

Malta's European Policy



THE EUROPEAN POLICIES OF THE EU MEMBER-STATES, Candela Barroso Torres

History and Accession



- On 16 April 2003, in Athens, the Prime Minister of Malta, Eddie Fenech Adami, and his Foreign Minister, Joe Borg, sign the Treaty of Accession of Malta to the European Union.

1

British Colony

Since 1814, the British exploited Malta's military facilities, making the dockyard the economic backbone of the colony. Malta gained independence in 1964 and sought closer ties with Europe.

2

Association Agreement

With the European Economic Community even before membership, Malta signed an Association Agreement in 1970.

3

EU Accession

Malta joined the EU in the big Enlargement of 2004.

History and Accession

The decision for Malta to join the European Union (EU) was a pivotal and contentious issue in the country's modern history.

1. Dom Mintoff's Opposition

Mintoff viewed EU membership as a threat to Malta's sovereignty expressing skepticism.

2. The 2003 EU Referendum and the 54% Vote

The result difference of 7% symbolized a victory of Yes as Malta's elections and referenda are typically decided by very narrow margins.

A general election was held to confirm the results. The Nationalist Party, which supported EU membership, won decisively, further validating Malta's decision to join the EU.

3. The Labour Party, once opposed to EU membership, gradually embraced it by the 2010s, reflecting a shift in political attitudes.

Economic success, driven by access to EU brought significant improvements in infrastructure, employment, and living standards. These benefits helped to significantly reduce skepticism.



- Dom Mintoff, former Prime Minister of Malta (1971–1984), (1955–1958)

Size and Geography

Small Size

Malta is one of the smallest EU member states, with a population of just over 500,000.

Island Geography

Influences its economy, making it heavily dependent on trade with the EU. This dependency arises from limited natural resources, prompting reliance on imports for essential goods.



Economy

❖ Economic Transformation Post-EU Membership

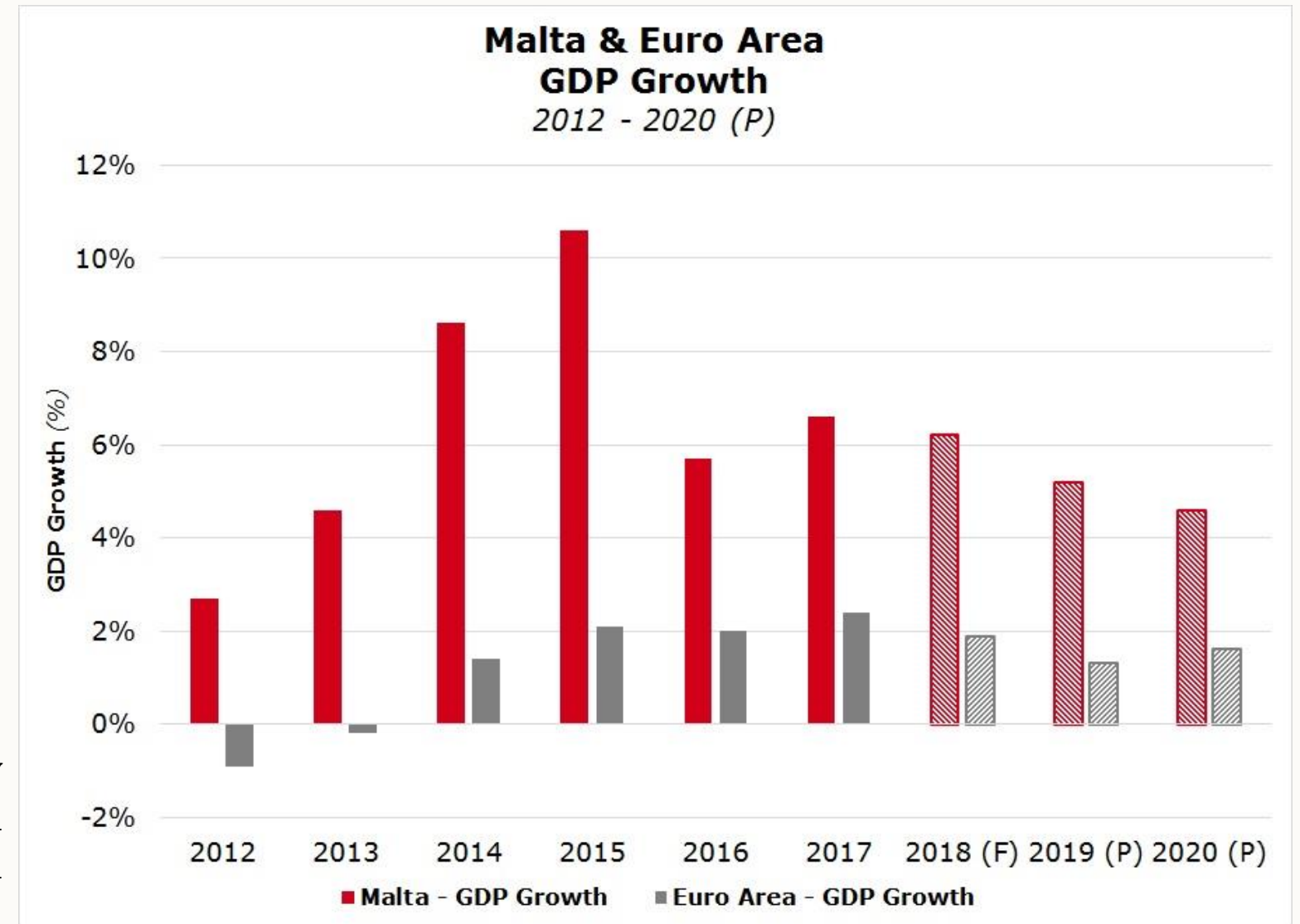
The EU plays a crucial role in Malta's trade, accounting for approximately 80% of its imports and about one-third of its exports.

❖ Strong Economic Growth and GDP Per Capita

Malta's economic growth stands out, as it is the only 21st-century EU accession country to surpass the average EU GDP per capita; €39,500.

❖ Structural Changes Driving Growth

A shift towards service-oriented industries, particularly financial services, tourism, and online gaming, has been key. Additionally, the influx of foreign labor has bolstered productivity and employment rates.



External Security and Relations

1 Security Cooperation

Malta, as a small island state places, high importance on EU security cooperation.

2 Neutrality

Malta is one of four members of the European Union that are not members of NATO.

Yet, has had formal relations with NATO since 1995, when it joined the Partnership for Peace programme.



3 Mediterranean Policies

Malta's location makes it a key player in EU migration and Mediterranean policies.

Government & Political Parties

Government & Political Parties

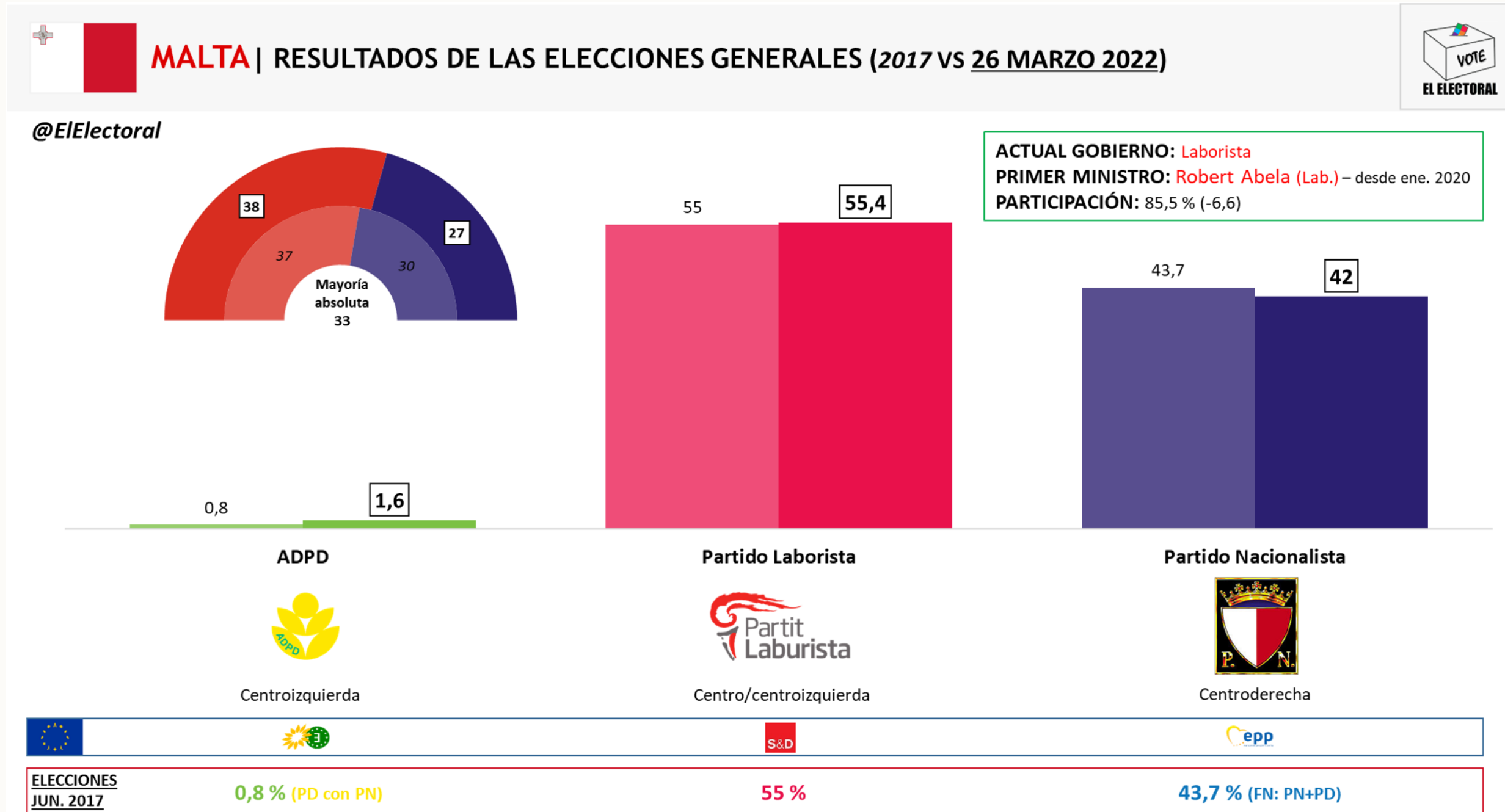
Malta operates as a **parliamentary representative democratic republic**, with the president as head of state and the prime minister, Robert Abela of the MLP, leading the government and cabinet.

Two-Party System

Dominated by two major parties: the **Nationalist Party (PN)** and the **Malta Labour Party (MLP)**. This two-party system persists despite the use of the Single Transferable Vote (STV), which is intended to encourage proportional representation and greater voter choice.

The dominance of the two-party system is rooted in Malta's historical context. Since gaining independence in 1964, these two parties have maintained strong support, alternating in power and shaping national policies. Key events, such as its EU accession, were heavily influenced by these parties, solidifying their central roles in Maltese politics.





❖ The Maltese Government 2022–2027 is the incumbent Government of Malta (Maltese: Il-Gvern ta' Malta) as from 30 March 2022. It is the second ministry of Prime Minister Robert Abela. The Maltese government is elected through a General Election for a five-year term. The Labour Party (Partit Laburista) won a majority following a general election which was held on 26 March 2022.

Position on EU Issues

Social Union	Stronger social union and solidarity between member states
Immigration	Collective EU action on immigration
Neighborhood Policy	Flexibility in EU neighborhood policy
Tax System	Maintaining its tax system autonomy

- Malta often uses its small size to argue for special treatment or exemptions in EU negotiations. It sees the EU as a way to amplify its influence beyond what its size would normally allow.



Why enter the European project?

❖ Economic Benefits

Access to the Single Market: Facilitated trade and increased investment opportunities.

Economic Growth Potential: Promised enhanced economic stability and foreign investment.

Structural Funds: EU financial support targeted infrastructure projects and social programs.

❖ Political Stability and Security

Strengthening Democratic Ties: Joining a union of democratic states.

Strategic Mediterranean Location: The EU provided a framework for security and foreign policy cooperation.

Public support: On the 2003 referendum



What Europe?

Malta's Preferences for European Integration

❖ Economic Integration

Benefiting from the Single Market and EU financial mechanisms like Structural and Cohesion Funds. The Maltese government views EU membership as a means to support national economic growth.

❖ Policy

The Labour Party (PL), which has governed since 2013, has emphasized a balance between integration and safeguarding national interests, especially concerning financial regulation and neutrality.

❖ Defense and Sovereignty

Malta has been cautious about EU proposals that could infringe on its constitutional neutrality. For example, Malta prefers intergovernmental cooperation over supranational EU defense mechanisms.

❖ Migration and Mediterranean Concerns

The government seeks more equitable burden-sharing, reflecting its frontline position in migration flows.

Malta's Basic Preferences for the Future of Europe

EU Governance and Democracy

- Maintaining flexibility in EU approaches to meet smaller member states' needs.

Immigration and External Relations

- Advocating for collective EU responsibility in handling immigration.
- Promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts near the EU.

Digital Transitions

- Prioritizing digital transformation as a key element for the future.

Social and Economic Concerns

- Addressing the rising cost of living and inflation.

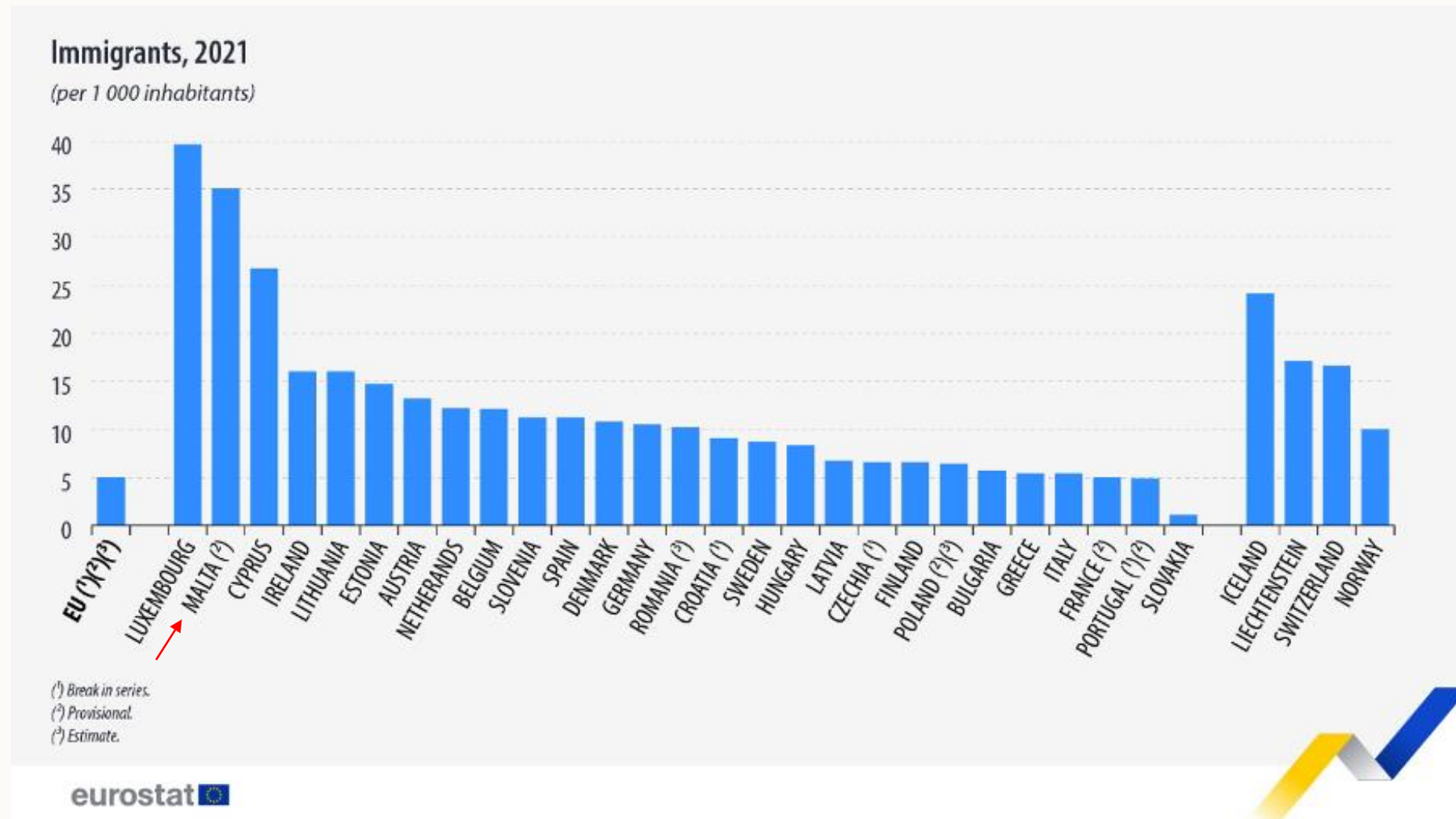
Recent and Current Challenges

❖ Migration Patterns

Malta has experienced a notable increase in asylum seekers since 2002, with numbers peaking in certain years.

As of 2021, 22.2% of Malta's population identified as non-Maltese, a sharp increase from 4.9% in 2011.

Malta has one of the highest numbers of refugees per capita in the EU and one of the highest rates of irregular migrant arrivals relative to its population size.



Migration Patterns



- Immigrants in Malta protesting for their rights

1

Burden-Sharing:

- Malta has championed "burden-sharing" in the EU since its accession in 2004.
- Advocates for equitable distribution of migration responsibilities among member states.

2

Revising the Dublin Convention:

- Persistent calls to reform the Convention, which places asylum application responsibility on the country of first entry. Case of Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta.

3

Comprehensive EU Migration Policy:

- Pushes for a permanent asylum seeker relocation system.

Immigration Case

Asylum Applications and Trends

- In 2023, Malta ended the year with a backlog of 833 cases. Most applicants were from conflict-affected countries . The recognition rate for asylum seekers was 15%, still relatively low.

Reception Conditions

- They have faced criticism for inadequacy. The largest center, housing unaccompanied minors, uses metal containers with shared facilities, highlighting its temporary setup.

International Relations

- Malta has been criticized for its immigration management, with the European Court of Human Rights raising concerns of its accelerated asylum procedures. NGOs report restricted access to information on vulnerable individuals.

The migration crisis has strained Malta's relations with the EU, as the country struggles with one of the highest per-capita refugee populations in the bloc, hindered by limited structural capacity and the burdens of the Dublin Regulation.

Policy Approaches and Challenges

1 Evolution of Migration Management:

Initially detained all irregular immigrants in substandard conditions.

Recent reforms introduced:

- Open centers for migrants.
- Changes to the asylum process, including reception and assessment phases.

2 EU Funding Support:

€52.4 million allocated under the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (2021-2027).



• Ursula von der Leyen, Robert Abela, Prime Minister of Malta

In conclusion, Malta's policies within the EU context have focused on advocating for more equitable distribution of responsibilities among member states, while also implementing controversial measures to manage arrivals.

The Russia-Ukraine War and Malta's Response

1 Policy Changes

The geopolitical repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war prompted Malta to reassess certain policy areas. The government has been aligned with EU-wide efforts to diversify energy sources and lessen dependency on Russia.

2 Support for Ukraine

Malta has shown solidarity with Ukraine, mainly through humanitarian aid, as its constitutionally enshrined neutrality constrains military involvement. Additionally, Malta has managed an influx of Ukrainian refugees.

3 EU Sanctions

Despite its neutral stance, Malta has endorsed the EU's collective sanctions against Russia.

The Russia-Ukraine War and Malta's Response

4 Public Opinion and Political Opposition

Public opinion in Malta is characterized by strong humanitarian support for Ukraine. The Labour Party emphasizes neutrality.

5 Position on EU Enlargement to Ukraine and Moldova

Malta supports EU expansion to include Ukraine and Moldova for regional security but emphasizes strict adherence to accession criteria, including governance and economic reforms, to ensure alignment with EU standards.



- Order of Malta serving Ukranian refugees

Euroscepticism in Malta



Historical Context

During EU accession debates, the Labour Party initially opposed membership, citing economic risks and neutrality concerns. Since Malta joined the EU in 2004, public support has grown as the benefits of membership became evident.

Extent of Euroscepticism

Limited, with the two major parties—Labour (PL) and Nationalist (PN)—supporting EU membership. The two-party system limits Eurosceptic political traction. With no Eurosceptic parties in parliament, government policy remains pro-EU.

Eurosceptic Parties

Eurosceptic parties, such as Imperium Europa, remain on the political fringe, unable to secure parliamentary seats due to Malta's electoral system.

Conclusion

