

# The national flag of Lusatian Sorbs

by Ladislav Hnát

**Abstract** This paper deals with the national flag of the Sorbs or Wends: its origins, its first presentation, the symbolism of its colours, its usage in the 19th and 20th centuries and its regulations.



The flag of Lusatian Sorbs/Wends consists of three colors – blue, red and white in horizontal stripes of equal width.

As in case of many other flags an exact date of rise of the flag of the Lusatian Sorbs cannot be unambiguously stated. According to the most probable version, the blue-red-white flag flew at the Song Festivities in Bautzen on 17.1.1845<sup>1</sup>.

This indicates the fact that the women participants of the second Song Festivities on 7.5.1846 decorated themselves with rosettes in the mentioned colours<sup>2</sup>.

However, it is not excluded that the Sorbs used their flag sooner. The Sorbian patriot Smoler wrote that on the occasion of blessing bells in the village Lohsa in 1842 a flag with a legend in Sorbian was carried in procession.<sup>3</sup> In the same year H. Zejler claimed in his poem: "To stay, the Sorbs must forever stand and the Sorbian flag fly free."<sup>4</sup>

The Lusatian Sorbs, isolated at that time, awarded unconsciously blue, red and white as Slavic colors. The periodical „Kamenzer Wochenschrift“ of 21.6.1848 stated that together with the Saxon white-green flag the blue, red, white tricolor appeared during protest rallies of serfs of the St. Mary's Star convent in the cloister village Schmeckwitz on 17.3., 31.3. and 19.4. 1848<sup>5</sup>.

In that period originated an attempt to install common Slavic colors according to the example of liberation and emancipation movements in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands etc. The meeting of representatives of some Slavic nations took place for that reason in Berlin on 23.3.1848. Owing to the fact that majority of Slavic nations had white and red and some even blue as their national colors, the representatives agreed to introduce blue, red and white arranged vertically in three equal stripes beginning with blue at the flagstaff as panslavic colours<sup>6</sup>.

It is interesting to note that France flew the same colors in the same arrangement from 25.2. to 7.3.1848<sup>7</sup>.

Even though that panslavic colors in the afore mentioned combination did not come into effect, as the panslavic colors were later considered white-blue-red in horizontal tricolor, the Lusatian Sorbs as the smallest Slavic nation paradoxically retained the colors in combination intended originally for all Slavs until present days.

Dr. J. P. Jórdan, Sorbian awakener, presented for the first time the blue-red-white flag



as exclusively Lusatian Sorbian on the occasion of the Slavic Congress in Prague in June 1848<sup>8</sup>. The flag of Lusatian Sorbs undoubtedly originates from the beginning of the Lusatian Sorbian national revival period in the 1840's.

H. Zejler in his poem attributed to the colors of the flag the following significance: blue for sky, red for sunrise and love, white for innocence. In his other poem "Triad of Colors" of 1850 blue suggests forget-me-not meaning faithfulness, red rose meaning love, white lily meaning innocence. Blue suggests also the waters of Lusatia<sup>9</sup>.

It is not excluded that the horizontal arrangement of colors might be influenced by the Russian flag. Lusatian Sorbian patriots like patriots of other oppressed Slavic nations placed their hopes in Russia. The ruling German circles neither liked the national movement of the Lusatian Sorbs nor their flag itself. The use of this flag extended in connection with building of the "Sorbian House" in Bautzen. At the opening on 26.9.1904, the flag of the Lusatian Sorbs flew together with German, Saxon and Bautzener municipal ones<sup>10</sup>. J. Skala appealed then in his poem in 1913: "Hold on, Sorbian folk, to your flag"<sup>11</sup>.

The Lusatian Sorbian flag appeared again more frequently in the years 1918-19 during the struggle for independence or joining Czechoslovakia respectively. On 1.1.1919 the blue-red-white flag was proclaimed as flag of the failed Sorbian Lusatian Republic<sup>12</sup>.

After the adoption of "Nuremberg Laws" of 15.9.1935 hanging up the Lusatian Sorbian flag was forbidden<sup>13</sup>. "Domowina" (Homeland), the Roof Organization of the Lusatian Sorbs, under the presidency of P. Nedo did not give up and protested with the then minister of the German Empire R. Hess<sup>14</sup>. The national flag of the Lusatian Sorbs was hung up no more after the year 1937.

The Sorbian flags first appeared again in April 1945<sup>15</sup>. After the years of Nazi persecution there was an entire lack of them. That time and later on Czechs sent the flags of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia to Lusatia. The inversed order of colors served as Sorbian national flags.

After the foundation of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 the flag of the Lusatian Sorbs got equal rights in the so called bilingual regions of Lusatia. It might be hoisted next to flag of the G.D.R. or the red one at the public buildings, and even hung alone at private houses.

Nowadays in the Free State of Saxony the flag of the Lusatian Sorbs can be hoisted next to the German Federal and the Saxony State flags at Office buildings throughout the „Settlement area" of the Lusatian Sorbs. The constitution of the State of Brandenburg describes and recognizes the flag of the Lusatian Sorbs/Wends, usage is not regulated<sup>16</sup>.

The present ratio of width to length is 3:5.



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## Biography



Ladislav Hnát was born in Plzeň/Pilsen in 1936. Graduated at University of Economics, specialization External Commerce. Worked in an export corporation in Prague and among others for 4 years in Burma. After the Soviet invasion he was not allowed to have commercial relations abroad and was employed in municipal economy in Prague. After the „velvet revolution“ he works as diplomat in Moscow, Riga and New York. Now retired.

He entered Vexillological Club in Prague (today's Czech Vexillological Society) soon after foundation in the 1970'. He writes in the bulletin „Vexilologie“. He participated in vexillological congresses in Germany, Italy, England and Poland.

In the latest period he is interested in flags, colors and logos of European political parties. He edited „Colors and Logos of Political Parties in Euro parliament 2009-13/4“.