

Memorandum to Cabinet by the Hon. Minister of
Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs

Conference in Malta of Mediterranean States on
Maritime Questions including the Sea-bed

During the Second Conference of Heads of Mission which was held at the Ministry of Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs from 24th to 30th July, 1968, it was agreed that the Malta Government should be prepared to give facilities, even those involving expenditure, for the holding in Malta of International Conferences on the seabed with a view to making Malta known and eventually making a claim, to the establishment of an International Agency on the Sea-bed in Malta.

2. At the same Conference it was also decided that Government should take the initiative for the holding of a Conference of Mediterranean States in Malta in 1970 on maritime questions including the sea-bed.

3. It would be a great achievement were the first Mediterranean Conference on maritime questions to be held in Malta. This would increase our prestige and enhance Malta's claims as an ideal Conference centre. A still greater achievement would be attained were the Conference to succeed in adopting unanimous decisions and were the participating States to agree to co-ordinate their policies on some political, economic and legal question concerning the sea environment.

4. The Agenda of the Conference would reflect our objectives. The main items would fall within the following general headings:- the demilitarization of the sea-bed of the Mediterranean, the question of the limits of national jurisdiction over the sea-bed of the Mediterranean, the creation of a Regional Mediterranean Maritime Institute with its headquarters in Malta and the questions of Mediterranean fisheries and pollution.

5. The duration of the Conference would be of about two weeks and it would be important to secure participation by all States bordering upon the Mediterranean Sea. This may present some problems in view of the enmity between Israel and the Arab States which might refuse to participate if Israel is present. It would also be advisable to invite as observers the U.S.S.R., the U.K. and the U.S.A. and one or more United Nations Organisations interested in maritime questions.

6. It is to be pointed out that in the Summer of 1970 the Centre for Democratic Institutions of the United States of America is also holding a World Oceanic Conference in Malta. The Centre is raising one million dollars for this purpose and there will be no expense to Government though, no doubt, we would be expected to give a reception to participants.

7. It would be advisable were the timing of the Conference of Mediterranean States to be arranged so that it could take place immediately after the World Oceanic Conference, as any conclusions reached by the latter Conference may well be useful elements for consideration by the Conference of Mediterranean States.

8. It is estimated that the costs, including arrangements for interpretation and conference services, entertainment to delegates and payment of expenses of the leader of participating delegations, would amount to about £50,000.

9. Honourable Ministers are reminded that in 1970 Malta will also be the venue of the Council of Europe Exhibition on "the Order of St John of Malta" scheduled to be held during April, May and June. Though it is early to make even a rough estimate of the expenses involved, it is expected that this exhibition will cost Government a considerable sum.

10. Honourable Ministers are requested to consider whether a Conference of Mediterranean States should be held in Malta and if so, whether it should be held in 1970 or postponed to 1971 in view of the above considerations. In this connection it is to be pointed out that postponement of the Conference may be unfortunate due to its great political significance. There is also the risk of another nation taking the initiative from us.

11th March, 1969.