

THE EUROPA CEPT STAMP ISSUE

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In 1956 six western European countries — France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) — each issued a set of two stamps of low face value, with the exception of Luxembourg which issued a set of three stamps, to commemorate the then recently established European Community of Posts and Telegraphs (CEPT).

These six sets of stamps had one common design, ie the six letters of the word “Europa” (EUROPA) vertically arranged, giving the semblance of a tower. Each of the six sets were issued in the currency of the six different states.

Thus the now most popular and perhaps the most widely collected philatelic theme in Malta as well as in many European countries — the Europa CEPT stamps — came into being.

The six states decided amongst themselves that this special issue of “Europa” CEPT sets was to appear once a year in the future and should be of modest denominations.

In the following year, 1957, however, these six CEPT countries agreed between them that the second set was not to be issued in one common design as in the

previous year, but to leave each of the six member countries free to issue its individual set in a design of its choice, but with an artistic detail symbolising the unity among the six original members states, which, as it happened, were this year joined by the Saar and Switzerland.

So we find that GERMANY and SAARLAND, using a common design but in different colours, had a tree with six roots depicted on their two stamps; BELGIUM a tatched roof resting on six pillars; FRANCE, two hands holding vegetable produce with the three middle fingers of the left hand separated to form the letter E; ITALY, the letter E formed by a ribbon with the colours of the six CEPT countries; NETHERLANDS, a six-pointed star and LUXEMBOURG, once again issuing three stamps and not two like the other five states, the word EUROPA spread over a stately edifice with the word PAX in block letters superimposed.

The design of the newly joining country SWITZERLAND was a strong rope tightly woven round a stud unfurling in seven branches on the stamp's left-hand side.

Back to a common design

From 1958 to 1973, the six original CEPT countries, which each successive year were joined by other European states, both from the west and the east, in this annual popular stamp issue, including Andorra (French and Spanish), Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Sweden and Turkey etc, with isolated exceptions, reverted to the original idea of issuing these annual sets in one common design, chosen well in advance by the CEPT council.

We find once again that from 1974 to the present year, the CEPT countries decided to issue their annual "Europa" CEPT set on a given theme suggested by the CEPT union, preferably connected with each of the issuing countries. Thus in 1974 the theme was sculpture, in 1975 paintings, in 1976 craftsmanship, in 1977 the local landscapes, in 1978 local historical monuments, in 1979 postal history, in 1980 local personalities, 1981 folklore, 1982 historical events of ancient times, 1983 works of art of the human genius, 1984 a bridge representing European cooperation, which was the one and only exception, since 1974 in that it was once again issued in common design for all countries, 1985 International Music Year, 1986 protection of nature and environment, 1987 modern architecture, 1988 means of transport in the different countries, 1989 children's games, 1990 old and new local post offices, 1991 spacecraft and 1992 Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus.

Malta sets

Malta being one of the CEPT member countries, in 1971 issued its first ever

EUROPA CEPT set of 3 stamps of the denominations 2d, 5d, 1/6, depicting a chain crossing at right angles the word Europa running vertically across the left-hand corner of the stamp, a common design featured on the Europa stamps of the 20 other countries issued that year.

From that year onwards Malta has regularly issued these stamps in the first half of the year and the popularity and demand of these special stamps has always been heavy and sustained, both locally and from abroad, as can be amply attested by the Malta Philatelic Bureau. The 1971 and 1973 sets comprised 3 denominations, whereas the 1972 and 1974 editions consisted of four stamps. From the year 1975 onwards these sets were invariably issued in two denominations. However from the 1972 issue onwards the Malta set has always appeared in attractive and elegant sheetlets of 10 stamps and two vignettes, one incorporating the word **EUROPA**, the **CEPT** emblem and the year of issue and the other a design pertaining to the special theme of the particular year. The inclusion of these sheetlets of ten stamps in the Europa CEPT collections is popular with many collectors of this thematic.

This year the Malta Postal Administration has regaled philatelists with a neat and attractive set of two stamps, designed by the artist Harry Borg, depicting the three ships on which Christopher Colombus sailed for America on his expedition in 1492, on the 10c stamp and an impressive portrait of Colombus on the 35c stamp.

New CEPT member countries

Following the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe, most of the countries of the eastern bloc immediately applied for membership of the CEPT and by 1991, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Roumania had issued their first Europa CEPT stamps. Besides, Hungary also issued a set of two stamps and Poland one stamp to commemorate their application and subsequent admission to CEPT membership.

Maltese in Hungarian stamps

Of special interest to Maltese philatelists and to all Maltese citizens who pride themselves on our language, is the "Hungarian Admission to CEPT Membership" 1990 issue. This set of two se-tenant stamps of the five and seven forint denominations was issued in a sheetlet of 16 stamps in four rows, each of four stamps surrounded by a white margin and on each part of this margin over and at the side of each of the 16 stamps in the sheetlet is an inscription in 16 different European languages, including **MALTESE**, each describing the admission of Hungary to CEPT membership.

The issue is of special interest to Maltese philatelists because the first inscription

