

# My Malta Experience

Text and photos by Anker Petersen

Sliema, October 28, 2003

It's noon on another sunny day with about 25° C on the small island of Malta. I'm sitting at the old San Giljan Watch Tower of the town of Sliema. The tower was built in year 1658 by the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem to warn the population of enemy warships which so often during the past 2000 years have attacked these strategically located islands in the middle of the Mediterranean. Thus they are heavily fortified and even at the entrance to the Cathedrals guns are emplaced.

To my right is a typical yellow-brown limestone beach and behind that the blue, clear sea with some local yachts, ferries and sightseeing ships passing close to the coast. Further out are seen cargo ships probably passing between the Suez Canal and Gibraltar. To the north behind the horizon is Sicily 93 kilometres away.

To my left is the town of Sliema, a suburb of the historical capital Valletta. In front of me is the tranquil St. Julian's Bay with a lot of small, private fishing vessels, and behind that one of the three Casinos and St. George's Bay. Behind that I can see in the far distance the five-star Corinthia Marina Hotel where the "Forum of Multilinguism and International Broadcasting" was held on Oct 24-26, 2003 hosted by the Voice of the Mediterranean (VOM), supported by the European DX Council (EDXC).

The Republic of Malta consists of seven rocky limestone islands out of which only three are inhabited. One of these is Comino having just two families. The most green island is Gozo which has about 9,000 inhabitants. The main island of Malta has about 390,000. The latter is just 27 kilometres long and 15 kilometres wide, so the density of population is very high.

Under the flat topped hills with small, terraced, dusty fields, several prehistoric monuments have been excavated dating back as much as 7,000 years. A lot of beautiful buildings and fortresses around the biggest natural harbour in the Mediterranean at Valletta illustrate the turbulent history of this country.



Entrance to the Great Harbour in Valetta

The mother tongue of most of the population is Maltese – a semitic language related to Arabic and Hebrew. To me the pronounced language sounded more related to Hebrew although many written words have Arabic origin. It also has many English and Italian words included. Both Maltese and English are official languages, but Maltese was first officially accepted 120 years ago! Nearly everybody speaks very good English, so it is easy to be a tourist there. Thus Malta is a multilingual country like Belgium, Finland and Switzerland.

About 30 men and women from 11 countries took part in the Forum for Listeners and Broadcasters held by the Voice of the Mediterranean (VOM). These radio stations took part: The VOM, Vatican R, Swiss R, Deutsche Welle, R Exterior de España, R Vlaanderen International and R Free Asia. This was the very first Broadcasters Conference ever held on Malta !

The DSWCI was represented by these members: Torre Ekblom (Finland), Valerio Cavallo and Paolo Morandotti (Italy), Peter Zerafa (Malta) and Anker Petersen (Denmark).



It began with a visit to the new premises of VOM in the western suburb of Birkirkara inaugurated on March 28, 2003. The Managing Director, Mr. Richard Muscat welcomed us and kindly showed us around in this two storey building. On the ground floor are the managing and administrative offices, and on the second floor several state-of-the-art studios and offices for the producers. Their offices are split into an Arabic section mostly manned with Libyan personnel and an International section with Maltese, because the VOM is jointly owned by the Maltese and the Libyan Governments! In the Arabic section a photo of President Gaddafi was seen on the wall.



Mr. Muscat (right) and two producers in the Internat. Section.

The VOM was established in 1988 to spread information about the Mediterranean countries, but particularly about Malta. It does not have its own transmitter, but has always been renting airtime from transmitters abroad. Nowadays it is via Prato Smeraldo near Rome; Moscow and Komsomolsk. B03 schedule is:

Monday to Saturday:

0630-0700	6110	Arabic
1700-1730	6185	Italian
1730-1800	6185	English
2000-2100	7440	English (except on Friday)
2100-2200	7440	Arabic

Friday:		
2000-2200	7440	Arabic
Sunday:		
0500-0600	15560	Japanese
0800-0900	9630	Italian
0900-1000	9630	English
1000-1100	9630	Maltese
1100-1200	9630	French
1200-1300	9630	German
2000-2100	7440	English
2100-2130	7440	French
2130-2200	7440	German



Luigi Cobisi (left) and Richard Muscat in VOM Discoteque.

The VOM appreciates reception reports and verifies with nice QSL-cards. Address: Chircop Building, Valley Road, Birkirkara BKR14, Malta. VOM has registered listeners in 64 countries and receives about 2000 letters each year, particularly from shortwave listeners. Mr. Muscat revealed that the languages Spanish, Russian and Chinese may be added in the future. Since July 2003 programmes have also been broadcast 24 hours a day via the internet at [www.vomradio.com](http://www.vomradio.com), click "vom live radio".

The Forum on Multilinguism and International Broadcasting had a session Friday afternoon and another Saturday afternoon, co-chaired by Messrs. Richard Muscat, Luigi Cobisi and Paolo Morandotti. Broadcasters and DX-ers had a lively exchange of views in English and Italian on how radio listening and broadcasting are affected by the use of local and international languages and how languages are chosen for the tasks of international broadcasters.



Sitting from left: Luigi Cobisi (EDXC), Richard Muscat (VOM), Paolo Morandotti (EDXC), Elsa Romei (VOM), Waldemar Kramer (DW) and Andrew Janitscheck (RFA) who is giving a lecture about the multilingual broadcasts from R Free Asia.

One of the conclusions was that Radio is the largest medium and will continue to stay so. It can reach everyone with news, education and entertainment. Since many people only understand their mother tongue, the broadcasting stations will

be more efficient when they produce programmes in several languages. Little countries need to have a Foreign Service in order better to be known abroad.

I explained that a small country like Denmark cannot do much communication and trade with other countries using the Danish language, so additional languages are compulsory taught in our schools. That is also why the DSWCI shortly after it was established in 1956 began to publish "Short Wave News" in English. The result was that we soon got members in about 35 countries around the world, and still have so.

Another conclusion was that it is very useful for the communication with neighbouring countries, if the international stations broadcast in the languages of these countries.



Sitting from left: Peter Zerafa (DSWCI), Torre Ekblom (DSWCI), Valerio Cavallo (DSWCI), Luigi Cobisi (EDXC), Richard Muscat (VOM) and Paolo Morandotti (DSWCI).

During the Forum the EDXC Secretary General donated to the VOM archives seven boxes with the unique collection of the past three years DX-bulletins from the 17 member clubs received at the Florence Postbox of the EDXC, including Short Wave News from the DSWCI. During an official dinner at Bay View Restaurant, Luigi Cobisi also presented the ITALRADIO Prize 2003 to the VOM (Cf. [www.italradio.org](http://www.italradio.org)).

The foreign participants also enjoyed two excellent, guided tours to the major historical locations in Malta, including Valletta, M'dina (= the city) and Rabat (= the suburb). From the fortress of the former capital, M'dina the whole island of Malta could be viewed.

The official domestic broadcaster is R Malta 1 on 99.9 MW and 93.7 FM and R Malta 2 on 91.7 FM. Besides these, I heard 10 commercial and 14 community stations – all on FM. Between these I was also able to catch many weak Italian stations on Sicily from the listening post at the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of my hotel. There was little time for shortwave DX-ing except that several broadcasts from R Denmark could be received well.

This short Malta experience was fantastic and with its wonderful climate, holidays on these islands can absolutely be recommended.

#### POST SCRIPTUM:

On November 19, 2003, Mr. Muscat announced that the VOM is to close down on December 31 after the Libyan government informed Malta that "it no longer sees a function for this kind of station".

After this successful Forum the DSWCI regrets that very much!