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Malta

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Figure 19.1 Map of Malta
1 Geographical position

The Maltese islands consist of three inhabited islands: Malta, where the capital Valletta is located, as well as the main airport and seaports; Gozo and Comino, and a number of smaller uninhabited islands and atolls. The total population in Malta was estimated at 425,384 as at the end of 2014, of which 5.3 per cent were foreigners (Eurostat, 2014). The population of Gozo and Comino was 31,432, with fewer than ten people actually residing in Comino. The islands’ population density at 1,339.8 people per square kilometre in 2013, makes the Maltese islands one of the most densely populated countries in the world (Eurostat, 2013). There are no significant ethnic minorities in Malta.

2 Historical background

After a long period under British rule, which started in 1800, Malta became an independent country in 1964, but remained in the Commonwealth with Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state.

For most of this period, the Maltese enjoyed a limited amount of self-government in domestic affairs, a constitution, a parliamentary system, an independent judiciary and periodic free elections, whilst foreign and defence policies remained firmly in the hands of Britain. In times of political crises the constitution was usually suspended by the British authorities, only for a new one to be introduced as soon as the country returned to normality. In the nineteenth century we witness both the beginnings of a free press, the first Maltese political parties, and the initial stirrings towards self-government.

At the end of WWII, political activism intensified. In between 1955 and 1958, a government formed by the Malta Labour Party (MLP), led by Dom Mintoff, struggled to secure integration
Malta

with Britain, failing which the country descended into political instability and the constitution was suspended. The restoration of a new constitutional order and the 1962 election saw the Western-oriented Nationalist Party (NP) win a wafer-thin majority in the House of Representatives and the right to form a government. One of the party’s main electoral promises was to seek independence from Britain, a goal that was attained in 1964. Prior to this, the NP tried to secure Malta’s membership of NATO, but its efforts were rebuffed. It also expressed a readiness to take Malta into the European Economic Community (EEC) after independence.

In 1970 a Nationalist government concluded an Association Agreement with the EEC, envisaging the eventual creation of a customs union. This agreement was expanded further between 1971 and 1987, when Malta was governed by the MLP. In March 1979, UK military bases were closed down and Malta declared itself a neutral state. In 1990, three years after the NP’s return to government, Malta submitted its application to join the EU. This application was suspended in 1996, following the MLP’s brief return to power, and was reactivated in 1998 by an NP government.

The MLP consistently opposed EU membership but sought the strongest relations with the EU on the basis of a free trade area agreement. The MLP described this policy as ‘A Switzerland in the Mediterranean’, a slogan originally coined by Dom Mintoff in 1959. After a clear majority voted for EU membership in the referendum on 8 March 2003, and subsequently returned the NP to power in the general election of 12 April of the same year, the MLP changed its policy on membership citing pragmatic reasons for doing this. In 2008, Malta joined the European Monetary Union and introduced the euro. In an election held in March of that year the NP retained a parliamentary majority of one seat and the right to form the government. That year the MLP changed its name to the Labour Party (LP) and elected Joseph Muscat as its new leader. The general election held on 9 March 2013 was won by the LP, which secured a landslide advantage of nine parliamentary seats over its rival the NP; Muscat became Prime Minister on 11 March 2013.

3 Geopolitical profile

After gaining its independence from Britain in 1964, Malta joined the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe in 1965. From 1973 it started participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the so-called Helsinki Process. It adopted a policy of neutrality in 1979, which was inserted into the Constitution in 1987. Malta retained neutrality when it joined the EU in 2004. Malta joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme in 1995, left it a year later, and rejoined it in 2008. Malta is an important actor in the processes of Mediterranean cooperation such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and other North–South Mediterranean cooperation programmes, such as the ‘5+5’ in the western Mediterranean. Malta is a member of the Commonwealth.

4 Overview of the political landscape

Malta is a republic and its highest democratic institution is the unicameral Parliament, the House of Representatives, to which deputies are elected roughly every five years. Two main parties have dominated its politics for practically the whole of the post–WWII period: the Christian Democrat Nationalist Party (NP) and the left-wing Malta Labour Party (MLP), which, since 2008, has become the Labour Party (LP). The President is elected by the House of Representatives for a five-year term. His powers are formal. In contrast, the Prime Minister, moulded on the British model, is the country’s executive head. From 2009, George Abela was the President of Malta, succeeded in 2014 by Marie Louise Coleiro Preca.
5 Brief account of the political parties

Since 1966, only two political parties have managed to elect deputies in the House of Representatives: the Malta Labour Party (MLP/LP since 2008), which is in government and the Nationalist Party (NP). The last time that small parties entered the House of Representatives was in 1962. All efforts since then to break the NP-LP competitive duopoly, particularly those made since 1992 by the small green party, Alternattiva Demokratika (AD), have been fruitless.

Ideologically, the NP is a Christian democratic party at its core but it also gathers under its wings many voters with different, non-Socialist political tendencies, such as Liberals and Conservatives, who do not have an alternative strong party to represent them. Founded in 1880, the NP initially struggled for Malta’s self-government within the British Commonwealth but in the late 1950s it started demanding full independence and made this a central aim of its 1962 election manifesto. The Nationalist government elected that year secured Malta’s independence from Britain in 1964.

The LP’s origins go back to 1920 but it was re-founded and renamed the Malta Labour Party by Dom Mintoff after splitting in 1949. The ousted leader, Sir Paul Boffa, founded the Malta Workers Party (MWP). Between 1955 and 1958, the MLP struggled for integration with Britain. When the latter project failed, it demanded full independence and the closure of the UK and NATO military bases. In government from 1971 to 1987, it pursued non-alignment, joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), developed special ties with Libya, and in 1979 declared Malta a neutral state.

5.1 Party attitudes towards the European Union

From 1993 the LP conducted a strong campaign against EU membership and in favour of a free trade area with the EU. During the membership referendum campaign, many of its supporters became active within the Campaign for National Independence (CNI), led by former MLP leader and Prime Minister Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici and the Front Maltin Igum (Arise Maltese Front), led by another former MLP leader and Prime Minister Dom Mintoff. The Labour Party refused to accept the result of the 8 March 2003 membership referendum and a general election was called to finally decide the issue. The LP lost the election, following which it made a pragmatic shift of policy and accepted membership.

However, members of the CNI and Eurosceptic elements continue to militate in the Party. In the 2009 European election the LP presented as one of its candidates Sharon Ellul Bonici, a prominent member of the CNI and the ‘No’ campaign, who had worked closely with Eurosceptic former MEP Jens-Peter Bonde and who had tried to launch a ‘June Movement’ in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original name</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partit Laburista</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Labour Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partit Nazzjonista</td>
<td>PN</td>
<td>Nationalist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternattiva Demokratika</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Democratic Alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleanza Liberali Demokratika</td>
<td>ALD</td>
<td>Liberal Democratic Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alpha Liberal Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azzjoni Nazzjonali</td>
<td>AN</td>
<td>National Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperium Europa</td>
<td>IE</td>
<td>European Empire or better European rule or command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.u.L. Europa</td>
<td>KULE</td>
<td>K.u.L. Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Libertas Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partit tal-Ajkla</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Eagle’s Party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Malta. Ellul Bonici was accepted as a Labour candidate only after pledging to work within the Party of European Socialists (PES) in the event of her successful election to the European Parliament. Before the 2003 membership referendum and election, Malta was the most Eurosceptic of all the candidate countries. Party Euroscepticism came to an end in 2004 (Pace, 2011).

6 Public opinion and the European Union

The success and failure of the 2009 party campaigns hung largely on the public mood and the way voters perceived the situation. Eurobarometer surveys provide a glimpse of the public mood and their findings indicate what factors are most likely to have helped shape not only voters’ decisions, but also those of political campaign managers. According to the Standard Eurobarometer 70 (2008) economic optimism in Malta was ebbing. This normally hurts the governing party and helps the opposition. This survey showed that only 19 per cent of Maltese respondents stated that they expected the economic situation to improve, a decrease of 16 percentage points over the previous year; 45 per cent expected the economy to worsen, EU average 51 per cent, a substantial increase of 25 percentage points when compared to the Autumn 2007 survey. When compared to the year before, the percentage of those who said that the financial situation of their household would improve decreased by 10 points, from 23 per cent to 13 per cent, whilst respondents who stated that they were expecting it to get worse increased from 15 per cent a year earlier, to 30 per cent in autumn (Standard Eurobarometer 70, 2008).

In addition to these findings the Special Eurobarometer 303 survey on the approaching EP campaign and whose field work was carried out at the same time as the Standard Eurobarometer 70, showed how the Maltese people viewed the themes that ought to be prioritized in the European election campaign. The Maltese did not think that economic growth was to be the main theme, but 67 per cent of respondents placed immigration at the top of the list. This seems to indicate that whilst respondents had every faith in resolving their own economic problems by their own capabilities, they expected the EU to help Malta deal with illegal immigration. According to the same survey, Malta was amongst the three Member States where respondents considered themselves to be the best informed about the EP and amongst the seven countries where a majority (65 per cent) of citizens were interested in the European election and where more than six out of ten respondents (63 per cent) considered that the EP was close to their expectations.

After the European election, the spring Standard Eurobarometer 71 – field work carried out between 12 June and 6 July 2009 – reported that immigration was the main issue which 59 per cent of the Maltese wished to see emphasized by the EU, followed by energy, 39 per cent, the environment, 26 per cent, and the European education policy 23 per cent. There is no doubt that these public perceptions had been influenced by the intense election campaign, but they also indicate how the electorate viewed priorities on polling day.

7 National and EP electoral systems

The Maltese electoral system is a proportional representation one, based on the single transferable vote (STV). This system is used in the European, national, and local council elections. In national elections, the Maltese islands are divided into 13 electoral districts, with the islands of Gozo and Comino being the thirteenth and smallest one of them. Five members of Parliament are elected from each district. In the European elections the whole of the Maltese islands are merged into one district to elect five Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), six after the Lisbon Treaty provisions on the size of the European Parliament came into effect. Indeed in December 2011, Malta’s sixth MEP took up his seat in Parliament.
Notwithstanding that the proportional system can lead to political fragmentation and often to government by coalition, this has not been the case in Malta.

8 A glance at the EP and national elections

Three European elections have been held in Malta since the island joined the EU on 1 May 2004. Table 19.3 summarizes the data of the first two European elections held in Malta since it joined the European Union in 2004, and those of the two national elections closest to these events, namely those of 2003 and 2008.

Table 19.4 shows that in European elections, the number of registered voters is higher than that for national elections because EU citizens residing in Malta have the right to vote and stand for election.

Table 19.3 National and EP election results in Malta: 2003–2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party/electoral/list</th>
<th>National elections</th>
<th>EP elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>146,172</td>
<td>143,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>134,092</td>
<td>141,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>3,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrugia Carmelo (Independent)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seats won by parties

- NP: 35 35 30 2 2
- LP: 30 34 39 3 3+1


Table 19.4 Turnout at national and EP elections in Malta: 2003–2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National elections</th>
<th>EP elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered voters*</td>
<td>297,9</td>
<td>315,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votes cast*</td>
<td>285,1</td>
<td>294,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid votes cast</td>
<td>282,2</td>
<td>290,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note:
* Votes cast/registered voters × 100.
The average turnout at EP contests was 14 per cent below the average of the last two national elections, with a fall in turnout between the first and the second one. The results show that EP elections may have become second-order ballots from their birth.

Although in raw terms more voters cast their ballots in the 2009 European election than in 2004, voter turnout in 2009 as a percentage of registered voters was 3.6 per cent below that of 2004. Notwithstanding this, in both European elections turnout in Malta was the third highest in the EU after that of Belgium and Luxembourg and well above the EU average of 45.5 per cent in 2004 and 43 per cent in 2009. However, voter participation in the Maltese European elections was markedly below that registered in national elections. Turnout in both the Maltese national and European elections shows a declining trend.

Comparative data by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) shows that average turnout in Malta for all the elections between 1945 and 2001 was 88.2 per cent, placing Malta in twenty-fourth place out of the 169 countries ranked (Nohlen and Soderbergh, 2002).

Several factors may account for this high voter turnout: power is overly concentrated in the government, so that the winning party wields quasi absolute domination of the decision-making process until the next election. This certainly spurs competitive behaviour between the two main parties; intense and pervasive partisanship (Baldacchino, 2002); very strong campaigning by individual candidates who compete for the parliamentary seats against other candidates of the same party as well as those from rival parties, a feature of the STV system; and strong mobilization tactics by the parties that have their own television, radio, print, and internet media (Cini, 2002; Hirczy, 2006; Pace, 2008 and 2011). The number of ‘floating voters’ is small, but decisive. This intense rivalry also explains the marginal difference between the winning and losing parties. The same factors with some qualifications are also at play in European elections and the fact that they do not achieve the same level of voter turnout as those of the national elections is one of the most telling signs of their second-order status.

More political parties contest the European elections than the national ones. The 2003 national election was contested by three parties, the Nationalist Party, the Labour Party, Alternative Demokratika, and an independent candidate. The 2008 national election was contested by four parties that fielded candidates in all electoral districts, two parties that contested two districts, two that contested one district, and an independent candidate. The 2004 European election was contested by six parties: the NP, LP, and AD, which were joined by a number of new, much smaller parties including the Alpha Liberal Democratic Party (ALDP), the Christian Democratic Republican Party (CDRP), Imperium Europa (IE), KUL Europa, and five independents, one of whom, Carmelo Farrugia, the secretary-general of the main hunting federation, polled 3,119 votes.

In the 2004 campaign, the NP capitalized on having taken Malta into the EU. At the same time it criticized the MLP for having opposed membership, only to perform a political U-turn and embrace it just a few months after the 2003 election. The NP was also struggling against the small green party AD, which enjoyed strong electoral support in view of the clear stand it had taken in favour of membership during the EU membership campaign. The NP tried to denigrate this party by claiming that it belonged to a European parliamentary group that supported abortion, but AD retorted that it informed the European Greens that it was against abortion. The MLP focussed on the domestic political issues, such as rising unemployment, which was mainly caused by the restructuring of the public sector and state-owned corporations as a result of EU membership. This diversion to national issues also suited the MLP in another way: after strongly campaigning against membership for so many years, a substantive segment of its own supporters had still not come to terms with the party’s policy shift, whilst many were still
opposing membership. In the election, AD’s good showing, though insufficient to help it elect at least one seat, sufficiently weakened the NP’s vote, which only managed to elect two of the five seats, with three going to Labour.

9 The 2009 European election

9.1 Party lists and manifestos

The 2009 European election was peculiar in a sense because it was held under pre-Lisbon rules, which meant that Malta was to elect five MEPs. However, the election was also held under the shadow of the Lisbon Treaty, since its eventual ratification would increase Malta’s EP seats by one. Hence, government and opposition agreed that the runner-up in the election would eventually take up the sixth seat once this became available, as indeed happened in December 2011.

In this election, the two main parties, the NP and the LP, captured all the seats: four, including the sixth seat, went to the LP and two to the NP. The greens (AD) did not perform as well as they had done in the 2004 election, obtaining only 2.3 per cent of the valid votes cast compared to 9.3 per cent in 2004.

In all, ten parties contested the election. A handful of very small parties, fielding one or two candidates, joined the electoral fray obtaining a negligible amount of votes. Amongst these we find Alleanza Liberali (AL), the Alpha Liberal Democratic Party (ALDP), KUL Ewropa, Libertas Malta, and Partit tal-Ajkla. The right-wing Azzjoni Nazzjonali, which entered politics for the first time in the 2008 national election obtained 0.6 per cent of the vote, but its rival on the right, Imperium Europa, which took a markedly stronger anti-immigrant stance, outperformed it by taking 1.5 per cent of the vote. Azzjoni Nazzjonali tried to capitalize on hunters’ disgruntlement following tighter rules on hunting introduced after membership in compliance with the EU’s ‘Birds’ Directive’. Alleanza Liberali and Alpha Liberali had a single main issue, the introduction of divorce. Libertas Malta contested under Declan Ganley’s ‘Libertas.eu’, with a single candidate who had split with Azzjoni Nazzjonali. The political platforms of the other small parties were obscure.

The NP’s manifesto was based on four fundamental issues: employment creation, the protection of the environment, solidarity, and values. The LP capitalized on the image of its new leader Joseph Muscat, still an untried quantity in Maltese politics, and presented a manifesto with 18 main objectives: a moratorium on payments due to workers who become unemployed, more funds for retraining schemes for the unemployed, working with PES in favour of the ‘Pact for Future Employment’, workers retain the right to choose how much overtime they wish to work, resources for childcare centres, strengthening of consumer rights, a 20-point Action Plan to control illegal immigration, Labour MEPs to work to shorten patients’ waiting time in hospital, continue legal action to return VAT overcharged on new cars to consumers, strengthen consumer rights in general, enforcement of EU regulations to compensate car owners for any damages sustained by their vehicles because of bad roads, improved opportunities for youth and students, prioritization of climate change in the European Parliament, provision of impetus to ‘green economic growth’, Labour MEPs to work to ensure that the EU’s Climate and Energy Package benefits Malta, Labour MEPs to be bound by a code of transparency, and also to organize information sessions for the public, Labour MEPs to open a representative office in Malta and one in Gozo (Labour Party, 2009).

Both main political parties stressed the environment, which was the fulcrum of the AD’s manifesto and in direct competition with it. Under the banner of a ‘New Green Deal’, coined by European Green Party spokesman Urlike Lunacek, AD stressed the need of a third ‘voice’
for Malta in the European Parliament: a European immigration policy, an ecological and social Europe, consumer rights, family values, and a stronger role for civil society.

9.2 Electoral campaign

Domestic political issues played a dominant role in both European elections. The 2009 campaign unfolded under the shadow of the international recession. Just a few months after seeing its mandate renewed as a result of the March 2008 national election, the government announced the introduction of higher utility prices, mainly water and electricity, because of the spiraling costs of petroleum in the world markets. Malta is completely dependent on petroleum as a source of energy. To compensate for these price hikes, the trade unions demanded wage increases that were fiercely resisted by the government and the main business organizations. The opposition Labour Party did not fail to capitalize on this discontent, which continued right up to and beyond the June 2009 European election. This was the most important issue, which contributed to the ‘crowding out’ of European issues from the campaign and which ultimately influenced voters’ choice.

Indeed, as the European election campaigning started in the first quarter of 2009, Malta’s economic situation was relatively uncertain both because of the global financial crisis and volatile prices in the world petroleum markets; although world oil prices declined sharply from September 2008, they resumed an upward trend in January 2009. Public finances also became a matter of concern. After reining in the public deficit within the margins of the so-called Maastricht convergence criteria, which permitted Malta to join the European Monetary Union and introduce the euro on 1 January 2008, the government seemed to lose control of spending once again, ending 2008 with a deficit of 4.7 per cent of GDP, much above the reference value of 3 per cent. The government blamed this on the international recession, but in 2008 the Maltese economy expanded by 1.6 per cent. The likelier factor contributing to the growing public deficit was an increase in government spending related to the restructuring and eventual privatization of the shipyards and unexpected delays in the payment of corporate taxes (European Commission, 2009).

Another important issue was the government’s handling of illegal immigration, which was strongly criticized by the opposition. Criticism focussed on the perceived failure by the government to secure a ‘burden sharing’ agreement with the other Member States. This issue alone was the main factor that helped IE increase its vote tally from just 84 votes in the 2008 national election to 3,637 in the 2009 European election.

Troubled by these concerns, voters who traditionally voted for the NP grasped the opportunity presented by the 2009 European election to protest against their party either by abstaining or by switching their vote to other parties. In addition, those voters who were convinced that the result of the European election was not going to impact upon the country’s governance also decided not to vote. Taken together, these factors account for the lower turnout when compared with the 2008 national election and the increased popularity of the small, single-issue parties.

In the meantime, the governing Nationalist Party unsuccessfully tried to divert the focus from domestic political issues to its record in the EU, where it could show better results. Thus, the Nationalist campaign concentrated on Malta’s entry into the euro-zone and the smooth adoption of the euro on 1 January 2008, the increase in the inward flow of foreign direct investment after membership, and the fact that Malta as an ‘objective one’ region, had secured a substantive financial package of structural aid, €850 million at 2007 prices, for the period 2007–2013. The NP also criticized the Labour MEPs’ performance in the European Parliament.
For its part, the LP responded by trying to minimize these achievements whilst strongly exploiting the domestic issues that dominated public concerns. In 2008 and in the first half of 2009, the LP carried out a campaign claiming that Malta was a net contributor and not a net beneficiary from the EU budget. This is not substantiated by facts, and the campaign may have had the aim of neutralizing any advantage that the NP could have reaped from exploiting the favourable EU structural aid package that it had negotiated.

Hence the emphasis placed by the opposition LP and other smaller parties on criticizing government on the economy and above all for mishandling illegal immigration, struck a chord with a bigger cross-section of voters than the government’s campaign based on its European record.

One final issue which dogged the Nationalists both in the 2008 general election and in the 2009 European election was the ban on spring hunting. In January 2008, the European Commission took the issue of spring hunting in Malta to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). While the Maltese government rejected the Commission’s position, it announced that the spring hunting season would not open (Department of Information, press release no. 0171, 31 January 2008). Hunters claimed that prior to the 2003 referendum and election they had been assured that hunting would continue to be practiced in Malta after membership in the same way as it had always been. Meanwhile, both the NP and the LP declared that they would respect the ECJ’s decision. This issue also led to some vote switching from the NP to the LP, as well as some abstentions from voting.

Finally, although no Eurosceptic party contested the 2004 European election, Azzjoni Nazzjonali did so in 2009, obtaining 1,527 preference votes, a marginal improvement on the 1,461 preference votes it secured in the 2008 national election. This poor result also shows that amongst those who turn out to vote in the Maltese European elections, support for Euroscepticism is very low. When comparing Malta’s first two European elections, it can be said that the smaller parties and independent candidates focussed on single issues, whilst the big two parties had broader agendas. AD concentrated mostly on green issues, whilst AN broached the thorny issue of identity and immigration, and tried to capitalize on the ban on spring hunting linking it to Malta’s identity just as the hunters’ associations do. Other small parties and independents took up other issues such as divorce and illegal immigration. In the 2004 election, Carmelo Farrugia, the Secretary General of the main hunters’ federation stood as an independent representing hunters’ interests and obtained 3,119 preference votes. But he did not contest the 2009 election, despite the fact that the issue was still simmering. Despite the salience of the environment, immigration, and hunting in Maltese public opinion, the smaller parties have not been able to fully capitalize on them, mostly because the two large parties have taken them over themselves.

What is also significant is that despite campaigning so strongly against EU membership and despite the fact that the NP used this to criticize it, the LP managed to do so well in both European elections. It managed to mobilize its supporters, a very difficult task in the 2004 European election, though less so in the 2009 one. The main reason behind this success is that the LP did not campaign on European issues but on the government’s record in office, thus exploiting voter disgruntlement to its advantage.

9.3 Electoral results

The outcome of the 2009 EP election in Malta is summarized in Table 19.5.

This shows the number of preference votes polled by all the political parties and independents who contested the election. In Malta’s STV system, parties are listed on the ballot sheet in alphabetical order and within each party section, candidates are in turn listed in alphabetical order. Voters place the numeral ‘1’ in a box next to the name of their preferred candidate and continue
to place their other preferences, ‘2’, ‘3’, next to the names of the other candidates, sometimes crossing party lines. The ‘quota’ or the number of votes required by a candidate to win a seat is calculated by dividing the number of valid votes by the number of seats to be filled plus one and adding one to the final answer. In the 2004 and 2009 elections, only one candidate, the Nationalist Party’s Simon Busuttil, surpassed the quota and was elected on the first count. His ‘extra’ votes were then shared amongst other candidates according to voter preferences. In addition, with each count, half the candidates with the least number of votes are eliminated and their votes are redistributed according to voters’ preferences. This process continues until all seats have been allocated. In the 2009 election all the seats were finally allocated by the twenty-ninth count:

\[
\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{Valid votes cast}}{\text{Number of seats} + 1} = (n + 1)
\]

In the 2009 European election, the opposition Labour Party with 54.8 per cent of the vote won three seats, the remaining two seats going to the governing Nationalist Party with 40.5 per cent of the vote. In addition, as agreed by the parties before the election, the runner-up, also a Labour Party candidate, took up his seat in December 2011. In the 2009 election all of these parties except the CDRP contested, but they were also joined by some new parties, namely Aleanza Liberali Demokratika (ALD), Alleanza Nazzjonali (AN), and Libertas. In addition, two of the new parties that were launched for the 2004 European elections, namely ALDP and IE, contested the 2008 national election. It is also interesting that though none of these smaller formations managed to come within reach of electing an MEP, those that contested the national as well as European elections such as AD, IE and to a more limited extent AN, performed better in the European than in the national elections.

The main shift in voter preferences in the European elections occurred mainly from the governing NP to the smaller parties. IE, which obtained 1,603 in the 2004 European election, scraped just 84 in the 2008 national election, but then received 3,637 in the 2009 European election. AD, which fields candidates in all districts in national elections, obtained just 1,929 preference votes in the 2003 national election when the main issue was whether Malta should join the EU or not. In the European election of 2004 it secured 22,938 votes because many voters who had voted for the Nationalists the previous year to ensure EU accession switched to AD in appreciation for its support of Malta’s EU membership during the membership campaign.

### Table 19.5 EP election results in Malta: 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Number of candidates</th>
<th>First count votes</th>
<th>Votes (%)</th>
<th>EP seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5,802</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,595</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3,637</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KULE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>135,917</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100,486</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>248,169</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5 + 1 from 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AD also performed better in the 2009 European election than it did in the 2008 national one. The performance of these two smaller parties is compatible with Second-Order Election theory, for it shows that in European elections there is a stronger tendency for voters to switch allegiance to the smaller parties.

Paradoxically however, whilst European issues took a back seat in both European elections, Europhile candidates managed to do better than others. NP candidate Simon Busuttil, who was the first to be elected in both European elections, surpassed the quota required to win a seat in the first count on both occasions. In 2004, he obtained 58,899 votes – the quota was 40,945 – and in the 2009 election, he improved his performance by obtaining 68,782 votes – the quota was 41,362. Busuttil headed the Malta-EU Information Centre (MIC) during the membership negotiations and was the best-known public figure up to the EU referendum. The other NP MEP, David Casa, was also prominent in the ‘Yes Campaign’; Casa was re-elected in 2009.

Similarly, of the three Labour MEPs elected in 2004, two were not prominent anti-EU membership campaigners; they had in fact stayed in the background whilst the LP opposed membership. The third, Joseph Muscat, who polled the highest number of preference votes amongst the Labour MPs (36,958), had taken a hard anti-membership position. His success was attributable to his popularity with the party rank-and-file, mainly due to his party loyalty, which is often richly rewarded in Maltese politics. In 2008 Muscat was also elected party leader, following which he resigned his European parliamentary seat to be co-opted into the Maltese House of Representatives. To make this possible, Joseph Cuschieri vacated his seat in the House of Representatives to clear the way for Muscat’s co-option. In return Cuschieri was supported by the LP to win a seat in the EP. It is noteworthy that during the membership referendum campaign, Cuschieri took a hard Eurosceptic line.

In both European elections no woman candidate was successful, which makes Malta the only EU Member State with no woman MEP. Indeed, in the first two European elections, women fared worse than in national elections, though it must be added that female members of the House of Representatives have never surpassed the 10 per cent of parliamentary seats achieved in 1951. In both European elections, ballot positioning negatively affected the fortunes of women candidates. Since voters mark their preferences starting by giving ‘1’ to their preferred candidate, a candidate’s position on the ballot also determines his or her performance, particularly due to the widespread practice of many voters not to vote strategically, but to mark their preferences sequentially from top to bottom. This phenomenon has been studied by Carmen Ortega, who concludes that it often negatively affects women candidates.

In the 2004 election, David Casa overtook fellow NP candidate Joanna Drake largely because his name came after that of Simon Busuttil on the ballot sheet. In the 2009 election Labour candidate Marlene Mizzi was beaten by incumbent John Attard Montalto for the same reason, after the elimination of Claudette Abela Baldacchino in the twenty-sixth count.

In the EP, the NP forms part of the European People’s Party (EPP), whilst the Labour Party forms part of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). Of the five elected MEPs, two are lawyers by profession, one is a former economics professor at the University of Malta, one is a graduate, and the fifth has no university background.

9.4 Campaign finance

There is no public financing of political parties and in February 2012 a new law aiming to regulate such financing was introduced in the House of Representatives as a private member’s
Table 19.6  List of Maltese MEPs: seventh legislature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>National party</th>
<th>Political group</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Committee Chair</th>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Delegation</th>
<th>Number of mandate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attard Montalto, John</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>07/02/1953</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>International Trade (INTA)</td>
<td>Vice-Chair Delegation for Relations with South Asia (DSAS)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busuttil, Simon</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>21/03/1969</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Petitions (PETI)</td>
<td>Delegation for South East Europe DSEE</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa, David</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>16/11/1968</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly DACP</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuschier, Joseph</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Politician/journalist</td>
<td>20/02/1968</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transport and Tourism (TRAN)</td>
<td>Delegation for Relations with the Arab Peninsula DARP</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grech, Louis</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Economist</td>
<td>22/03/1947</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vice-Chair IMCO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand DANZ</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scicluna, Edward</td>
<td>LP</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Economist</td>
<td>12/10/1946</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vice-Chair ECON</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly DACP</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

motion. The political parties raise finance from fund-raising activities, but their biggest sources are private companies, including their own, and individual wealthy donors. There is hardly any transparency on amounts spent by political parties or candidates on their political campaigns, nor is there any disclosure of where the financing comes from. There are sufficient indicators that party spending on the European election campaigns is much lower than in national ones, since the former tend to be more low-key than the latter.

10 Theoretical interpretation of Euro-elections

10.1 Second-Order Election theory

The analysis in this chapter has shown that the two European elections in Malta have so far fitted within the SOE paradigm, primarily due to lower turnout registered than in national elections, a huge loss of votes by the governing party, and small parties managing to do better than they do in national elections – though not significantly well enough to win parliamentary seats.

It must be kept in mind that the 2004 and 2009 European elections were held 14 and 15 months, respectively, from the preceding national elections of 2003 and 2008. Although this is normally considered to be the ‘honeymoon’ period for parties in government, historically in Malta’s case this period is often the most difficult for the governing parties, for it is in this early phase of the national election cycle that they tend to implement the most unpopular reforms, with negative repercussions on their popularity. This is one of the main reasons why the NP, which led Malta into the EU, has been outperformed by the LP in the European elections. The European elections have also instigated small parties and independents who normally do not contest national elections to enter the electoral race.

10.2 Europe Salience theory

The campaigns have also focused mainly on domestic political issues, primarily the government’s record and where European issues were debated – this was usually in respect of some issue of concern to the Maltese electorate, like illegal immigration and the ban on spring hunting. Small parties and independents do not do well because of the rivalry between the two main parties and the fact that their issues are usually taken over by the former. Although the two large parties, the NP and LP, do manage to take the lion’s share of the votes, the smaller parties tend to perform slightly better than in national elections. More small parties contest the European than the national elections. The smaller parties are more likely to link their campaigns to European issues than the large parties. There is also a tendency for the electorate to favour candidates who are associated with the EU. An interesting observation made in the aftermath of the 2013 national election is that the result appeared very similar to the 2009 European election. This raises a number of interesting questions related to the discussion above, which are still being assessed.

There are other signs that point to the secondary nature of the Maltese European elections. In the absence of transparency in party financing, this can be deduced from the fact that campaign advertising and mailing is appreciably lower, as is the length of the campaigns themselves. Although more work will have to be done in the future to provide more reliable data on these elections, there is little doubt that the Maltese European elections exhibit all the SOE symptoms at birth.
Malta

References

Primary sources

Secondary sources