
DECLARATION OF THE CROATIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS ON THE CROATIAN HISTORICAL COAT OF ARMS

The official state coat of arms of the Republic of Croatia is regulated by the Law on the Coat of Arms, Flag, and Anthem of the Republic of Croatia, and the Flag and Sash of the President of the Republic of Croatia (OG 55/93 and 29/94, in force since April 19, 1994). It consists of the shield ("the historical Croatian coat of arms in the form of a shield divided horizontally and vertically into 25 red and white/silver fields, so that the first field in the upper left corner of the shield is red") and a stylized crown (with "five smaller shields with historical Croatian coats of arms"). This is, then, a complex coat of arms with six historical Croatian coats of arms that recapitulate and symbolize the complex past of our homeland, and that have been used for centuries in their distinct versions.

The use of the official coat of arms of the Republic of Croatia is prescribed by law, but variants of the Croatian historical coat of arms, in the past and today, have been displayed with pride both in Croatia and in other countries on private, public, cultural, sporting, and other occasions and events. Given its role, tradition, and mandate in the study of all aspects of Croatian history, culture, and identity – including the symbolism of heraldry – the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts presents its scientifically based position concerning exclusively the Croatian historical coat of arms and its variants:

DECLARATION

Numerous scientifically substantiated heraldic studies by domestic and foreign authors have answered questions about the genesis of the Croatian checkerboard coat of arms and its development and appearance throughout history. The checkerboard coat of arms of Croatia is a stylized representation of a fortress, stronghold, or bulwark. At the end of the 15th century, it was designed according to the contemporary figure of Croatia as fortress, rampart, or bulwark of Christianity (*Antemurale Christianitatis*), most often in the variant with an initial silver (white) field and a final red field (supposing an even number of fields).

Checkerboard coats of arms of Croatia, featuring an initial field either in silver (white) or in red, have been almost equally present and employed since the beginning of the 16th century. Therefore, disputes related to the initial field (white or red) – implying that the use of one variant would exclude the other – constitute a false dilemma. Historiographical insights attest to the centuries-old practice of displaying variants of the checkerboard coat of arms. All of this challenges recent theses about the special meaning of the initial field of our coat of arms, theses that can be deemed pseudoscientific and driven by political agendas.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, these theories have been foisted upon the public by the reiteration of inaccurate claims and the false conclusions derived from them. These are mostly malicious media problematizations of the initial silver (white) field of the Croatian historical coat of arms, which link it exclusively to the period of World War II. The version with the initial silver field is incorrectly declared the coat of arms and symbol of the Independent State of Croatia. The historical Croatian coat of arms with an initial silver field

is thus ideologized and used for short-term political point making. Such an ahistorical approach also reduces the diversity of the centuries of continuous use of the checkerboard coat of arms and excludes five hundred years of history of equal use of variants of this Croatian heraldic symbol.

The artificial problem with the initial fields of the checkerboard coat of arms can also be viewed as an example of the historical tension between the permanence of symbols and the changeability of context, or as proof of the irrational dimension that contemporary manipulation of symbols takes on. The imposition of a tendentious and ideologized debate whose goal is to restrict and distort the symbols of Croatian identity demands that the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts clearly distinguish historical facts from malicious fabrications. The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts believes that such discussions about the Croatian coat of arms, especially about the colour of its initial field, are not motivated by scientific, historical, and cultural goals, but by politics and political agendas. For all these reasons, this Declaration by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts brings an end to the stigmatization of the variants of the Croatian historical coat of arms and the contemporary ideologization of historical symbols in general.

The official coat of arms of the Republic of Croatia is prescribed by law and has no variants. However, the Croatian historical coat of arms can and should with good reason and pride be displayed in both private and public settings. For generations, Croats have honoured and regarded it as their own, irrespective of whether the initial field is white or red.