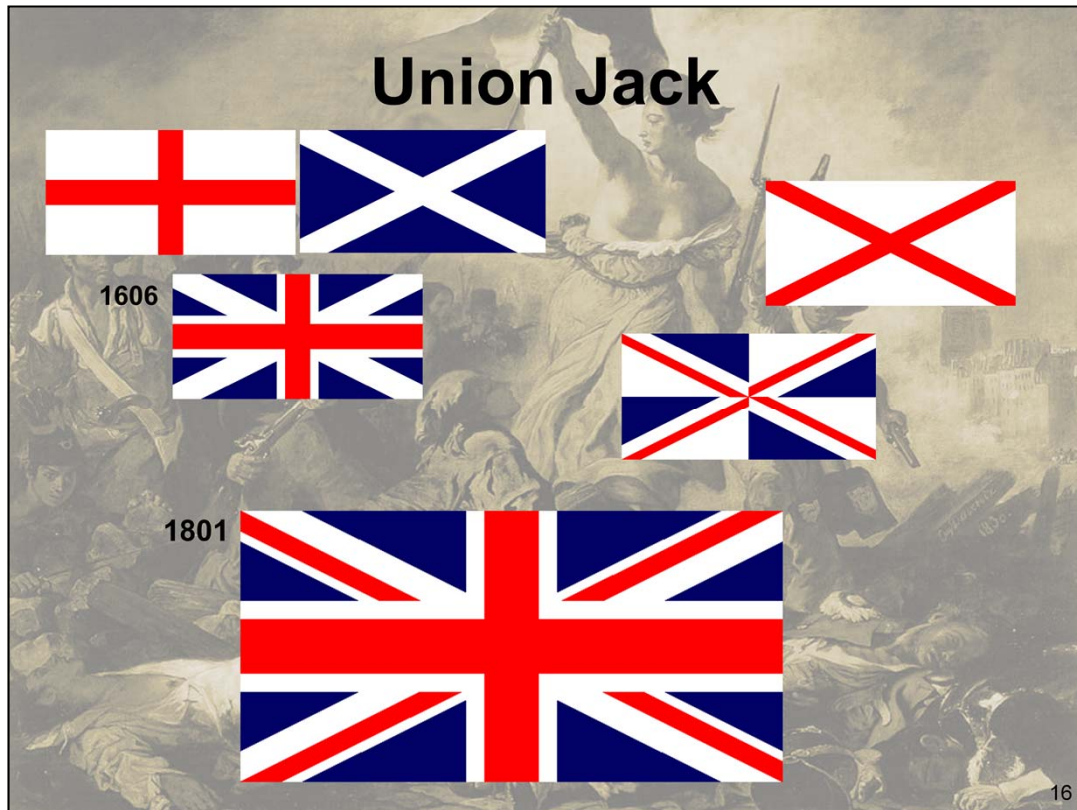
There seems to be four basic ways to show the integrative intentions in the national flags.

The first and the oldest is inherited from heraldic practices of partitioning the shield – you take a half of one previous symbol and half of the other and join them together by cutting and sawing them into one piece of cloth.

The other very popular method is the use of symbolic elements, most notably the stars, and repeating them as many times as there are subdivisions that form the united entity.

The third way is by devising a new element that has neutral symbolic that could now be taken as unifying symbol.

And finally the fourth way is to use a flag of a new, neutral design, into which are included, as a rule, small, symbols of various constitutional element – typically by use of multiple coats of arms joined according to the heraldic rules. Let us take a look at the examples of each.



Probably the most widely known flag of integrative character is, beyond doubt the British Union Jack.

Its design is known around the world even by those who heed not at all about the flags, not only because the British empire had its influence throughout the world, but also because of its striking design.

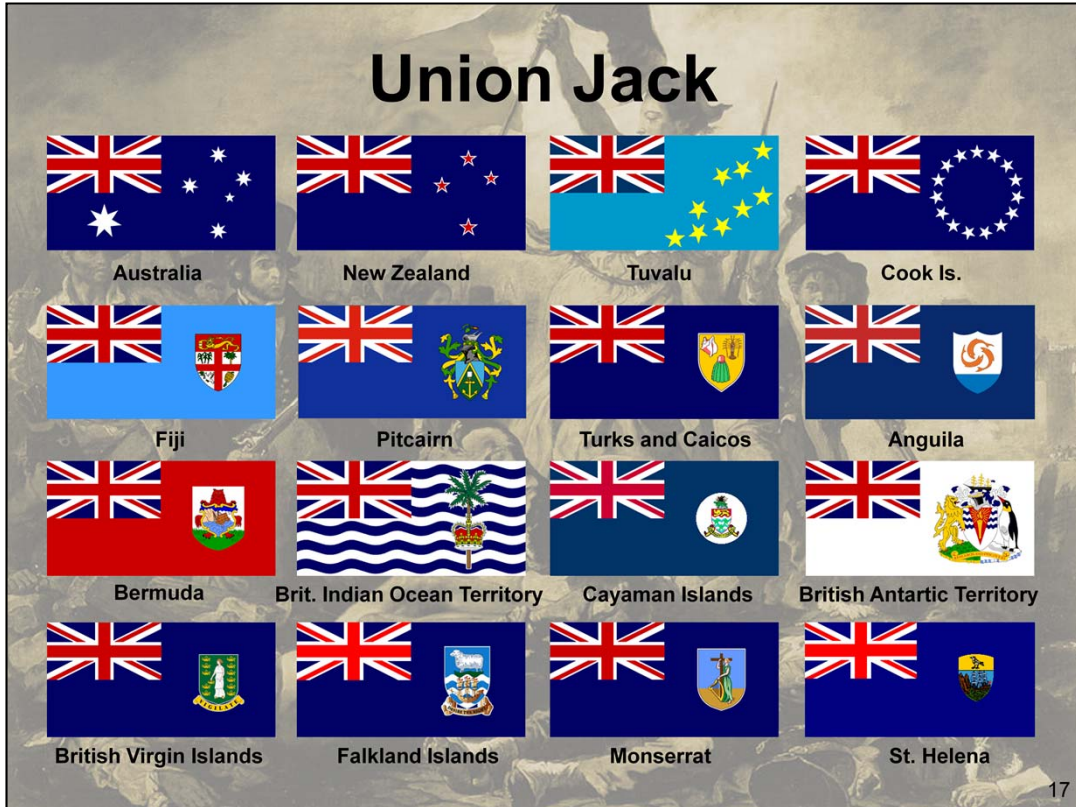
The flag was initially devised by cutting and sawing together of the English flag of St. George and the Scottish flag of St. Andrew in 1606 into the first Union Jack,

In 1801 to it was added also the St. Patrick's of the Ireland.

The combination of the Scottish and Irish flag is made by the heraldic practice of dividing the two equally important elements into eight pieces, with the English flag superimposed.



# Union Jack



This flag is not only used on its own but forms an integral part of a numerous flags of former and current British colonies and territories, but is also used in similar design for various British maritime services.

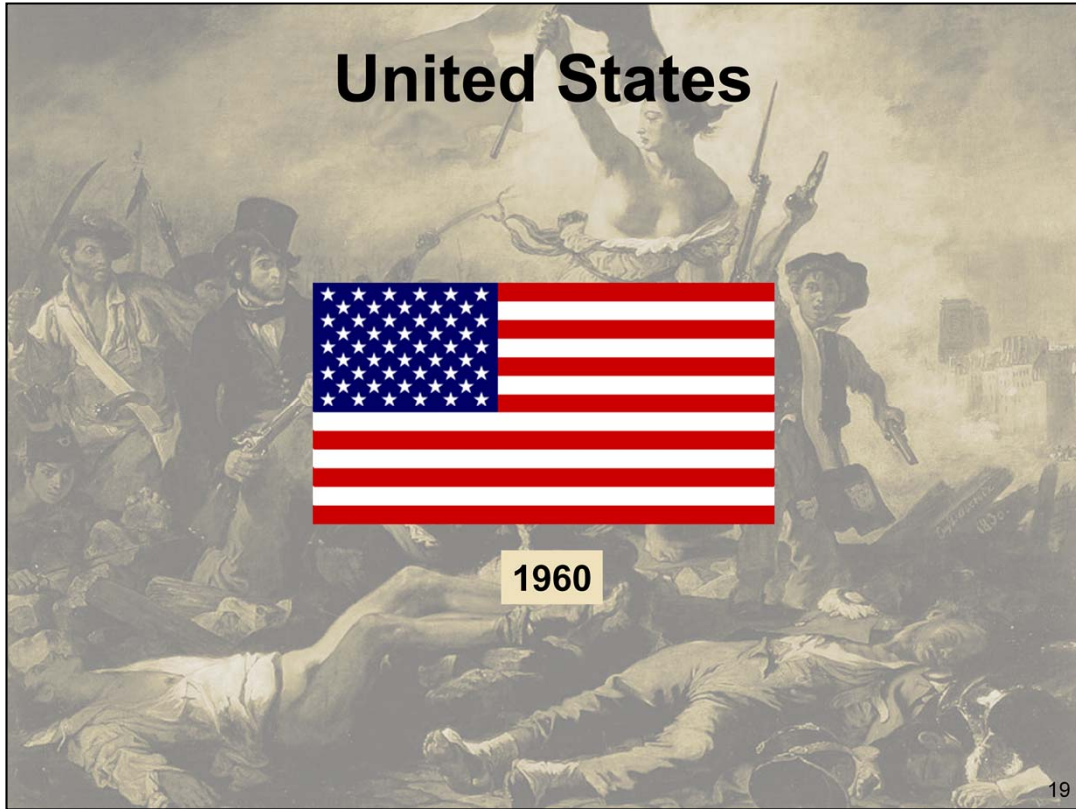
Here are shown but a few of the current national flags that includes it, but the total number of various versions of this basic design raises up to several hundreds.

# 1. Combining previous flags ("cut & saw" method)



The cut and saw method was apparently more popular previously than it is today, and the second most well known design of this type is the popularly nick-named "Herring salad" of the Union of Sweden and Norway.

Since 1844 it was set also as the Union Mark in the flags of both countries, to be used until the dissolution of the Union in 1905.



The second method of “counting stars” was introduced in flags by the founding fathers of the United States.

The number of stars was gradually increased with the admission of new states into the Union graphically depicting the motto of the United States – E pluribus unum – One out of many.

## 2. Repeating unique element ("counting stars" method)



Commores



Brasil



Netherlands Antilles



Sao Tome and Principe



Venezuela

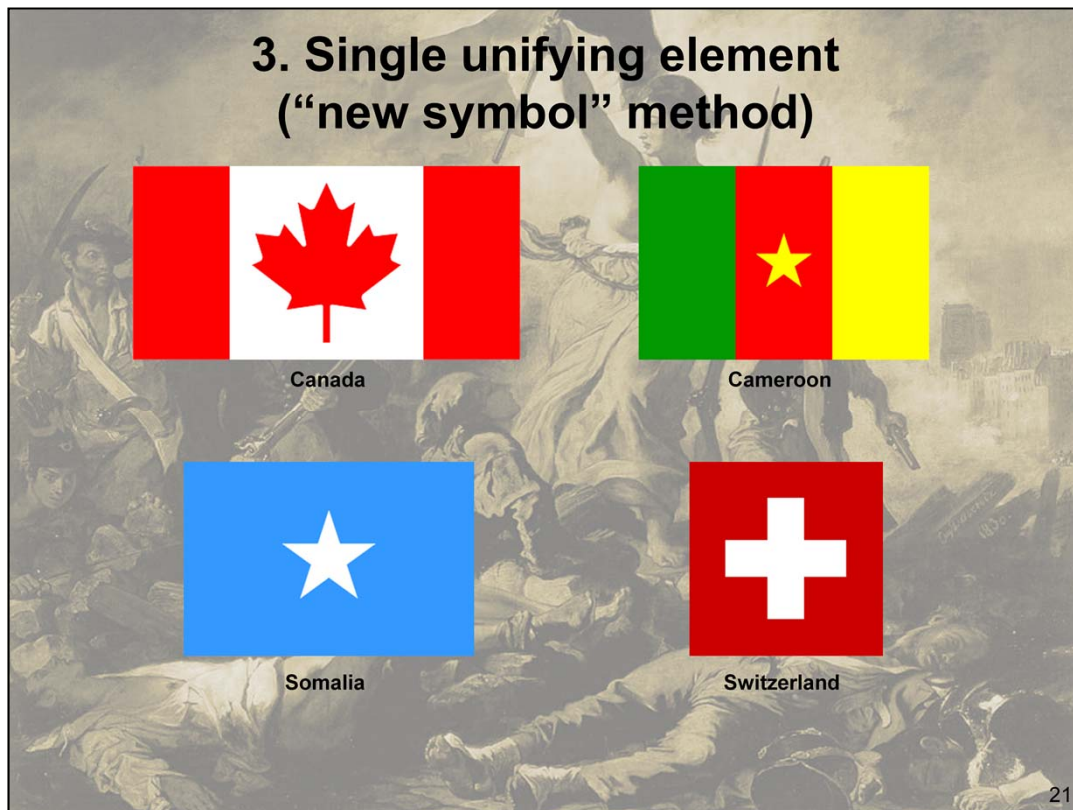


Bolivia, naval ensign

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The influence of liberal ideas of the constitution of the United States was probably a reason for the popularity of this method.

Until it was used in the flag of the US, the five-pointed star was rather infrequent heraldic motive. However, it was since very well received, from then it is hard to find an example of national flag where the repeating symbol is any other then the stars, (although we shall yet see one such example further on...)



The third way is devising of a new symbol.

Certainly, a new political entity may devise an entirely new flag that may be looked upon as a "new symbol" of this kind taken widely, but the idea here is to look for a new unifying symbol within a flag.

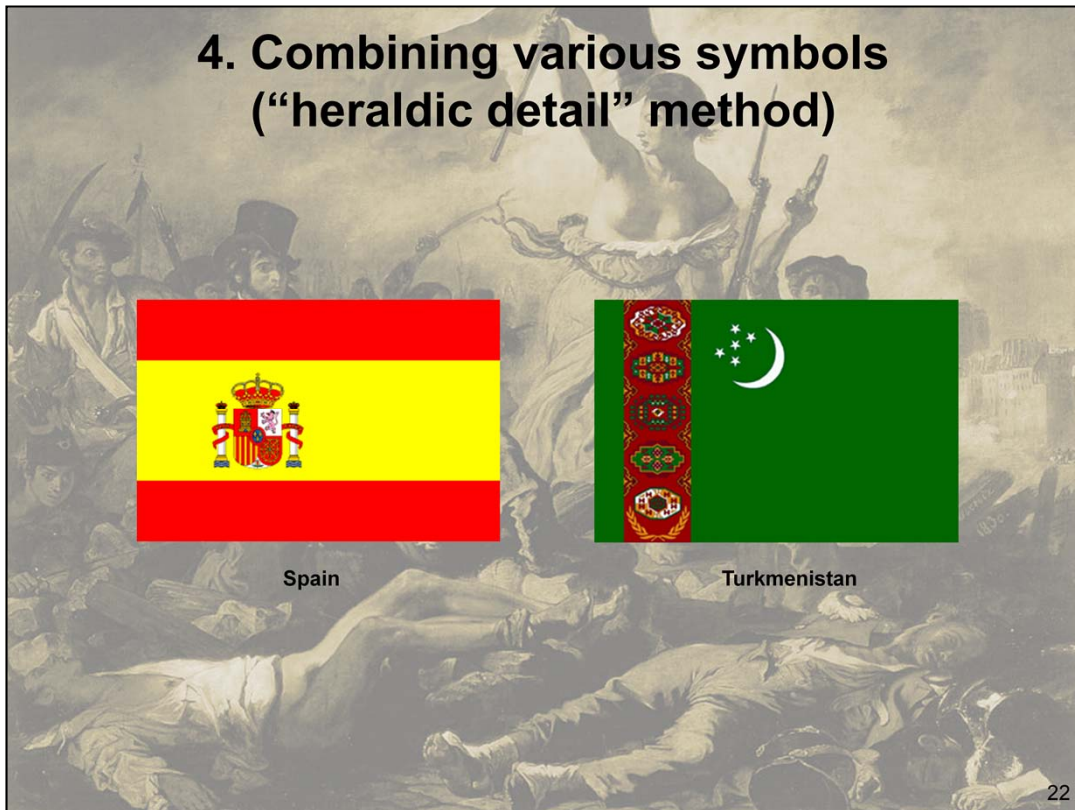
The new symbol need not to be unknown from before and need not be without a tradition.

For example, both maple leaf of Canada and the cross of the Switzerland were found in their previous flags as a small and auxiliary symbol that has been taken a new meaning of an integrative element.

Other countries, as Cameroon and Somalia in the examples shown, have taken a single star to symbolize unity.

After all, the European union has taken no less than 12 stars in a ring to serve the same function.

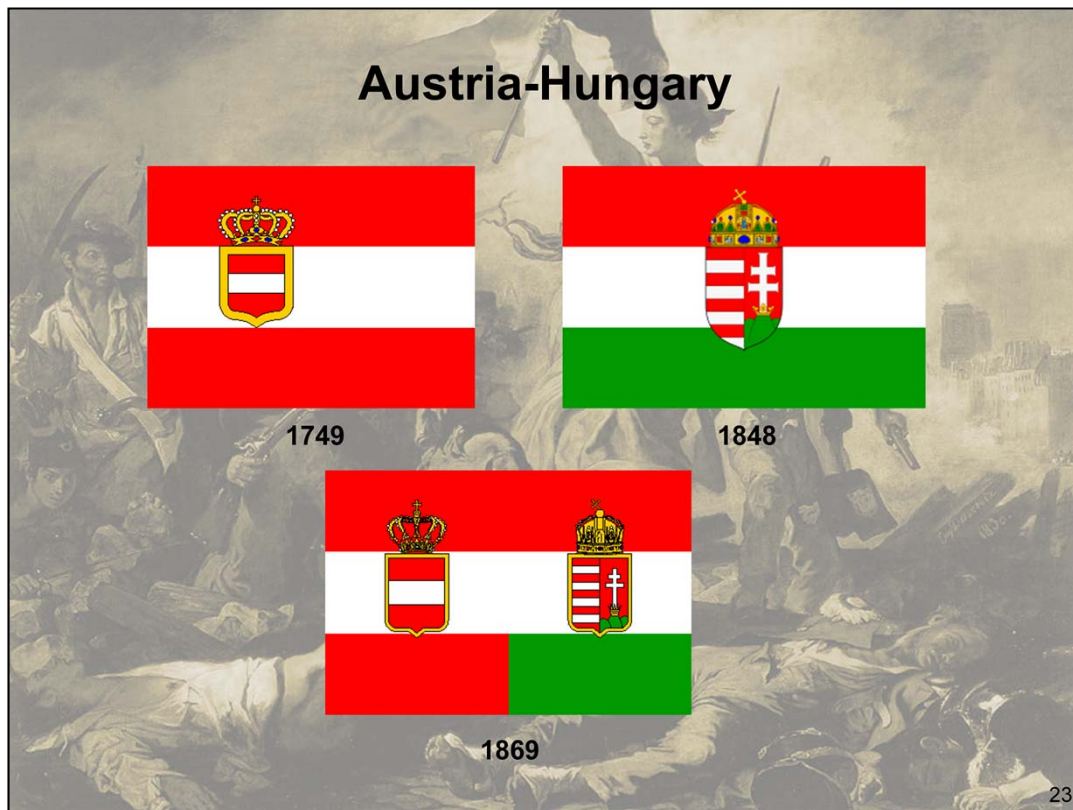
#### 4. Combining various symbols ("heraldic detail" method)



The fourth method is intricate to provide easily noticeable examples, as the heraldic details are often so small that they evade the casual glance.

However, their existence on these flags is of great importance to the constituent parts of the nation.

The example of Spain shows the coats of arms of various regions joined into one coat of arms according to heraldic principles, while the example of Turkmenistan show something else – the five different design of the carpet ornaments represent five regions of the country.



To finish off this presentation I am going to show you the integrative flags that have been used in these regions in history.

The complex and heterogeneous states in these regions were more often a rule than exception.

In the Habsburg Monarchy, the emergence of the various national flags in 1848 was initially a shock, but soon the Monarchy became more or less very tolerant towards local flags within people.

However, the official flags in the military or on the ships were an other story, and it took quite a fight in the dualization of the Monarchy to provide for the joined merchant flag, acquired in 1869 after the *Ausgleich*, by the cut and saw method – joining the previous flags of the two main parts of the country.

Beside the two previously mentioned flags obtained by this method - the British Union Jack and the Swedish-Norwegian Herring Salad, this is the third most important example of the national flag of this model.

Of course, a valid question may be raised whether this flag actually represent the integration of the double state or its disintegration...



With the breaking up of Austria-Hungary after the World War I, the new state of the Southern Slavs did not have the flag initially and its integrative intention were symbolized, for example on ships with an unusual and in the history previously unheard of practice of displaying several national flags at the same time, i.e. with the Serbian tricolor flag at the stern, Croatian at the top mast and the Slovenian at the bow – otherwise it is world-wide custom that a ship's nationality is to be show by a single flag only. Some ship even displayed the fourth flag – the Czechoslovakian one, as a number of sailors on the former Austro-Hungarian ships were also there from.

With the formation of the Kingdom of the SCS a new tricolor was devised with the integrative, soon even unitaristic meaning, while the integrative symbols are seen in the naval ensign that includes the state coat of arms – depicting the three national coats of arms, following the fourth model.





During the World War II the units of Tito's partisans again use the first method devising very peculiar flags for their naval ships in 1942, combining the Yugoslav tricolor with the three tricolors of the three main nations.

With the centralization of the partisan government this flag was replaced in 1943 with the Yugoslav tricolor where the integrative element was the red five-pointed star, according to the third model.



This was formalized after the World War II into the national flag.

On the naval ensign the joined element is highlighted with a golden wreath.

The system of repeating element (that is not a star!) is to be seen on the naval jack (flag used on the stern of a naval ship) that included the national emblem – with five or latter six torches to represent the constitutional elements of the federated state.

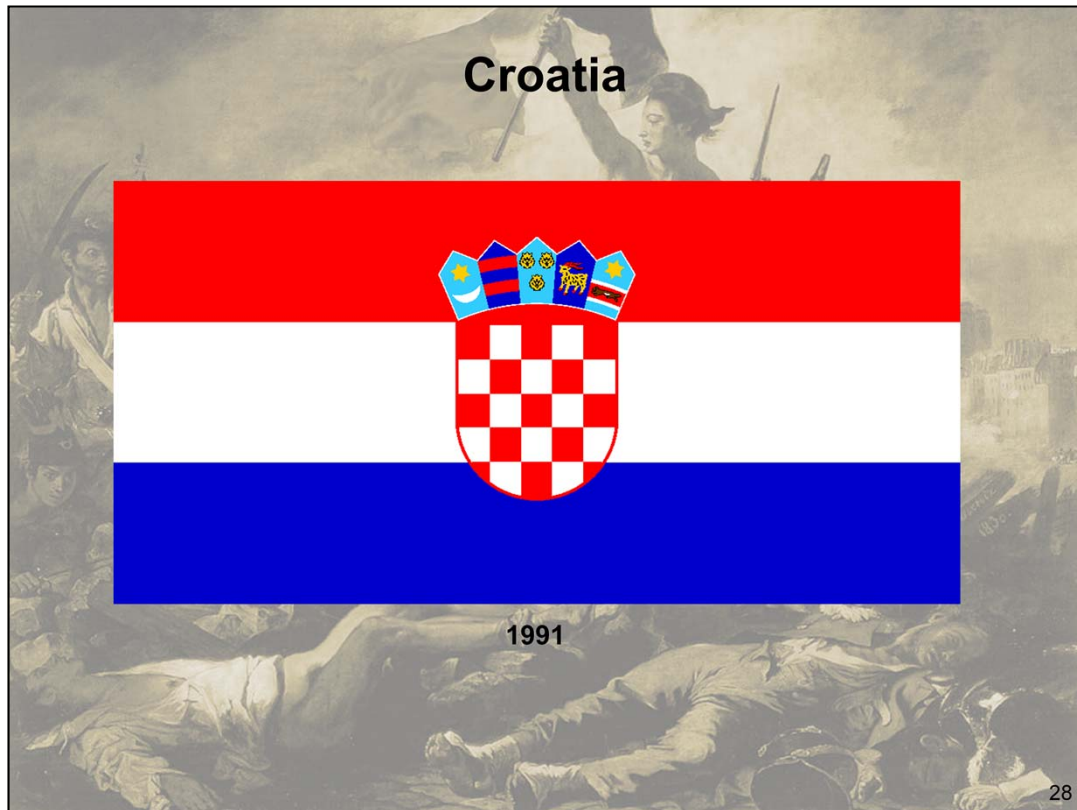


The cut and saw method was “resurrected” in one of the projects to make a new flag of the short lived joined state of Serbia and Montenegro after 2003 reorganization of the FR Yugoslavia.

The two states at the time used the same traditional Serbian tricolor or red, blue and white, however Montenegro prescribed an unusually long flag with light blue shade.

The proposed flag was to be half Serbian-half Montenegrin – with the central stripe being half dark and half light blue.

However, the state was way to short-lived to decide on the flag.



The modern flag of Croatia may also be seen as an integrative flag according to the fourth model.

Even though the reading of the coats of arms shown in the “crown” is somewhat more complex, the simplest explanation is that these are the historic coats of arms of Croatian regions.

According to academic Stančić in his recounts on the emergence of this flag in 1990 - though these historical symbols the flag represents the “program of independence and integrity of Croatia” that was being proclaimed by the Parliament and the government when adopting it.



## **Integrative flags design**

- 1. Combining previous flags (“cut & saw”)**
- 2. Repeating unique element (“counting stars”)**
- 3. Single unifying element (“new symbol”)**
- 4. Combining various symbols (“heraldic details”)**

And in the end, let me repeat the main thesis of this presentation. There are four models or methods by which national flags are designed to represent national unity of a plural society of various kinds.



To this one may add yet a fifth one, that where the flags represent the unity without showing any particular symbols of division at all – I have left them out as these can hardly be called the symbols of integration – their forceful symbolic is apparently doomed to failure in a way of speaking as we can see in the examples of Cyprus or Bosnia and Herzegovina, although this should be a topic of an other work.

A new flag of this type is emerging just as we speak, as the competition for the new flag of Kosovo was issued a week ago – largely requiring yet an other flag that should not have integrative design according to this four methods and may prove to be an other flag designed by some committee and fail in its function.

However, as they say, giving prediction in social sciences, especially those concerning the future is not very wise ☺



**Thank you for  
your attention!**

## Zastave kao simboli socio-političke integracije

Nacionalne zastave odnosno zastave država su kao simbol državnosti oduvijek pokušavale iskazati vladajuću ideologiju koja je često kao svoj važan element naglašavala društvenu i političku integraciju heterogenih pa i homogenih političkih entiteta.

Najpoznatiji primjer nacionalne zastave koja zorno prikazuje integraciju svakako je britanski Union Jack, koji se pojavljuje ne samo kao nacionalna zastava Ujedinjenog Kraljevstva nego je i temelj je mnogim varijantama pomorskih zastava, zastava različitih državnih službi te nacionalnim zastavama kolonija ili bivših kolonija kao što su Australija, Fiji, Novi Zeland, Sv. Vincent, Tuvalu; Bermuda, Falklandi, Monserrat, Sv. Helena i mnoge druge...

Američka zastava sa zvjezdicama vizualizacija je devize SAD-a „E pluribus unum!“. Ta dva primjera prikazuju dva osnovna principa dizajna integrativnih zastava: u prvom slučaju kombinacija ranijih posebnih elemenata identiteta i u drugom slučaju odabir novog neutralnog elementa koji se ponavlja određeni broj puta. Treći način odabir je jednog elementa koji simbolizira jedinstvo nacije. Četvrti na način svojevrstna kombinacija prvog i drugog, gdje se posebni elementi različitog dizajna kombiniraju i ponavljaju na temeljno neutralnoj zastavi.

Primjer prve metode, osim u mnogim zastavama temeljenim za Union Jacku, danas je rjeđi. Među značajne predstavnike ove metode zajednički je znak zvan „salata od sleđa“ u pomorskim zastavama Švedske i Norveške uveden 1844. i napušten pred sam raspad Unije krajem 19. stoljeća.

Drugu metodu usvojile su mnoge zemlje, a simbol koji označava pojedine entitete danas je gotovo redovito zvijezda, najčešće peterokraka, kao u zastavama Komora, Brazila, Nizozemskih Antila, države Sv. Toma i Principe, Venecuele, kao i pomorska zastava Bolivije koja osim zvjezdica povijesnih provincija, sadrži i jednu koja označava u ratu izgubljenu provinciju. Mnoge su i danas povijesne zastave koje zvjezdicama ili drugim ponavljajućim simbolom naznačuju integraciju dijelova države koju su predstavljale.

Treći način iskazivanja jedinstva složenih nacija su primjeri Kanade, Kameruna, Švicarske ili Somalije. U ovom smislu, dakako, svaka državna zastava može se promatrati za sebe simbol kao jedinstva nacije pa tako i služi kao simbol socio-političke integracije.

Četvrti način je uključivanje grba (ili drugog simbola slične funkcije, jer se svi takvi simboli ne mogu nazivati grbovima) koji je složen od elemenata koji predstavljaju dijelove države. Često je zbog prilično sitnih detalja u takvim slučajevima integrativnost teško iščitati, no onome koji zna sadržaj takvih simbola (dakle članu zajednice koju takva zastava predstavlja) ta kompleksnost u pravilu jasna je i očita.

Na našim prostorima složene državne tvorevine nisu bile rijetkost, već gotovo pravilo. Njihove zastave sadrže simbole te složenosti te integrativnih ideala. Već od srednjeg vijeka vojne zastave Habsburške Monarhije sadrže crnog dvoglavog habsburškog orla preko kojeg su prikazani grbovi krunskih zemalja. Dualizacijom Austrijskog Carstva, 1869. godine uvodi se dvojna civilna pomorska zastava kojoj pola dužine pokriva austrijska crveno-bijelo-crvena zastava, a drugu polovicu mađarska crveno-bijelo-zelena, svaka sa svojim odgovarajućim grbom. Ta zastava treći je, uz dva



naprijed spomenuta, najvažniji primjer prve spomenute metode dizajna integrativnih zastava. Svakako, validno je pitanje da li ovakva zastava više simbolizira integraciju ili dezintegraciju Monarhije.

Raspalom Austrougarske na kraju Prvog svjetskog rata, nova država Južnih Slavena, u samom početku, zbog nepostojanja zajedničke zastave, integrativne težnje, primjerice na brodovima, ističe zanimljivom i u povijesti neobičnom praksom isticanja više nacionalnih zastava istodobno (inače se državna pripadnost broda iskazuje upotrebom isključivo jedne zastave) primjerice hrvatska zastava na krmi, srpska na pramcu i slovenska na jarbolu, zabilježena je i upotreba i četvrte čehoslovačke zastave. Stvaranjem Kraljevine SHS uvodi se nova trobojnica koja uskoro poprima čisto unitarističko značenje, a integrativni simboli su vidljivi u vojno-pomorskoj zastavi koja osim trobojnice sadrži i grb koji je sastavljen od triju nacionalnih grbova, prema četvrtom modelu.

Tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata ponovo se pojavljuju zastave složene od nacionalnih elemenata. Takve partizanske zastave zabilježene su u upotrebi na brodovima 1942. godine. Centralizacijom partizanske vlasti uvode se zastave trećeg modela, na kojima crvena peterokraka zvijezda predstavlja zajednički integrativni element. Na vojno-pomorskim zastavama ovaj je element još izraženiji okružen žutim vijencem, a one zastave koje sadrže i državni grb (počasna, propisana 1945-1950, pramčana od 1947 do 1990) integrativnost prikazuju ponavljanjem elemenata, ali ne tipičnih zvjezdica, već ponavljanjem pet (odnosno od 1963. šest) buktinja.

Suvremena zastava Republike Hrvatske također se može protumačiti kao svojevrsna integrativna zastava, i to po četvrtom modelu. Iako je heraldičko iščitavanje grbova prikazanih u kruni iznad šahiranog štita ponešto složenije, najjednostavnije tumačenje ovih grbova je da su to povijesni grbovi hrvatskih regija, a na kraju krajeva i šahirani štit povijesno je grb jedne od regija - središnje Hrvatske.