



Malta in the European Union

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Malta in the European Union,

Mark Harwood

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Anyone interested in a conceptually informed and empirically rich account of Malta's preparations for European Union (EU) accession and its eventual membership should seriously consider Mark Harwood's *Malta in the European Union*. While journal articles and book chapters by Armstrong and Mitchell (2011) on football; Azzopardi (2013) on the labour market; Baldacchino (2014) on multi-level governance; Cini (2002), Baldacchino (2009) and Abela (2014) on Malta's transforming national identity and party politics; and Fiott (2010) on foreign policy offer interesting accounts of Malta's Europeanisation, Harwood's work is the first sustained examination in book form. It thus marks itself out as a must read in this area of study for established academics, students and for civil servants with a desire to understand the problems and vagaries associated with Malta's public administration and EU membership.

Harwood begins by dedicating some time to debunking the stereotype that is normally levelled at the EU's southern member states; namely, that they are enthusiastic about EU membership, but not so willing to comply with EU rules and obligations. Harwood briefly delineates the nuances between the southern members and situates Malta in this context by differentiating the country to Cyprus – the EU member state Malta is usually compared to. Indeed, compared to other southern states Harwood shows how Malta – despite its small size and resource constraints – is not only generally enthusiastic about EU membership (it joined the eurozone and Schengen Area not long after EU membership), but it has one of the highest rates of compliance with EU law.

The pluralism to be found in national systems and how they react to EU integration is a key reason why Harwood has opted for the Europeanisation research agenda as the conceptual basis for his book. Indeed, Europeanisation offers sufficient flexibility as a conceptual tool to allow the author to outline the peculiarities of Malta's own EU experience. The specific chapter on Europeanisation is rich and Harwood grapples with some of the underlying conceptual and theoretical problems associated with Europeanisation as a research agenda. It is good that he shows the reader early on that he acknowledges that Europeanisation is not about studying causes but rather processes of change.

In this regard, Harwood is correct to state that EU membership only guides policy and does not dictate the terms in which policy is implemented. This perspective allows the author to highlight the administrative problems and burdens that confronted Malta prior to EU accession and which, in many areas, still persist today. What comes across from Harwood's analysis is not just that Malta has managed to adjust to EU membership but that it has done so in the context of a lack of resources, a highly polarised political system and a centralised public administration. Harwood makes a strong argument for the relevance of his case studies, and they help show some of the idiosyncrasies of the Maltese national system.

The author's case studies on Malta's integration into the customs union and Malta's agricultural sector are empirically rich. Harwood should be commended for his nuanced readings of Europeanisation in each case. For example, in his study of Malta's customs department he questions whether the need to adapt to EU membership was really behind changes in the department, or whether it was merely an opportunity for the department to redress its diminished status within the Ministry of Finance (p. 158). In this sense it

would appear that power plays within the Maltese public administration, rather than Europeanisation, were a key causal factor in reform of the Customs Department.

Equally interesting is Harwood's case study on the Maltese agricultural sector, where he shows how factors such as a lack of political leadership, clientelism and strong vested economic interests colluded to ensure that the sector retrenched and resisted changes that needed to be made to reflect EU membership. This situation, Harwood argues, was exacerbated by Malta's lack of administrative capacity to handle the Common Agricultural Policy (p. 193). Again, Harwood seems to challenge the main precepts of Europeanisation by showing how factors specific to the Maltese political context shaped the government's response (or lack thereof) to EU membership.

What emerges from a reading of the case studies is the fact that many of the tenets of Europeanisation studies (political integration, cultural diffusion, elite socialisation, etc.) do not hold sway. It is interesting to note that while the book's conceptual basis is found in Europeanisation, the case studies highlight tangible causal factors that may equally explain (if not more) Maltese adaptation to EU membership. In this sense, what is missing in the concluding chapter is a more focused attempt to relate Malta's specific experience to the broader conceptual debate about Europeanisation that he so ably outlines in Chapter 2. Harwood could have specifically answered the two questions he poses on p. 19: how Europeanisation takes place? and, what is Europeanised? By answering such questions directly, and while not taking away from the overall strength of the book, Harwood could have made an extremely valuable contribution to the Europeanisation research agenda.

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