

“NATIONAL UNITY THROUGH HUMANITY”: SPEECH COMMEMORATING VICTORY DAY IN MALTA, 2025

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Abstract. *8 September is Victory Day in Malta. This commemoration is marked by a speech delivered by an individual selected by the Prime Minister of Malta. This article reproduces the speech delivered on 5 September of this year by the author. Inspired by the concept underlying the design for the memorial in remembrance for what this day stands, this speech puts forward arguments for national unity through determination, faith, civilisation and diversity. It recalls Malta’s neutral and non-aligned status, and it calls out greed. Whilst arguing for diversity rather than homogeneity, it argues against advocating for the eradication of national identity. It concludes by stating that the symbiotic relation between courage, faith and civilisation – born from the heart, soul and the mind, respectively – ensures national unity.*

Keywords: *Malta, national unity, humanity, Great Siege of Malta, courage, faith, civilization.*

Victory Day in Malta is celebrated annually on 8 September. Since 1927, it has been marked by a speech. This article reproduces the one delivered by the author on 5 September 2025 which had as a theme “National Unity through Humanity.”¹ On request from the editor, footnotes and bibliographical references were added.²

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Honourable Prime Minister, distinguished guests, Maltese and foreign brothers and sisters.

Tonight, we gather at the memorial of the Great Siege of 1565 in remembrance of the victory through the valour of our forefathers in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire. The siege was a statement of resilience: the people of Malta – men, women and children – together bore the hardship with courage as they faced danger, blood and death. Today’s commemoration

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¹ Bianco 2025a.

² Editor’s note: The Victory Day in Malta is marked by a keynote speech of a distinguished personality (University of Malta 2025). Further to being an academic, Professor Lino Bianco is a diplomat. He is the Ambassador Emeritus of Malta to Romania, Moldova and Bulgaria, and at present he serves as the non-resident Ambassador of Malta to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bianco 2025b). He was granted three state awards: the Order of the Madara Horseman (First Class) by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Cross of Commander “Pro Merito Melitensi” by the Sovereign Council of the Order of Malta, and appointed Member of the National Order of Merit (Ġieh ir-Repubblika) by the President of the Republic of Malta (Ibid.) For a comprehensive overview of his academic, professional and diplomatic contributions, see Oleinic 2022 and Davitaia 2023.

was revived soon after the 1927 elections for the Legislative Assembly. The first ever commemoration speech was delivered that year by the national poet Dun Karm Psaila.³ His speech included the victory of the Maltese over the French in 1800. Later, the victory over Fascism and Nazism in the Second World War was included. 8 September was initially suggested as the day to mark the end of colonial rule in Malta, but the date for Independence Day was eventually set for 21 September.

In 1926, the Maltese artist Antonio Sciortino was commissioned to design this impressive memorial.⁴ In metaphorical, neoclassical grammar marked by axiality and symmetry, this work of art includes masonry blocks with three allegorical standing figures in bronze – a central figure with two others, one on each side. The central figure represents courage whilst the figures on the right and left symbolise Catholic faith and civilisation, respectively; the Great Siege was always read as the victory of the Cross over the Crescent, of the Latin civilisation over the uncivilised. The memorial is positioned in the square between St John's Cathedral and the Law Courts, the palace of faith and the palace of justice, respectively. Wrapped in the flag of Malta, it was unveiled four months prior to 8 September 1927 by the British Lieutenant-Governor. During the inauguration, two speeches were delivered: one in Italian by Chief Justice Arturo Mercieca and another in Maltese by the friar Professor Anastasio Cuschieri.⁵ Cuschieri had a special fervour for the language of the Maltese populace, a semitic language written in Latin alphabet. Indeed, it is the only official Semitic language within the Afroasiatic family of the European Union. The 15th-century *Il-Kantilena* by Pietru Caxaro,⁶ the oldest known literary text in our language, was included earlier this year in the international register of UNESCO's *Memory of the World*.⁷ Our language emerges from the geophysical location of our islands. Today, nearly a century from this inauguration, we are gathered here, seated at the foot of this memorial, as if at a place of worship, facing the representation of the holy ground of salvation! What is the significance of this commemoration to contemporary Malta? What is its relevance to today's Malta?

Unity through determination

8 September was first celebrated as the national day in 1923, long before Malta's Independence, decades away from being a sovereign state, when we were not yet masters of our homeland in the true sense of the term. We had

³ Friggieri 1987, p. 3; Mangion 2018, p. 4.

⁴ For a description of the memorial, see SCH 2012. For a description of the plaster model, see Bugeja 2015, p. 199–200. As potential sources of inspiration, Bugeja cites Havasi 1999 and Schembri Bonaci, Moulden 2012.

⁵ Anon 1927, p. 1.

⁶ NAM, Notary Brandano Caxaro, *Notarial Registers Archives*, NAM-NRA-R175-REG-01.

⁷ UNESCO 2025.

our national day where we celebrated pivotal historical events and asserted our distinct culture and identity in world civilisation. 8 September was established unanimously as the National Day of Malta during the first Legislative Assembly out of a sense of national unity and pride in who we are;⁸ the spirit of unity as a nation had long been there. At the time, our homeland was still under colonial rule. It is the day which united our past generations as a nation. This legacy was entrusted to us, and we are duty bound to safeguard, cherish and maintain it for present and future generations. Victory Day unifies us as a nation; it is the feast which recalls that when we stood united, we succeeded. When facing issues of freedom and identity, it was unity, courage and determination that allowed our ancestors to secure their victories despite overpowering circumstances. Another instance which manifested such national unity was in 1957, when the Legislative Assembly approved unanimously the *Break with Britain Resolution*. The main political leaders of the time were Malta’s leading statesmen, Dom Mintoff and George Borg Olivier. On Dom Mintoff’s resignation from the premiership, George Borg Olivier refused to form a minority government. Irrespective of their differences of opinion on how to attain independence and freedom, both leaders were loyal to their oath to serve the Maltese people and held the nation at heart. Both Borg Olivier and Mintoff loved and worked for the cause of Malta as a sovereign, democratic state, to serve as a beacon of peace, not war. Although they came from opposite sides of the political divide and had different opinions, they tackled the message, not the messenger. Their mutual respect on a personal basis helped unite our people.

Another manifestation of courage and determination was when the Parliament of Malta agreed and accepted to include the principal of military neutrality and non-alignment in our *Constitution*.⁹ For centuries we faced misery as we were made to serve and fight wars of others. We are not a nation of warriors; our traits are hospitality and a love of peace. The *Acts of the Apostles* recall how locals welcomed St Paul and those on board – the vulnerable – after their shipwreck with “unusual kindness” and provided them with food and shelter.¹⁰ With the constitutional amendment, our national status and vocation were included in the highest law of the state. Our *Constitution* maintains that “Malta is a neutral state actively pursuing peace, security and social progress among all nations by adhering to a policy of non-alignment and refusing to participate in any military alliance.”¹¹ At the time, attaining and maintaining neutrality was no mean feat of diplomacy. Malta’s position was respected by the superpowers at the time. A powerful endorsement of Malta’s foreign policy was the Malta Summit in 1989, where

⁸ Legislative Assembly 1924, p. 2137–2153, 2221–2246. See also Spiteri 2006, p. 64–72.

⁹ *Constitution* 1992.

¹⁰ Acts 28, 2. Cited in Wansbrough 1985, p. 1844.

¹¹ *Constitution* 1992, article 1(3).

the United States and the Soviet Union declared an end to the Cold War.¹² Their selection of our islands recalls our long reputation as a place of shelter at the cross-roads of the Mediterranean Sea. Military neutrality and non-alignment are not a trump card in foreign policy. These principles are in the hearts of our people; they reinforce Malta's call to pursue and maintain a peaceful rapport with all nations.

Unity through faith

The concentration of built heritage dating to antiquity indicates that our islands were a sanctuary embracing places of worship. They were a haven, a place of refuge and protection, proffering complete trust to a supreme higher power for direction, assistance, and eventual, deliverance. Faith is belief with strong conviction. Our *Constitution* states that our faith is Roman Catholic.¹³ Christianity, Islam and Judaism are the main faiths along the Mediterranean Basin, and indeed of Europe and Western Asia. They are Abrahamic monotheistic religions; their spiritual traditions share similar values, teachings and morality; these values will ensure that all peoples live in harmony. All these faiths disapprove of greed; they call for ethical conduct and compassion in the generation of wealth.

Greed is egoistic. It is uncompassionate and not altruistic. Greed renders the comfortably-off vulnerable and the vulnerable desperate. Greed undermines unity in our nation, the oneness which fluctuates around the middle ground rather than from one extreme to the other – the greedy rich and the vulnerable poor. Recalling the message of the Prime Minister Gerald Strickland for the occasion of Victory Day commemorated in 1927, we have a single goal: “the wellbeing, the prosperity and happiness of the nation.”¹⁴ The sun rises for all. Greed generates quick finance for the few but destroys the economy in the long term. Let's not confuse accounts with economics; the latter is not an arithmetical science but a social one. When one looks at the tip of one's nose, one's vision is cross-eyed.

Unity through civilisation

Civilisation thrives where wisdom, justice and law rule. The rule of law does not imply the right to rule. Malta is a democratic republic. Democracy is the will of the majority over the minority. Through rigorous scrutiny, the nation benefits as decisions are taken which consider varying perspectives and opinions. Loyalty to the good of the nation and respect towards one another ensures humane, compassionate understanding which helps improve the workings of government. In his speech at the inauguration of this memorial,

¹² Nelsson 2024.

¹³ *Constitution* 1992, article 2(1).

¹⁴ Strickland 1927, p. 750. His message was dated 5 September 1927.

Cuschieri stated that where there is homeland, there is no partisan politics but love.¹⁵ Throughout their term in office, all Members of Parliament should reach out to others, whether endorsing their belief or otherwise, whether from their district or otherwise. Our islands are one district; we are all one family. Disagreement is healthy, but agreeing to reach out to others is healthier, commendable and secures unity in time of need. One reaps what one sows. Let’s move away from one’s ego to empathy, from cruel political discourse to one grounded in love and mutual respect. Destructive political division hinders progress; dehumanising the opponent undermines oneself and renders an unreal representation of self; there is good in each one of us. The good unites us.

Unity in diversity

Nobody leaves one’s homeland to find refuge in another if not for hope for a better way of life. During the British colonial government, Maltese people were encouraged and supported to emigrate.¹⁶ Notably after the Second World War, a significant number of young people legally emigrated to English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹⁷ They emigrated where there was demand for workers, thus securing money to ensure their families were fed and could live better. These lands provided opportunities for our earlier generations. In today’s Malta, unemployment is something of the past. On the contrary, there is a shortage of employees for labour-intensive work. Foreign workers are needed to support our economy. Some seek Malta as a place of refuge and protection – to use the Tunisian quasi-idiom, “Malta ħanina, hobża u sardina” (roughly translating as “Malta is kind, a bread loaf and a sardine”).¹⁸ Migrants with work permits run our waste disposal system; they are essential to our construction, healthcare and other sectors. Migrants from different countries set up associations in Malta whose cultural events and community initiatives flavour and enrich our, already rich, calendar. Differences, not homogeneity, enrich unity. Why not respect and accept them as Maltese diaspora is respected and accepted in the respective countries where they are present? Foreign workers are vulnerable to exploitation. Like us, they are humans and like us, they have dignity. They were brought over to help our economy as workers not slaves; they deserve respect and not exploitation of their toil. Their security and workplace rights should not differ from those of locals. Beyond nationality there is humanity.

Weeks ago, the Chamber of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises acknowledged that worker shortages are still an issue, but the skills of the

¹⁵ Anon 1927, p. 1.

¹⁶ Attard 1994.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ With respect to this proverb, see Aquilina 1972, p. 488. See also discussion in Gatt 2025.

imported workforce are improving.¹⁹ Proper vetting of who is allowed into the country would greatly benefit our society – we cannot afford to let everyone in, considering our small size, the most densely populated state in the European Union. Educated foreigners are cultured if they manage to recognise the local customs of the country they visit or live in. If the host country is respected and its rules are followed, it reduces cultural clashes, such as those we see in Malta nowadays.

Cultural diversity enriches our nation, yet we must not put aside our culture and beliefs to be “politically correct” or “in favour of diversity.” As a nation, we should stand by our psyche and not advocate for the slow but steady eradication of our identity.

The remembrance of 8 September is an acknowledgement of our identity; it is a statement of our unique individuality. This commemoration is a renewal of our vow to our homeland and the values for which it stands. There is more which unites rather than divides us. Let us focus on the former. This is the way to nurture a stronger nation and encourage constructive change. Putting aside vested interests in favour of shared values and the common good helps us as a nation to work together to resolve disputes; the national interest prevails. Everyone won when past generations pulled the rope in the same direction. Let us cultivate the bravery and the endurance to work towards consensus on national issues, in both local and overseas forums. Our islands will continue to stand high as an esteemed nation with its own unique spirit and renewed humanity amongst all other nations.

Courage is born from the heart, faith from the soul, and civilisation from the mind. The symbiotic relationship between them ensures our unity as a nation. There is no need to justify one’s existence; the We is greater than the sum of the I’s. “Seddaq il-ghaqda fil-Maltin u s-sliem,” which translates as “Confirm us all, in unity and peace.”²⁰ May unity and peace prevail among the Maltese people.

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¹⁹ Borg 2025, p. 6.

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