

**United in diversity:****ANTHEMS AND FLAGS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,**

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# Malta

## 1. Flag

- Created in 1947  
and adopted in 1972



Cosmopolitan both in spirit and by tradition, the island of Malta has been moulded over the centuries by its successive occupiers: the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Christians, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Normans of Sicily, the Hospitaller Knights of St. John, the Ottomans, the French and the British. This sovereign nation, which has been a member of the British Commonwealth since 1964, became an independent Republic in 1974.

Numerous standards, banners and flags have flown on Maltese soil over the centuries. The Cross of Malta, a distinctive symbol of the archipelago, is associated with the Knights Hospitaller, officially the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, which was enfeoffed with the island by Emperor Charles V in 1530, when it changed its name to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. It was the first entity on the island to have an official flag, consisting of a white cross on a red ground (which had been the emblem of William the Conqueror at Hastings in 1066). Thus the two national colours were chosen by tradition, but the Maltese Cross was eventually to be removed from the flag.

The French flag flew over the archipelago for a time, Napoleon considering the islands an imperial conquest, but the Maltese people appealed to the British for assistance against the French occupier in 1801. England took over the island, which became the official property of His Britannic Majesty after the Treaty of Paris in 1814, and the Union Jack replaced the French tricolour flag on its public buildings.

The colony was granted “self-government” status - intermediate status between imperial territory and membership of the Commonwealth - in gratitude for the Maltese people’s display of fortitude during the Second World War. King George VI also awarded the entire island the George Cross in 1942, and this was to be added to two vertical white and red bands of equal size when the official flag was devised in 1947.

But while some of the island’s inhabitants approved of Britain’s presence, the Maltese nationalists were seeking complete independence. Winning the support of the Church of Malta, they forced the British Government’s hand and achieved the granting of independence on 21 September 1964. The country’s flag, however, which was officially adopted at the same time as the Constitution, continues to bear the George Cross rather than the Maltese Cross.

Protocol surrounding the flag today is very strict, bearing witness to the strong symbolic significance the Maltese people attach to it. Fluttering in the wind from sunrise to sunset, or lit up at night, it flies over all public and school buildings. The flag of a visiting international friend may be raised alongside the national flag as a mark of courtesy, and since 2004 it has been systematically associated with the European flag inside public buildings and at all points of entry into the country.

## 2. Anthem

- *L-Innu Malti* (The Maltese Anthem)
- Written by Dum Karm Psaila  
and composed by Robert Samut
- Composed in 1922  
and adopted in 1964

Set in the heart of the Mediterranean, the Maltese archipelago comprising the four islands of Malta, Gozo, Comino and Filfoła is a multilingual country. While Italian can still be heard on street corners, its two official languages today are English and Maltese. The origin of the Maltese language goes back to Ifriqiyān Arabic, which was

### *L-Innu Malti*

*Lil din l-Art ħelwa, l-Omm li tatna isimha,*

*Ħares Mulej, kif dejjem Int ħarist;*

*Ftakar li lilha bl-oħla dawl libbist.*

*Agħti kbir Alla, id-deġn lil min jahkimha;*

*Rodd il-ħniena lis-sid, saħħa 'l-ħaddiem;*

*Seddaq il-ghaġda fil-Maltin u s-sliem.*

### **Maltese Anthem**

Guard her, O Lord, as ever Thou hast guarded!

This Motherland so dear whose name we bear!

Keep her in mind, whom Thou hast made so fair!

May he who rules, for wisdom be regarded!

In master mercy, strength in man increase!

Confirm us all, in unity and peace!

then spoken in the Roman province of Africa and which has been contaminated over the centuries by the superimposition of Sicilian and Italian. The oldest trace of this traditionally spoken language, transcribed through Italian literature, is to be found in a 15<sup>th</sup> century poem. The island became a British possession in 1800, after the departure of Napoleon's troops, and then His Britannic Majesty's personal property in 1814. National identity began to take shape and by 1880 the National Party was coming out in defence of the Italian language. The language question, combined with difficulties in obtaining supplies and with growing nationalism, led to uprisings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century caused by the British policy of seeking to eradicate the Italian language through the teaching of English. But London's recognition of a new Maltese Constitution in 1921 and the simultaneous creation of an alphabet, a grammar and an accepted spelling system were to permit the officialisation of the country's mother tongue and the destitution of Italian in 1934.

It was in this context that Dr. A. V. Laferla, the archipelago's director of education, turned in 1922 to Dun Karm Psaila to write the lyrics for a song built around a composition with an English musical tone by Dr. Robert Samut, a teacher and military musician. Actively working to achieve recognition of the new written mother tongue in 1912, Dun Karm composed his poetry in Maltese. Thus he conceived a sung prayer dedicated to the nation, underscoring a deep attachment to the land as a protective mother, of whose adornments the people could be proud. This strengthened the island's political unity, firming it up around a deep sense of Catholicism.

*L-Innu Malti* was played for the first time at the Manoel Theatre in Valletta on 3 February 1923. Recognised as the national song in 1941, it became the official Maltese national anthem in 1945 and could be sung at the same time as *God Save the King*, the anthem of the British occupying power. It was instituted at the British governor's expense during a football match in which Malta was playing Yugoslavia on 25 March 1945. After playing the official Yugoslav and British national anthems, the whole stadium began to sing *L-Innu Malti*, forcing the British governor, much against his will, to remain standing in its honour. The anthem was to be institutionalised on 21 September 1964, Malta's official independence day and national feast day. Today the anthem is sung only in Maltese, although an English version was still being sung well into the 1970s.

