



Valletta: the one-dimensional Euro-Mediterranean dimension

Anna Khakee, University of Malta

The centre of Malta's foreign policy has always been the Mediterranean. In his day, Malta's longest-serving prime minister, Dom Mintoff, single-handedly forced a Mediterranean chapter into the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. More recently, Malta has been active on a range of Mediterranean initiatives, such as the 'Five plus Five' dialogue and the EU's various policies towards its southern neighbourhood.

Malta's interest in the Mediterranean has traditionally been multidimensional, including trade, security and stability, maritime affairs and peace (Malta is a long-standing and active supporter of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). So it was only logical that Malta's Foreign Minister, George Vella, stated on the first day of the country's presidency of the Council of the European Union that "there is a definite sense of expectation in EU quarters that Malta should leave its imprint primarily on Mediterranean affairs."

It is a measure of the extraordinary state of current European politics that the southern Mediterranean has, in practice, received only limited attention during the first months of Malta's presidency. This is mostly due to factors far beyond Malta's control. Looming Brexit negotiations, the strains on NATO and European security following the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the rise of chauvinistic nationalism across Europe and its effect on European policy-making, the continuing policy failures around

migration and escalating violence in Ukraine all compete for the attention of Europe's leaders.

However, it is noteworthy that the Maltese presidency has so far been unable to stop a longer-standing EU trend towards viewing Euro-Mediterranean relations through one single lens: migration. Recent initiatives on Libya have, in practice, been focused on border control and migration, as this is perceived as being key to stabilising the so-called 'central Mediterranean route'. The Maltese presidency has emphasised the follow-up to the Joint Valletta Action Plan on migration management and proposed new measures to disrupt the business models of human smugglers and traffickers, to mention just a few examples.

But discussing migration is not discussing the Mediterranean specifically. Migration is a much wider problem. A cursory survey of migrants' and refugees' origins, as well as their reasons for migrating, is enough to make that clear. And the challenges of the Mediterranean are so much vaster and deeper: peace and security, economic inequality, discrimination and intolerance, patronage-based politics, democratisation and social change. All are important in their own right – not only insofar as they affect migratory flows. Reinforcing a one-dimensional Euro-Mediterranean dimension would be an ironic and unfortunate legacy of the Maltese presidency. ◦