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/  
**Hungarian  
National  
and State  
Symbols**  
/  
**Theses**

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The state coat of arms on the 1945 100 pengő banknote



The men's épée team celebrating their Olympic victory with the national flag (2024)

Abstract

Our state and national symbols are an integral part of our culture, and their development is closely linked to Hungarian history, which has shaped them over the centuries into what we know today. This form is unique and unmistakable, yet it fits into the iconographic canon that connects our own culture to European culture.

Over time, not only the form of these symbols, but also their role and significance have changed considerably. From a millennial perspective, perhaps the contemporary interpretation differs most from that of earlier eras. What remains common and constant in these symbols, however, is that they carry a symbolic meaning that transcends their appearance, centering on the historical representation of identity at any given time.

It follows that the coat of arms has not lost its role as a symbol of public authority, and thus remains an indispensable part of our everyday lives, appearing on our documents, banknotes, and government buildings.

We carry many such symbols from our past, some of which are not

always clear in their meaning today, or are sometimes divisive<sup>1</sup> due to the layers of historical events that have accumulated around them. Being symbols themselves, they are extremely susceptible to the ideological intentions of the moment, as the literature on the development of national identity accepts the approach that, in certain periods of the political era from the Compromise to the present day, the national theme being constructed in the discursive space, through which we can define the duration of our collective identity, was consciously influenced.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it is no coincidence that only a very small number of them enjoy widespread social acceptance to this day. The historical coat of arms, the tricolor, and the anthem are our three national symbols, which, based on public consensus, currently have constitutional legal confirmation<sup>3</sup>.

This study and the related development program focus on two visually interpretable symbols: the coat of arms and the flag. Their unique status distinguishes them from all

other symbols that surround us in our everyday lives and are similar from a semiotic point of view (e.g., commercial, informational, transportation, etc.). What makes them special are their origins, rooted in our common past, which give rise to our unique relationship with them, one that is personal and emotional. They belong to all of us and to the community, a public treasure that belongs to everyone who feels part of the national community.

They are also public property in the sense that, since they are only partially binding in formal terms, their reproduction can be interpreted within fairly broad parameters. The current relevant regulations essentially only stipulate the existence of formal elements that are indispensable in terms of meaning, and make recommendations on how they should be displayed in a limited and, in many respects, incomplete manner, which allows for a fairly free interpretation in terms of form. On the one hand, this can even be considered correct, as in certain situations it may be justified to allow for the

individual expression of certain stylistic or aesthetic requirements. On the other hand, however, the lack of any restrictions in the regulations and the shortcomings of the recommended designs mean that we are often forced to see our valuable national symbols in an undeservedly poor image quality, from which even official representations are sometimes not exempt.

Recognizing this and the intention arising from it inspired the creation of the program, which aims to lay the professional foundations for a quality assurance system for these symbols using the tools and methods of design research and development. The study includes a historical analysis that examines the topic in the context of attributes related to national symbols. In addition, it provides a critical overview of the current relevant legal background and explores issues and considerations related to the contemporary use of state symbols. Summarizing all of this, it lays out a modernization program that provides a sufficiently stable professional basis for future legislative codification.

1 Consider, for example, two symbols that originated in the era of the Hungarian conquest: the Árpád stripe flag and the turul bird, both of which became compromised when they were used as political tools by the Arrow Cross Party.

2 National Identity – Unity or Diversity? – Political Reconciliation Discussion Series II, Policy Solutions, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Büro Budapest, May 2013.

3 Act XLIV of 1990 on the amendment of the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary and the Fundamental Law of 2011



The development approaches the issue exclusively from the perspective of public administration and official state communication. It does not seek to influence the diverse, folkloric world of lay usage, or at most seeks to do so indirectly.

The rapidly changing communication environment of our age is characterized by an increasing number of parallel media, which are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of their technical characteristics. This diversity poses increasingly complex challenges for visual elements, whose primary communicative power lies in their unmistakability, which requires them to be displayed in the same form under all circumstances. To ensure this, it is essential to optimize the graphic image, taking into account the possibilities and limitations of the imaging technologies of this heterogeneous media environment.

Based on the above, the program approaches the topic from two angles. On the one hand, it seeks to explore the contextual connections inherent in symbols through the study of historical references; on the other hand, it seeks solutions to the formal problems of representation in the context of heterogeneous communication and media technology. The program's development concept does not examine stylistic issues related to the visual appearance of symbols—primarily the coat of arms—in the context of shaping interpretation. From this point of view, the intention is neutral, i.e., in its visual gestures, it reinforces the original content of the existing symbol, taking into account the sensitivities associated with these symbols, and strives to maintain a clear, neutral, and emotionally neutral formal position in its appearance, which aims at unifying intention in widespread acceptance.

It is also important to note that the new design consciously avoids both historicizing effects and conformity to contemporary graphic trends. The goal is clearly to create a visual construction that is optimized for modern and diverse communication needs, ensuring that our symbols are always presented in a manner befitting them and with the highest possible quality.

Folkloric coat of arms  
representation,  
(Kővágóórs,  
Veszprém County) ►





**Thesis 1.** The current legal regulations governing state symbols do not provide a sufficient professional basis for ensuring the quality of visual communication.

**Thesis 2.** The formal appearance of the state coat of arms under current regulations does not adequately meet contemporary communication requirements.

**Thesis 3.** The description of the flag and the national colors is incomplete and inaccurate.

