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neutral stance. Having withstood Arab pressure to sever relations with Israel during the Yom Kippur War, Malta stayed on friendly terms with the Arab world, particularly neighboring Libya, with whom an offshore oil dispute was settled a few years ago.

Today, official statements from Tripoli and Valletta speak of "the depth of affection and friendship between the two friendly peoples."

In contrast, Malta's relationship with Israel was much warmer two decades ago. After Malta's independence from Great Britain, Israeli experts provided the island with aid in dairy farming, poultry raising, sewage projects, afforestation, even plans for an atomic-powered sea water desalination plant that never materialized.

For a time, Malta was a transshipment point for Israeli off-the-record exports such as fertilizers, pesticides, electronic goods and chocolates to Arab lands. Malta's exports to Israel included jeans, hides and synthetic yarns.

Today, relations between Malta and Israel are on a formally "correct" basis. Occasionally, critical remarks are heard from Maltese officials, and anti-Israel comments appear in some of the newspapers.

But a reservoir of good feeling toward the Jewish state does exist. One Maltese Christian friend in the public relations field, whose family lived and worked in Israel for many years, is convinced that admiration and respect for Israel is as alive as it always was.

On the diplomatic level, Israel's charge d'affaires, now moving Malta from Rome, and Malta's consul general in Tel

knighthood of the Order of St. John was bestowed) work for the day when closer ties will return.

Father Dionazio Mintoff concludes his book on Malta's Jews by noting the difficulties the

younger community members have in finding spouses within the faith. Despite this, he points out, there has only been one reported case of intermarriage in the last 40 years. Mintoff claims that the lack of available partners is the principal cause the community does not grow in numbers.

Yet he ends his book on an optimistic note by affirming that Malta's Jews are held in the highest esteem by the government and the people of Malta and "they are happy to enjoy a pleasant life in an island of sunshine and friendship."

*Courtesy the Philadelphia Exponent*

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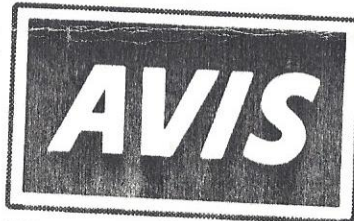
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