

# Philatelic Echo of 1989

## Bush-Gorbachev Malta Summit

by Carmel G. Bonavia

For many people, philately or stamp collecting reminds them of their childhood when they were encouraged to collect colourful used and stick them in an album classified by country. When they advanced at school and their studies required more time and dedication, their interest in philately waned, perhaps surfacing again when the individual was settled in life and career. Adult collectors find a spectrum of attractions in this hobby, ranging from its historical, political, economical to social aspects. Joining the philatelic society, reading a magazine or attending a philatelic exhibition fuels deeper enthusiasm for the real meaning of stamps and their multi-faceted importance.

Today, philatelic research has reached a very high level. Postal museums and archives of all sorts have been opened and such research has yielded new knowledge about the postal service from many angles. This has also led to academic studies and the publication of books on the subject.

The annual philatelic exhibition MALTEX 2009 organised by the Malta Philatelic Society produced a golden opportunity to appreciate what Maltese collectors have in their collections. Some of the exhibits had even been shown abroad and received prestigious awards.

At this year's MALTEX edition, one of the exhibits dealt with the Malta Summit held two decades ago on December 2-3, 1989, between former U.S. former President George Bush Sr. and Michail Gorbachev, Chairman of the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The exhibit included stamps, special commemorative covers, postcards and other items both local as well as foreign.

The year 1989 has been described as a unique year of great events. In February, at Kiev, the Soviet Bloc was officially dissolved and Gorbachev announced the end of limited sovereignty. A month later, Russians voted for the reformed Supreme Council and in May, Gorbachev was elected head of state.

In August, the Polish United Workers Movement created by Mueszylov Rakowski with the acquiesce of Gorbachev, led to the establishment of Solidarnosc and free trade unions. This encouraged other countries to react to changes towards democracy. In Hungary, the Communist party was changed to a socialist one, leading to a democratic state.

Early in October, a new wave of people's demands for democracy burst out in East Germany. The Berlin Wall was breached and fell to the strong and enthusiastic strokes of chisels and heavy hammers, opening all frontiers between East and West.

Gorbachev accompanied by his wife, Raisa, visited Rome on November 29, and after meeting the Italian President Francesco Cossiga, he called at the Vatican and

had a long private conversation with Pope John Paul II. Thus Gorbachev became the first Soviet Chairman to meet the head of the Catholic Church since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Pope welcomed the distinguished visitors and emphasized the need to reconsider the Yalta Agreement of 1945, and expressed the wish that the Malta summit scheduled for December 2 would be successful.

As soon as the venue of the Summit was made public, especially after Bush's Address to the Nation on Thanksgiving Day which that year fell on November 22, 1989, the world's leading media personnel converged on our small Island.

After the necessary preparations, the Malta Government appointed an organizing Committee, under ex-director of Information, Paul Naudi who had been responsible for the Celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence just over a month before. By November 24, a Press Centre had been set up at the Mediterranean Conference Centre with all the facilities required by the media including a temporary Post Office.

At the same time, the General Post Office at Auberge d'Italie, was in full swing with preparations for a commemorative stamp. The stamp production process, which normally takes months to finalise, had only hours to be concluded. As soon as the photographs of Bush and Gorbachev reached the desk of the P.M.G. Alfred Costa, from the respective Embassies, a design was prepared in house and within 24 hours was approved by the Prime Minister Dr Fenech Adami.

The stamp featured the portraits of the two leaders with Bush on the left and Gorbachev on the right, with the map of the Maltese Islands in the middle, all on a light blue background. Fortunately, in Malta we had a security printing firm, Printex Ltd of Qormi, which had been producing Maltese stamps since 1972. This was a great asset as no foreign printer would have accepted to produce a stamp at such a short notice. For Printex it was not easy to meet the challenge but it succeeded and the stamps were delivered in time to be made available on the first day of the Summit, December 2 at 20 Branch Post Offices, 14 Sub Post Offices in Malta and 5 B.P.O and 2 S.P.O. in Gozo, a total of 41 outlets. Besides stamps, the Posts Department produced First Day Covers, Presentation Folders and the publicity folder *The Malta Stamp*.

On the first day of issue, up to the closing of Offices at 1.45pm a record total of 303,000 stamps were sold worth Lm 30,300. At the Press Centre alone 1,570 presentation packs, 450 souvenir folders, 5,570 F.D.C. and 14,200 mint stamps were sold on the first day. The stamps remained available for a year, being withdrawn on December 3, 1990. A number of covers were sent by the Maltese Prime Minister to the two Presidents and to the members of the crews of the *Belknap* and the *Slava*. During the final press conference, President Bush in a light vein in reply to a question on the subject by Anthony Montanaro, the then Editor of *The Sunday Times* said that he was so pleased with these envelopes that he mailed them to his close friends.

Captain John F. Sigler, The Commanding Officer of the *Belknap*, prepared some special envelopes franked with a US stamp showing the Stripes and Stars (as ships are regarded a part of the territory of origin), with a special cancellation dated December 3, 1989 and inscribed *Conference at Sea, F.P.O. USS Belknap*. They also showed a

coloured design of the U.S. and Soviet flags with the slogan Peace at Sea in the Roman and Russian alphabets. Capt. Victor Lesnoy, of the Russian cruise liner *Maxim Gorky*, where the summit ended up, being held due to the inclement weather, autographed a few covers and applied the ship's rubber stamp on them as souvenirs of the Summit.

The *Belknap* and the *Slava* were later featured in the *Naval Vessels in Maltese History* stamp set issued on August 18, 2006 by Malta Post; this set of five stamps, designed by Francis X. Ancilleri covered the period of more than four centuries since the coming of the Knights of St. John in 1530 to the Summit of 1989. This stamp with a face value of Lm 1 showed the *Belknap* and the *Slava* at anchor in Marsaxlokk Bay, based on photographs from the Wickman Collection.

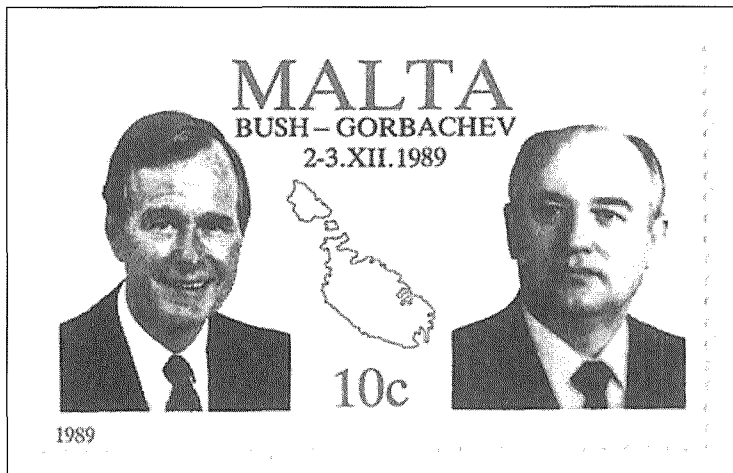
The Malta Summit was also featured on some foreign stamps. The ones I have seen came from the African countries of the Central African Republic and the Republic of Guinea. On July 27, 1990, the Central African Republic issued a 120 Franc stamp depicting Bush and Gorbachev with the dove of Peace at the centre. An accompanying Miniature Sheet included this stamp on a background showing the USA –USSR joint Mars Conquest Mission. Later in the year, the same stamp and another showing Gorbachev's visit to Pope John Paul II at the Vatican on the eve of the Malta Summit appeared on another miniature sheet of 8 stamps commemorating major events in world history.

On August 3, 1990 the Republic of Guinea released a set of two stamps and two miniature sheets relating to the Malta Summit, each valued 200 Francs. One stamp shows a map of the Maltese Islands flanked by portraits of the two Leaders in front of the American and Soviet flags. The other stamp depicts Gorbachev being greeted at the Vatican by the Pope on December 1, 1989. The same stamps appeared in a miniature sheet of 8 stamps commemorating important events in world history.

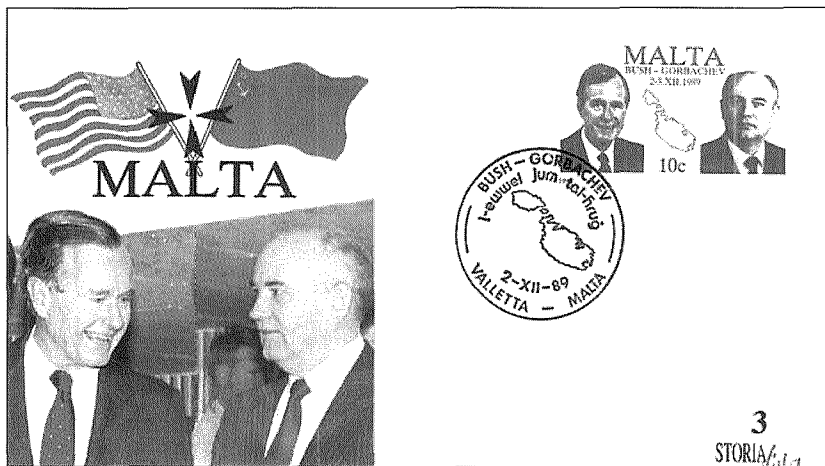
A very interesting postcard on the Malta Summit was produced by the Associazione Filatelica Jonia of Catania, Sicily. It includes a colourful map of Sicily with portraits of Bush and Gorbachev bearing a postmark inscribed ***Incontro di Bush e Gorbaciov nelle Acque della Sicilia / 2-12-1989***. One may remark whether this was wishful thinking or a genuine oversight! It might have been also produced before the actual Summit took place in Malta!

Today after twenty years, these philatelic items have already become historic documents. This is the value of documenting small details of very important events. Philately becomes a part of living history. In our case they are part of our National History.

*Mr Bonavia exhibited a 63 album-page study on the Malta Summit at the MALTEX 2009 some of which are being reproduced.*



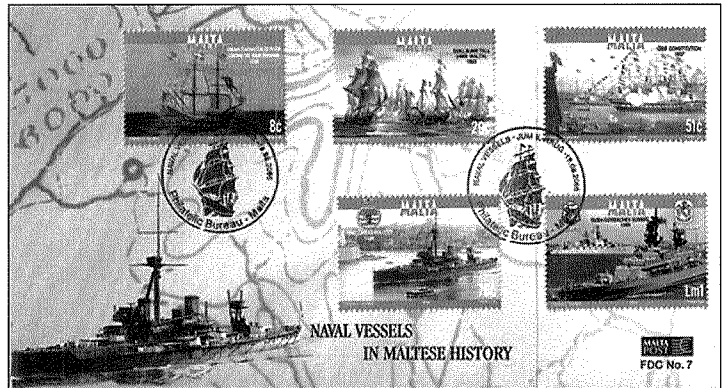
*Commemorative issued by the Malta Post Dept, September 2, 1989*



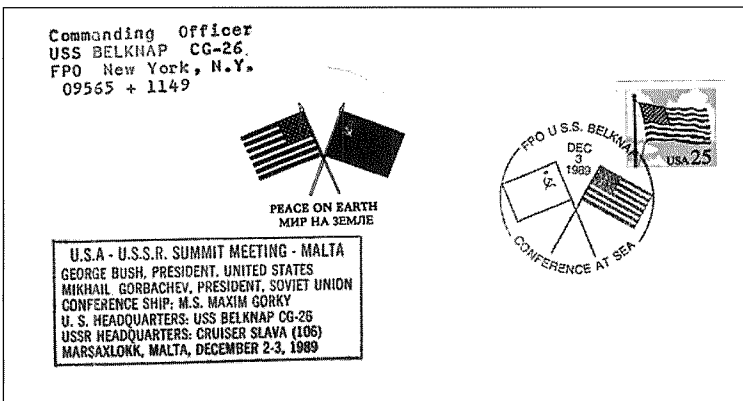
*First Day Cover designed by Golden Italia (Rome)*



The Lm1 stamp showing the Belknap and Slava, the Vessels hosting the Summit issued on August 18, 2006

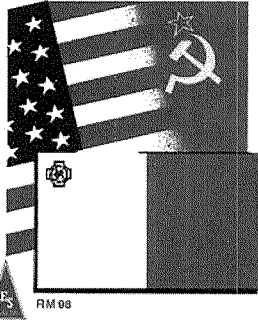


F.D.C. of the Naval Vessels in Maltese History issued on August 18, 2006



Cover from USS Belknap Captain J.F. Sigler

**BUSH-GORBACHEV**  
2-3 · XII · 1989

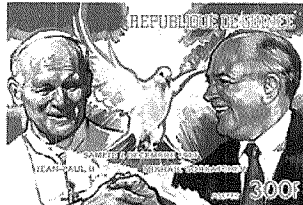
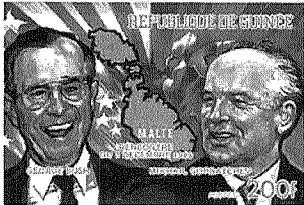


MALTA  
BUSH-GORBACHEV  
23 XII 1989



Cover from  
MS Maxim  
Gorky signed  
by Capt. V.  
Lesnoy

REPUBLIQUE DE GUINÉE



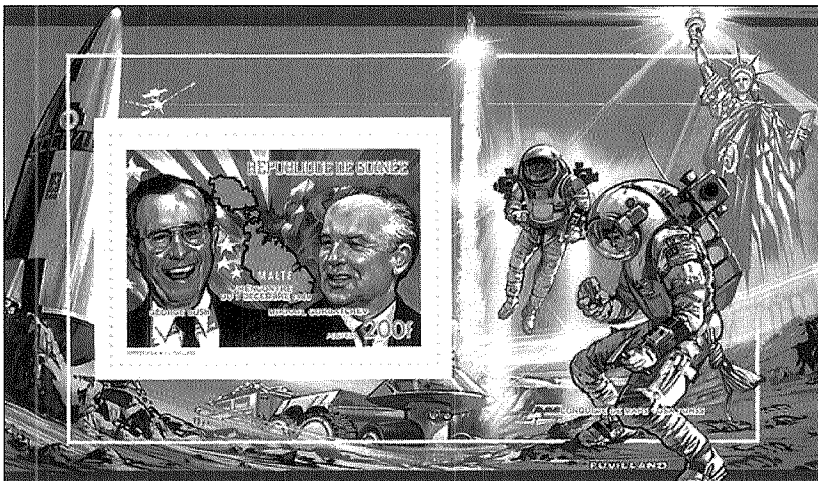
Miniature Sheet  
from the Republic  
of Guinea issued  
on August 3, 1990  
commemorating  
the Malta Summit  
and Gorbachev's  
Visit to H.H.  
John Paul II on  
December 1, 1989



Miniature Sheet  
from the Central  
African Republic  
issued on July 27,  
1990 commemorating  
the Bush-Gorbachev  
Malta Summit with  
USA-USSR Mars  
Conquest Mission in  
the background



*Card issued by Associazione Filatelica Jonia di Catania showing the special Summit postmark*



*Miniature Sheet 1990 by the Republic of Guinea issued on August 3, 1990 commemorating the Malta Summit with USA-USSR Mars Conquest Mission in the background*