

BULGARIA

New luck with the New Year –‘SURVAKI’

"Surva" is the key magic word related to the New Year rituals. In some regions in the country New Year's Eve is called Surva. The etymology of the word "surva" comes from "raw, fierce". The cornel-tree is used for making "survachki" for its buds appear even in the winter, and even a branch cut off the tree is likely to blossom. Thus the living force of the cornel-tree is transferred upon the humans.

In the first hours of the New Year the Christmas carol singers begin their tour of the houses. They carry special cornel-tree branches - surovachki, decorated with dried fruit, pop corn, small buns, red woolen threads and coins. The carol singers tap the back of the owners of the house with the cornel-tree branch starting with the eldest among them and chanting:

*"Let there be a merry year
Let the fields breed golden ear,
Let the orchards grow red apples,
And the house be full of silk.
Let the household be alive and kicking
Till the next year, and forever!"*

The hosts return generously the favour by giving the carol singers small change, ritual buns, fruit, nuts, lard, etc. One of the members of the group of carol singers called the "donkey" collects the gifts in a special poach, and also makes



jokes and jest with the people. The tongue-in-cheek mood dominates the celebrations. The visit itself marks the culmination in the New Year's Eve celebrations.

After the New Year's dinner was over the crunches were thrown into the fire with a blessing read out loud, "Let there be crops, wine, and silk born out of these crunches". The cornel-tree buds were also thrown into the fire. The person whose cornel-tree bud broke off and popped in the fire was believed to remain healthy throughout the year.



CZECH REPUBLIC

New Year

Day of Restoration of the Independent Czech State

The public holiday is celebrated together with the New Year. The creation of the independent Czech Republic on 1st January 1993 is commemorated.

After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire broke up into several independent states. The "Pittsburgh Agreement" was a political agreement signed on 31st May 1918 in Pittsburgh by the representatives of the American Slovak League of America, the Czech National Association and the Association of Czech Catholics and by Tomas G. Masaryk who formulated the text of agreement during his visit in the U.S. The agreement allowed the union of Czechs and Slovaks in an independent state. The official establishment of Czechoslovakia dates back to the 28th October 1918. The state of Czechs and Slovaks lasted for 74 years, two months and three days.

On Friday, the 1st January 1993 two new independent states have arisen in Central Europe - the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. It was agreed by the representatives of political parties. The breakdown of the Czechoslovakia happened despite the fact that the political and economic factors led to the integration at that time. Disintegration of Czechoslovakia didn't lead to political destabilization in Central Europe. The federation was simply changed by the constitutional way into two independent states, whose relations are correct and friendly.

Since the year 2001, the 1st January has not been celebrated just as New Year, but also as a public holiday - Day of Restoration of the Independent Czech State.

GREECE

January 1: the New Year's Day

January 1 is the Feast of Áyios Vassílios (Saint Basil), celebrated with church services. It is also the day of the "vassilopita", a sweet bread with a coin inside which brings to its finder good luck for the future year. January 1 is also the day when the Christmas gifts are given to the children.

Extensive fire work shows are arranged all over the country at the different cities in Greece. The January 1 is not just New Year Day in Greece, but it is also considered as the St. Basil's Day and therefore there are some particular traditions guarding it. A cake called as Basil Cake or "Vassilopita" is sliced and eaten on the day. The custom

is based on the fact that the Greeks believe that they will find a coin of fortune within the cake. It is the



January 1st

responsibility of the head of the family or the father to cut the cake into pieces. The first slice is dedicated to Jesus, while the second one is a share towards the house and the third slice is distributed among the family. People sing the New Year Carols. The children visit the houses in the neighborhood one after another and sing the “Kalanda” and wish New Year to everyone. It is also the practice to gift the children with money on the New Year Day.

Many people pay particular mind to the good/bad omen regarding who will first enter their home in the new year (pothariko). On New Year's Eve they will ask a close friend or relative, whom they consider lucky, to be the first to come into their house the following day. Often, a child is preferred for this special practice because children are considered innocent and their hearts free of malice and envy.

LITHUANIA

LITHUANIA'S FLAG DAY

The Flag of Lithuania

The flag of Lithuania consists of a horizontal tricolor of yellow, green and red. It was adopted on March 20, 1989. The yellow in the flag is meant to symbolize the golden fields of Lithuania, the green is for its green countryside, and the red represents all the blood that has been shed for Lithuania.



On 1st January the flag is displayed at all the state and municipal institutions and agencies. On 1st January, 1919 Lithuanian national flag was run up in Gediminas Castle Tower by Lithuanian platoon of volunteers. On 6th January, 1919 Bolsheviks occupied Vilnius and they seized off the flag's yellow and green colors, leaving only red. The second time Lithuanian tricolor hoisted in 1920 when Lithuanian army returned to Vilnius. However, on 9th October 1920 Vilnius was occupied by "želigovskininkai" and the Lithuanian national flag was stripped away. For the third time Lithuanian flag was raised over the tower of Gediminas Castle only on 7th October, 1988 and has been fluttering since then. Every year, on 1st January, noting the Lithuanian flag day, solemn ceremonies of the Lithuanian flag change are held on Vilnius Gediminas Hill.

SPAIN

Saint Manuel. New Year's Day

ESTONIA

New Year's Day