

The Mediterranean 'Vocation' of the University of Malta

Ronald G. Sultana, Director of the Comparative Education Programme in Euro-Mediterranean Studies and Head of the Department of Foundations in Education at the University of Malta, explains.

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In geographic, cultural, political and linguistic terms, Malta has often been described as being at the crossroads of the Mediterranean.

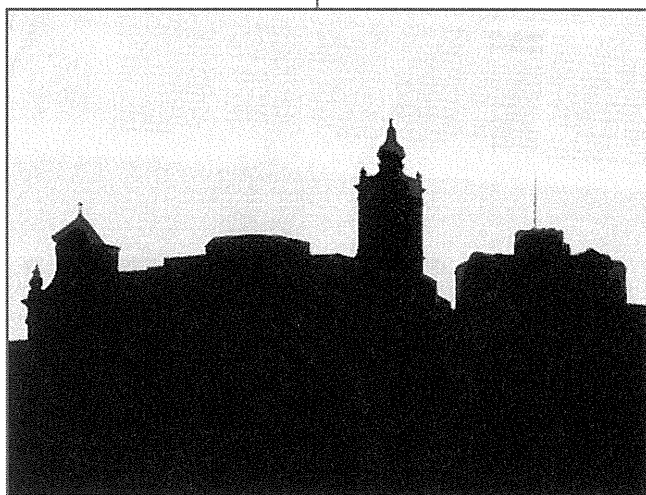
Situated 93 kilometres south of Sicily and 163 kilometres north of the African coast, Malta's history is a patchwork of diverse influences. The language spoken today in Malta is written in Latin script but is almost perfectly understandable to native Arabic speakers, reflecting the creative integration of two cultural traditions: the Arabo-Islamic on one hand and the Euro-Christian on the other. Malta's attempt to come to terms with both these traditions is a fascinating example of identity-building through the ages.

In recent times, the University of Malta has come closer to realising its own Mediterranean vocation. In the mid 1970s, school syllabi started taking into account Mediterranean history and culture, and Mediterranean studies began featuring at all levels of the educational system. The University was at the vanguard of this movement, in several ways:

- From the mid-1960s onwards, all undergraduate students following liberal arts courses were obliged to take courses in the History of Mediterranean Civilisation
- A Mediterranean Institute was established with the aim of

promoting Mediterranean Studies

- In 1989, an interdisciplinary introduction to general culture



connected directly with Mediterranean issues was introduced to the pre-university syllabus. A matriculation pass in this subject is required for entry into the university.

- In identifying the areas of excellence as part of the University's strategic plan, the Mediterranean was singled out as central to the enterprise, particularly due to the scholarship that it generated.
- Three international journals are produced at the University of Malta: *The Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, and the *Mediterranean Journal of Human Rights*

- Malta has proved to be an ideal partner for European Universities and research institutes which needed a 'southern' country to have access to the Med Campus and other Meda projects of the European Union. As a result, the University played a formative role in the new education market that has

is the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, a joint initiative between Geneva's Graduate Institute of International Studies and the Maltese government, which opened in 1990. The fact that the language of instruction at the University is generally English and that many Maltese know Italian, French, or both has facilitated regional and international networking, particularly with southern Europe.

As the East-West axis has declined in importance in the post-Cold War world, we have seen an increasing focus on North-South relations internationally, and in the Euro-Mediterranean region particularly so. Set as it is *in medi-terra*, Malta, and the University in particular, has a significant role to play in the region.

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the Università del Mediterraneo (Uni Med), and the Laboratorio Mediterraneo

- The relatively high profile achieved by Malta's University in the area of Mediterranean Studies has also led to other forms of investments by countries in the 'north'. A prime example

