

# Political Symbols Fact Sheet

## The Flag

Black, red and gold in three horizontal stripes are the colors of the flag of the Federal Republic of Germany. These bright colors date back to the emperors of the Middle Ages when they were used for flags that were supposed to be seen from far distances and as identification marks for the soldiers and knights who were all wearing armour that hid their faces. The colors were painted on the shields and helmets of soldiers of the same party. Black, red and gold are part of the only six colors, which are gold, silver, black, red, blue, and green, that are used for flags or coats of arms. Bright colors are usually put next to darker ones and non-metallic colors next to the metallic colors gold and silver.

## The Coat of Arms

A black eagle with red beak and talons on a gold field is the coat of arms of the Federal Republic of Germany. The eagle, as the *king of the birds*, is one of the oldest national symbols in the world and the oldest existing national symbol in Europe, today.

The eagle appeared in antiquity adorning the guard of the first Roman Emperor, Augustus. Thereafter, it became symbol of the dominion of all Roman Emperors. After the decline of Rome, the eagle reappeared on shields of the kings who dominated Europe in the Middle Ages. Charlemagne, the first Frankish king to gather the Germanic nations along with other Europeans into his vast empire, had the statue of an eagle placed on top of his palace in Aachen. Subsequently, after the empire was divided into France and the *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation* – which included all the German territories with their different princely or ducal leaders – a black, double-headed eagle on a gold escutcheon remained the seal of the Emperors.

## National Anthem

The text of the song was written in 1841 by the German poet August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798–1874).

In May 1952 the third stanza of the *Deutschland-Lied* was proclaimed the official anthem of the Federal Republic of Germany. The melody was composed by Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), the famous composer of many symphonies, operas and oratorios. The melody is that of the old Austrian *Kaiserhymne* (Imperial Anthem). The German text and the English translation are:

Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit  
Für das deutsche Vaterland –  
Danach laßt uns alle streben,  
Brüderlich mit Herz und Hand.  
Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit  
Sind des Glückes Unterpfand –  
Blüh' im Glanze dieses Glückes,  
Blühe, deutsches Vaterland.

*Unity and right and freedom  
For the German Fatherland,  
For this let us all fraternally  
Strive each with heart and hand.  
Unity and right and freedom  
Are the pledge of happiness.  
Bloom in the splendor of this happiness,  
Germany, our Fatherland.*