



The Washington Flag Congress 2011

The 20th Anniversary under the Slovene Flag

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Abstract

This year's international congress of vexillology, held in the capital of the United States of America, fits neatly into the context of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the autonomy and independence of the Republic of Slovenia. 2011 also marks the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Slovene national flag. The design of such an important and recognizable national symbol such as a Slovene flag can be traced to the 7th century, the period of the earliest Slavic state—the Duchy of Carantania. It is exactly through Carantania and its unique system of inaugurating dukes at Gosposvetsko polje (Maria Saal)—a practice which continued in the Slovene language until 1414—that another interesting connection emerges between the Slovenes and the U.S.A. The influence of the installation of dukes in Carantania can be clearly observed in the *Declaration of Independence*, 1776. Since the flags in their original concept illustrate the colors of an emblem, the first symbol of this kind in the history of Slovene people was the Carantania's panther. Today's Slovenian flag developed from this early symbol.



The Slovenian National Flag

THE 20th ANNIVERSARY UNDER THE SLOVENE FLAG

This year's international congress of vexillology, held in the capital of the United States of America, fits neatly into the context of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the autonomy and independence of the Republic of Slovenia. It is also the 20th anniversary of the activities run by the society formed to take intensive care of the symbols of Slovene nation, thus becoming their herald of sorts. Since these symbols largely comprise state emblems and flags, we have named the society simply *Heraldica Slovenica*. This year also marks the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Slovene national flag. The appearance of Slovene flag in public life is much more common than the appearance of state emblem.

The designing of such an important and recognizable national symbol such as a Slovene flag can be traced back to the 7th century, the period of the earliest Slavic state form—the Duchy of Carantania.¹ It is exactly through Carantania and its unique system of inaugurating dukes at Gosposvetsko polje (Maria Saal)—a practice which continued in the Slovene language until 1414—that another interesting connection emerges between the Slovenes and the U.S.A., the host of this year's congress.

One of the early humanists, Enea Silvio Piccolomin, a secretary to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Frederick III, and a later Pope Pius II, wrote about this installation ritual. Based on his records, Jean Bodin, a lawyer and a political philosopher, painstakingly studied the process of Carinthian ducal installation and dealt with it in his work *Les Six Livres de la Republique*. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the U.S.A., owned this book in his private library and it was with special attention that he marked the description of ducal inauguration. The influence of the installation of dukes in Carantania can be clearly observed in the *Declaration of Independence*, 1776, where special emphasis was given to the description of how a ruler was to serve his people and not exercise his power despotically like a tyrant. The memorial plaque erected in 1976 by Slovenian-American Cultural Council in Cleveland (Ohio), also confirms this influence.

Since the flags in their original concept illustrate the colors of an emblem, the first symbol of this kind in the history of Slovene people was the Carantania's panther. A black panther on silver (white) background thus suggested a black-white-black flag and its image appeared in the middle of a white field. With the extinction of the Carinthian dukes of Spanheim in 1269, the use of the flag and coat-of-arms came to an end as well.² In the 9th century, in 828 to be precise, a border county of Krain (March of Carniola) was established and it soon became a hereditary fief of Bavarian counts of Andechs. Their coat-of-arms on a blue escutcheon represented a white bird bearing a resemblance to an eagle (highly likely a griffon vulture). It soon became popular as a white eagle. The first mention of the family crest dates to 1195 when, on the occasion of a knights' tournament, Count Berthold IV displayed it on his escutcheon. Under Ulrich III in the 13th century, the blue eagle in a silver (white) escutcheon appeared for the first time. Around the

eagle's neck a breast buckle was displayed, similar to a luneta, with alternating rectangular red and white fields. Since 1358 the breast buckle has appeared regularly in various illustrations of the coats-of-arms. The white and blue colored flag that originated from this coat-of-arms was known as the flag of the County of Krain, and after 1364 also of the Duchy of Carniola. On 12 January 1463, out of gratitude to Carniolan Länderstände for their military assistance against his brother Albrecht, Emperor Friederich III improved the Carniolan coat-of-arms. He exchanged silver (white) color for golden (yellow) and crowned the single-headed eagle with an imperial crown. Since the Habsburg eagle was a double-headed eagle on a golden (yellow) background, the flag displayed black and golden (yellow) color. Following the improvements of the coat-of-arms of the Duchy of Carniola, the flag featured golden and blue colors. However, replacing the silver (white) color for golden (yellow) did not last. The imperial crown remained preserved. The predominantly white and blue color design of the original flag of Mark Krain (the March of Carniola), later the Duchy of Carniola, or better said the Province of Krain and one of the crownlands under the Habsburgs³, persevered until 1800.

On 22 August 1836 the Austrian emperor Francis I issued a decree that all coats-of-arms be revised and corrected, which influenced also the Duchy of Carniola. Following this decree, silver (white) color was officially reintroduced while the eagle preserved its imperial crown. Soon afterwards the red luneta squares around the eagle's neck joined the white and blue colored flag of the Duchy of Carniola.⁴ In March 1848, the Slovene intelligentsia belonging to the Slovenia Association in Vienna chose the Slovene national colors on the basis of the armorial colors of the Province of Krain.⁵ In 1848, well known as the year of the Spring of Nations, the first explanations of the symbolism of the national flag colors emerged in light of the nation's freedom. White symbolized purity and innocence, blue stood for enduring steadiness, and red characterized true patriotic and public-spirited love. 7 April 1848 was the day when the Slovene national flag fluttered for first time. On 3 October 1848 the flag was officially confirmed in the then-official gazette. The Slovene national flag was also praised in the former Slovene national anthem, the words of which were written in the second half of 19th century by Slovene poet and writer Simon Jenko. Another Slovene poet, Simon Gregorčič, dedicated one of his songs to this symbol of Slovene nation.

With the passing of Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1918, a new Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was formed. Despite the kingdom's officially defined flag (a blue-white-red tricolor with the coat-of-arms of the kingdom in the center of a white field), the Slovenes continued to prefer their own national white-blue-red tricolor. In October 1941 a permanent red five-pointed star was added to the Slovene flag. It usually occupied the center of the flag, yet occasionally it also appeared in the upper white field. It was later fimbriated in yellow.

When Slovenia became a sovereign country on 25 June 1991 the state flag was officially confirmed. The new flag was basically the national flag with Slovene coat-of-arms in the upper left-hand corner. The Slovenian coat-of-arms incorporates the stylized silhouette of Slovenia's

highest peak, Triglav (2,863 m); above it there are three golden six-pointed stars taken from the coat-of-arms of the Counts of Celje, and two wavy blue lines representing the Adriatic Sea and Slovenian rivers.⁶ On 26 June 1991, the Slovene state flag was publically hoisted for the first time, and the Republic of Slovenia has its own state and national flag.

The year when Slovenia became a sovereign and independent country also marked the founding of the Heraldica Slovenica Association which advocates the state symbols, and strives for their proper and honorable application.⁷ Bearing this in mind, each year on 7 April, Heraldica Slovenica Association organizes an event honoring the day of Slovenian flag with a solemn hoisting of the flag at GEOSS, the geographical centre of Slovenia at Spodnja Slivna near Vače. The solemn blessing of the Slovenian flag is followed by honorary procession of Slovenian municipal flags and banners of various associations that accompany the Slovene Guard of Honor with the Slovene state flag. Following the procession, the flag is hoisted on a flagpole.

In remembrance of the first hoisting of Slovene national flag in Ljubljana, the Heraldica Slovenica Association has organized the hoisting of Slovene flag at 8, Wolfova Street. Since 8 February (Slovene Culture day) 1997 the place of the first hoisting of the flag has been marked by a memorial plaque. Heraldica Slovenica Association is fully aware of its responsible yet noble task of caring for the nation's ensigns, and the national flag occupies an extremely important position among them. There is, of course, a lot of work left to be done, improved, or implemented. The knowledge that such meetings and congresses, like this one in the capital of the United States, encourage us in our endeavors, gives us a new boost in our activities.

¹ Stane Granda, *Mala zgodovina Slovenije* (Celje: MD, 2008), 56.

² Franz Gall, *Österreichische Wappenkunde* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 131–132.

³ Franz Gall, *Österreichische Wappenkunde* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 133.

⁴ Božo Otorepec, *Kakšna je prava slovenska zastava* (Rodna Gruda, 1974), 10.

⁵ *Complete Flags of the World* (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.), 156.

⁶ Alfred Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags* (London: Lorenz Books, 1999), 154.

⁷ Rinaldo Stanič, Tadej Jakopič, *Osnove heraldike in istovetnostni simboli slovenskih občin* (Ljubljana: Lečnik d.o.o., 2005), 23.

About the Author

Tadej Jakopič was born in Ljubljana, 8 May 1974. After secondary school he graduated from the University of Ljubljana; his thesis was *Coats of Arms of the Bishops of Ljubljana since 1463*. He was awarded the highest honor by the Faculty of Theology—the St. Thomas Aquinas Award (1999). He began with post-diploma study in Church History and in 2005 he finished his PhD; his thesis was *The Historical Development of the Rule of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and its Influence on the Imagery of Medieval Knighthood*.

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