

# Cyprus (Kýpros) and Malta

Cyprus and Malta joined the European Union in 2004. They are both island nations located in the Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus lies to the south of Turkey, while Malta is located to the south of Sicily. Due to their strategically important locations, both countries have a long history of invasion and conflict. Indeed, to this day Cyprus remains divided between its different ethnic populations; only the Greek-Cypriot part of the island has gained EU membership.

## Recent History

Both countries are former British colonies. With the dismantling of the British Empire following World War II, Cyprus and Malta were granted independence, in 1960 and 1964 respectively. Cyprus became a republic, while Malta kept the Queen as head of state until 1974. Both joined the Commonwealth.

The population of Cyprus is ethnically and geographically divided between the majority Greek speakers in the south and the minority Turkish speakers in the north. Unrest has existed between the two communities since independence. In 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus, claiming that they were defending the Turkish minority population. Turkey occupied the northern third of the island. The Greek-Cypriot Government in the south proclaimed itself the island's legitimate government, and gained international recognition as the Republic of Cyprus. The UN established a separating line between the two parts of the island and, in 1983, Turkish-occupied Cyprus declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Although significant attempts were made to broker a peace deal that would allow the reunification of the island in the 1990s and early 2000s, efforts failed. When Cyprus entered the EU in 2004, only the Greek-Cypriot part was recognised.

## Government Structure

Malta is a representative parliamentary republic. The head of state is the President, currently George Abela, who serves a term of five years and has mainly ceremonial duties. The Prime Minister (currently Lawrence Gonzi) heads the government. Laws are made by the single chamber House of Representatives (*Kamra tar-Rapprezentanti*), which has 65 members. Malta has a two party system – the centre-right Nationalist Party has been in power since 1998. At the last general election, in 2008, the Nationalist Party won by only a very thin margin, so Maltese law awarded the Party 4 extra seats to ensure it had a majority.

Cyprus is a presidential republic. Its 1960 constitution was designed to balance power between Greek and Turkish-Cypriots, but since partition Greek Cyprus has continued to use the same structures. Most executive power is held by the President, while there is a separate 59 member House of Representatives (*Vouli Antiprosópon*). The current President, Demetris Christofias was elected in 2008.

## Relations with the EU

While most of the attention leading up to the expansion of the EU in 2004 focused on the former Communist states of central and eastern Europe, Maltese and Cypriot accession also marked a significant change. It was an important step onto the world stage for both countries.

As the smallest member of the EU, with a population of 403,000 people, Malta gained status by joining the EU, where it nominates an EU Commissioner and elects five MEPs to the European Parliament. In December 2007, Malta became part of the Schengen area, which enables passport free travel across national borders and it joined the *Eurozone* in January 2008.

For Greek Cyprus, EU membership was an important recognition of their claim to *sovereignty*. In the build up to Cyprus joining, the EU, along with the UN, played a leading role in attempting to reunify the island. They made their offer of membership on the basis that the whole island would join. It was not clear whether Cyprus would be able to join without reunification. However, when this proved impossible following an unsuccessful referendum in 2004, the Greek part of the island joined alone. This prevented the TRNC's population from enjoying the benefits of EU membership. Recently, there have been signs of progress: travel restrictions were lifted and, following the election of Demetris Christofias as Cyprus' President in February 2008, UN-sponsored talks were held between the Turkish and Greek leadership in March 2008. Also, on 4 April 2008, a famous shopping street that crosses one of the Island's divided cities was reopened for the first time in 40 years.

This on-going situation has important implications for Turkey's prospects of EU membership. In December 2006, eight of Turkey's 35 negotiating chapters were suspended when it failed to open its ports to Greek Cypriot ships. Greek-Cyprus joined the *Eurozone* in January 2008.

## Facts and Figures

- While both countries benefit from tourism, the Maltese economy is also a centre for Mediterranean shipping while Cyprus is home to several important *off-shore companies*.
- As Malta has few natural resources, its economy is reliant upon manufacturing products, such as electronics and textiles, for export.

### Technical Terms

**Sovereignty:** having the ultimate power to make decisions about your country.

**Eurozone:** the geographical/economic area formed by the EU countries that have adopted the euro.

**Off-shore company:** a business based in one country but that only does business in other countries.

### Links

- [http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/portal/portal.nsf/dmlgovernment\\_en/dmlgovernment\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/portal/portal.nsf/dmlgovernment_en/dmlgovernment_en?OpenDocument)
- <http://www.gov.mt/index.asp?l=2>