

WHAT IS EUROPE DAY ALL ABOUT?

The 9th of May is marked by various activities across the European Union, celebrating what has come to be known as Europe Day. It is one of the milestones, albeit perhaps less known, that provides a unifying element for EU citizens, besides the flag and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

BY JULIAN MICALLEF



The date goes back to 1950 when, following various preparatory initiatives by Robert Schuman (then the French Foreign Minister) to create a democratic structure for the European continent, a Declaration announcing the principles for an organised Europe was made. The Schuman Declaration invited all European countries to jointly administer their coal and steel industries. This step's fuller meaning must be understood in the context of a devastated continent brought about by a war that had just ended and the fact that steel and coal were the raw materials used for manufacturing of weapons at the time. That Declaration led to the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community.

The date, besides being significant in terms of remembering a political announcement to pursue this monumental project, also presents us with the idea of a collaborative spirit working towards the improvement of society.

From then on, a series of gradual steps have led to a Union of 27 Member States across the European continent. The various cultural, historical and linguistic backgrounds are now all brought together harmoniously: unity in diversity. There can be no other way!

This brings us to this year's emphasis on intercultural dialogue. The richness in variety found within the EU presents an opportunity for exchanging ideas and learning from different experiences. By promoting dialogue, the European Union is seeking to increase mutual understanding, as well as to continue consolidating European citizenship. Hence the various activities happening throughout this year.

The EU's role in the world is a priority for its Member States. Intercultural dialogue becomes more prominent in its relations with its partners. In a global background characterised by the constant threat of a clash, dialogue comes as a much welcome effort. Culture provides a good start to understanding and appreciating the diversity in the world.

Forum Malta fl-Ewropa together with the European Commission Representation Office, the European Parliament Information Office, the Education Department and the Europe Direct Relay was involved in the organisation of a series of activities to mark Europe Day. The activities targeted school children and the themes chosen for this year's events were Intercultural Dialogue and Energy & Climate Change. The activities included school outings, visits by non-Maltese football players to schools, as well as a debate in Parliament involving the participation of students.

The significance of Europe Day is certainly not to be underestimated. More than fifty years later, the tangible results can be seen and the opportunities created by a European citizenship can be appreciated. Just one day to mark it all! ☺

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