

Malta-Bulgaria diplomatic relations

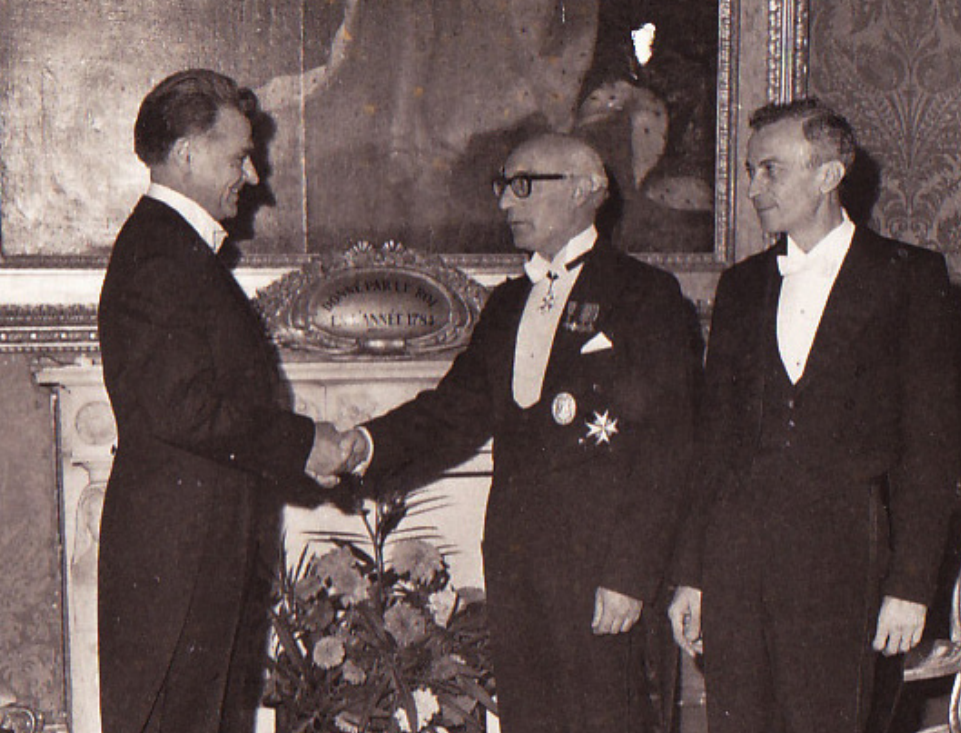
Diplomatic relations between Malta and Bulgaria date back to 10 September 1971 and, since then, both countries have engendered strong political and economic relations which were further enhanced through an array of bilateral agreements signed over the years covering different areas of cooperation and through mutual EU membership. As member states of the European Union, the relations between the two countries went beyond bilateral and multilateral exchanges to the spirit of solidarity. Over the years a sizeable community of Bulgarian nationals developed in Malta, they live, work and send their children to local schools.

After 1971, the government adopted a broader perspective to foreign policy by establishing political and economical links with the Eastern Bloc; a shift from close co-operation with the Britain and other NATO countries to other countries including members forming part of the Warsaw Pact. This took place not just at governmental level. Malta opened up to new foreign influences and professional advice in football.¹

The relations between Malta and Bulgaria and the strengthening the economic, cultural, educational and commercial between the two countries were always on the agenda. One ought to mention, in addition to sports, music. Bulgarian classical singers and teachers had significantly contributed to the

cultural milieu of Malta of the 1970s and 1980s.^{2,3}

The international recession of 2008-09 did not impinge on Bulgaria's exports to Malta which increased by more than 14 times over a span of 6 years, from €1.8 million in 2009 to €12.4 million in 2015. Tourism figures had almost doubled between 2004 and 2007.⁴ Travelling to and from Malta to Bulgaria is on the increase mainly due to low-cost airline fares. Trips are becoming popular with Maltese; in 2015, the number of Maltese travelling to Bulgaria increased by 1,039 or 25% to 5,318 from the previous year. The support and assistance between both countries within the EU framework was further strengthened through bilateral consultations. To this end,



The first Bulgarian ambassador to Malta presenting his credentials to H.E. Sir Anthony Mamo, Governor-General of Malta, 17 September 1971

the Parliamentary Secretary for EU Funds and the 2017 Presidency Hon. Ian Borg, had an official visit to Bulgaria in May 2015.

For the initiative of the Council of Europe, The President of Malta H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca had travelled to Sofia in April 2016, to address the conference to launch the Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

Malta welcomes the positive response expressed by President of Bulgaria, H.E. Rosen Plevneliev, during his meeting with Malta's Ambassador to Bulgaria and Romania H.E. Lino Bianco in December 2014, to engage in the President's Foundation for Social Well-Being initiated by the President of Malta and looks forward to communicating further on the social initiatives due to be taken in connection with this Foundation in the near future.

To consolidate and establish new links in the spheres of culture and

education, Ambassador Bianco identified and works with a number of Bulgarian nationals living in Malta, most notably Professor Milena Dobрева, a Bulgarian academic at the University of Malta. Following a suggestion by Bulgarian Maltese Cultural Association, he facilitated the establishment of the Bulgarian Sunday School Cyril and Methodius funded by the Bulgarian Ministry for Education. This school, which started functioning in October 2015, will be accepting Maltese candidates as from October 2016. Furthermore, on the 14-15 May 2015, The President of Malta hosted, for the first time ever, the celebration of the feast of Cyril and Methodius at her official presidential residence at Attard.

Over the years, the diplomatic relations were reinforced through the exchange of several state visits which included the ones to Bulgaria by the late Presidents of the Malta Agatha Barbara and Guido de Marco

Visit of Bulgarian
delegation to Malta
Drydocks, 15 February
1972



and, more recently by President of the Republic of Bulgaria H.E. Georgi Parvanov in October 2009 and the return state visit by President of Malta H.E. George Abela in May 2011.⁵ Economy, commerce and education were highlighted during the meeting of the President De Marco with the President of Bulgaria H.E. Petar Stoyanov, held in Sofia in March 2001. The said meeting also noted that there was room for increase in trade, tourism and investment.⁶ During this visit the Minister of Education Louis Galea, who was accompanying the President, had signed a co-operation agreement with the Bulgarian counterpart with respect to health care and medical science.⁷ During the state visit of H.E. Parvanov in October 2009, the President of Malta H.E. George Abela had discussed bilateral and EU relations. Following its accession as member state of the European Union, Malta had supported Bulgaria's accession and will support its application

to join Schengen area and the eurozone.⁸ This was reiterated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tonio Borg during the signing of the cooperation agreement between the two countries on matters of foreign policy.⁹ President Parvanov was accompanied by high ranking officials including the Bulgarian ambassador to Malta H.E. Atanas Mladenov.¹⁰

The mutual respect between the two countries lead Bulgaria to grant the honour 'Stara Planina' to President Barbara in 1983¹¹ and to President De Marco in 2001.¹² The latter bestowed the Bulgarian counterpart President Stoyanov with the honour 'Companion of Honour with collar of the National Order of Merit'.¹³ During a courtesy visit by the Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria H.E. Marin Raykov, the former interim Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, the Speaker of the House of Representatives Hon. Anglu



Minister for Foreign Affairs Hon. Dr George W. Vella with Bulgarian Ambassador to Malta H.E. Marin Raykov, 4 March 2015.

Farrugia reiterated the political ties between the two countries.¹⁴

In addition to having non-resident ambassadors, Malta and Bulgaria have honorary consuls in the respective countries: Dr Borislav Boyanov is the Honorary Consul of Malta in Bulgaria whilst Dr Giannella De Marco, the daughter of the late President De Marco, is

the Honorary Consul of Bulgaria in Malta.

All the historical photos in this section, except for the one of H.E. The President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca with H.E. The President of Bulgaria Rosen Asenov Plevneliev, are being reproduced by the courtesy of the Department of Information, Government of Malta.

Notes

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 13. Ibid.
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