

## Malta Parliament passes same-sex marriage, adoption

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After a controversial vote in parliament Monday, Malta became the latest country to recognize same-sex unions as the legal equivalent of marriage, and to permit adoption by same-sex couples.

Shortly before the 37-0 vote, Auxiliary Bishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, the former sex abuse investigator for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, told *The Malta Independent* newspaper that the civil unions bill had some good points but was not in the best interests of children.

The opposition Nationalist Party, which supported the legalization of civil unions, abstained from the vote because of objections to permitting adoptions by same-sex couples.

Simon Busuttil, party leader, told the Maltese *Daily Star* that that four out of five Maltese oppose such adoptions and that "Malta is not prepared for such a step."

In December, following a meeting with Pope Francis, Scicluna reported that the pope had been "shocked" when informed of the civil unions bill and forthcoming vote.

"We discussed many aspects ... and when I raised the issue that's worrying me as a bishop, the pope encouraged me to speak out," Scicluna told the *Times of Malta*.

"The law puts civil unions on a par with marriage without recognizing the intrinsic and deep-seated distinction between the two types of relationships and their distinctive social roles," Scicluna told *The Malta Independent* shortly before the parliamentary vote. Children adopted by same-sex couples may suffer "adverse effects," he said.

When the final vote was announced, hundreds gathered in the main square of Valletta cheered. "Malta is now more liberal and more European, and has given equality to all its people," said Prime Minister Joseph Muscat of the Labor Party.

The island nation of fewer than half a million, where Catholicism is the official religion, legalized divorce three years ago but abortion remains illegal.