Jean Claude Cachia

The Europeanisation of Party Politics in Malta

Values, Legitimation, and Polarisation

Springer

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✎ Springer

Jean Claude Cachia
Institute for European Studies
University of Malta
Msida, Malta

For
Craig, Kirsty, Crystal, Conor,
Keanan, and Khloe

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Alleanza Bidla (Alliance for Change)
AD	Alternattiva Demokratika (Malta's Green Party)
ADPD	Alternattiva Demokratika-Democratic Party
AEA	Annual Emission Allocations
AFD	Alternative for Germany
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
AMLD	Anti Money Laundering Directive
AN	Azzjoni Nazzjonali (National Action)
CASH	Coalition for the Abolition of Spring Hunting
CET	Customs and Excise Tax
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CMTU	Confederation of Malta Trade Unions
CNI	Campaign for National Independence
CoC	Capital of Culture
CPC	Consumer Protection Cooperation
CSCE	Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CVM	Cooperation and Verification Mechanism
DNP	Democratic Nationalist Party
DOI	Department of Information
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ECHR	European Convention of Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
EDD	Europe of Democracies and Diversities
EEA	European Environment Agency
EEC	European Economic Community
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EIM	External Incentives Model
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy

ENISA	The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity
ENP	EU Neighbourhood Policy
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
EURODAC	The European Union Fingerprint Database for Asylum Seekers
FAA	Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar (Together, for a better environment)
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FKNK	Federation for Hunting and Conservation
FMI	Front Maltin Inqumu
FOI	Federation of Industry
FŻL	Forum Żgħażagħ Laburisti (Labour Youth Forum)
GDP	Gross domestic product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GNP	Gross national product
GRECO	Group of States against Corruption
GRTU	Malta Chamber of Small and Medium Enterprises
GWU	General Workers' Union
HSBC	Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation
IIP	Malta Individual Investor Programme
IĠM	Institute of Maltese Journalists
ILGA	The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IVF	In vitro fertilisation
KNŻ	Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażagħ (National Youth Council)
KSU	Saint Hubert Hunters
Lm	Maltese Lira
LIBE	European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, Intersex, Queer and questioning
MEUSAC	Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee
MFSA	Malta Financial Services Authority
MGRM	Malta Gay Rights Movement
MHRA	Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association
MLP	Malta Labour Party
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
MŻPN	Moviment Żgħażagħ Partit Nazzjonalista (Nationalist Party Youth Group)

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	A Non-profit organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PANA	Inquiry Committee into Money Laundering, Tax Evasion and Tax Avoidance
PD	Democratic Party
PDN	Partit Democratiku Nazzjonalista
PES	Party of European Socialists
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PL	Labour Party
PN	Nationalist Party
Pulse	Social Democratic Students of Malta
RE	Renew Europe
RN	National Rally (France)
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
SaR	Search and Rescue Area
SDM	Studenti Demokristjani Maltin (Maltese Christian Democrat Students)
SHout	Spring Hunting Out
SLAAP	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
STV	Single transferable vote
TEU	Treaty of the European Union
TPPI	Today Public Policy Institute
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UEDC	European Union of Christian Democrats
UHM	Voice of the Workers (Union)
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAT	Value-added tax
V18	Valletta 2018

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Chapter 1
Europeanisation and Party Politics in Malta: An Introduction

> The path of civilisation is fatal, the idea of the monarchy is irreconcilable with that of a republic, governments do not trust the working class. Therefore there is no disarmament—no declaration of the cessation of hostilities—increasing war costs—and a dark tumultuous night at the last horizon, from which the worse that can emerge is a United States of Europe which every government and governing class believes is utopia (Manara, 1892).

Ernesto Manara, a nineteenth-century Maltese politician, drew a link between his vision of a 'United States of Europe' and peace in the continent. Manara wrote the above statement in 1892 when the European Union was still a far-fetched idea; when the continental powers of France and Germany were heading from one conflict to another and when Malta was still a British fortress colony with no plan for actual independence.

This statement expresses the desire of seeing Malta as part of a larger European conglomerate. Manara could not have foreseen that Europe would experience two world wars, leaving millions of victims and crippling European powers and their economies. It was this environment that led to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community, which evolved into the European Union in 1992 following the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty.

Manara's vision of a united Europe, conceived on Europe's geographical and political periphery more than a century ago, provides a contrasting vision to the challenges being faced by the European Union today. As the European Union came into being, and as politicians attempted to give it a constitution that would have brought it closer to the concept of a United States of Europe, a growing tide of Euroscepticism not only halted the Constitutional project but together with the financial crisis, the Syrian migration crisis, Brexit referendum, and even the Covid-19 pandemic threatened the future of the European project. Apart from this, the European Union was further challenged by developments, first in the European periphery and then in Central and Southern Europe with member states ignoring or rejecting Europeanisation. This led to a confrontation with the European Union on issues regarding the rule of law, political standards, and governance norms.

Decades later, the same vision would be proposed by other politicians. Following the end of the Second World War, movements for the country's independence gained traction and discussions were underway about Malta's future constitutional arrangements. This was a time when most European powers were revisiting their colonial commitments. Herbert Ganado was the first politician in Malta to propose membership in the European Economic Community. The Electoral Manifesto of the Democratic Nationalist Party for the 1962 election states that 'the D.N.P. will do its best to make of Malta the 'Free Port' and Entrepot of the Common Market in the Mediterranean placed as it is between Europe and Africa, between East and West' (PDN, 1962). The proposal was, once again, made at a time when Malta was still part of the British Empire.

Still by the end of the Second World War, the main Empires in Europe could not keep their colonies. Once a symbol of pride and nationalism, these colonies slowly became a burden, and Empires such as Great Britain opted to provide sovereignty to these states to focus on national matters. Whilst empires were in decline with colonies, including Malta and Cyprus, gaining their Independence, the European Economic Community developed and became more influential. This led various states across Europe, to show their interest in forming part of this organisation. These included Malta. For nearly two decades after the country achieved full sovereignty, one of the main political divisions would be on the kind of relationship should Malta have with this community.

Malta is not the only country in Europe in which the question surrounding membership in the European Union created political divisions. Even though much of the literature on Europeanisation focuses on the larger states, Malta provides an interesting study of how the European Union can influence party politics in member states. Malta is located in the Central Mediterranean, approximately 290 kilometres from the North African coast and 96 kilometres south of Sicily. It consists of a small archipelago with few natural resources. It has an important geopolitical position and its official language, Maltese, is a testament to the history of occupation which shaped the archipelago's development since this Semitic language, written in the Latin script, incorporates elements of Arabic, Anglo-Saxon, and Romance languages.

Malta's first inhabitants arrived from Sicily in 5000 BC. The archipelago then was home to a succession of regional powers, including the Carthaginians, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Knights of Saint John, and the French, before finally being incorporated into the British Empire. Malta gained its independence in 1964 and became a republic in 1974. The rule of the Order of St John was especially important as it exposed the country to a primitive form of Europeanisation. The Knights not only fortified the country but also helped to integrate Malta into the European artistic, cultural, and political mainstream because most of the Knights came from different parts of Europe. Their rule served to reinforce Malta's perceived European Identity, despite being an island on the periphery of this continent (Warrington, 2022). Membership was first mentioned by the Nationalist Party in 1979 as a response to the departure of the British forces from Malta in that same year. Malta eventually became an EU member state in 2004.

Malta merits a study and a consideration of its own, particularly regarding Europeanisation, the term scholars used to evaluate the impact of the European Union on member states. Firstly, its political groupings were not formed around ideological standpoints but around charismatic individuals who turned politics into a second religion for the Catholic Island. Secondly, as these parties developed, the struggle for power between them increased, and this influenced their supporters who followed their leaders blindly. This polarisation, encouraged by the main political parties, reached an unprecedented high in the last two decades, with turnouts reaching over 90% in national elections and a continual political struggle (Baldacchino, 2002) which split the country into two main divides, the Nationalists (blue) versus the Labourites (red). On this matter, Pirotta wrote:

> Since their emergence in Malta over one hundred years ago, political parties have come to exercise enormous hold and influence over the Maltese electorate. Every five years or so, during the general elections, over ninety percent of those entitled to vote, although, under no legal compulsion to do so, they are out to cast their vote in favour of one of the contending parties and its candidates (Pirotta, 1994, p. 9).

Maltese citizens breathe and eat politics. Politics and political parties are at the heart of Maltese social life. National elections are a huge event, and more often than not, these are divisive and polarised. Massive campaigns are developed by major political parties, and mass meetings see the mobilisation of thousands of Maltese people, with a number of these treating party leaders like political messiahs. It is therefore not particularly surprising that the issue over European Union accession and the impact of the EU membership on Malta, which was fought along party lines, led to strong divisions between those who were for and against membership.

This combination of politics and public adoration is a political tool that leaders use to maintain their vote levels and limit the impact of emerging political parties. This has in turn supported the duopolistic status quo in Malta's political system and enabled the leaders to frame and politicise the EU to their advantage. However, there is a cost to this divisive political environment since it reinforced the divisions within Malta's society and strengthened political tribalism and patronage (Pace, 1990; Hirczy, 1995).

Harwood (2020) and Verney (2017) argue that Malta is an anomaly. It did not experience the same economic problems as its Mediterranean neighbours and the country did not require any austerity measures. Beyond Malta's economic policies, the country has a different political system than the other new member states and both major political parties are now considered to be Europhile. Still, this does not mean that Malta did not face any challenges or that Euroscepticism does not exist. Irregular migration has long been a problem within the country. One of the reasons for this problem is Malta's Search and Rescue area which covers 250,000 km^2, roughly equating to the size of Great Britain (Mainwaring, 2014). The size of this area posed various challenges for many administrations (Cachia & Vassallo, 2020). This is because Malta had to protect irregular migrants within a vast area and with limited resources. These challenges increased from 2004 onwards as the country had to abide by the Dublin regulations. This means that Malta had often requested

support and solidarity from the EU. However, finding a long-term solution is often a struggle with such a diverse area of opinions. Irregular migration became one of the main priorities promoted by Malta during the 2017 EU Presidency.

Irregular migration would become one of the major problems within the European Union, as would spring hunting. Spring hunting led to a long-term debate on whether Malta negotiated a concession in the European Birds Directive and whether the European Union was threatening the Maltese traditions and identity. Society has moved forward, and the mentality has changed. Many began to look outwards at the 'European Ideal' and civil society groups became more vocal in the fight for rights. During various liberal reforms towards safeguarding minorities, the country witnessed the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. Caruana Galizia was not simply a journalist. Long critical of the country's political system, its political parties, and some of its political leaders, she was behind some of the most controversial corruption allegations which were made against the Muscat administration, including the Hospital Deals, Individual Investment Scheme (IIP), Panama Papers and Malta files. She was also very critical of the approach political parties took towards irregular migrants. Two years after the assassination of Caruana Galizia, Lassana Cisse (a migrant) was killed in a racially motivated drive-by shooting. The assassinations of Caruana Galizia and Cisse raised several questions on whether the two were victims of institutional failings and whether the country was ready to tackle problems such as intolerance and racism.

Europeanisation of party politics has multiple dimensions. The European Union is a complex entity. It is not only made up of legislation but also of values. It provides rights but also obligations. The reality concerning the European Union is usually built by political parties. They form a narrative and promote the European Union in one way or another. This promotion usually takes place during elections, but instances exist when referring to the European Union is made during parliamentary legislation. The European Union can be a challenge, an opportunity, or both. Yet, political parties have also been facing the rising challenge from civil society groups who are also looking at the European Union for guidance. The European Union can be used as the guarantor of European values. Yet, even the European Union has its limits, and it has always faced the dilemma of how to safeguard these values without undermining national sovereignty.

This book takes a deductive approach by making use of Europeanisation to observe the influence of the European Union on party politics in Malta. To provide a comprehensive study on the Europeanisation of Party Politics in Malta, this book utilised various sources. These include newspaper articles, speeches, manifestoes, minutes from the European and national parliaments, press releases, interviews, and surveys. Interviews were extremely important to understand the evolution of Malta's political system. Several participants were interviewed twice, once as part of the Ph. D. process and for the book. This meant that it was possible to understand how the political system evolved and how political decisions were being taken. The study also took into account new sources of information such as official social media accounts. Social media statuses can provide an insight into the way parties and politicians behave especially as it is much easier for them to use such sources when

they need to react quickly to something which is happening in the country. Some of these sources used in the study tend to be ignored by the electorate especially as during elections, they are flooded with leaflets, manifestoes, and other promotional material. Still, this material is valuable resources to understand political parties and leaders. This information was essential to understand the behaviour of political parties and their politicians, and the way they used European values in their attempt to legitimise their policies. In addition, these sources were important as they reflect the way these political parties approached the European Union over the decades and their reaction to the intervention of the European Union in Malta's political system.

1.1   Europeanisation and Malta's Identity

As a young and small state, the issue of national identity became an integral part of the debate on whether the country should join the European Union. The notion that membership would reaffirm Malta's European identity would be used in the first and second stage of Europeanisation as the Nationalist Party sought to persuade the electorate that membership would bring more opportunities for the country and its people. The identity of the Maltese does not fit with the prevailing categories of the nation-state. Over the centuries, this identity has been continuously (re)negotiated due the domestic and global political concerns as the country shifted from one power to the other. Official nation-state ideologies traditionally refer to two important identities: the country's 'Mediterranean' identity and its 'European' background. The European and Mediterranean identities of Malta and whether these identities would be threatened by a potential membership would become an issue when membership in the European Union was proposed by the Nationalist Party (Sant Cassia, 1993).

The origins of Malta's European identity can be traced back to the shipwreck of Saint Paul in Malta in 60 AD. This period is important as it is considered as the time the country converted to Christianity. This is why the Feast of Saint Paul in Valletta is considered a feast of Malta's shift towards Europe. Still, the country fell under Arab rule between 870 and 1090. There is a debate (see Wettinger, 1986; Luttrell, 2017) on whether the Maltese converted back to Islam. Still, this debate goes beyond the scope of this book. The narrative states that Count Roger the Norman would again establish Christendom in Malta. The Great Siege of 1565 between the Knights of Saint John against the Ottoman Empire is seen as the triumph of Christianity over Islam. The siege strengthened Malta's Christian credentials and built the narrative that by defeating the Ottoman Empire, Malta saved Europe from the threat of Islam. Following the victory of the Knights over the Ottoman Empire, Valletta would be built. The capital was considered a symbol of modernity and a projection of the power and glory of the Knights of Saint John (Mitchell, 2012).

With the arrival of the British Forces in Malta, a new issue would emerge in the fight over the Maltese identity. This concerned which official language should the country have. The issue was not simply on whether English or Italian should be the

official languages of the country, but extended to the identity and culture of the Maltese. The debate emerged in the early nineteenth century and lasted until the middle of the twentieth century. The Language question would lead to the establishment of the first political parties, with these becoming the ancestors of the Nationalist Party and Labour Party. The language question concerns the conflict between English, the official language of the Empire, and Italian, the official language of the Roman Catholic Church and Italy. The country's culture was linked to Italy. For two centuries, Malta was ruled by the Knights of Saint John. The Knights brought the influence of the Renaissance through art, architecture, and music. This was also helped by the Italianisation of the country (Cassar, 2001). By the nineteenth century, Malta was part of the British Empire, even though Italian was still considered the language of the Church and the Courts (Mitchell, 2003). Still, English was required for those who wanted to work directly with the British forces or around the harbour areas. It was the language that could help the Maltese to secure their economic future (Debattista, 2022a, b). However, whilst Italian was the cultural high language of Malta and the main language of communication amongst the higher society and English was the language used by the British Empire and those Maltese working with it, Maltese was the language used for communication by the ordinary people (Cassar, 2001). English was considered by Italian-leaning Maltese as the 'foreign' language and the language of the country's colonisers. The language question would end up as a conflict between dignity and power and between tradition and imperialism (Friggieri, 1988).

The debate on the official language would only be solved during the Second World War. At the time, Italy formed part of the Axis powers, whilst Malta as a colony of the British was part of the Allied powers. The decision by Mussolini to bomb Malta led to the decline in the popularity of the language with the notion of italianità losing its appeal. Maltese (alongside English) would only become an official language in 1934. For years, the Maltese nationalists resisted the upgrading and spreading of Maltese language education in schools, as they perceived the introduction of Maltese as a threat to the influence of Italian and as a tool that the British could use for the promotion of English (Frendo, 1994). Maltese would only have a standard orthography by 1931 and would only become the official language of Malta after the British granted Malta Independence in 1964 (Cassar, 2001).

The language issue would also become part of the debate surrounding Malta's EU membership. With the country having a national language, that is Maltese, with English also considered an official language, the fear was that Maltese would be sidelined by not being recognised as an official language. The Nationalist Party used the example of Ireland with the Gaelic language an official language in the European Union to highlight how Maltese would be treated the same way and would not be excluded by the EU (Frendo, 1996). The debate on the importance of the Maltese language is still ongoing. A reflection of this could be the decision by the European Commission to nominate Latvian economist Martins Zemitis as the European Semester Officer of the Commission Representation in Malta. He was chosen even though the post required candidates to have a good command of the Maltese language. The Commission defended itself by declaring that the working language

is English. Still, the decision was criticised by Labour MEP Alex Agius Saliba for treating the Maltese Language as a second-class language (Vella, MaltaToday, 19 August 2022).

In the post-independence period, a debate often ensued about Malta's identity. The discussion was based on the 'European' and 'Mediterranean' components of this identity and whether membership in the European Union would strengthen the 'European' element at the expense of the 'Mediterranean' element. George Borg Olivier described the Maltese at the Council of Europe as European and Mediterranean. Borg Olivier believed that the Council of Europe was the country's natural home. The turn in Malta's politics in the 1970s towards a greater emphasis on Mediterranean relations and the disagreements with the Council of Europe and the EU on the renewal of the 1970 Association Agreement led to some concerns on whether Malta was drifting away from Europe. However, at no point did Malta seek to end its membership of the Council of Europe or severe ties with the EU (Pace, 2022a, b).

During his term as Prime Minister of Malta, Dom Mintoff promoted the Mediterranean dimension of Malta's identity. At the international level, between 1973 and 1975, Mintoff pressured the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe which would later be renamed The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to insert Mediterranean security into the conference agenda and Helsinki Final Act (Il-Gżejjer, July 1973). As Prime Minister of Malta, Mintoff's rhetoric was very hostile to the culture of Western Europe. On the other hand, he insisted on fostering Arab culture and Arabic language instruction, which was declared mandatory in the secondary educational system from 1975 to 1987 (Pace, 2011). On this matter, the anthropologist Boissevain (1991) declared:

> the Labour government broke off relations with NATO and sought links with the Arab world. After 900 years of being linked to Europe, Malta began to look southward. Muslims, still remembered in folklore for savage pirate attacks, were redefined as blood brothers. . . (Boissevain, 1991 p. 88).

The promotion of Neutrality and non-alignment by Mintoff and the Labour Party would add to the confrontation over the EU membership issue. The issue of neutrality was, over the years, embedded in the country's political history. Whilst the enshrining of the country's neutrality was a political bargain between the two main parties over other political issues, including the need to change the electoral system, it was also a clear-eyed view of Malta's security need. Neutrality has become part of Malta's diplomatic identity, and this has had certain strengths. For example, it has allowed Malta to play the role of a neutral interlocutor and to focus on questions related to global social justice. For a country the size of Malta, neutrality also makes sense to a degree, and it reflects the country's past colonial experiences (Fiott, 2022).

Following the turbulent 1990s in Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the independence of several countries in Europe. A number of newly established republics in the Balkans and Eastern Europe were interested in joining the European Union. During this period, Malta applied to join

the EU. At the time, the need to emphasise Malta's European identity increased. Malta did not wish to be left out of the new Europe that was taking shape after the fall of the Iron Curtain. By affirming its Europeanness, Malta also felt more confident in playing a stronger role in the Mediterranean through the EU. European identity and EU membership also stopped Malta's 'drift' in international relations, a temptation that becomes stronger for a neutral country when it interprets this as entailing isolation and independence from 'alliances'. These included the European Union (Pace, 2022a).

Therefore, Identity remained an important issue because of its link to narrative and, consequently, of the way political actors can set the scene. Identity issues also tap into the need for individuals to have a sense of belonging. Thus, framing the debate on identity issues provides benefits that go both ways; the political actors have a context within which to explain their proposals, while the citizens have a narrative to make sense of their place in the world. The referendum in Malta before EU membership brought out some interesting strands for political scholars, including, but not limited to the notion of EU membership and its link as being a safeguard of European values, the contrast between the Mediterranean nature of Malta and the European aspect of its identity and, whether one could hold European values and not be part of the EU. The latter point was deemed to be impossible by the PN, and it successfully framed its arguments to this effect (Debattista, 2022a).

Identity is also important as it 'anchors' individuals, groups, and peoples within a particular culture, with its politics, values, and virtues. Therefore, identity is not a static 'concept' and it is based on multidimensions elements which evolve over time (Frendo, 2002). When the Nationalist Party promoted Malta's European identity, it wanted to convey an image of a state and nation that were part of the mainstream of [Western] European culture, one that has been identified with liberal democracy, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, peaceful coexistence, shared sovereignty, and solidarity. How true (as opposed to mythical) and authentic (as opposed to pretence) this 'European identity is, of course, open to a wider discussion on what is the European Union and whether there is an actual European Identity (Warrington, 2022).

The importance of Malta's European identity was also reflected in the discourse being used by the European institutions. The European Commission, for example, highlighted in 1993 the fact that Maltese were considered Europeans:

> Malta's culture and history reflecting the deep links with several of the people's of Europe, have for century developed a European Identity (European Commission in Avery & Cameron, 2001).

For the Nationalist Party and the Europeanist camp, Malta not only shared several principles and beliefs with the EEC, but membership was a tool that could enrich Malta's Maltese, Mediterranean and European identity, as well as Malta's historical heritage in a globalised world (Fenech Adami, 2014). The Nationalist Party managed to successfully link Malta's Identity with the Christian European Heritage. The European Union became to be known for democracy, peace, and rule of law, though it was also seen as a threat to tradition and morality. Whilst this was a challenge for

the Nationalist Party, it still managed to overcome it by promoting the role of Christian Democratic Parties in the foundation of Europe (Mitchell, 2012).

The opposite position was taken by the majority of Labourites, who felt that European integration and Europeanisation (the promotion of the EU values and principles) would threaten Malta's identity and the Mediterranean heritage of the country. There was also the fear that the vision of the European Union to adopt a 'European Identity' would lead to the loss of national identity. Still, there were doubts on whether the EU had the ability to influence national identities and whether the adoption of a 'European Identity' would be at the expense of the national identities (Cini, 2001). There are those who believe that the European Union is a place where national identity can be affirmed, rather than threatened. In addition, the discussion on the influence of the European identity have often focused on whether the European Union is able to converge all the national cultures into a one European Identity (Debattista, 2022a, b). The debate surrounding Malta's EU membership application produced a clear division in the country. It ultimately rested in the hands of the voters, who were given two options during the 2003 referendum and subsequent general election, either to: (1) embrace the European Union and reaffirm Malta's European Identity, or (2) maintain the strong relationship which Malta enjoyed with North African countries and safeguard the country's Mediterranean heritage.

1.2   Europeanisation and Malta's Culture

To understand how the European Union was politicised by the main political parties, and how European values were framed in their effort to gain legitimacy, it is essential to understand Malta's culture, folklore, and political environment. Within this culture, prestige is still seen as important. Prestige reflects the social standing of that individual or family (Boissevain, 1980). One of the ways this prestige can be achieved is through education. The traditional courses in Malta are medicine and law. Membership in the European Union and investment in the economy have increased the popularity of several subjects, including Information Technology, engineering, sciences, and gaming. Still, law and medicine are seen as the most prestigious courses, especially for those who want to improve their social mobility. Law is considered the best and most prestigious route for politicians. The tradition of the party electing lawyers as party leaders and candidates still persists. Whilst Labour Party has elected leaders with different academic backgrounds, with Mintoff being an architect and Sant and Muscat being economists, the Nationalist Party has retained the tradition with all of its leaders being lawyers.

An important tradition in Malta is linked with towns and villages. These are 'festas' or feasts. Whilst politics and society may have changed, these festas have remained popular and have become more vibrant for the residents of towns and villages (Sant Cassia, 1993). Feasts are a celebration of the patron saint of the towns and villages around Malta. They provide the opportunity for the community to meet

during a week filled with activities to celebrate the patron saint (Boissevain, 1964), The first feasts in celebration of these patron saints originated in the sixteenth century. However, during this period, these celebrations were mostly liturgical. The modern-day functions of these feasts including the outdoor festivities (beyond the procession) emerged in the late eighteenth century. Festas would continue to evolve during the nineteenth century under British colonial rule when band clubs were formed, and fireworks began to play an important role throughout the celebrations (Cassar, 2005). The statue of the patron is accompanied by a brass band, as it goes around the streets across the town or village. Along the way, confetti are thrown from windows and balconies. The procession is traditionally accompanied by the ringing of the church bells and the ignition of fireworks. The main streets and the church are also decorated and illuminated (Koster, 1988).

Over the centuries, the religious context of the feasts paved the way for divisions and competition amongst the villages and neighbouring towns. The reason for this is that every town and village has its own patron saint. Some towns are luckier than others, enjoying two patron saints rather than one. If a town or village has one patron saint, then it will traditionally have two band clubs. If they do not have two band clubs, then they have two fireworks factories. These strengthened the tradition of *pika* (competition or hostility) between the various factions.

These factions would later find a way in the country's political culture. As the main political parties were established, they opened their clubs in every village/town in Malta. Villages and towns were used to recruit members of these political parties through social clubs. This led to more divisions within these communities and strengthened the rivalry between one party and the other (Boissevain, 1980). This promoted a two-way mentality in the country. Political Parties began to organise mass meetings that were very similar to the traditional feasts. In these mass meetings, thousands of Maltese gather in an area of the town and which includes food stalls, fairs, fireworks, and entertainment (Frendo, 1994).

Until the country's independence in 1964, this division was reflected in the narrative of the Maltese 'ġewwieni' against the 'barrani' foreigner (Friggieri, 1981). This narrative will be discussed in more detail in the next few chapters. When the main political parties or NGOs felt that the European Union was gaining too much influence, it was usually branded as 'il-barrani', the foreigner, to outline how the organisation was behaving like a coloniser.

This division was even reflected in the dates chosen by the government as national holidays. As a tradition of former colonies, Malta began to celebrate the date of Independence on 21 September as a national holiday. The decision was taken after an agreement was reached in parliament by Prime Minister Borg Olivier in 1965. The election of the Labour Party in 1971 led to various disagreements on which dates should be considered national holidays. Mintoff removed Independence Day as a national and public holiday when he assumed office in 1971. Instead, he opted to celebrate the 13 December (1974) as a national day being the day Malta became a republic. The day would later be replaced by Freedom Day. In fact, on 31 March 1979, the military agreement between Malta and Britain expired, and the British forces left the country. The return of the Nationalist Party in 1987 led to the

reinstatement of Independence Day as a national holiday. Because the main political parties could not reach a consensus on which date should be used as the national day, five national feasts were proclaimed. Beyond, Independence Day, Republic Day, and Freedom Day, the country included 8 September (1565/1943) as the feast of our Lady of Victories (Great Siege/Second World War) and 7 June (1919) (Sette Giugno) as the day when the Maltese revolted against the British (Frendo, 1989). The main political parties would take ownership of these national holidays. The Nationalist Party celebrates Independence Day, given that the country gained its independence under the premiership of Borg Olivier. On the other hand, the Labour Party has placed more emphasis on Freedom Day, given that it took place under the premiership of Mintoff and was seen as the day Malta finally gained its full sovereignty.

This two-way mentality has transformed itself into a ritual (Mitchell, 1996). *Pika* or the intense rivalry between the main political parties shaped the European Union membership issue. The main political parties claimed ownership of the national interest, highlighting their support/opposition to European membership to protect the country and secure its future (Cini, 2002). Still, it also meant that the issue was radicalised and led to the strengthening of the two main factions rather than a mature dialogue over the advantages and disadvantages of membership in the EU (Friggieri, 2002).

1.3   Europeanisation and the Party Leaders

A study on the impact of Europeanisation on Malta's political parties cannot take place without including the role of party leaders. Decisions surrounding the impact of the European Union were and are taken by Malta's political leaders. They can enact legislation passed by the European institutions, react to the development of the European Union, 'use' the European Union to promote themselves and their parties, and use the European institutions against their competitors. These opportunities are easier to use in Malta, which has a statist system with power concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister and his (so far) executive. This enables these individuals to introduce significant reforms and leave their mark on the country's development, without the threat of being seriously challenged by potential competitors. With only two major parties competing for power, the Maltese electoral system displays a personalised style of politics, with the image of political leaders, agendas, and political decisions shaping parties' political campaigns and their EU approach (Hirczy, 1995).

Table 1.1 provides an illustration of the characteristics of the political leaders which dominated the country's political system from 1980 onwards. Malta has seen some very strong political leaders, who, although loved by their traditional supporters, were also quite divisive because of what they represented. The Nationalist Party under the helm of Edward Fenech Adami proposed Malta's EU membership in 1979 and included this in the 1981 political manifesto. This was strongly opposed by

Table 1.1 The Main Characteristics of Malta's Political Leaders

	Duminku Mintoff	Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici	Alfred Sant	Joseph Muscat	Robert Abela	Eddie Fenech Adami	Lawrence Gonzi	Simon Busuttil	Adrian Delia	Bernard Grech
Prime Minister	1955-1958 / 1971-1984	1984-1987	1996-1998	2013-2020	2020-	1987-1996 / 1998-2003	2004-2013			
Party	MLP	MLP	MLP	LP	LP	PN	PN	PN	PN	PN
Party Leader	1971-1985	1983-1992	1992-2008	2008-2020	2020-	1978-2003	2004-2013	2013-2018	2018-2020	2020-
Vision	Malta free from Colonialism / Secular State	Secular State	Partnership in the Mediterranean / Eliminate Corruption	Promote Civil Rights and turn the country into a large economic and political center / Eliminate Stagnation/Secularisation	Continue with the economic and political reforms / Safeguard the Maltese dream	Membership in the EU / Building a Democratic society	Strengthen the country within the EU. / Eliminate Public Debt	Restore Democracy / Eliminate Corruption	People First / Fight Corruption	To make the Maltese dream a reality
Slogan	Malta First and Foremost	It Gets Better	The Citizen First	Malta belongs to us all	Malta Together	Truth will always win	Together, everything is possible	I choose Malta New Way	Society which cares	With you, for Malta
EU Approach	Hard Eurosceptic	Hard Eurosceptic	Euro-realist (Sceptic)	Eurosceptic (until 2008) / Europhile (2008 onwards)	Europhile	Europhile	Europhile	Europhile	Europhile	Europhile

Adapted from DeBattista (2012).

the Prime Minister and Labour Party leader Dom Mintoff, whose opposition towards membership was based on ideological and economic grounds. Mintoff dominated the country's political system until 1984 when he resigned as Prime Minister and as Leader of the Labour Party. He was replaced by his hand-picked successor.

Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici maintained the party's approach towards the European Union, which meant complete resistance to any Nationalist challenge to make Malta part of the then European Economic Community. The Labour Party was voted out of office in the 1987 General Election. In 1992, Labour leader Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici was replaced by Alfred Sant who took a more Euro-realist approach towards the European Union. Nonetheless, his vision was that of 'partnership' rather than 'membership' with the European Union. From 1992 until the eventual EU membership in 2004, the Nationalist Party leader Fenech Adami and Labour Party leader Sant fought alongside party lines over the EU issues with the matter only settled with an eventual referendum and national election—both of which took place in 2003.

Following EU accession, the vision of these party leaders continued to evolve, and so did that of their political parties and party members. Soon after the country joined the EU, Fenech Adami resigned as party leader and as Prime Minister to be replaced by Lawrence Gonzi. The latter's vision and approach towards the EU was similar to that of his predecessor, even though as Prime Minister, he had to face the new challenges arising from membership, the loss of the 2004 European Parliament Election, and a financial crisis that threatened the country's economic system. At the same time, whilst Alfred Sant accepted the 2003 national election results, he kept his scepticism towards the European Union. In 2008, the party elected Joseph Muscat as the party leader. Muscat, a former Eurosceptic, quickly embraced the European Union and transformed the party, eventually leading to several electoral successes in national as well as European Parliament elections. This was largely due to the various reforms he introduced, including that of civil unions and same-sex marriage which turned Malta into one of the leading countries when it comes to LGBTIQ rights. The rising popularity of Joseph Muscat and his vision of a growing movement to safeguard the national interest came at a time of a rapid decline of the Nationalist Party, which had been plagued by internal struggles with the party failing to provide an alternative vision to that of Muscat.

The election of Joseph Muscat also transformed the role of MEPs. They now took a more prominent role within their parties and being elected to the European Parliament was seen as a necessary step to raise the profile of those who were eyeing the party leadership. Yet, Joseph Muscat and the Labour administration faced an unprecedented amount of opposition within the European Parliament mostly due to the Individual Investment Programme—dubbed the 'cash for passports' scheme—introduced by the administration in 2014. This was also due to the investigations on the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, which in December 2019 led to the resignation of Tourism Minister Konrad Mizzi and the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff Keith Schembri, and Economy Minister Chris Cardona. Prime Minister Joseph Muscat announced his resignation in December 2019 and left office in January 2020, with the Labour leader being replaced by Robert Abela.

On the Nationalist front, Lawrence Gonzi resigned soon after obtaining a disastrous result in the 2013 national election. The Nationalist Party lost by more than