MALTA

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1 Muslim Populations

The National Statistics Office (NSO) of Malta has never conducted a census that records the numbers of Muslims in Malta. Malta’s main imam estimates that there are about 6,000 Muslims in Malta, that is 1.45% of the total population of 413,609. The majority are Libyan Sunnis, while most of the rest hail from North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. A number of Lebanese and Iraqi Shi’is worship with the Sunnis at the mosque of the Corradino Hill Islamic Centre (Paola). Around 1,000 Muslims hold Maltese citizenship. The same imam reports that about 300 native Maltese have converted to Islam. In addition, 1,001 of the illegal migrants who arrived in Malta during 2009, when asked about their religion, said they were Muslims; 879 were from Somalia.

Islam reached Malta in 870 CE with the Aghlabid occupation of Malta. Under Norman rule (1091–1194), Muslims co-existed peacefully with the other inhabitants, but they were expelled by the Hohenstaufen King Frederick II of Sicily sometime before 1250. During the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Islam was practised in Malta by Muslim slaves captured during maritime raids. In modern times, Islam returned to Malta during the 1970s, with the establishment of close political and economic relations with the Arab world, particularly Libya. Muslims from various Arab countries settled in Malta and in 1982 the Islamic Centre at Paola was established. The 1992 United Nations sanctions against Libya over the Lockerbie issue led to Malta

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2 The inhabited islands of the Maltese archipelago (315.2km²) are Malta, Gozo, and Comino. Source: NSO.
4 Information supplied by the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees in Malta (Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs). A number of illegal migrants chose not to disclose their religious affiliation.
being Libya’s only gateway to the world, and the number of Libyans in Malta increased substantially. Since Malta’s accession to the European Union in 2004, the number of Libyan visitors has fallen dramatically as a result of visa restrictions. In general, Arab Muslims in Malta retain Arabic as the language of communication among themselves, but switch to Maltese or English with other members of Maltese society. Although retaining their ethnic and cultural identities, Malta’s Muslims generally integrate well into the Maltese context. They live in various towns and cities on the island of Malta, with a minority living on the second island, Gozo.

2 Islam and the State

Malta’s Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the religion of the state, but provides for religious freedom. The main imam of the Islamic Centre is appointed by the WICS (see below, section 3) and his appointment is endorsed by the Maltese state. He enjoys substantial autonomy in the local affairs of his community, and he is the official point of contact between the Muslim community and the Maltese administration. In accordance with a protocol between the WICS and the government of Malta, the Islamic Centre and its officials enjoy diplomatic immunity. The imam maintains good relations with state and religious authorities, and has regular access to them. Nevertheless, Islam is not recognised by law, and so the Islamic Centre does not receive any state funds, nor do Muslims enjoy any educational, cultural, or social privileges. The state does allocate money to Catholic schools, however, which prompts the Muslim community to make representations to receive a similar treatment.

3 Main Muslim Organisations

In 1984, the World Islamic Call Society (WICS) in Tripoli, Libya, established the Islamic Centre (Islamic Centre, Corradino Rd., Paola PLA 9037, Malta, tel. 00356-21-697203, fax. 21697574). The Centre aims to provide services for the Muslim community, to acquaint the

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5 About 95% of the Maltese are Roman Catholics.
6 The imam is Sheikh Muhammad el-Sadi and he is of Palestinian origin.