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## **Constitutional graphic symbols of Spain and its autonomous communities**

**Keywords:** Spain, constitution, autonomous communities, flags, coats of arms, heraldry

**Słowa kluczowe:** Hiszpania, konstytucja, wspólnoty autonomiczne, flagi, herby, heraldyka

### **Abstract**

Flags and coats of arms are graphic state symbols. They define national and regional identity. State and regional graphic symbols have a particularly important place in legal acts in Spain. Symbols of each autonomous community are listed in their statutes. Most of them refer to the rich historical and cultural tradition of the region. In only a few cases, it was necessary to create flags or coat of arms in connection with the establishment of an autonomous community in the early 1980s.

### **Streszczenie**

#### **Konstytucyjne symbole graficzne Hiszpanii i jej wspólnot autonomicznych**

Flagi oraz herby są graficznymi symbolami państwowymi. Identyfikują one narodową i regionalną tożsamość. Szczególnie ważne miejsce graficzne symbole państwowe i regionalne znajdują w aktach prawnych w Hiszpanii. Symbole każdej ze wspólnot autonomicznych znajdują się w ich statutach. Większość z nich odwołuje się do bogatej tradycji historycznej i kulturowej regionów. Jedynie w niewielu przypadkach należało stworzyć flagi lub herby wraz z powołaniem wspólnot autonomicznych na początku lat 80. XX w.

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**I.**

State and regional symbols are an important element of each state identity and its citizens. They are a link between the citizens and the state, integrating them<sup>2</sup>. Flags and coats of arms are graphic state symbols. Those symbols, defining national and regional identity are a particularly important element of legal acts in Spain. In contrast to the Constitution of Spain, which laconically defines the state symbols, the statutes of the autonomous regions usually precisely define the insignia used in every region. This is due to the complicated regional situation of Spain, a country entirely covered by autonomous communities.

By virtue of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Spain of 1978, the “right to autonomy of nationalities and regions” was recognised and guaranteed<sup>3</sup>, as well as the right to have own flags and ensigns used together with flag and ensigns of Spain<sup>4</sup>. Highly developed regionalism had to translate into the creation of separateness also in symbolism and insignia, because “the colours and iconography of flags and state coats refer, apart from history, to the broadly understood geographical problems – the natural environment, population and economy of the country”<sup>5</sup>. Spain is characterised by a rich heraldic tradition, and the creation of autonomous communities has placed new regional authorities in the task of establishing insignia reminiscent to the local tradition. In cases of “historical regions”, where regional identity has been well-established for a long time, there were no difficulties with finding characteristic symbols, often even derived from ready-made solutions, as in the case of the *señera* or *ikurriña*. However, in regions that previously did not display autonomous claims, local authorities had to resolve this issue in a different way.

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<sup>2</sup> B. Banaszak, *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Komentarz*, Warsaw 2012, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Art. 2, Constitución Española, de 27 de diciembre de 1978 (further: CE), Boletín Oficial del Estado (further: BOE) 311, de 29/12/1978.

<sup>4</sup> Art. 4.2, CE.

<sup>5</sup> J. Wrona, *Analiza elementów geograficznych i ich symboliki na flagach oraz w herbach państw współczesnego świata*, Cracow 2002, p. 8.

Although coats of arms are older than flags and, consequently, have a greater tradition, the Spanish vexillum has been mentioned in the Constitution, which means that it is the flag that has the primacy over the coat of arms and other ensigns in the Spanish law system. The image of the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Spain is regulated by a regular law (*ley*), a lower rank document than the Constitution.

## II.

The Spanish Constitution states that the current flag of the Kingdom consist of three horizontal stripes: red, yellow and red, while the yellow stripe in the middle being double the width of each red stripe<sup>6</sup>. Although the official state flag of Spain is a relatively young institution, its roots reach the beginning of the real Castilian-Aragonese union. With their appearance on the Spanish throne, the Habsburgs used on the battlefields and in order to mark the Spanish fleet a flag with a red Burgundian cross on a white background. The Burgundian cross is a variation of the diagonal cross (St. Andrew's), but its arms are not smooth and symbolize the knots of branches. Although it was not legally regulated, the flag with the Burgundian cross was a symbol of the Spanish imperial monarchy in its lands around the world during the entire Habsburg dynasty rule, and later (with the coat of arms of subsequent monarchs being imposed on the flag) after the takeover of power by the Bourbons. To this days (with a short break for the period of the Second Republic and the dictatorship of Franco, 1931–1975), the Burgundian cross with the royal coat of arm on the flag is used by the Spanish Infantry Regiments<sup>7</sup>.

It was not until the enlightened Spanish king Charles III of Bourbon, among the numerous reforms and orders he had carried out during his reign, also decided to standardize the question of the state flag. The previous flag had a dominant white background, so it was hardly recognizable from a distance. First of all, it caused problems when trying to distinguish the nationality of a ship on the high seas. In the second half of the 18th century also France (as

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<sup>6</sup> Art. 4.1, CE.

<sup>7</sup> J. Álvarez Abeilhé, *La bandera de España. El origen militar de los símbolos de España*, "Revista de historia militar" 2010, No. LIV, pp. 37–69.

well as the Italian states under the Bourbon regime) and Portugal had white flags that only distinguished the coat of arms, and the English flag with the red cross of St. George on a white background was deceptively similar to that one used by Spanish units. In view of the existing situation, Charles III announced in 1785 a contest to create a new flag and chose a proposition with vivid red and yellow colors – placed in such a way that they formed three horizontal stripes, where the red ones were extreme and half thinner than the yellow one located in the middle. On the yellow field there is a crowned round coat of arms consisting of vertical halves, where on the right there was a yellow castle on a red background, while on the left side a red lion standing on its hind legs turned to the right on a white background<sup>8</sup>. Although there is no sufficient confirmation of this fact in the sources, it seems possible that Charles III suggested the color of the flag of the Kingdom of Naples, which he ruled before he took the Spanish throne, and whose coloring comes from the period of Aragonese domination in the Middle Ages. It can therefore be assumed that the colors of the current Spanish flag have their source in the colors of the *señera*, the oldest flag of the Iberian Peninsula (which will be discussed below), the symbol of the Crown of Aragón, which during the period of its glory, the late Middle Ages, had a powerful influence on the states of the western Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the Aragonese colors were supposedly applied to Spain by a circuitous route through the Apennine Peninsula. The current maritime flag became officially the state flag in 1843 during the reign of Isabela II. From that moment on, with one exception indicated below, the Spanish flag was basically subject to minor modifications only in the area of changing the coat of arms: during the First Republic (1873–1874), the crown of the coat of arms disappeared, while during the Franco period, the image of a black eagle holding a shield of arms appeared. The present flag has been in force since 1981 and the place of the previous coat of arms has been assumed nowadays with the current one with the Pillars of Hercules symbolizing Gibraltar's Strait on the sides of the shield, a crown and five fields symbolizing Castile, Leon, Aragon and Navarra, and three yellow lilies on a blue background commemorating the reigning Bourbon dynasty, centrally in front of the other fields.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, pp. 56–58.

The only period when Spain had a different flag was the time of the Second Republic (1931–1939), when the traditional flag was replaced with the *tricolor*, where all horizontal stripes were of the same width and had red, yellow and violet colors from the top. In the central place of the flag on the yellow strip there was located the coat of arms of the state, with four fields symbolizing historical regions and the Pillars of Hercules on both sides of the coat of arms<sup>9</sup>. While the red and yellow stripes referred to the traditional Spanish flag, the new violet stripe was a reference to the tradition of the Comuneros Uprising in Castile (1520–1522), a grassroots rebellion against the newly enthroned Habsburgs and the Castilian nobility. The republican government tried in this way to refer to the tradition of the popular struggle against absolutism. However, it was not sufficiently confirmed in the sources whether the insurgents really used purple flags<sup>10</sup>. All the more so when matching the colors of the Republican flag with the traditional colors of Madrid, referred to hereinafter.

### III.

The traditions of Spanish vexillology date back to the Middle Ages. The earliest, ca. mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, is a banner with the so-called The Royal Sign of Aragon (Spanish: *Señal Real de Aragón*, Aragon: *Senyal Real*), also known as “Aragonese bars” (*barras* or *palos de Aragón*) based on the royal coat of arms of Aragón. Its heraldic composition is uncomplicated, because on the gold background there are four vertical pales (stripes) in red<sup>11</sup>. The first known image of the insignia is the privilege granted to the oxytan town of Millau by King Alfonso II in 1187, where appears, among others, the right to use the royal sign, which was called “*vexillum nostrum*”, meaning “our flag”<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Art. 2, *Símbolos nacionales de la República Española*, Decreto del Gobierno Provisional de la República, de 28 de abril de 1931 “Gaceta de Madrid” 1931, No. 118.

<sup>10</sup> Often there are interchangeably different color names of the Comuneros flag, always within red and purple, recently, for example, the color of the rebellion was named as iris (*cárdeno*). J.J. Sánchez Badiola, *Símbolos de España y de sus regiones y autonomías. Emblemática territorial española*, Madrid 2010, p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> A. Montaner Frutos, *El señal del Rey de Aragón: historia y significado*, Zaragoza 1995.

<sup>12</sup> F. Menéndez Pidal de Navascués, C. Iglesias, *Símbolos de España*, Madrid 2000, p. 102.

The origin of colors and their composition on the banner is not entirely clear, as it is one of the oldest heraldic symbols appearing on the Iberian Peninsula. The Heraldists and historians have various theories and conjectures about the origin of *Señal Real*, connecting it with the reigns of the Kingdom of Aragón or the County of Barcelona, even before the merger of the two territories into a single state, what took place in 1137. Definitely the most interesting legend associated with the creation of the coat of arms, which later gave birth of the flag, was the “Legend of four lanes”, which first appeared in the “General Chronicle of Spain” (“*Crónica general de España*”) in 1551, written by a Valencian historian Pere Antoni Beuter. The legend undoes the creation of the flag until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the count of Barcelona, Urgell and Girona, among others – Wilfred the Hairy went to help the French king who fought the Normans. During the battle, Wilfred was mortally wounded and, as the last wish, he asked the king of France to give a sign that his successors would be able to use. Then the monarch dipped four fingers into the wound of the dying man and passed them over the gold shield of the Catalan Count. The legend gained enormous popularity, even though it was discredited by historians at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the author of the legend confuses historical facts (like the names of the kings of France), however, the story of the heroic Wilfred is still popular today and has become one of many arguments to which Catalan nationalists, who have fought for independence in recent years, appealed<sup>13</sup>.

The banner of *Señal Real* gave the beginning of the flag called *señera*<sup>14</sup>, which also has nine alternating stripes in gold (five) and red (four), but in a horizontal position. All four autonomous communities, from the territory of the former Crown of Aragon, adopted the Aragonese tradition in their insignia. After the transformation of the end of the 1970s and the restoration of the rights to establish autonomous regions in Spain, it was assumed from the outset that autonomy would be granted to the so-called historical regions, included Catalonia. Hence, the statute regulating the autonomy of Catalonia was passed as one of the earliest and it was the Catalans who had the option

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<sup>13</sup> J. Canal i Morell, *Con permiso de Kafka. El proceso independentista en Cataluña*, Barcelona 2018, p. 297 and next.

<sup>14</sup> G. Fatás Cabeza, *El escudo de Aragón*, [In:] *Aragón, reino y corona*, Madrid 2000, pp. 167–174.

of choosing the *señera* in the traditional version as the flag of their autonomous community<sup>15</sup>. In the following years, the whole country was divided into autonomous communities, thus, and the remaining territories once forming the Crown of Aragon obtained the privilege to establish their own regional flags. To distinguish it from Catalonia, the autonomous community of Aragon imposed the regional coat of arms on its traditional flag<sup>16</sup>. In this case, the elements of the coat of arms are very different from the flag itself, referring to the historical territories that were part of the Kingdom of Aragón. The coat of arms of Aragon was first chronicled in 1499 and adopted by law as the autonomy coat of arms in 1984<sup>17</sup>. The flag of the Valencian Community, in turn, crowned with a blue strip party per pale next to the spear with 1/4 of the total length<sup>18</sup>.

The flag of the Balearic Islands is also based on the Aragonese flag, with a white castle with five towers on the violet field in the upper left corner of the flag. The flag is a reference to the former medieval banner of the Kingdom of Mallorca, which, however, had two identical fields with a castle located opposite each other in the upper left and right bottom corner<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the autonomous statute of the Balearic Islands provides for the possibility of establishing flags by the government of each of the islands included in the archipelago, which have all benefited<sup>20</sup>. Each of the four islands with its island government has established a flag, where the background is always a *señera*, while the differences are only heraldic figures – and so Mallorca has a cas-

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<sup>15</sup> Art. 4, EA de Cataluña de 18 de diciembre de 1979, Ley Orgánica 4/1979, BOE 306, de 22/12/1979.

<sup>16</sup> Art. 3, EA de Aragón de 10 de agosto de 1982, Ley Orgánica 8/1982, BOE 195, de 10/08/1982. According to the statute, the coat of arms was to be placed in the central point of the flag, but the later decree of the Aragonese government moved the coat of arms on the flag to the left. Decreto 48/1984 de la Diputación General de Aragón, de 28 de junio, Boletín Oficial de Aragón 25, de 14/07/1984.

<sup>17</sup> Art. 4, Ley 2/1984, de 16 de abril, Boletín Oficial de Aragón 5, de 18/04/1984.

<sup>18</sup> Art. 4.1, EA de Reforma de Ley Orgánica 5/1982, de 1 de julio, de Estatuto de Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, Ley Orgánica 1/2006, BOE 86, de 11/04/2006. It is called also: royal *señera* (*real señera*), crowned *señera* (*señera coronada*), *señera* with blue (*señera con azul*), *señera* tricolor (*señera tricolor*).

<sup>19</sup> Art. 6.1, EA de Illes Balears, Ley Orgánica 1/2007, de 28 de febrero, BOE 52, de 01/03/2007.

<sup>20</sup> Art. 6.2., *ibidem*.

tle identical to that located on the autonomous flag, but placed on the vertical strip on the left side of the flag, and the same the figure of the castle is perpendicular to the *señera*. Ibiza has four castles of brown color with a blue moat located in the corners of the flag directly on the background. Menorca and Formentera imposed coats of arms on the *señera*. In the first case, a white tower surrounded by a wall of the same color on a blue background, while on the other island is a diamond located centrally on the flag, on which the gold tower stands on a blue background, two grains above it, and at its feet the sea waves in white. It is easy to see that both colors and heraldic figures refer to the defense and maritime tradition, which coincides with the rich history of conquest and a strategic point on the map of the Mediterranean. The popularity of the *señera* is not only noticed in the east part of the Iberian Peninsula, but it has also a considerable impact in some parts of Italy, France and Latin America, where the fame of the flag reached together with the representatives of the former Kingdom of Aragon.

#### IV.

The situation of legal regulations of the symbols of autonomous regions of Spain is interesting. Admittedly, the constitution dedicates them only one article, but it is referring to the statutes, where the regional symbols have been precisely described.

During the Reconquista, Castile has become the largest and most significant kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula. Today, two large Spanish regions have in their names the “Castile”. In the north there is Castile-Leon, formerly called Old Castile, and in the south of Castile-La Mancha, once New Castile. Their heraldic traditions are inextricably linked with the Middle Ages, and the official flags of today’s autonomous communities refer to the banner of St. Ferdinand – under which King Ferdinand III (King of Castile and Leon) conquered in 1248, Seville, one of the most important cities in the Arabian Andalusia. The flag has been kept in the Cathedral of Seville until today, and after the canonization of the king in 1671, it became a Catholic relic. At the same time, it is one of the oldest flags in Europe. The coat of arms of King Ferdinand III, which is one of the oldest not only in the Iberian Peninsula



but also in the world, has been placed on the flag<sup>21</sup>. The flag consists of four fields, one of which in the upper right corner is the symbol of Leon, a purple lion climbed on two legs, turned to the right, on a silver background, while the other three fields on a red background have golden castles with three towers – the symbol of Castile<sup>22</sup>. The contemporary flag of Castile-Leon is modeled after the banner of St. Ferdinand. Retaining the color of the original, only one field with a castle, was replaced by a field with the lion, so that the same fields were diagonally relative to each other, introducing symmetry into the flag configuration<sup>23</sup>. In contrast, the flag of Castile-La Mancha is a bit farther variation of the banner of St. Ferdinand. It consists of two fields, where on the left there is a golden castle, while the right one has No. heraldic figure (Leon, which symbol is a lion, is a part of Castile-Leon). There is also a slight modification in colors – the background of the left field with the castle has been described as magenta<sup>24</sup>.

Directly connected with Castile remains the autonomous community of Murcia, which consists only of a homonymous province, most territorially suits the former Kingdom of Murcia, created as a result of the Reconquista in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and located on the edge of more powerful Christian kingdoms – Castile (included in its borders at the beginning of 14<sup>th</sup> century.) and Aragón and the Islamic emirate of Granada. Thus, in the contemporary autonomous flag in the upper left corner there are four gold castles in two rows, symbolizing the border areas, each of which means one of the powerful neighbors, with the fourth of the castles being a metaphor of the Mediterranean. In the opposite, lower right corner, the flag of the autonomous community is decorated with seven golden crowns arranged in four horizontal rows, so that in the upper one there is one crown, in the second three, in the next two and in the last one again. They were given to Murcia by Castilian monarchs – the first five by Alfonso X the Wise in a privilege granted in 1281. Ex-

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<sup>21</sup> A. Znamierowski, *Wielka księga heraldyki*, Warsaw 2008, p. 191.

<sup>22</sup> The name Castile refers to a large number of castles located on its territory, from the spanish word *castillo*.

<sup>23</sup> Art. 4.2, Estatuto de Autonomía (further: EA) de Castilla y León, de 25 de febrero, Ley Orgánica 4/1983, BOE 52, de 02/03/1983.

<sup>24</sup> Art. 5.1, EA de Castilla-La Mancha, de 10 de agosto, Ley Orgánica 9/1982, B.O.E. 195, de 16/08/1982.

actly 80 years after this event, Murcia enriched with another crown, this time with the attribution of Pedro I Cruel, as a reward for loyalty, during the civil war, called the Two Peter's War. The citizens of Murcia were waiting for the last crown until 1709, when king Philip V, gave this prestigious award during the succession war, again for keeping the region of allegiance, this time to the first Bourbon on the Spanish throne<sup>25</sup>. The autonomous statute specified the background color for figures entered in the flag as crimson (*carmesí*) or *cartagena*<sup>26</sup>. The last one is a characteristic of the region and is defined as a transitional between red and purple, identical with crimson. Its name refers to the oldest city in the region, founded in 227 b.c. by the Phoenicians on the Mediterranean coast.

A much shorter but important tradition has the Andalusian flag. The territory conquered in the late Middle Ages by Castile, was the cradle of Arabian heritage on the Iberian Peninsula. It is to the Muslim tradition that refer the colors of the largest contemporary autonomous community – Andalusia. Its flag was created in 1918 during the Assembly of Ronda, hosted by the local nationalist organization of the Freedom Assembly of Andalusia (*Junta Liberalista de Andalucía*). The assembly adopted the “insignia of Andalusia”, which are now the flag and the emblem of the autonomous community of Andalusia. The assembly agreed that the flag would consist of three longitudinal stripes of the same width, of which the upper and the lower will be green and the middle will remain white. The designer Blas Infante explained that green is supposed to symbolize the Umayyads, while the white the Almohads, two dynasties during the rule of which Al-Andalus experienced the greatest bloom in history. At the same time Infante remarked that the flag was not made in accordance with heraldic standards, because he did not want it to be tied to any contemporary family or historical event, because it was to symbolize the unity and peace of the Andalusian people<sup>27</sup>. There was no doubt at the time of deciding on the flag of the autonomous community. A traditional green-white-and-green calligraphy by Infante was adopted, with the pro-

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<sup>25</sup> J.J. Sánchez Badiola, *Símbolos...*, s. 311.

<sup>26</sup> Art. 4, EA para la Región de Murcia, de 9 de junio, Ley Orgánica 4/1982, BOE 146, de 19/06/1982.

<sup>27</sup> Vergara Varela J., *La bandera en Al-Andalus*, [In:] *Actas del XIII Congreso sobre el Andalusismo Histórico*, Sevilla 2010, p. 197.

viso that it can also be accompanied by the autonomy emblem placed in the central point of the flag<sup>28</sup>. The emblem is often referred as a coat of arms, but technically, as it was not designed with heraldic rules it can only be called an emblem, the only one among coats of arms of other autonomous communities. Therefore we can see some nonheraldic figures included, like the mythical Greek hero Heracles, between two lions, but also appearing in the heraldry of Spain the Pillars of Hercules. What is more, the emblem's appearance has been partially regulated in the autonomous statute, which is an exceptional record among autonomous communities. The Andalusian's statute stated that "Andalusia will have its own emblem, approved *de jure* by its Parliament, in which the following legend shall appear: "*Andalucía por sí, para España y la humanidad*" ("Andalusia by herself, for Spain and for Humankind"), taking into account the agreement adopted by the Assembly of Ronda of 1918"<sup>29</sup>.

## V.

Chronologically, the second older monarch's banner in the Iberian Peninsula, about which the source is preserved, is the one of the King Navarre, known from the battle of Navas de Tolosa in 1212. On the red background are placed gold chains that form a rectangular frame and intersect two crosses: St. Andrew's and St. George's, connected in the center of the coat with a green emerald. A legend says that the golden chains were protecting the tent of the caliph Muhammad an-Nasir and were cut with a sword by the king of Navarre Sancho VII the Strong during the battle, while the emerald was taken out by the king from the caliph's turban. Historians rejected the truth of the legend, considering it fantastic<sup>30</sup>. The characteristic element of the chains remained, however, among the insignia of the Kingdom of Navarre, which is the region that had the longest political independence of the territories currently forming part of the Kingdom of Spain. This contributed leaving a certain uninterupt-

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<sup>28</sup> Art. 6.1, EA para Andalucía, de 30 de diciembre de 1981, Ley Orgánica 6/1981, BOE 9, de 11/01/1982.

<sup>29</sup> Art. 3, *ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> J.M. Muruzábal Aguirre, *El emblema de Navarra*, [In:] *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie VII, Historia del Arte*, 1993, t. 6, pp. 117–118.

ed legal autonomy in Navarra, distinguishing the region from other in Spain, because incorporating Navarre to Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, local laws were left in force. Laws known as “*forales*” (from the privileges issued by the rulers of Spain – the so-called *fueros*) enabled the establishment of the *Diputación Foral de Navarra* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a provincial tax and administrative authority, that in 1910 officially established the flag of Navarre, where over a red background was placed the crowned coat of arms of Navarre, previously known from the medieval banners, described above<sup>31</sup>. Through the turbulent Spanish 20<sup>th</sup> century, the flag of Navarre underwent only minor graphic modifications (between 1937 and 1981 the Order of St. Ferdinand was added to the coat of arms and the flag, as the highest military decoration in Spain), finally becoming the official symbol of the autonomous community, by virtue of a resolution of the foral parliament in 1981<sup>32</sup>.

Navarre borders on the west with the Basque Country. Historically, they created one land. To date, most Basques believe that Navarre is part of the Basque heritage. Like Catalonia, the Basque Country exhibits the greatest centrifugal tendencies, striving to constantly increase the regional autonomy, and in extreme cases to independence<sup>33</sup>. The flag is an important symbol for the Basques. Designed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Basque identity was awakened. The designers of the flag, called *ikurriña*, were the brothers Luis and Sabino Arana. Sabino was the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, PNV), which for more than a century has been the most significant political power in the region, regularly represented in both local and state parliaments. The name of the flag is a neologism of its designer (*ikur* means “symbol” in Basque). The literature of the subject emphasizes that the flag was first a symbol of the ideology of Basque nationalism before it became a symbol of a specific territory<sup>34</sup>. The flag has an interesting

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<sup>31</sup> M. del Mar Larraza, Á. Baraibar, *La bandera de Navarra (1910–1937). Un símbolo plural*, “Historia Contemporánea” 2013, No. 47, pp. 494–501.

<sup>32</sup> Art. 7.2, Reintegración y mejoramiento del Régimen Foral de Navarra, Ley Orgánica 13/1982, de 10 de agosto, BOE 195, de 16/08/1982.

<sup>33</sup> More about the genesis of modern autonomy of the Basque Country, see: M.Z. Dankowski, *Geneza i konstytucyjne podstawy prawnoustrojowe autonomii baskijskiej*, “Przeгляд Prawa Konstytucyjnego” 2015, No. 4, pp. 159–176.

<sup>34</sup> C. Rubio Pobes, *La primera bandera de Euskal-Erria*, “Sancho el sabio: Revista de cultura e investigación vasca” 2004, No. 20, p. 174.

combination and arrangement of colours – on a red background two crosses are placed: a diagonal (St. Andrew's) is green and a St. George's is white. The flag was already institutionalized during the period of the Second Republic, when the first statute of the autonomous Basque Country came into force in 1936. Abolished and banned in the Franco era, it became the official symbol of the autonomous community under its 1979 statute<sup>35</sup>.

Strong peripheral nationalism, as movements cultivating regional traditions are named in Spain, also occurs in Galicia. The flag of the autonomous community refers to the heritage of Gallegos, a people inhabiting the region, but its genesis is lost in the darkness of the Middle Ages and is not entirely clear. In the course of organizing autonomy, the heralds made various proposals regarding the insignia of the established community. They were willingly referring to the tradition of barbarian kingdoms, which during the Barbarian Invasions of the declining Roman Empire, settled on the north-western coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, the inclusion of the green Suebian dragon and the red Alanian lion in the flag was taken into account, the more so as it was proven that the symbols had survived in the memory of the inhabitants of the region for centuries, which was reflected in local documents of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, the vast majority referring to preserved documents and images, was agreed in the issue of the flag – it should be white, with a golden chalice and six red crosses on it, symbolizing the Apostle James, whose grave is in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia and is one of the most popular places of Catholic pilgrimage<sup>36</sup>.

So why there is another model of the flag of the present autonomous community? According to the autonomous statute, the flag of the autonomous community of Galicia is white with a transverse strip in blue which runs from the top of the upper left corner to the lower right corner. In the central point of the flag, the crowned coat of arms of Galicia is placed<sup>37</sup>. In the coat of arms on a blue background there is a golden chalice, present as a symbol

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<sup>35</sup> Art. 5.1, EA para el País Vasco de 18 de diciembre de 1979, Ley Orgánica 3/1979, BOE 306, de 22/12/1979.

<sup>36</sup> J.D. Vales Vía, *La Bandera Gallega o una tradición mal herida*, "Anuario Brigantino" 2011, No. 34, pp. 288–289.

<sup>37</sup> Art. 6.1, EA para Galicia de 6 de abril de 1981, Ley Orgánica 1/1981, BOE 101, de 28/04/1981.

of Galicia in medieval armorials and refers to the papal privilege for the cathedral in Lugo for public display of the host (sacramental bread)<sup>38</sup>. Currently, he is accompanied by seven white crosses, referring to the seven former lands within the borders of Galicia (currently the autonomous community is divided into four provinces). An interesting story is associated with a blue belt that cuts through the traditional white flag background. The sea-ships, which home port was La Coruña, were marked with flags, where a blue cross was seen on a white background (St. Andrew's). A similar sea flag in the Russian fleet was introduced by Peter the Great at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Along with the development of the Russian fleet, mistakes began to occur in the seas in the following century. As a result of the intervention of the Russian ambassador in Madrid in 1891, it was ordered to change the flag of Galician ships. It was decided to subtract one strip from the previous cross, leaving the one that runs from the upper left corner to the lower right. It was then that in times of the great exodus of the Galician Jews, who emigrated to America for economic reasons, a white flag with a transverse blue strip, the last European port became a symbol of the abandoned family land. Probably the symbolism that settled in the collective memory of the Galician emigrants, and then spread and propagated abroad, later returned to their countrymen who remained in Spain and that was suggested by the members of the Royal Galician Academy, who were asked to give their opinion flags of the region in 1930. The designers decided then that the flag of Galicia should look like it is at present<sup>39</sup>.

The Reconquista started from the mountainous areas located on the central north coast of the Iberian Peninsula. The Principality of Asturias became the cradle of Christian resistance against the Muslim invaders. Traditionally, the successor of the Spanish throne is named the prince of Asturias. The first Asturian insignia are unknown, although it is believed that it could have been a white banner with a red cross held by the army of Ramiro I<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> E. Couceiro Domínguez, *Actualizar la memoria: usos rituales de la Ofrenda al Santísimo Sacramento de Lugo*, "Anales de la Fundación Joaquín Costa" 2009, No. 26, pp. 10–13.

<sup>39</sup> J.D. Vales Vía, *op.cit.*, pp. 285–304.

<sup>40</sup> E. Carrocero Fernández, *La oriflama del Reino de Asturias*, "La Nueva España", 21.09.2008. <https://www.lne.es/sociedad-cultura/2008/09/21/sociedad-cultura-oriflama-reino-asturias/677587.html> (14.11.2018).

The current flag of Asturias originated in the Napoleonic era, when the General Assembly of the Principality of Asturias proclaims sovereignty and creates an army to repulse the French occupiers. For military purposes, it was necessary to create a banner under which rebels would fight. Reference was made to medieval traditions. The symbol of Asturias – the Cross of Victory (*La Cruz de la Victoria*), the work of Asturian pre-Roman art, which is deposited in the cathedral of Oviedo, is inscribed on a blue background. Hanging Greek letters placed on both arms of the shorter cross-beam: the big alpha and the small omega are characteristic for this artefact. They are a metaphor of the beginning and end, or divine infinity. According to the tradition, the cross was to have don Pelayo during the Battle of Covadonga in 722, the first victorious battle with the Muslims during the Reconquista<sup>41</sup>. The banner of the brave Asturian army that repelled the French, became a symbol of the region and at the time the autonomous community was formed, it was naturally recognized as the flag of autonomy<sup>42</sup>. However, it took several years before the autonomous authorities defined in the regional law the exactly technical issues related to the use of the flag, its dimensions and colours, which officially became blue (background) and yellow (cross)<sup>43</sup>.

The flag of Cantabria consists of two horizontal stripes, the upper one of which is white and the lower red, which evokes an analogous arrangement of colours in the Polish flag. This symbol was adopted by the autonomous statute in 1981<sup>44</sup>. A later act of the Regional Assembly imposed on the flag the regional coat of arms<sup>45</sup>. There is no accordance in the Spanish historiography as to the genesis of the colours of today's Cantabrian flag. It is known that it was used by ships mooring in the port of Santander probably already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that over time became a symbol of the entire province<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> J.J. Sánchez Badiola, *Jovellanos y el escudo de Asturias*, "Argutorio" 2008, No. 21, pp. 22–24.

<sup>42</sup> Art. 3, EA del Principado de Asturias, de 30 de diciembre de 1981, Ley Orgánica 7/1981, BOE 9, de 11/01/1982.

<sup>43</sup> Ley 4/1990, de 19 de diciembre, de la Bandera del Principado de Asturias, BOE 32, de 06/02/1991.

<sup>44</sup> Art. 3, EA para Cantabria, de 30 de diciembre de 1981, Ley Orgánica 8/1981, BOE 9, de 11/01/1982.

<sup>45</sup> Ley 9/1984, de 22 de diciembre, de la Bandera de la Comunidad Autónoma de Cantabria, BOE 35, de 09/02/1985.

<sup>46</sup> J.J. Sánchez Badiola, *Símbolos...*, s. 490.

## VI.

All of the aforementioned symbols are characterized by more or less developed traditions and have their origins in distant past or are strongly associated with colours that have characterized the region for centuries. By virtue of the new division of the state and the creation of autonomous communities throughout its territory, it was not easy to determine what signs or colours symbolize every region. In this way, the turn of the 1970s and 1980s became a testing ground in the creation of new coats of arms and flags for the needs of the newly created autonomous communities. This has not always been done in accordance with heraldic rules, and the new insignia evoked controversy and heated discussions among local communities.

The Community of Madrid was founded as one of the last autonomous communities after the return of a democratic state of law to Spain. Although historically Madrid belonged to New Castile, it was decided to separate the city and its agglomeration in order to maintain the political and economic balance between autonomous communities. The city itself had a rich heraldic tradition, however, the Madrid autonomy was a new administrative unit and had to adopt new insignia, not quite coinciding with the existing municipal ones. The autonomous statute describes the flag as having a crimson background, on which there are seven white five-pointed stars in two horizontal rows, four in the upper and three in the lower<sup>47</sup>. In practice, however, the flag with a red background is often used. The project itself was criticized by Spanish heraldry (a poet and a graphic designer participated in the design of the flag) as a poor, non-traditional for Spanish heraldry and politically marked by the then ruling socialist party in Madrid (hence the red colour and five-pointed stars unfamiliar in Spain, while characteristic Iberian symbols of the star appear in six or eight-branched variations)<sup>48</sup>.

La Rioja autonomous community does not have a rich heraldic tradition. The flag was created from the colours of the provincial coat of arms (La Rioja is a monoprovincial autonomy), arranged in horizontal stripes, from the top:

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<sup>47</sup> EA de la Comunidad de Madrid, de 25 de febrero de 1983, Ley Orgánica 3/1983, BOE 51, de 01/03/1983.

<sup>48</sup> J.A. Vivar del Riego, *Símbolos Heráldicos de Madrid*, [In:] *Paseo documental por el Madrid de antaño*, coord. N. Ávila Seoane, Madrid 2015, pp. 390–392.



red, white, green and yellow. It first appeared unofficially during the La Rioja Week organized in Madrid in 1977 and quickly became a symbol of the region<sup>49</sup>. Institutionalized by the provincial government in 1979, it became the flag of autonomy under the statute of 1982<sup>50</sup>.

Also the flag of Extremadura, a region located near the border of Portugal, was created for the needs of the autonomous community established. Extremadura consists of two provinces, whose traditional colours are green and white for Cáceres and black and white in the case of Badajoz, which combined formed a tricolour flag in longitudinal green-white-black stripes. Often the flag appears in the version with the regional coat of arms in the middle<sup>51</sup>.

Although the flag of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands was adopted with the creation of the autonomy, its origins, like in the case of Cantabria, go back to the royal order of 30 July 1845, which gave each of the so-called marine provinces (*provincias marítimas*) its own flag. In this way, the Canary Islands received a blue flag with a white diagonal cross (St. Andrew's), analogous to the flag of Scotland<sup>52</sup>. In 1867, the province of the Canary Islands was split into two – Tenerife remained with the current flag, while for Las Palmas, the flag was divided in diagonally yellow and blue. For the purposes of autonomy, the colours of both flags of the provinces were merged, into one tricolour flag, where the colours were arranged vertically, from the left: blue, white and yellow. It is allowed to use the flag with the autonomy coat in the middle<sup>53</sup>. The order of colours is not accidental, because it corresponds to the geographical distribution of both provinces – white as a common colour for both was decided to be put in the middle as a connector. Tenerife is located in the west, which translates to the placement of blue on the left side of the flag, leaving for the yellow right side, as the symbol of Las Palmas.

As can be seen from the above analysis, the adoption of heraldic symbols of autonomous communities in Spain mostly refer to the rich historical leg-

<sup>49</sup> J.J. Sánchez Badiola, *Símbolos...*, p. 217.

<sup>50</sup> Art. 3.1, EA de La Rioja, de 9 de junio de 1982, Ley Orgánica 3/1982, BOE 146, de 19/06/1982.

<sup>51</sup> M. Rodríguez Contreras, *Sobre la bandera de Extremadura*, [In:] *Encuentros de historia de Extremadura y su didáctica*, Badajoz 1993, pp. 345–346.

<sup>52</sup> A. Bernal de O'Reilly, *Practica consular de España: formulario de cancellerías consulares y coleccion de decretos, reales ordenes y documentos diversos*, Havre 1864, p. 109.

<sup>53</sup> Art. 6, EA de Canarias, de 10 de agosto, Ley Orgánica 10/1982, BOE 195, de 16/08/1982.

acy of the regions. In only a few cases, it was necessary to create flags or coat of arms in connection with the establishment of an autonomous community in the early 1980s. A vast majority of regions proudly institutionalized their traditional symbols. It is worth noting that among the regional colours often prevail red and its shades as well as yellow and gold, which clearly refers to the colours of the state flag. The same applies to coats of arms, which often also refer to traditional regional or national equivalents, repeating heraldic figures and colours. Only a handful of autonomies broke from this principle, drawing inspiration for its symbols from other sources, although usually strictly related to the diverse history of the Iberian Peninsula, as in the case of Andalusia.

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