An analysis of Malta’s foreign relations with Russia, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania (1971-1992)- dissertation research.

The regions of the Black Sea and Eastern Europe always fascinated me due to their history, culture and political developments. The MA degree in Black Sea Cultural Studies which I have read at the International Hellenic University (IHU) in Thessaloniki, Greece from October 2013 to January 2015 fulfilled my aims to broaden my research horizons on this region. My specific interests are in diplomacy and foreign affairs politics, and therefore there was no doubt to relate my MA dissertation research with these themes. The title of my dissertation was ‘An analysis of Malta’s foreign relations with Russia, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania (1971-1992).’

The four countries under analysis all had their particularities in the foreign relations with Malta. Greece is not a Black Sea country per se but it is included in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and has interests with region for political, cultural and economic reasons.

For this dissertation I analysed Malta’s relations with these four countries in the political, economic and cultural fields. While doing my research it was evidently clear to find out that the Maltese government in this period had a concrete Mediterranean policy at the forefront of its foreign policy. Despite the fact that Russia, Bulgaria and Romania are not part of the Mediterranean region, they all confessed their interests to establish the Mediterranean as a region of peace and stability. The four countries under analysis all recognised Malta’s neutrality policy and gave credit to this policy as being crucial for peace and stability in the region.

Mintoff’s government had good relations with these Black Sea countries, especially with the Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou. Their discourse on NATO, the European Community (EC) and American bases in the Mediterranean was similar. Most media reports considered them as ‘political twins’.
As regards to the economic relations Malta fared better with Russia. In this period Malta enjoyed good economic relations with Russia, irrelevant who was leading Malta’s administration. This can be noted with the amount of economic agreements between the two countries, including: The Bunkering agreement (1981), Trade and Health agreements(1984), the Second Trade Protocol (1989),and many others.

The relations with Bulgaria were intensified after 1980. The good relations between Malta and Bulgaria can be attributed to the then President Agatha Barbara. She was invited several times by Bulgaria’s ministers and top officials, and she was also awarded the ‘Stana Planina’ medal, which was usually given to leaders of states who contributed to improving their country’s relations with Bulgaria, as well to those who promoted peace between states.

With the help of Romania’s leader Nicolae Ceausescu Malta managed to start building relations with China in 1972. Bilateral relations between Malta and Romania were conducted in a friendly and positive atmosphere. In the early 1990s one of the main issues in Malta was about the adoption of Romanian children.

I also analysed how the global bipolarity between the East and West, Capitalism and Anti-Capitalism was reflected in the local discourse of Maltese party politics. I concluded that although there were discrepancies between the two main political parties on foreign policy, there wasn’t any significant change in the late 1980s in the transition from an MLP administration to a PN administration, apart from the links cut with Romania’s Ceausescu. After the 1987 election Malta continued promoting peace and stability in the Mediterranean. All Maltese governments had no interest to interfere in the politics of any country and always acted in an understandable manner to endorse peace.

In the concluding chapter I also dealt about Malta’s relations today with these four countries. Despite the fact that the relations are not tense, there is room for improvement. Some of my suggestions and remarks included: Since there are sizeable communities of Bulgarians and Romanians in Malta, they should seek open a cultural centre to promote Bulgarian and Romanian languages and culture, and act as a bridge to integrate further with the Maltese community. Greece should seriously consider to
open a Cultural institute in Malta to teach Classical and Modern Greek, to promote its history, civilization and culture, and to strengthen the relations between it and Malta. Also direct flights to Thessaloniki, Greece should start operating. Thessaloniki is known to be the gateway to other Balkan countries. This will surely help the tourist flow from other destinations.

It must be noted that the research on Malta’s relations with Greece, Bulgaria and Romania was never done before and primary sources such as newspapers, government documents and press releases were mainly used for this analysis.

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