



On this day: January 7, 1797, the Tricolore is born, an idea of Italy is born

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On January 7, 2026, an anniversary that speaks directly to our identity occurs: exactly 229 years ago, on January 7, 1797, the Tricolore was adopted for the first time as the national flag by a sovereign Italian state, the Cispadane Republic. The decision was made in Reggio Emilia, in the hall of the town hall that has since borne a symbolic name: **Sala del Tricolore**. It was there, in the midst of the political transformations triggered by the French Revolution (1789-1799), that the idea of a flag as a symbol of the people, not of a dynasty, began to take shape on the peninsula.

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The Sala del Tricolore in Reggio Emilia - Photo Wikipedia

Before the flag: the cockade and the first signs of belonging

Before waving on a pole, the Tricolore appeared pinned to the chest. The first documented trace of the three colors in Italy dates back to **August 21, 1789**, when in Genoa some witnesses reported demonstrators with a green, white, and red cockade. In that initial phase, there was not yet a structured national consciousness: the colors were often associated, even due to the confusion of the gazettes of the time, with the revolutionary ideals of the French.

But the signal was clear: a simple symbol could transform into a political language.

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Italian tricolor cockade - Photo Wikipedia

The Tricolore takes shape: from the European wave to Italian identity

The cultural model was inevitably the French one: the tricolor flag from across the Alps had introduced a groundbreaking novelty, shifting the meaning of the flag from the dynastic-military level to the national one. In France, the cockade quickly evolved and the green, which appeared in the very early days of 1789, was almost immediately abandoned in favor of blue and red, later completed by white.

In Italy, however, the green remained. Here too, the explanations intertwine: on one hand, the association with **nature** and the “natural rights” evoked by revolutionary ideas (equality and freedom); on the other, a very concrete element, linked to uniforms and local militias, especially in the Lombard area. The result was an original choice, capable of distinguishing the emerging Italian identity even within the long wave of European change.

The decisive step occurred in 1796, when the colors began to move from the “civil” and symbolic dimension to become a **military insignia**. On **October 11, 1796**, in Milan, the **Lombard Legion** adopted a tricolor flag; a few weeks later, the symbol was taken up in the civic sphere in Bologna, where documents of the time explicitly speak of “national colors” green, white, and red to form a flag. Here the Tricolore began to transform from an echo of external ideals to a recognizable sign of an internal political tension: independence, self-determination, the idea of a common destiny.

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The Standard of the Requisition Hussars of the City of Milan - Copyright Regione Lombardia

January 7, 1797: Reggio Emilia and the official birth of the flag

January 7, 1797 marks the watershed. During the XIV session of the Cispadane congress, Giuseppe Compagnoni, remembered as the “father of the Tricolore,” proposed making the three-color standard universal and using them also in the cockade that “must be worn by everyone.” The motion was approved amid enthusiasm and applause: for the first time, the Tricolore became the **national flag of an Italian state**, no longer just a departmental flag or municipal banner.

The Cispadane Republic, which united Bologna, Ferrara, Modena, and Reggio Emilia, was not united Italy, but it gave the future country a symbol that managed to overcome **borders, local rivalries, and pre-existing affiliations**, offering a visible, immediate, shareable point of reference.

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Flag of the Cispadane Republic - Copyright Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia

After 1797, the Tricolore did not remain a detail of the archive. Its presence grew in popular perception, until it became one of the central symbols of the **Risorgimento**. In the following decades, amid repressions, bans, and clandestinity, those colors continued to re-emerge in revolts and patriotic movements: not as an ornament, but as a declaration.

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The departure of the Expedition of the Thousand from Quarto - Copyright Regione Piemonte

The culmination came with the proclamation of the **Kingdom of Italy on March 17, 1861**, when the Tricolore became the national flag of the new State. From that moment, the flag went through all the seasons of Italian history: monarchy, wars, crises, reconstruction, up to the Republic.

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Italian flag dating back to the First World War - Photo Wikipedia

1946: the Tricolore of the Republic

With the birth of the **Italian Republic**, the Tricolore was confirmed in its essential form, eliminating the Savoy coat of arms. The principle was established first in 1946 and then

definitively in the Constitution: **Article 12** states that the flag of the Republic is the Italian tricolor *“green, white, and red, in three vertical bands of equal dimensions”*. A choice of continuity and, at the same time, of a new beginning: the same flag, but as the common home of a new form of State.

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The Frecce Tricolori draw the Italian national colors above the Vittoriano in Rome - Copyright Quirinale

Today: a flag that is not just memory

The Tricolore is not a ceremonial relic: it is a living symbol, capable of crossing two centuries of history while remaining recognizable at a glance. It has accompanied **decisive transitions, revolutions, wars, national unity, the birth of the Republic**, adapting to the changes of the country without losing its communicative strength.

For this reason, January 7 is not just an anniversary. It is the date when, in Reggio Emilia, a political choice became for the first time a shared sign: **three colors that since then continue to tell, every day, the very idea of Italy.**