

The Sunday Times

MARCH 31, 1985

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WEATHER FORECAST

(Issued by the Meteorological Office of the Civil Aviation Department)

General Statement: An anti-cyclone extends from Algeria to the Balkans.

Forecast from dawn to dusk

Sunny periods. Visibility: good. Wind: light to moderate NNE. Sea: slight to moderate. Swell: low NE. Max. temp. 18C.

Luqa observations at noon

Mean sea level pressure ... 1022.2 mbs
Wind ... NNE 8 kts
Relative humidity ... 44%
Cloud ... 1/8 cumulus
Visibility ... 35 km
Hours of bright sunshine ... 10.5
Max. shade temp. during day ... 18C
Min. temperature during previous night ... 11C
Average sea temp. around Malta ... 15C
Rainfall average Malta (past 24 hours up to noon yesterday) ... nil
Average Gozo ... nil
Since Sept. 1 for the Maltese Islands ... 605.0 mm
Sunrise ... 6.50 a.m.
Sunset ... 7.23 p.m.

SPEAKING on the signing, in Malta, in December 1970, of the EEC-Malta Association Agreement, the then Prime Minister, Dr. George Borg Olivier, said: "The political significance of our association with the Community lies, on our part, mainly in the establishment of yet another strong link with the democracies of Europe. The association opens a new chapter in Malta's economic and political history during which the earlier bonds formed on common ideals and on shared experiences and sacrifices should, in our view, develop into a fuller participation in a united Europe".

In a report to the Political Affairs Committee and the Committee on External Trade Relations of the European Community Sigismund Freiherr von Braun, President in Office of the Council of the EEC and State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany who, together with Franco Malfatti, then President of the Commission, had signed the agreement in Valetta, on behalf of the EEC, pointed out that "Malta is not merely seeking a trade agreement with the EEC, but hopes in the long term to achieve gradual and full integration. In this connection since it became independent, in 1964, Malta has laid special stress on its role as part of Europe, and in the request for association it confirmed its

by Roderick Pace

wish to forge closer links with the Six".

These sensible ideals have repeatedly been trampled underfoot by the Socialist Administration. In relations with the EEC this Administration tended to over-emphasize the economic aspect, with a special bias of its own, while forgetting, sometimes even ridiculing, the fact that culturally Malta belongs to the European fold.

The Nationalist Administration took an early interest in the Community both for political reasons, by associating Malta with a European Community of democratic nations, and to strengthen the Maltese economy.

IMMENSE BENEFITS

The association agreement had immense benefits: foreign capital was attracted to the island and a wider market opened to Malta's growing industrial sector. Ten years after the association agreement had become effective the percentage value of Maltese exports going to Britain, which formerly amounted to more than 30 per cent of total exports, making Malta overdependent on one market, had gone down to around 19 per cent while the percentage value of total exports to the original Six members of the Community had increased to more than 53 per cent with some 28.8 per cent going to West Germany. This is explained by the fact that the heaviest foreign investment undertaken in the Seventies was by West German firms.

In Mr. Mintoff's time the original scope of the association with the EEC was widened in the economic field without parallel steps in the political sphere through the development of closer bonds with the European democracies. It is true that a number of other protocols, including a financial aid protocol, were signed in the mid-Seventies between the Community and Malta, but the latter's negotiating tactics and constant bickering over more money irritated officials in Brussels to a point that they cannot even conceal by "diplomatic" behaviour.

Mr. Mintoff's notorious speech in Strasbourg on September 28, 1978, the constant verbal attacks on Western Europe and on individual European countries, the human rights situation in Malta and the attempts to taunt Europe by getting entangled with powers seen by Europeans as a direct threat to security have embittered our friends rather than gained any tangible advantage.

The not-so-flattering anecdote that makes the rounds in European circles is that Malta would sell its soul to the devil for a good financial settlement. I heard one official, who formed part of a delegation to Malta for talks, say that while they came to Malta under the impression that they would be discussing security with the Maltese authorities the subject that kept cropping up was money. "They were only interested in money", he remarked.

An EEC bureaucrat said that he tried to keep as far away as possible from anything involving Malta. The renowned EEC

Mediterranean expert, Alfred Tovas, wrote: "Malta's negotiating tactics arouse ill-feeling in Brussels, which may be a significant negative factor" ("EEC Enlargement - The Southern Neighbours", Sussex European Research Centre, 1979, p.58). He was referring to future negotiations between the EEC and Malta to take account of developments affecting us in the light of Spain and Portugal's entry into the Community.

All true Maltese are hurt when they hear these comments about us, as I was when I heard them. But they serve to open our eyes to certain realities and convince us to change our approach. Malta must understand that its size and market place it somewhere in importance between Svracuse and Catania and cannot therefore display the arrogance of a superpower without being exposed to international ridicule.

Nor can any government in Malta expect to flout the democratic institutions and have good relations with the European Community. Past experience, such as the Colonels' coup in Greece, in 1967, the situation in Spain under Franco and in pre-revolution Portugal, has clearly shown that the Community is prepared to take concrete action where human rights are violated and to encourage the promotion and establishment of democracy.

It is time for Malta to take up again Dr. Borg Olivier's vision in its relations with the Community; a vision embodied in the Nationalist Party's electoral manifesto voted for by the absolute majority of the people and which declares that: "A Nationalist Government affirms unequivocally that we are Europeans, that our place is in the fold of a united Europe as conceived by the three Christian Democrats who are rightly referred to as the fathers of Europe... we will seek full membership in the European Community if, as we expect, the right conditions are negotiated for us to be able to take this step".

In the Eighties, and especially after the 1981 elections, Mr. Mintoff's Government began to give clear indications that Malta would seek a way out of its domestically generated economic troubles with aid from and by opening new markets in Eastern bloc countries. For a time even barter trade became a catchword in the Maltese authorities' jargon. By looking Eastwards we were emulating similar initiatives abandoned by other states on the way to development, not least among them being Egypt, the largest Southern Mediterranean state.

SOVIET MODEL

In the period 1955-70 the Egyptian economy, in trade and investments, was tied to the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries. An aggressive attempt was made to structure the economy on the Soviet model of central planning. A number of important projects were started or completed with Soviet help, such as steel works and the Asswan dam.

Then it started dawning on the Egyptian Government that there were limits to Soviet-style economics and that this model could not take Egypt into the

next stage in development. The limits of barter trade were immediately recognised and the cost of industrialization through import substitution in terms of inflation was adequately assessed.

Egypt's and our own experience, as regards aid to set up industrial projects obtained from a centrally planned country which has itself recently recognised the benefits that can result from opening up the economy, show that there is a limit to which countries with a centrally planned economy can aid a country in its industrialization efforts. Modern technology needed for us to move to the next stage of industrialization can only come from Western Europe, the USA and Japan.

The Federation of Industry once complained that Malta had been rendered uncompetitive by wages rising faster than they should have in the late Seventies (apart from the Malta pound rate of exchange). Such a development is to be expected in the first stage of industrialization. As wages rise a successive process sets in by which the uncompetitive, labour-intensive industries are replaced by more capital-intensive and specialised industries or services.

This second stage does not seem to have started in our case mainly because of the discouragement of foreign investment by unnecessary burdens being placed on would-be investors, by our exchange rate, government bureaucracy and interference, and all the other trappings of an undeclared "closed door" policy.

A return to a democratic government, a sizable pruning of government controls and interference in the running of the economy, more consultations with constituted bodies representing the private sector and industrialists, the proper drawing up of a national development plan and the establishment of sounder and more fruitful relations with the EEC could possibly see us out of a vicious circle.

The wage and price freeze, now in its fourth year, is just another way of doing nothing. It places undue burdens on the working class and keeps industries going which would have otherwise closed down to be replaced by something better, given availability of foreign investment and the domestic conditions needed to encourage investment.

NO SECRECY ON EDUCATION

PARENTS, students and all who are interested in education — excluding no one — should be grateful to the Council of the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations for lifting the curtain of secrecy on at least one aspect of Church-State talks on the schools: a subject which should be open to the widest possible participation in decision-making.

The FPTA rendered a public service to participation when reiterating its opposition to the common entrance examination as proposed by Government.

The first objection is in defence of the parents' fundamental right to choose the school they want for their children at the primary and the secondary level. Children already in Church and other private schools, if they fail the common entrance exam, would forfeit the right to continue their studies in the school they chose from the very first day of their school life.

The FPTA rightly rejects the socially divisive Government claim that the common entrance exam is needed to remove discrimination against those desiring to send their children to private schools but financially unable to do so. Apart from the fact that, in the case of Church schools, inability to pay is generously taken into consideration, the introduction of a common entrance exam is certainly not a way of determining who is and who is not able to pay. This is a matter that parents decide for themselves depending on the priority they give to the education and the school they want for their children.

The FPTA consider also that the common entrance examination is elitist in the sense that, at age eleven plus, it would favour the abler against the less able of pupils with possible grave consequences to the latter in preparing themselves for a place in society as future adults.

The FPTA, as in duty bound has made these objections known once more to the parents, to the Prime Minister, the Archbishop and the Vatican representatives at the Church-State talks.

The Prime Minister's reaction has been true to the usual form: threats of Government "action" if no agreement is reached in continuing Church-State talks and holding the FPTA responsible for those actions. It is rather a question of parents, students and all interested in education, as electors, holding the Government responsible for "actions" going against the free choice of education.

Guidelines for the 21st century

The Prime Minister, who is also Minister of Education, should follow the more constructive ways of dialogue on education as the British Government did on Tuesday with the publication of a 90-page White Paper entitled *Better Schools*, giving guidelines for the better preparation of today's school-children for life and work in the 21st century.

With that end in view the White Paper has been described as one of the most comprehensive documents on education since the last war. It explains reforms in the public examination system and in appraising the performance of teachers, goes into the problem of truancy and would reform schools governing bodies by breaking the present political domination of those bodies and strengthening parental representation instead.

The White Paper suggests, at the primary level, the teaching of English, mathematics, science, the humanities, arts, craft and practical work, moral education and new technology as well as giving children an insight into the adult world, including how people earn a living. At the secondary level it suggests the addition of a foreign language, with maths, science, the humanities, aesthetic subjects and physical education.

To give schooling a new sense of purpose the White Paper favours a basic curriculum for the first three years of secondary education with limited options in the remaining two years "leading to a 16-plus test of attainment for all school leavers, whatever their ability, to stand them in good stead whether they are going into work or higher education and training".

The intention is to introduce a new examination in 1989, the Advanced Supplementary (AS) level to broaden the studies of A-level students with a balanced combination of Arts and Science. It's a Plan, now open to public debate, for "marrying" schooling to the economy with this warning: "School education, like other aspects of our national life, will flourish only if it succeeds in adjusting to the demands of the time more rapidly and flexibly than it has hitherto been called upon to do".

The Government considers present standards in State schools in Britain as "neither as good as they can be nor as good as they need to be if young people are to be equipped for the world of the 21st century". Is the present Government in Malta capable of thinking on similarly constructive lines to raise standards in State schools, or will it go on, in the run-up to the next election, thinking it must be right and everybody else wrong?



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