

Palestine International Institute

**Aspiring to Bind Palestinians in Diaspora
and Expatriates to the Homeland**

The Palestinian Community In Italy

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Summary

Foreword

The Palestine International Institute (PII) pioneers in producing studies provided by researchers in the Diaspora, in coordination with the Institute, under the broad category 'Palestinians in Diaspora'. This time we are pleased to present our readers with the new study titled, 'The Palestinian Community in Italy'. This study falls under the category of the Horizontal Studies series which examines the emergence and evolution of communities and tackles issues related to the origins, structure, makeup, size, problems and challenges facing Palestinian communities in the Diaspora. The PII also issues the Parallel Studies series which are supplemental studies with indirect bearing on communities, such as the study on Arab-European relationships. These studies are overseen and supervised by the executive chairman and the research team. In addition, our scientific committee, comprising Dr. Mohammad Mikdashi, Dr. Hasan Al-Charif, Dr. Emile Nemah Khoury, and Dr. Nabil Dajani, supervises the upgrading and maintenance of the PII website, as well as the update of the Vertical Studies series, which are studies on the elite, focusing on activists of the Palestinian communities in the Diaspora.

Before scrutinizing the following data, statistics and information, we wish to indicate that this study presents academic insight based on scientific and objective research. This is indeed one of the goals for which PII has been established.

Our researchers have exerted considerable effort in order to overcome the difficulties imposed by the scarcity of resources and documents, in an attempt to achieve integrated, rather than fractured data, at a time when scientific research is considerably lacking and insignificant. The importance of this study, as well as other PII studies, emerges from a number of factors, the most important of which are the following:.

▶ It comes as an early harvest in virgin territory, where documents and sources of information on these subjects, in both Arab and foreign libraries, are virtually nonexistent, including the Internet and centers that specialize in Palestinian issues

► No scholar or institution has come up with a partial, needless to say complete, series of studies about Palestinians in the Diaspora in countries where they exist, or about communities of countries that have hosted Palestinians.

We acknowledge the fact that the present study is in its early stages and is open to further development and expansion on the basis of professionalism, authenticity, transparency and documentation, and with the intent of being broadened and updated. Our mission and duty dictate that we make sure it is subject to the above processes in each of its new editions. In this respect, I would like to express my sorrow and extreme disappointment because of the total lack of cooperation on the part of the PLO's representative in Rome, Ambassador Sabri Attiyeh. Attiyeh ignored all requests from the Institute, even from the court of the Palestinian president, to provide us with vital information on the Palestinian community in Italy, or the Palestinian embassy. Active community members we met in Milano, Rome and Naples, have expressed their dismay at the fact that the embassy remained distant and did not interact with the community. We are confident that had the ambassador cooperated with us in this undertaking, this study would have been much more comprehensive and broader in content.

The Institute welcomes any comments on the development of its studies and scientific and research references, with the aim of achieving our final goals and aspirations. If it appears that we are slightly lagging, it is because our human and financial resources are limited, and the conditions under which the research is being conducted are difficult.

The time to pickup the fruit of our labors is near. This has been the result of an effort exerted by a dedicated team, despite our humble resources. Our gratitude goes to all scholars and researchers who have contributed to this and other studies which aim to reach those interested, address their patriotic, national, human and intellectual aspirations, and reveal facts and data that were unknown to those who previously have had no access to such information.

We reiterate our desire to receive feedback, and urge our readers to send us their comments and suggestions which would serve to improve or advance our studies.

As'ad Abdul-Rahman,
Executive Director

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We also like to acknowledge the efforts of the main author of this study, Dr. Samir Al-Qaryouti.

Thanks are due to all PII staff, including researchers and technical support, for their hard work and dedication, which is the reason this study has been produced with useful content and in proper format. Without their efforts, this study would not have been possible.

Chapter One

Italy: the History, Politics and Social Systems

A Historical Résumé

The first people to reside in Italy before the Roman era were the Legorians in the northwest, the Venetians in the northeast and the Etruscans in Emilia and Tuscany in the mid-north. In the mid-southern regions lived people such as the Umbrians, the Sabines and the Slavs; the Italian Greeks lived in the south.. Disputes among these contentious people usually ended with bloody wars, especially between the Greeks and the Etruscans. The latter were stronger and more numerous.

During that period, Rome started its political and military ascent. Between the fourth and the second centuries B.C., the Romans practically unified Italy by force. Waging wars for many years against the Etruscans, the Gallic tribes, the Sentines and the Italian Greeks in the south, the Romans created a unique political system. Republics were established and all Italians were granted the nationality of Rome, enjoying the rights of its citizens in addition to reduced taxes. With the purpose of fortifying the authority of the central state in Rome, the Romans dispatched rulers (consuls) to the various Italian regions. Italy was the name given to all regions of the peninsula, and Latin became the official and public language across Italy.

When Christianity began to expand 2,000 years ago, Rome was not the practical capital town because barbarians, like the Lombards, continued their raids against Milan, which became the Italian defensive citadel against barbarian invasions coming from Germany, France, and Windals from the south. The actual authority shifted in Rome to the Pope, who founded his universal authority in the name of Christianity and the successor to Jesus Christ on earth. In 395, after the death of Emperor Thiodosius I, who adopted Christianity, the division of the Roman Empire into the Western Empire in Rome and the Eastern Empire in the Byzantine became a matter of fact. Italy was invaded and many peoples from various places moved inland, until the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was dethroned and replaced by King Odoacer, of the Etruscans, who was of German origin. In 496, Byzantine Emperor Justinian successfully conquered Italy. In 568, the Lombards occupied all the northern Italian regions and dominated the country

for 200 years. Then came Charles II (King of France), who occupied the north and took over the rest of Italy, inaugurating the Carolingian Dynasty (843-987).

For 130 years, trends toward independence became stronger in the northern regions of Tuscany and Badania, where noble *seignories* of the towns, supported by the Vatican, built ruling municipal systems, which defined the birth of the municipal system in Italy. In 1266, the French Angevine princes dominated most of Italy and, for 20 years, waged wars against the Spanish Aragon, but victory was eventually on the side of the Spanish kings. In the 14th and 15th centuries, numerous towns and municipalities fortified their political dominance and grew economically prosperous. Venice, Verona, Pisa, Milan and Florence, were ruled by such noble families as the Scaliger in Verona, the Sforza and Visconti in Milan, and the Medici in Florence, and the cities were practically transformed into principalities.

A long fight for the domination of Italy and the northern territories broke out among the cities of Milan, Florence and Venice but ended with a peace treaty at Lodi, near Milan, in 1454. This treaty set the basis for a political balance and a cultural upswing in the north. On the other hand, between 1282-1302, the popular uprisings in the south, known as the Sicilian Vespers, recurred and resulted in the secession of the Kingdom of Sicily, under the Spanish Aragon's rule, from the Kingdom of Napoli (Naples), under the French Angevines.

In the Middle Ages, five large states, Napoli, Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan were united by a non-aggression agreement. This system lasted for 40 years, from 1454 until 1494. When Charles VIII became king of France, the war of dominance over Italy broke out between France and Spain and resulted in the dominance of Spain, especially over the kingdoms of Sardinia, Napoli and Sicily, which lasted until the turn of the 18th century. Their dominance extended to the shores of the Sea of Turin and the Islands of Elba and Piombino in Tuscany. The French were forced to return the whole of the region of Piemonte to the Savoia family, which later became the royal family of Italy.

The Spaniards imposed their system and subjugated the rebellious barons. In spite of miserable economic conditions in the kingdom of Napoli, and the harsh taxation system which the people of Milan, unlike those in the south were able to put up with, the Italians were obedient to the kings of Spain. Still, the cultural movement flourished, and Italy produced such cultural icons as Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Ludovico Ariosto and others. The allegiance of the Italians to the Spanish throne continued, but the people's malaise gained momentum due to misgovernment and fiscal oppression until an insurrection broke out in 1647 led by a Neapolitan fisherman named Masaniello, who declared Napoli a republic. By the end of 1648, however, the Spaniards crushed this rebellion. Following this, the power of the church-state, i.e. the Vatican, took over and was the only state in Italy that was independent from Spain. The popes used this opportunity to strengthen their control of Italy, especially their political influence — together with

their religious influence. The greatest concern of the popes was to defend the Catholic Church and its unity against both internal and external attacks. Venice was the only republic in Italy which remained outside the circle of wars. When war broke out between the Venicians and the Turks over the island of Cyprus, the rest of the Italian states came to its support with arms and warships, particularly Tuscany and the Vatican which launched a crusader campaign as did the states of Sabaudia, under the Savoia family, who took over some territories that were under the French control. Between 1600 and 1700, the whole of Italy became an arena of conflict for European powers. The Savoia family fortified their control and political influence, and Spain started to retreat, leaving the country, after the Treaty of Utrecht on April 16, 1713, under Austrian influence. After the treaty, Austria replaced Spain and imposed its control over Italy, controlling Milan, Sardinia, the region of Napoli and parts of the state of citadels that had covered territories from Milan to Torino. Vittorio Amideo II, of the Savoia family, tried to claim the region of Milan, but eventually accepted the region of Monferrato at Piemonte, and also the title of King of Sicily. The Austrian Lombardia used to comprise Milan, Como, Varese, Cremona, Mantova and Bafia. It flourished through the Austrian or Aspourgi reforms (Aspourgi are the Austrian emperors). The same held true of Tuscany, where the cultural movement flourished, thanks to Austrian rule. It also witnessed the birth of enlightened thoughts. However, economic conditions deteriorated in the rest of the county, especially in the countryside. In fact, most Italian states at the end of the 18th century suffered a crisis.

In the period between 1796 and 1814, Italy went through the Jacobian and Napoleonic periods, during which time, the basis for the modern Italian renaissance was set, when part of the enlightened elite seceded from the governments of Melzi, Ferri and Fasco by adopting moderate constitutional stands in preparation for joining the republic. Many national and Jacobian societies and organizations were formed. In this period, Napoleon Bonaparte started encroaching upon the Italian territories. In March 1796, an electoral congress was called for at Reggio Calabria first, then at Modena (December 27, 1796–March 1, 1797). The congress agreed to establish the Cispadana Republic, which Napoleon decided, in July 1797, to dissolve and attach to Romagna in the north and then the Republic of Cisalpina (Milan and Torino), which was founded on June 29, 1797. On June 6 of the same year, the Democratic Republic of Liguria (Genoa) was founded.

The Jacobian movement suffered a painful setback when the region of Veneto, in the Treaty of Campo Formeo, on October 17, 1797, was given to Austria by a decree from Napoleon, who used this to achieve several political objectives. The French also occupied Rome and established the Republic of Rome in 1798. In 1805, Napoleon Bonaparte became emperor and carried the title of king of Italy, and named the Italian republics the Kingdom of Italy.

The defeat of Napoleon at Leipzig in 1813 gave rise to hopes that the Napoleonic kingdoms in Italy would gain independence from Austria and France. Austria used this new situation to form a regency council in Lombardia, where the council declared the attachment of entire Lombardia to Austria on June 12, 1813. In the absence of Napoleon, the destiny of Italy was finally decided in 1814 at the Vienna conference that returned the European kings to their thrones. The spirit of independence prevailed in Italy, and secret societies were established throughout the country, such as the Carbonara Society and other numerous revolutionary groups. The first operation of these societies took place in 1820 by the Carbonara of Napoli. This movement obtained the revival of the Spanish constitution in Napoli from King Fernando. Acts of rebellion and violence took place in numerous areas of Italy but were totally suppressed by authorities. Throughout this period, the church practically ruled, represented by the Vatican and its dioceses.

From Renaissance to Unity

Buonarroti (a Communist), Balbo (liberal) and Gioberty (Catholic), Giuseppe Mazzini and others founded a political movement called, La Giovine Italia (Young Italy) in 1831. The goal of this movement was to create a united Italian republic by promoting a general insurrection in Italian reactionary states and in the lands occupied by the Austrian Empire. Gioberty wanted a state under the Pope's leadership, whereas Mazzini was looking for an overwhelming revolution to establish the republic. 1848 witnessed the beginning of fierce battles on the way to independence and the first Italian war of independence took place when a few cities, Palermo, Milan and Venice revolted. King Carlo Alberto di Savoia hastened to support the revolutionaries and other kings followed his example. So did Pope Pius IX, who sent his forces to fight with the revolutionaries against Austria in Milan and Venice. The pope, however, recalled his troops from battle, an action that spurred a revolution against him in Rome, so that he had to sneak out of his besieged palace and seek asylum in France. King Carlo Alberto was defeated at the Battle of Custoza. The next year, under pressure from the Republicans at Piedmont, he resumed the war, but the Piedmontese were crushed again in Novara by troops of the Austrian General Radetzky. King Carlo Alberto, therefore, had to abdicate in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel II. The uprisings continued, but eventually they were unable to change the situation.

Although Carlo Alberto had been defeated in his bid to drive the Austrians from Italy, the Piedmontese did not abandon hope of aggrandizement. Camillo di Cavour, who became president of the council of ministers in 1852, also had expansionist ambitions. Cavour, however, saw that Piedmont would not be able to single-handedly add to its territory. Instead he hoped to secure aid from Britain and France to expel the Austrians from the Italian peninsula. An attempt to gain British and French favor by supporting them in the Crimean war, which Piedmont entered in 1855, was unsuccessful, as Italian affairs were ignored at the Congress of Paris. Nevertheless, the war achieved a useful objective — it left

Austria, which had tried to balance between the two sides during the war, dangerously isolated.

In the summer of 1858, Cavour met with Napoleon III at Plombières and the two signed a secret agreement, which was known as the Pact of Plombières. Cavour and Napoleon III agreed to wage war jointly against Austria. Piedmont would gain the Austrian territories in Italy (Lombardy and Venetia), as well as the Duchies of Parma and Modena, while France would be rewarded with Piedmont's transalpine territories of Savoy and Nice. In order to allow the French to intervene without appearing as the aggressors, Cavour was to provoke the Austrians into aggression by encouraging revolutionary activity in Lombardy. The Austrians conveniently made their opponents' task easier by sending an ultimatum to the Piedmontese demanding demobilization. The Piedmontese could conveniently reject this, and by making Austria seem the aggressor, allowed the French to intervene.

The war itself was quite short. The Austrian advance into Piedmont was incompetent and they were unable to secure the Alpine passes before the arrival of the French army which was personally led by Napoleon. At the Battle of Magenta on June 4, the French and Sardinians were victorious over the Austrian army of Count Gyulai, leading to Austrian withdrawal from most of Lombardy and a triumphant entry by Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel into Milan. On June 24, a second battle was fought between the two armies at Solferno, where the French were again victorious. The Austrians withdrew behind the quadrilateral fortresses on the borders of Venetia.

There were many reasons Napoleon III sought peace at this point. On July 11, he met privately with Franz Joseph at Villafranca, without the knowledge of his Piedmontese allies. Together, the two agreed on the outlines of a settlement to the conflict. The Austrians would retain Venetia, but would cede Lombardy to the French, who would then immediately cede it to Piedmont (the Austrians themselves were unwilling to cede the area to Piedmont).

The Sardinians were outraged at this betrayal by their ally. Cavour demanded that the war be carried on, and resigned when the more realistic Victor Emmanuel determined that acquiescence was the wise option. But the Villafranca agreement would prove useless before it was formalized into the Treaty of Zurich in November. The Piedmontese troops occupied the smaller Italian states and the Legations, and the French proved unwilling to pressure them to withdraw and allow the restoration of the old order, while the Austrians no longer had the power to compel it. In December, Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and the Legations were unified into the United Provinces of Central Italy, and, encouraged by the British, were seeking annexation by the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Cavour, who triumphantly returned to power in January 1860, wished to annex the territories but realized that French consent was necessary. Napoleon III

agreed to recognize the Piedmontese annexation in exchange for Savoy and Nice. On March 20, 1860, the annexations occurred. Now the Kingdom of Sardinia encompassed most of northern and central Italy.

After the Palermo uprising of April 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi led his 1,000-man band of 'Red Shirts' against the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and was able to liberate Sicily and Napoli from the Spanish Bourbons. On October 1, 1860, Garibaldi met with King Victor Emmanuel II at Teano, receiving control of southern Italy. Another series of plebiscites in the occupied lands resulted, on March 17, 1861, in the proclamation of Victor Emmanuel as the first King of Italy by the new parliament of a unified Italy. Turin became the capital of the new state. Only Rome, Veneto, Trentino and Dalmatia remained to be conquered.

The political scene in the country at the time showed two trends: the right-wing trend of the conservative and moderate liberals and the left-wing trend of the progressive liberals and the democratic movements. After the death of Cavour on June 6, 1861, Bettino Ricasoli was appointed prime minister and he immediately divided Italy into 59 provinces, each with its own governor. Ricasoli also unified the general debts, bearing the debts of the states that had vanished because of the unification process. In the south, particularly in Sicily and Sardinia, the government fought gangs of thieves and bandits in a war which lasted until 1865, costing the country 5,000 lives.

In 1866 Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismark offered Victor Emmanuel II an alliance with the Kingdom of Prussia in the Austro-Prussian War; in exchange Prussia would allow Italy to annex Austrian-controlled Venice. King Victor Emmanuel agreed to the alliance and the third Italian war of independence began. Italy fared poorly in the war due to a poorly organized military against Austria, but Prussia's victory allowed Italy to annex Venice. The one major obstacle to Italian unity remained Rome.

In 1870, Prussia went to war against France, starting the Franco-Prussian War. To keep the large Prussian army at bay, France abandoned its positions in Rome in order to fight the Prussians. Italy benefited from Prussia's victory against France by taking over the Papal states from French authority. Italian unification was complete, and shortly after, Italy's capital was moved to Rome. Economic conditions in the united Italy were poor: there were no industry or transportation facilities, together with extreme poverty, high illiteracy, and only a small percent of wealthy Italians had the right to vote. The unification movement had largely been dependent on the support of foreign powers and remained so afterwards.

Following the capture of Rome in 1870 from the French forces of Napoleon III, relations between the Italian government and the Vatican remained adverse for the next sixty years, with the popes declaring themselves as prisoners at the Vatican. The Catholic Church frequently protested the actions of the Italian government, refused to meet with envoys from the king and urged Catholics not

to vote in Italian elections. It was not until 1929 that positive relations were restored between Italy and the Vatican.

In 1874, the right-wing conservatives were heavily defeated in the general elections, and the king had to appoint Agostino Depretis, the left-wing liberal leader in parliament, as prime minister, which helped strengthen the socialist organizations. The new government decided to raise the number of voters in the 1882 elections from 600,000 to 2 million.

In 1887, Francesco Crispi became prime minister and began focusing government efforts on foreign policy. Crispi worked to build Italy as a great world power through increased military expenditures, advocacy of expansionism and attempts to win Germany's favor. In 1882, Italy joined the tripartite alliance, which included both Germany and Austria-Hungary, which officially remained intact until 1915. Despite being authoritarian, Crispi put through liberal policies such as the Public Health Act of 1888 and established tribunals for redress against abuses by the government.

In a country suffering from great internal crises, Crispi tried expanding Italy's colonial trend and occupied Musawwa (present-day Eritrea) to cover up his internal problems. He then tried to invade Ethiopia, but was defeated by the Ethiopian army near the town of Adwa on March 1, 1896. Consequently, Crispi lost office and Italy went through severe economic and political crises which gave rise to revolutionary and liberal uprisings in which the army was used to suppress. The situation continued until 1900.

On November 3, 1903, Giovanni Giolitti assumed his office as prime minister for the second time. Under his rule, several policies of government intervention were enacted. Besides establishing several tariffs, subsidies and government projects, he also nationalized the private phone and railroad operators. Liberal proponents of free trade criticized the 'Giolittian system'. Giolitti himself saw the development of the national economy as essential to the production of wealth. He resigned his fourth premiership in 1914 after being defeated in the general elections of the previous year. It was under his administration that Italy sent its forces to occupy Libya in 1911. Giolitti was succeeded by Antonio Salandra who led Italy into the First World War

On the Road to Fascism

Italy was victorious in WWI, but drowned in a difficult socio-economic crisis. The situation gave great popularity to the two people's parties, the left-wing Italian Socialist Party and the Catholic Popular Party. Italy witnessed the following developments:

- ▶ Following the end of the war and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Mussolini created the Fasci di Combattimento (or Combat League).

▶ On April 15, 1919, the Fascists descended into political violence, when a group of members of the Fasci di Combattimento attacked the offices of Avanti, the Socialist Party's official organ.

▶ In January 1921, the general congress of the Socialist Party convened, and the minority, following Communist principles, seceded from the party and founded the Italian Communist Party.

▶ Recognizing the failures of the Fascists' initial revolutionary and left-leaning policy, Mussolini moved the organization away from the left and turned the revolutionary movement into a political movement in 1921 named the Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party). The party copied the nationalist themes of D'Annunzio and rejected parliamentary democracy while still operating to destroy it from within.

▶ In October 1922, Mussolini took advantage of a general workers' strike in Italy, and announced his demands to the Italian government to give the Fascist Party political power or face a coup. With no immediate response, a small number of Fascists began a long trek across Italy to Rome which was called 'The March to Rome', claiming to Italians that the Fascists intended to restore law and order. The King was forced to decide which of the two rival movements in Italy would form the government: Mussolini's Fascists, or the anti-monarchist Italian Socialist Party. He selected the Fascists.

▶ On October 28, 1922, Victor Emmanuel III selected Mussolini to become the prime minister, allowing him and the Fascist Party to pursue their political ambitions as long as they supported the monarchy and its interests. Mussolini's supporters called him, Il Duce, or 'The Leader', an unofficial title that was commonly used to describe Mussolini's position during the Fascist era.

▶ Mussolini used past laws to concentrate all authorities under his control and ruled in the name of the King, depriving parliament of its powers. Mussolini changed his original revolutionary policies, such as moving away from anti-clericalism to supporting the Catholic Church and abandoned his public opposition to the monarchy. On February 11, 1929, he signed the Lateran Treaty (Concordat) with Pope Pius XI that allowed the existence of the independent Vatican City State. Mussolini used the Concordat to increase his popularity among Catholics.

▶ In 1936, after the quick victories in Africa, Mussolini declared the Fascist Empire, with Victor Emmanuel III as the emperor. Good diplomatic relations with Germany began when Rome and Berlin signed a treaty of friendship on October 23 of that year. Mussolini described this treaty as an

'axis' around which Europe would revolve, and this name, 'Axis', became the name given to the tripartite alliance comprising Italy, Germany and Japan in WWII. Italy and Germany jointly supported General Franco in Spain against the Communists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). On May 23, 1939, both countries founded the 'Pact of Steel', which obliged Italy to fight with Germany if war broke out against the latter.

The Second World War (WWII)

In 1940, Italy joined forces with Germany at war, which soon revealed that Italy was ill-equipped and its armed forces were poorly trained and failed in battle. This resulted in a schism that continued to widen between the Italian people and the Fascist regime. Italians were opposed to the war as well as the regime and considered Mussolini's miscalculations a blunder that entangled Italy in that misadventure.

The embarrassment of Italy, at the hands of Mussolini, led King Victor Emmanuel III and even members of the Fascist Party to push for Mussolini's removal. The first stage of his ouster took place when the Fascist Party's grand council, under the direction of Fascist member Dino Grandi, voted to remove Mussolini as party leader. Days later, Emmanuel III officially removed Mussolini from the post of prime minister and replaced him with Marshal Pietro Badoglio. Upon resigning, Mussolini was immediately arrested. The new Badoglio government stripped away the final elements of Fascist rule by banning the Fascist Party. Italy then signed an armistice with the allied armed forces and the Kingdom of Italy joined the Allies in their war against Nazi Germany.

All Italian parties resurfaced, but refused to deal with the monarchy because of the authority which the king had bestowed on Mussolini. These parties, namely the Communist, the Liberal, the Labor Democrat, the Republican and Labor were subject to persecution at the time of Mussolini.

Meanwhile, a German paratroop division, which had occupied Rome, rescued Mussolini from the mountain resort where he was kept under arrest. He immediately left for the city of Salo on the shore of Lake Garda in north Italy, which was under German control. From there, he declared the Italian Social Republic, also known as the Republic of Salo, on September 23, 1943.

The Provisional Government Leads the Country to a Republic

The aftermath of WWII left Italy with a destroyed economy, a divided society and anger against the monarchy for its endorsement of the Fascist regime for the previous twenty years. Anger also existed over Italy's embarrassment of being occupied by the Germans and then by the Allies.

Prior to the rise of the Fascists, the monarchy was seen as having performed poorly, with a society that was extremely divided between the wealthy north and the poor south. World War I resulted in Italy making few gains and was seen as the reason which fostered the rise of Fascism. These frustrations led to a revival of the Italian republican movement.

In June 1945, the first government after liberation was formed with Ferruccio Perri, secretary general of the Action Party and the well-known guerilla commander, as prime minister. This was a compromise after a heated dispute on government leadership between Alcide de Gasperi, leader of the Christian Democrats, and Pietro Nenni, leader of the Socialist Party. In March and April of 1946, the new government decided to carry out local administrative elections, where the popular parties, particularly the Catholics, the Socialists and the Communists, as those who had militarily resisted the Nazis, achieved a landslide victory.

On June 2, 1946, the government decided to hold special elections to elect members of the Constitutional Founding Society whose task was to write a new constitution and call for a plebiscite to decide between retaining the monarchy or becoming a republic. On May 9, 1946, hoping to influence the vote, King Victor Emmanuel III formally abdicated, and Crown Prince Umberto became King of Italy. On June 2, 1946, the republican side won 54 per cent of the vote and Italy officially became a republic. King Umberto II abdicated the throne, and a new republic was born with bitter resentment against the House of Savoy. All male members of the Savoy family were barred from entering Italy in 1948. This ban was only overturned in 2002. Alcide de Gasperi, leader of the Christian Democrats, formed the first government of the Italian Republic and signed the final peace treaty with the Allies.

The peace treaty with Italy was signed in Paris on February 10, 1947, between the Italian Republic and the victorious powers of WWII, formally ending hostilities. It came into general effect on September 15, 1947. The provisions of the treaty included:

- ▶ Transfer of the Adriatic islands of Cres, Lossino, Lagosta and Pelagosta; of Istria south of the river Mirna; of the city of Fiume and what is now western Slovenia (west of the Black Sea-Adriatic watershed) to Yugoslavia
- ▶ Transfer of the Dodecanese Islands to Greece
- ▶ Transfer to France of Briga and Tenda, and minor revisions of the Franco-Italian border
- ▶ Recognition of the independence of Albania and transfer to Albania of the island of Saseno

- ▶ Recognition of the independence of Ethiopia
- ▶ Renouncement of claims to colonies (including Libya, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland)
- ▶ Trieste and the surrounding area were incorporated into a new independent state called the Free Territory of Trieste. In 1945, this territory ceased to exist and Trieste, and the surrounding area, was divided between Yugoslavia and Italy. The city of Trieste itself became part of Italy.

Once the monarchy ended, the constituent assembly, with 80 per cent of the votes in the first round of voting, elected Enrico Roberto De Nicola provisional head of state on June 28, 1946.

After the Italian constitution took effect, Enrico Roberto De Nicola, on January 1, 1948, was formally named president of the Italian Republic. He refused to be a candidate for the first constitutional election the following May, in which Luigi Einaudi was elected to the Quirinale (the president's residence on Quirinale Hill, the tallest of the Seven Hills of Rome).

The first general elections in the republican era took place on April 18, 1948 and were heavily influenced by the then-flaring Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the US. Fears in the Italian electorate of a possible Communist takeover proved crucial for the electoral outcome on the April 18; the Christian Democrats, under the leadership of Alcide de Gasperi won a resounding victory with 48 per cent of the votes (their best result ever, and not repeated since) while the FDP only received 31 per cent. The Communist Party widely outdid the Socialists in the distribution of seats in parliament, and gained a solid position as the main opposition party in Italy. On May 11, 1948, Luigi Einaudi became the first elected president of the Italian Republic. In the 1950s, Italy became a member of the NATO and an ally of the United States, which helped revive the Italian economy through the Marshall Plan.

System of Government

The constitution of the Italian Republic was ratified by the Constituent Assembly on December 22, 1947, with 453 votes in favor and 62 against. The constituent assembly had been elected by universal suffrage on June 2, 1946, at the same time as the institutional referendum on abolition of the monarchy.

The constitution went into effect January 1, 1948.

Following are some of the important principles of the Italian constitution which is composed of 139 items:

1. Italy is a democratic republic established on the values of work and sovereignty.
2. The republic recognizes and guarantees human rights that should not be violated, whether they concern individuals or social organizations.
3. All citizens are equal in social dignity and in front of the law, without being discriminated in sex, race, language, religion, political opinion or personal and social status.
4. It is the duty of the republic to remove all economic and social obstacles standing in the path of citizens' freedom and equality.
5. The republic recognizes the right of all citizens to work and facilitates all practical conditions for them to enjoy this right.
6. Every citizen has the right to perform an activity or do a job that takes part in material and spiritual progress of society according to the citizen's abilities and his/her choices.
7. The republic is a non-divisible unity, although it recognizes local independence and brings about conditions for achieving it.
8. In the non-centralized administrative services, the principles and protocols stipulated in their laws agree with the requirements of local independence and decentralization.
9. Through special regulations, the republic protects minorities with linguistic differences.
10. The Catholic State and Church (the Vatican) are independent and sovereign according to their legal systems. The relations between the two are organized according to Lateran Accords. If treaties are modified through an agreement that both parties accept, a constitutional revision is not needed.
11. All religious sects are free and equal in front of the law. Non-Catholic religious sects have the right to organize themselves according to their constitutions, provided that this does not contradict Italian law.
12. Italy is a parliamentary republic that depends on legislative, executive and judicial power. According to the constitution, the three powers are completely independent of each other.

Parliament

The parliament of Italy is formed through elections in accordance with the constitution. It is a bicameral legislature with 945 elected members (parlamentari). The chamber of deputies, with 630 members is the lower house. The senate is the upper house and has 315 members.

Since 2005, a proportional system electoral law is being used in both houses. A majority prize is given to the coalition obtaining a plurality, at national level for the chamber, and at regional level for the senate. Between 1991 and 1993, resulting from two referendums and legislation, Italian electoral law was substantially altered. Electoral law in Italy is determined by parliament, not the constitution. This, taken with the concurrent collapse of the Italian party system, marks the transition between the first and second Italian republics.

The main prerogative of parliament is to exercise legislative power by enacting laws and modifying them according to the constitution. In addition, it controls political performance and defines general policies. The electoral system is based on free and general elections, which is a right that allows the electoral body, composed of adult citizens, to be nominated for election and to freely vote for the nominees. Voting, according to the constitution is free, personal, confidential and equal for all. Voting is a civic duty for all citizens.

Rival Political Parties

Several political parties operate in Italy. However, since the 2008 general elections, only five major parties have been represented in parliament. On one side, the center-right People of Freedom and the Northern League support the Berlusconi IV cabinet; on the other side there is the center-left opposition composed of the Democratic Party, which includes in its parliamentary ranks the Italian Radicals and Italy of Values. The Union of Christian and Center Democrats is the only party outside the two large coalitions to be represented in parliament, in an increasingly two-party system.

Other minor regional parties are represented in parliament, notably the Movement for Autonomy, the South Tyrolean People's Party and the Valdotanain Union, while many other parties are active or represented at the regional level.

Before the 2008 general elections, the following major coalitions of parties contended for seats in parliament:

1. **House of Freedoms** -- representing the center-right. It was composed of several political parties: Power for Italy, National Alliance, Union of Christian and Center Democrats, Northern League, Movement for Autonomy, Christian Democracy for Autonomies, New Italian Socialist Party, Italian Republican Party and Liberal Reformers. This alliance, led by Silvio Berlusconi, won the 1994 general elections under the name Popolo

della Libertà, but the resulting government was short-lived, as the Northern League withdrew their support and went into opposition.

2. **The Olive Tree** was a denomination used for several successive center-left Italian political coalitions from 1995 to 2007. The historical leader and ideologue of these coalitions was Romano Prodi, professor of economics and former leftist Christian-Democrat, who invented the name and the symbol of The Olive Tree with Arturo Parisi in 1995.

On April 21, 1996, The Olive Tree won the general elections in alliance with the Communist Refounding Party, making Romano Prodi prime minister of Italy. It was the first time since 1946 that the Communists, now gathered in the Democratic party of the left, took part in the government of the country and one of their leaders, Walter Veltroni, who ran on a ticket with Prodi in a long electoral campaign, was deputy-prime minister.

Social Status

The Catholic Church (the Vatican) has great influence on Italians' social life in general. The institution of marriage, according to Catholic norms, is still consecrated. The family, the bounds of which have never been broken, neither in the south nor in the north, is still valued. Even in the Italian economy, family character is conspicuous. Some of the strongest firms are family-run, many of them named after the families to which they belong including Merloni, Benneton, Barilla and Krispy, to name a few.

Class division shows a wealthy class forming the top of the economic ladder, followed by the *petit-bourgeois* which is composed of the neo-rich, the intellectuals and professionals, followed by a large middle class which is composed of relatively small traders and craftsmen who have a great share in the modern industrial and service facet of the economy. The last is the working class, which forms the greater number, most of which is specialized. The class of old nobles or aristocrats is still present, but has been in the political shadows. Some of them are in the fashion and banking businesses, while others are concerned with literature.

The fact that, historically, the Italian working class is politically orientated, gives the labor unions a great amount of influence in Italy. With rapidly expanding modern technology and information media, however, labor unions have lost some of their influence. There are 185 million subscribers to the Internet in Italy, exceeding those in India by 200,000, despite the great difference in the population between the two countries. According to the statistics of 2003, there are 55,918,000 mobile phones in Italy. Italians enjoy social security and health insurance benefits, while education is almost free. In addition to private and Catholic universities, there are 54 official universities in the country.

Economic Status

For the past 20 years, Italy has been in fifth and sixth place among the eight industrial nations. In spite of Italy's great internal debts, it remains a country of hidden economy, depending on small- and middle-sized industries, which is a unique economic system that has shown great efficiency in the last century. This is because Italy is a country without natural resources, depending on conversion industries, together with other services like tourism, fashion, agriculture, commerce, etc. This type of industry contributes, with noticeable financial income, to the gross national product. The success of all Italian governments is measured by the extent of execution of promised economic plans. The average economic condition of the individual is excellent. 80 per cent of the Italians own their homes, whereas only 20 per cent of them live in rented premises.

Italy is the fourth tourist destination in the world, visited by 39.6 million tourists annually. The tourism industry alone turned over \$31.3 billion in 2003. The economic growth in 2004, according to European standards, was about 0.5 per cent, while the deficit, according to Maastricht, was 4 per cent in 2005, which is quite high. By the end of 2008, it is expected to be 2.4 per cent.

Chapter Two The Islamic Community in Italy

The Beginnings

Taking into consideration the Islamic presence in Sicily, which used to be part of Dar Al-Islam (the House of Islam) in Arab history, the Islamic presence in Italy is long and ancient. We must mention here that the presence of the Vatican in Rome, representing Catholic Christianity around the world, came after Catholic secession from the original church in Palestine, leading to its becoming the faith of the majority of Christians in the world. Therefore, there has been interest in Islam and dealing with it in Italy from ancient history and until to date.

The Islamic presence in modern Italy started in the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1960s, with the influx of students from Libya, Syria, Jordan and Palestine, a Muslim presence with tangible numbers became noticeable. At the beginning of the 1970s, Moroccans started to come for work in Italy, where they would stay for a short period.

In Rome, the presence of a small Islamic center covered the necessities of the Islamic community. The center operated under very difficult conditions because of the political situation when the Christian Democrats, in the face of the Communists, took over the government.

In that period, the Vatican, and Christianity in general, was opposed by secularists, the Communists and the leftists. This was difficulty which religious Catholics faced in a society where turning away from religion became a prevalent social norm. Irrespective of the religion one followed, expressing one's faith was criticized in a society that was taken by what was known as the young people's revolution of 1968. This trend had started in France based on the principles of the German sociologist and philosopher, Herbert Marcuse and his school of thought which advocated complete freedom unrestrained by any chains or social repression, whether political or religious. This revolution prevailed through all of Europe and echoed in movements such as protesting against the US war in Vietnam.

The Islamic center, the nucleus of the Palestinian community which had settled in Rome for study or work, offered valuable services, like teaching Arabic. The individuals of this nucleus were not linked to any Islamic parties, but were faithful and committed to the national Palestinian action without being members of any of the Palestinian factions. This stance later gave them the reputation for being independent and enabled them to be active in the period of Islamic-Christian dialogue and in constructive discussions about the cooperation between civilizations. They also won respect in religious-trended Italian circles.

Among foreigners in Italy, Muslims were the majority. However, this Islamic presence did not have a defined identity or a clear organizational or institutional form. The Iranians, in a strict Islamic definition, were the greatest in number. Until the appearance of the Khomeini movement, their position was quite vague. A few of them were seen at the Islamic center in Rome, especially some merchants and diplomats. When the Khomeini movement assumed authority in Iran, two organizations appeared: the Iranian Communist Party and the Mujahidi Khalq Movement.

The Muslim Brotherhood also appeared, with few people speaking in its name — some of them Palestinians. Later it disappeared and concentrated on an internal buildup and a quasi-secretive organization, leaving room for Palestinian resistance organizations, Fatah and the left-wing organizations, as well as the two Ba'th factions.

The Somalis were part of a few political movements, mostly leftist, but rarely did they participate in any Arab or Islamic political or social activity. The Eritreans were concentrated in places like Milan and Bologna and did not mix with others.

There was no Islamic address showing the Islamic presence. The social problems due to their rising numbers increased without resolution, especially in cases of marriage, circumcision and death as well as in what defines halal meat. A great number of Arab and Islamic students could not stand living in Italy because of the problem of meat, which forced them to go back home or to move to other places where their religious needs were met.

The other part of Muslim existence was represented by the Arab and Islamic diplomatic corps and those who were working for the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), besides merchants, sailors and fishermen.

The phenomenon of an Islamic presence in Italy is inseparable from the same phenomenon in Europe. Historically, an Islamic presence in Italy goes back to the 11th century when an Islamic emirate was founded in Sicily and continued there for 350 years. In 1939, in his book, *Storia dei Musulmani in Sicilia*, the Italian scholar Michele Amari wrote about it saying that Sicily was part of Dar Al-Islam. Muslims there were not only expatriates, but also Sicilians, which made distinction difficult, especially since the Emirate of Sicily lived for over three-and-a-half centuries.

Practically, the recent Islamic presence in Italy started to take shape in the early 1980s after the influx of a great number of immigrants from various Arab and Islamic countries like Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Senegal. This presence was due to an increased immigration that carried with it many spiritual and cultural issues that attracted attention.

Nature of the Islamic Presence in Italy

Stephano Aliyefi, et al. conducted the first field study in Italy in 1993 aiming to understand the increased Islamic presence. This was followed by other studies which tackled various issues in the Islamic faith by scholars including Silvio Ferrari and Francisco Castro. These were research studies which had no political objectives.

One can summarize these studies by the following: Islam which came to presence in Italy through immigration has various characteristics that make it different from that in other European countries. This is due to the many racial origins of Muslims in Italy and their struggle to make a living in the country. The Islamic presence has been concentrated in the northeastern regions of the country where factories and firms that need foreign labor are more abundant, as well as in some southern regions where seasonal farm work is available, such as the tomato harvest season.

According to the latest statistics, the number of Muslims in Italy, the majority of whom are Arab, is 1.5 million people. In the country, Albanians form the majority, followed by Moroccans, Egyptians, Tunisians, Senegalis and Pakistanis. Economic factors were not the only reason behind Muslim immigration to Italy. Other factors were globalization, market movement, permanent labor, political crises, regional wars in places like Kurdistan and the Balkans, together with prevailing circumstances in Eastern Europe and Africa. As one immigration expert said: 'This should prompt officials to differentiate between refugees and job-seeking immigrants.' Italy differs from Germany where a Turkish presence

prevails, and differs from France, where North Africans form the majority; in the UK an Asian presence is prevalent. In Italy, the Albanians and Moroccans alone form the Islamic majority. The reason behind this is that Italy did not maintain good relations with its former colonies like Libya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea because Italian imperialism depended on indirect rule, which had less impact on colonized people who were able to get rid of Italy's influence much easier than in Algeria, India or Pakistan.

The geographic position of Italy makes it a bridge of paramount importance between the East and the West, at the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkan region, while facing the Arab African region. Pressure, therefore, comes to Italy from two directions — the east and the south. It is also important to point out that Muslims in Italy are multiracial, which renders their problems different in nature. In France, for instance, authorities considered the issue of Muslim women wearing veils a serious problem. In Italy, on the other hand, this particular issue was not even discussed. The main issue in Italy was the exaggerated propaganda by the press on the 'danger' of Islam to Italian Christian society. This transpired in the campaign led by the Northern League, the Cardinal Bivi, and the National Alliance Party for two years before the elections of 2001, when the center-right, including the Neo-Fascists, came back to power. The greatest danger to them was the building of mosques in Italy and the arguments raged about the role of the mosque in Muslim life, considering the mosque a center of political or radical action.

According to official Italian statistics, the largest mosque in Italy is the Mosque of Rome, at the heart of the cultural center, and was built by the Islamic community under Saudi supervision and support. There are mosques in Venice and Milan, where the mosque at Lodi gave rise to political turmoil in the country. The mosque represents an important strategic value, being a visual expression of the Islamic presence. The mosque also expresses legal and cultural equality with Christianity and Judaism.

In Italy, as in other places in Europe, the construction of mosques caused a series of nervous reactions. This is due to possible contentions among different factions. The most sensitive questions are, 'Who is allowed to be in charge of the mosque?' and, 'Who is supposed to perform spiritual duties?' Until now, there is no answer to these two questions.

In the past few years in Europe, especially after September 11, a few suggestions were presented regarding training sheikhs and imams who work at the mosques in Europe, as well as the staff of the Islamic centers there, in accordance with the laws in Europe. The philosopher Muhammad Arakon proposed a comprehensive project to establish an 'Islamic Sharia School' in Strasbourg, the city where the European Parliament exists. All international Islamic organizations, however, rejected the project completely.

In the second Italian report on 'Organizing Immigration Affairs', the following text is found: 'The mosque may become a hub for causing tension because it is a place attended by various Islamic organizations, and it is a place where the faithful on earth are watched. In the last years, the cultural and political initiatives and demonstrations that took place in the mosques were equal to the number of Islamic organizations that were behind them. Some of these organizations were initiated on racial bases, like the Somali Muslims or the Senegali Mureediyya group. Other organizations were set up on radical bases, while others were branches, like that of Rabitet Al-Aalam Al-Islami (Islamic World Association). Others were formed by those who had converted to Islam from different religions.'

Major Islamic Associations

► The Islamic Cultural Center in Rome

This is the oldest center in Italy and the only one recognized by the Italian state per a decree issued by the president of the republic on December 21, 1974, qualifying the center as a corporate body which is based on special rights. It is diplomatically represented with the Italian state and the Vatican.

The Islamic Cultural Center represents numerous nationalities. It is connected to the foreign presence in Italy and some of the represented countries have noticeable political presences. In spite of this, it must be said that the center itself took the initiative to form the Islamic Council in Italy for the purpose of coordinating all Islamic trends that are present in Italy and avoiding all differences among Muslims with the intent of bringing them together. However, it is still unable to realize its objectives in a practical way. (This is noted in the second Italian report, 'Organizing Immigration Affairs')

► Union of Islamic Communities

This is the largest Islamic organization led by Muslim activists; many of them are Palestinians and Syrians who are aligned with moderate Islamic movements in the Arab world and some are supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. This union is still the target of hostile campaigns that accuse it of radicalism and hostility to the West and Israel. However, the union was steadfast and, by virtue of its strong popular support, was able to bring some of its leaders to the Consulting Committee for Muslim Affairs which was formed in 2005 by the Italian ministry of interior.

► Association of Italian Muslims

This association depends mainly on the principle of a close relationship between religion and citizenship. It mainly represents Italians who converted to Islam. Italian citizenship to them is the actual criterion for expressing their identity and the warranty for Islam that is in line with the constitutional basis of the Italian state. The association believes that the rest of the Islamic organizations and associations are unable to represent Islam in Italy because they do not recognize the criterion of citizenship and because of their radical and extremist ideas, or because they are linked to some Islamic countries.

► The Islamic Religious Group (Coreis)

The majority of this group are Italians and Europeans who embraced Islam on the grounds of the teachings of the French philosopher, René Guenon, who adopted Islam and died in 1951 in Egypt, leaving behind a closed, traditional and conservative school of thought. This group has no interest except in adhering to the traditions. It is not involved in the problems of immigration or pertinent social problems, nor does it care about the differences with Christianity.

The question of Islamic authority and representation in Italy and most of Europe is still in question for many reasons. Unlike the Catholic Church, Islam does not have a hierarchal system, especially in the Sunni majority. The presence of an authority makes a clear basis for a relationship between the religious community and the state. That is why the different Islamic associations contend over leadership and authority, or on the right of representing the majority of Muslims.

In the negotiations on signing an agreement among the Italian Muslims (similar to that of the Jews), the Islamic circles presented three drafts that had the following demands:

1. Allotment of land plots for building mosques or worship centers
2. Allotment of land plots for Islamic cemeteries
3. Recognition of the Halal slaying mode
4. Availing meals with Halal meat at schools and in the dining rooms at work centers
5. Allowing Muslim women to have their pictures taken with their head covers on for the purpose of identity cards, etc., on condition that the face is not veiled
6. Modifying work hours during the month of Ramadan

7. Respecting the five prayers times
8. Recognizing the right of Muslims for religious feasts
9. Offering necessary religious assistance at hospitals and prisons by Muslim sheikhs
10. Granting the Islamic community the right to appoint imams for mosques
11. Recognizing civic rights consequent to the Islamic marriage contract
12. Teaching the Islamic religion to Muslim pupils in schools
13. Approving Islamic schools, the way Jewish and Catholic schools are authorized

Regarding these demands, the second official report had the following remarks: 'Some of these demands are new and ensuing from the Islamic presence in Italy, as a non-Islamic country, like allowing Islamic sheikhs to assist patients and prisoners. No agreement has been reached on making Friday a holiday, because the Muslim parties did not have a unified opinion on the issue. Algeria, for example, decided on Friday as a weekend only in 1978, while Morocco still has it as a working day.'

The most sensitive request is the question of civic rights consequent to the Islamic marriage contract, for this reveals the conflict between Italian civic jurisprudence and Islamic marriage law. Marriage in Islam is a contract and Islamic countries themselves have many differences in their prevailing marriage laws.

There is a more sensitive question related to the imams and employees of Islamic centers and mosques: Where do they receive their training? How is it possible to separate whatever ideology the Islamic sheikhs have absorbed at the schools where they were educated from the centers that would train them to perform their duties here? This problem may not be solved except in the following two ways: founding a European Islamic jurisprudence college, or signing a partnership agreement between Italian institutes and Islamic jurisprudence colleges where Islamic sheikhs have been educated.

The growth of independent Islam in Italy, according to the legal expert, Silvio Ferrari, may be delayed because of disagreements among the various Islamic associations and the weaknesses of authority and representation. To escape this crisis, as Ferrari believes, it is important to find a solution to the question of authority and representation and to unify the demands in the Act on Religious Freedoms which has recently been ratified in Italy.

Among the foreigners in Italy, Arabs are the largest community, followed by the Somalis who had later joined the Arab League, then the Iranians and the Greeks, together with a few thousand Latin Americans.

The first association of Arab students was founded in the city of Perugia in 1967, a few months before the June 1967 War. It was initiated by a few Syrian, Jordanian and Palestinian students, most of whom belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, whose leadership was in Switzerland. After the war, thousands of Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian and Libyan students poured into Italy in great numbers until 1969, with the highest number of Italian scholarships granted to students during that period. The Arab and Islamic population map in Italy started to change. The Palestinian organizations emerged, but met fierce opposition from three political organizations, namely, the Iraqi Ba'th Party, the strongest and led by Qassem Salam, who is presently in Yemen; the Syrian Ba'th, led by Muhsen Bilal, who was close to the late President Hafez Al-Asad and presently holds the post of minister of information, and the Muslim Brotherhood, whose authority was in Switzerland and later ceased all activity.

Chapter Three

The Palestinian Community in Italy: Past and Present

History of Palestinian Immigration

Every time we use the word 'Muslim' in Italy, we must understand that its synonym for all practical purposes is 'Arab'. When 'Arab' is said, it must be realized that the Palestinians, together with the Libyans and the Somalis, were the first who started political and social activity in Italy, this large and rich country, with its historically multicultural civilization.

The Palestinian presence started immediately after WWII when the then-burgeoning Italian Republic, in spite of the grievances of war, granted a few scholarships to students coming from Jordan to study at Italian universities in the regions of Toscana and Lazio. Part of this first group were Palestinian students and a number of them became intellectuals, ambassadors and high-ranking officials.

Ever since that time, the Palestinian presence in Italy was characterized by Palestinians who came to Italy for one purpose only: university education. After the first group was granted scholarships in the 1950s, another group arrived. Some came from refugee camps in Syria, others from Lebanon and a very small number from Jordan or the West Bank. All came to two cities, namely Perugia and Siena, where chances for university admission were better than elsewhere.

Learning Italian was available there. In addition to students, some Catholic Palestinians came to the Vatican to be qualified for service in the Palestinian Catholic churches when they returned home.

Palestinians of 1948 used to follow admission rules granted to Israel. Some of them arrived in the 1960s at the city of Siena in the region of Toscana and the city of Bologna in the region of Emilia-Romagna. They all came from the villages of the Triangle (Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem).

One can say that the two groups which came right after WWII paved the way for three major waves of immigration. The first occurred between 1967 and 1969, the second between 1970 and 1978, and the third after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, from 1982 until 1985. Then the number of incoming Palestinians dwindled and the student characterization changed.

During these stages, many Palestinians came from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Gulf countries, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There were also Palestinians from Iraq, Libya and some East European countries, like Romania and East Germany during the Cold War period. The major sources, however, were Jordan and Palestine. Before 1967, Palestinian activities took place through Arab political gatherings, like the Nasserite movement that did not have organizational cadres. They were simply expressions of admiration of Jamal Abdul Nasser. In fact, most Arabs were supporters of the Nasserite movement, while some of them in Italy were members of the Syrian and Iraqi factions of Al-Ba'th Party. After the defeat in June of 1967, things changed in the Arab circles in Italy, including Palestinians, some of whom became active in the Palestinian organizations, like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), of the nationalist trend; others preferred the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), being Marxist-Leninist. The latter also attracted those Arabs who supported the Italian Communist Party and some extremist Marxist political associations at that time.

As outlined earlier, after the 1967 War, the major Palestinian and Arab gathering was the city of Perugia in the Umbria region in central Italy. This city, which has the oldest university for teaching Italian language to foreigners, became the 'foreigners' university', the metropolis for receiving Arabs and the center for Palestinian and Arab political activities, including Al-Ba'th Party activities and the Nasserite gathering under Libyan sponsorship after the September coup d'état there.

Arab expatriates in Italy, all of whom were students, carried with them all the political, cultural and social contradictions of the Arab world. The question of adaptation, not to say assimilation, in a country whose people do not know foreign languages and strongly adhere to their Italian language became everybody's major problem, especially the Palestinians.

Until 1967, Palestinians had no real organization. However, the feeling of Arab brotherhood prompted some senior Arab students to obtain permission from the Communist Party in Perugia to provide classroom space for them to teach Arab students the Italian language. Dr. Fakhri Al-Asadi, a Palestinian from Syria, is to be commended, with some of his Syrian friends, for this activity.

The Arab Students Association was active until 1969, when the first wave of Palestinian students became strongly rooted. Most enrolled at the universities between 1968 and 1969. After the appearance of Fatah, a number of Palestinian students joined efforts to form a branch for the General Union of Palestinian Students, which became active at the end of 1968. In 1969, it was officially recognized around Italy. Members of Fatah, the Iraqi and Syrian factions of the Ba'th party, PFLP, DFLP and other students who qualified themselves as Nasserites, were the first building blocks of the union. The Muslim Brotherhood remained part of the Arab Student Association which, from the time of its foundation, had a cooperative relationship with the Italian Fascist Party, called the Italian Social Movement. The students who came to Perugia after 1967 stayed away from the Muslim Brotherhood.

With everybody's support, the Italian branch of the General Union of Palestinian Students expanded quickly, with Fatah taking the lead. From the time it was founded, the union took up many tasks, including the following:

1. Assisting incoming students from the moment of their arrival at the train station until finding accommodation for them, considered a national duty in support of the Palestinian cause
2. Organizing 45-day courses for learning Italian
3. Assisting students with necessary registration procedures at the universities
4. Providing Palestinian and Arab students with useful instructions on local traditions and the prevailing laws and norms to help them adapt to the Italian society. They also instructed newcomers on how to behave towards families who leased rooms to them, together with daily instructions on studying at colleges.
5. This assistance in the adaptation process later gave rise to intensive discussions within the political organizations about social habits and behavior in case of marriage. It was valuable because a few Palestinian and Arab students married foreign or Italian women between 1963 and 1968.

One may say that this adaptation process itself formed, in later years, the nucleus of the Palestinian community in Italy. Change, however, occurred in the

period of 1970 to 1974, when Jordanian events (Black September) took place, followed by the October war. After that, the geographic distribution of the Palestinians changed and Perugia lost its place as a gathering center. During this time and until 1980, the number of newcomers decreased as a result of changes in the admission requirements at universities and the start of granting scholarships to Palestinian students by the Italian embassies in Damascus and Beirut. In 1985, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the influx of Palestinian students practically stopped.

Palestinians were mainly distributed among the northern and central regions: Emilia-Romagna (Bologna), Lombardia (Milan), Veneto (Padova), Liguria (Genoa) and Lazio (Rome). The latter became an attractive place for those who would practice their professions after graduation. Some other Palestinian groups gathered in the southern regions, particularly Campania (Naples), Sicily (Palermo) and Sardinia (Cagliari). A smaller group resided throughout the rest of the regions, like Toscana (Florence), Umbria (Perugia), Marche, Abruzzo, Puglia (Bari) and Calabria (Reggio Calabria). Some of them, on an individual basis, went to the remote northern regions at Friuli, Alto Adige (Trentino), Piemonte (Torino) and Valle d'Aosta (Aosta).

With this scattered geographic distribution, the General Union of Palestinian Students was widely stretched. To cope with the situation, small units for the Union were founded in various cities of the 20 geographic Italian regions, which was considered a pioneering experiment of the Italian branch of the union. These units, based on democratically free elections, enjoyed independence in their activities and internal decisions. This opened the way for hundreds of political initiatives that served the central cause, polished the experience of the Palestinian young men and women and raised the level of the popular struggle. A great influence on Italian public opinion was clearly noticed and the majority of Italians strongly believed in the justice of the Palestinian cause.

Palestinian and Arab Organizations

The following Palestinian organizations were represented in the units of the student union's branch as well as in some Arab political powers:

- ▶ Palestinian National Liberation Movement – Fatah (the largest organization)
- ▶ Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
- ▶ Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
- ▶ Arab Socialist Ba'th Party (Iraqi faction)
- ▶ Arab Socialist Ba'th Party (Syrian faction)

► Arab Nasserite Organization

The other minor Palestinian organizations were not represented as they had no members in Italy. The Palestinian students, who came from the occupied Palestinian territories in 1948, were not accepted as members of the union or as obvious activists in the Palestinian quest, lest they might be subject to persecution by the Israelis. Students coming from the West Bank or Gaza, though small in number, had special enrollment procedures for membership in the union, especially those who occasionally went back home. Palestinian Christians studying at the Vatican were involved through social and personal links. Fatah used to publish a periodical named Thawratuna (Our Revolution) through the Union, expressing Palestinian interests and following their problems within available means.

The Union of Palestinian Doctors and Pharmacists represents one of the active Palestinian organizations in Italy. It was established more than 15 years ago, and has more than 120 members, distributed in all Italian cities and provinces. The Union of Palestinian Engineers was established more than 12 years ago and the membership exceeds 100 engineers, in various specialties.

Italian Political Powers

The union and its units, together with the organizations, formed the base of the Palestinian community. Intense political activities with Italian political powers commenced in 1968 in the following way:

► Left-Wing Parliamentary Parties

The names may be of some parties which disappeared or were amalgamated with other parties in the first Republic (until 1992-1993):

1. **Proletarian Unity Party:** this is the first left-wing party that had actual cooperation and understanding with the Palestinian revolution.
2. **Italian Communist Party:** the largest communist party in the capitalist world.
3. **Italian Socialist Party:** the oldest of the left-wing parties in Italy and Western Europe, from which the Communist and the Proletarian parties were born. The Socialist Party started its relations with the Zionist movement and the Palestinian problem as early as 1892. It is the party of a great friend of Palestine, the late Bettino Craxi. This man was the secretary general of the party and the first Socialist prime minister of Italy and died in exile in Tunisia

after a bribery scandal which was detrimental to the parties of the first republic in 1992.

► **Left-Wing Non-Parliamentary Parties**

These were small groups, the most important of which was Karl Marx Club in Perugia that used to have elements from the German Communist Party in its membership. Others were the Continued Struggle group, the Workers Power group, the Socialist Labor Party as well as a number of Marxist, Trotskyist and Maoist groups. Dealings with these groups were conducted with great care and special instructions from the Fatah leadership for fear of antagonistic penetrators, especially of the left-wing extremist Red Brigades,.

Two major groups had very close relationships with the Palestinians. Through them, the Palestinians were able to build a solidarity movement throughout the country, especially at universities and in the circles of manufacturing laborers. This activity played an effective role in neutralizing the Israeli influence on public opinion. The first group was the Student Movement Organization under the leadership of Mario Capanna, who was a charismatic student leader and became a well-known philosopher. The second was Il Manifesto newspaper group that seceded from the Communist Party and the Proletarian Unity Party which was liquidated in the 1980s.

► **Italian Centrist Parties**

1. **The Christian Democratic Party:** The party ruled Italy for more than half a century. Among its members were a group of its historical leaders, like Amintore Fanfani, Aldo Moro, Cardia, Frankanzani, to whom the European recognition of the Palestinian cause is attributed, and Giulio Andreotti, who is today a lifetime senator for the services he has given his country. All showed compassion towards the Palestinian struggle and Arab issues in general.

2. **The Socialist Democratic Party:** The Palestinians did not have a relationship with this party except in the early 1980s and at the level of the PLO Executive Committee. This was because of its bias towards Israel from the time of President Giuseppe Saragat.

3. **The Italian Republican Party:** This was — and still is — the most hostile party to the Palestinians and the Arabs in general. The most hostile journalists to the cause belong to this party, whose

thoughts, which can be described as extremely Zionist, form a school of hostility to the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims. They propagate Islamophobia, as the new fashion of the 21st century. One of its leaders was Giovanni Spadolini (1979-1987), a journalist who became minister of culture (1974-1976), prime minister (1981-1982) and president of the senate (1987-1994). He visited Israel and insisted on landing his official plane at Qalandia Airport in East Jerusalem in a campaign to promote Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Needless to say, there was no relationship between this party and the Palestinians.

4. **The Italian Liberal Party:** Like the Republican Party, the Palestinians had no relations with this party.

► **Right-Wing Parliamentary Parties**

The Italian Social Movement Party: This is the official Fascist Party in parliament, the name of which today is the National Alliance, led by Gianfranco Fini, an ex-foreign minister. It was founded by one of the officers of the Salo Fascist Republic by the name of Giorgio Almirante. He was an outspoken orator who used to excite the masses with his inflammatory speeches. When he died, Gianfranco Fini took over leadership in the mid-1980s. While the rank-and-file of the party were against Israel and the Jews — the way Mussolini was — its leadership was hostile to Arabs and the Palestinian cause. This kind of hostility towards both Arabs and Jews stems from a racial stance of looking down at both groups.

With clear-cut instructions from the leaderships of all Palestinian organizations, there was no relationship between the Palestinians and this party. Some activists from this party used to stand in front of student restaurants in Perugia and incite new Arab students against Jews, calling for the necessity of getting rid of them. They used to chant phrases that new Arab and Palestinian students would understand, showing their 'passions' toward Arabs and Muslims. However, the action groups from the General Union of Palestinian Students used to stand up to these instigators and explain to the new Arab students why they should not listen to them. Then they would call Arab students who spoke Italian fluently to conduct open discussions with these groups in front of Italian students.

The various Palestinian organizations used to believe that hidden behind these Fascists were Zionists with the intention of tarnishing the Palestinian cause in front of the Italian people, the majority of whom were leftists. The first assault against the Palestinians and

Arabs by this party's youth organization took place in 1969. However, in a proof of Arab unity, hundreds of Arabs from all over Italy marched in the streets of Perugia after threats from the Fascists to expel Arabs and Palestinians and smash their heads if they walked in the streets after a defined hour of the day. These threats were written on city walls. On that day, leftist Iranian students were on the side of the Arabs and Palestinians. The event ended peacefully except for some attempted assaults the next day which were thwarted.

► **Right-Wing Non-Parliamentary Parties**

These are mostly extremist associations and organizations that adopt folkloric names. Some of them quickly ended in the lines of the terrorist right-wing organizations that were outlawed because of their responsibility for many crimes in the country.

► **The Radical Party**

There are small invisible parties that cannot be categorized with the left, the right or the center. They would sometimes call themselves revolutionary and universal at other times. An example of this is the Italian Radical Party which has fought in defense of human and civic rights that included the laws of divorce and abortion, assistance to hunger-stricken people, especially in Africa, non-violence, peaceful struggle, the laws of merciful death, etc.

This party supports all freedoms, no matter where they are on the planet, and calls for saving lives (even of the most savage dictators) and rescuing animals. Still, it did not support Palestinian rights. Since 1982, on any occasion for the support of the Palestinian cause, this party has adopted a hostile attitude and its members fly the Israeli flag. No relationship has developed between the Palestinians and this party. After *Al-Aqsa Intifida*, all members of the Palestinian community were instructed to boycott this party's radio station which, for the past 15 years, has been organizing a continued campaign against the Palestinian cause, trying to tarnish the Palestinian people's struggle and status. In the name of freedom and democracy, this broadcast station is open to all malicious extremists against Arabs and Islam.

As mentioned above, all Italian parties have changed in name and form and essence, except this Radical Party that oscillates, according to conditions, between the left, the right and the center. Its foremost objective is the service of Israel.

The Palestinian Political and Media Activity

The Palestinian community was characterized by its aforementioned cadres and represented by its organizations which have widespread informational activities and well-thought out plans. Community members were active in political panel discussions, mass demonstrations, exhibitions of photography, issuing political leaflets in Italian, holding study workshops on the Palestinian cause in cooperation with Italian parties, forwarding letters to the press, etc. With the purpose of influencing what is reported on the cause, they were keen on having strong relations with the information media, and they regularly participated in annual festivals of the journals of left-wing parties, particularly L'Unita, a paper that was founded by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. They also had good connections in such realms as cinema, the arts and literature, far from any personal interests.

Thanks to participating in the festivals of L'Unita, the Palestinians refined their experience, and some Palestinian leaders had a good presence such as the martyr Majed Abu-Sharar. In 1970, they were able to round up a few thousand Italian young people at a grand demonstration in the city of Bologna. During the October 1973 war, hundreds of festivals were held during the siege on Tell Az-Za'tar refugee camp in Lebanon, together with a crowd of about 40,000. In 1982, a crowd of 80,000 demonstrators, tying the Palestinian *kufiyya* around their necks, took to the streets in Rome, shouting in support of the PLO and condemning the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut. The Palestinian *kufiyya* became a symbol for Italian young people, to the extent that La Repubblica, a widely distributed newspaper, considered the absence of this *kufiyya* an indication of change in Italy and the world. This was observed among great crowds of the young members of the Democratic Party who were listening to the speech of party leader Walter Veltroni, at the founding conference in October 2007. Unfortunately, the paper was right in pinpointing the low level of support for the Palestinian cause on the part of the Italian left for the past 40 years.

The festivals held by L'Unita and Avanti newspapers, as well as the left-wing media and cultural festivals, acted as training schools for political action and mass communication. At certain stages in the past, the Communist Party, during the preparations for its annual festival, used to call the Palestinian community, later the PLO office, for official meetings to discuss the details of installing a Palestinian booth at the central festival which would last for over a month. The same was done at branch festivals. This participation was a great chance for direct communication with thousands of people who formed Italian public opinion. Those who used to visit these booths were not necessarily leftists; most of them were ordinary citizens whose opinions would be expressed only in ballots.

Refining the Experience and Integrating with Society

Media and political activities enriched the experience of Palestinians in all their political affiliations. Many of them, far from their professional specialties, like pharmacists, physicians and engineers, were able to participate in the activities of Italian parties and syndicates, especially after 1982. Thus, the seeds of participation of community members in the activities of the left-wing Italian parties were sown and organizations that, otherwise, were on their way to fall apart after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, began a new journey. This period was characterized by extemporaneous actions on the part of all Palestinian organizations that were unable to hold one single congress. By all standards, it was the worst blow the Palestinian struggle had experienced since its inception in the 1960s.

► Decisive Events Marking Crossroads

There are three decisive political events and two social ones that have marked clear crossroads in the life and structure of the Palestinian community. Politically, the following may be said:

1. The most important political event is the commencement of Palestinian diplomatic activity and the appointment of a PLO representative to the Arab League, followed by the inauguration of a full-fledged office for the PLO.
2. The second was the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, with all its consequences in the Palestinian arena, and the forced movement of the revolution to distant places, far from the line of contact with the occupied homeland.
3. The third was the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 in the wake of the first *Intifada*, together with major events in the region, particularly the continued resistance in Lebanon, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its consequences, and the Madrid conference which was followed by the Oslo Accords.

Socially, the following events are worthy of mention:

1. The first event was the great influx of Arab immigrants looking for work after President Sadat's open policy following the Camp David Accords. This included thousands of Egyptians of various social categories, but the majority were poor and of low educational levels. Then came the immigration waves of Moroccans as a result of the admission of Spain and Portugal to the European Common Market, which had a detrimental effect on citrus farming in Morocco, decreasing the size of its export and leaving thousands of Moroccan families without enough income. In the mid-1980s, young Moroccans were forced to flow in great numbers to Italy, taking advantage of its lack of immigration regulatory laws. Tunisians, especially

in Sicily and the southern Italian cities, where they had settled with their families and mostly worked in the fishing industry, preceded both the Moroccans and Egyptians. Finally, temporary waves of immigrants came from Algeria after the elections of the early 1990s. These temporary waves used to remain in the country for a short time, then either moved on to the rest of Europe or returned home.

2. The second event occurred when the majority of Palestinian graduates started to work in the central and northern regions of the country, where one could see hundreds of physicians at public and private hospitals. Many of them married Italian women and had children, while those who graduated from universities in southern Italy preferred to work in Arab countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the Emirates and Jordan. Others, whether married or single, went back to Palestine or Lebanon to join the revolution. Some engineering graduates went back to Tunisia or Algeria, or immigrated to North or South America.

3. The political events were shattering to all Palestinians, whether at home or in the Diaspora. They were difficult even for those who were careless about the cause and kept away, and then, at a later stage, remembered that they were Palestinians. In short, it had a great and deep effect on all Palestinians wherever they were, and changed their behavior and mode of life.

Later, we shall elaborate on the first political event, leaving the second and the third, because every Palestinian is still experiencing them.

The social events, especially the first, naturally changed the character of the Arab presence in Italy, for there was no communication between the settled communities and the new immigrants. The Palestinians in Italy were no more in the front lines of Arab activities that were conducted under the banner of serving the Palestinian cause, in cooperation with Arab communities that were formed under similar conditions, like the Libyan, Jordanian, Syrian, Somali and, at a very late stage, the Lebanese communities. There was a dividing wall between the old communities and the local Italian element, on the one hand, and the new Arab gatherings on the other. The conditions of these gatherings were not capable of forming a community. This is because they lacked the elements of settlement, work, income, organization into unions and political affiliations, etc. Residence permits and work licenses were the most vital assets for every immigrant looking for a job. The new immigrant had no time to spare except to find a job. As a newcomer to a different world, he was overburdened with tensions and worries. He worried about the future and, as long as his fate was determined by having a passport and a certificate of good conduct, he was fearful of approaching such taboos as affiliation to an organization, even if it were a card-playing club that may be construed by security forces, locally or back home, as dangerous.

After a few years, the presence of these immigrants negatively affected the old and settled communities, like the Palestinian community, in the form of lost opportunities that otherwise were easily available in the past. It is true that, similar to other communities, the Palestinian community had many benefits in Italy, like free education for the older and the younger generations, work, health services, social security and naturalization. To be a Palestinian, though, one will suffer, especially since Palestine is officially considered Israel. However, the municipalities, for certain political considerations, started paying close attention to the new immigrants. There were also certain problems that the Arab and Islamic communities recently encountered in forming societies or associations. In the past, a group of persons was permitted to form cultural societies simply by registering their request at any legal office. After that, applying for assistance in the regions or municipalities would entitle them to receiving financial assistance for their societies that, somehow, would soon afterwards vanish. This negatively reflected on those even having Italian nationality, if they carried Arab names.

As the general impression of Italian society toward Arabs and Muslims changed, their image left on public opinion is one of ignorance and low standards. Unfortunately, some of the new immigrants committed unlawful actions, such as distributing narcotics, committing thefts, counterfeiting documents like residence permits, etc. All these acts led to the bad image mentioned above and to arousing feelings of enmity towards foreigners in general, and towards Arabs and Muslims, in particular. Still, it can be said that even after the events of September 11, this negative image has not reached the level of racial discrimination. Indeed, Italy remains a country of freedom, culture, democracy and a real bridge between the Arab Orient and the European Occident.

Persistent Problems that Need to be Overcome

Wael Zua'iyter was one of the founders of the Palestinian community in Italy and a man of Arab action who united his personal efforts with those of various Palestinian organizations and the Arab student unions. He had significant presence and an effective cultural involvement in the best Italian magazines and newspapers, and accompanied the world-famous writer Alberto Moravia on his famous trip to Kuwait and other Arab countries. He also assisted him in translation when Moravia wrote his well-known book on 'The Arabian Nights'. He was a good adviser to Palestinian students, participating in their activities and assisting them in establishing good relations with the Italian parties. He also communicated with their leaderships in Perugia in a humble way that shows the candid character of a superb thinker and solid struggler, until Golda Meir ordered his assassination in the wake of the Munich operation (September 1972). Wael Zua'iyter was the first of a series of martyrs who were assassinated in Italy.

The political drive in the Italian arena witnessed the assassination of Majed Abu Sharar in 1980 at the Flora Hotel, the assassination of Kamal Yusuf, the secretary of Fatah's Italian region, deputy director of PLO Office and his friend,

Dr. Nazih Mattar. Dr. Matar was a 1948 Palestinian, and was assassinated in June 1982, one day before his graduation from the School of Medicine. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon left the Palestinian arena in a state of disunity and confusion until the first *Intifada* in 1987, which revitalized Palestinian action in Italy. This new action took two paths. One was the Palestinian Cultural Society that was founded by the late Waleed Ghazal, a member of Fatah's organizational leadership and the man in charge of the information section at the PLO office. The other was through other cultural societies in Milan, Padova, Palermo, Catania, Naples, Modena, Bologna, etc., which formed the present Palestinian community.

Nimer Hammad took over the role of PLO representative in Rome after the death of Wael Zua'ter, for a period of 31 years, except for 3 years that he spent outside Italy. Relationships between the embassy and the community underwent highs and lows and different assessments were made of the times and different aspects of the relationship. In 2005, this responsibility was taken over by Sabri Attiyeh.

As the communities and the PLO office worked independently of each other, old problems stemming from the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords persisted, but new problems in important fields rose. The problems had one denominator: the PLO representative's interference in the affairs of the communities and their elections.

The Present Situation and Horizons of Hope

The Palestinian community in Italy suffers from difficult, perhaps tragic conditions. The aches and troubles of the community are similar to those encountered in other European countries, or countries in the Diaspora. Some of the reasons are intrinsic to the internal structure and traditions of the community, while others are related to the country of residence and government policies. Efforts were expended to unite the communities along common objectives in service of the community and the Palestinian quest. The most difficult problem the community faces now is expressing its presence and representation, not to mention the chronic financial crisis, to the extent that some communities in Italy have no funds at all, which cripples their activity.

The left-wing parties already changed their attitudes and kept away from the Palestinian cause and, therefore, from the Palestinian community. This is to say nothing about the complete media blackout against the cause and the community.

Still, with all said, reviving the conditions of the Palestinian community is far from being desperate. This, however, needs a realistic evaluation of the state of affairs as they are, coupled with absolute courage in dealing with them. Honesty and transparency in movement and action are vital, as well as adhering to absolute

democracy in choosing community leaders without interference from the Palestinian factions or the embassy. The community members should have the freedom to decide on their internal affairs, their path of action and their relationships.

Summary

For the past 20 years, Italy has been in fifth and sixth place among the eight industrial nations. In spite of Italy's great internal debts, it remains a country of hidden economy, depending on small- and middle-sized industries, which is a unique economic system that has shown marvelous efficiency in the last century. This is because Italy is a country without natural resources, depending on conversion industries, together with other services, like tourism, fashion, agriculture, commerce, etc. These industries yields considerable income to the gross national product. The success of all Italian governments is measured by the extent of execution of promised economic plans. The moderate economic condition of the individual is excellent. Eighty per cent of Italians own their residences, whereas only 20 per cent of them live in rented premises.

Italy is the fourth most popular tourist country in the world, visited by 39.6 million tourists annually; the tourism industry alone turned over \$31.3 billion in 2003. Economic growth in 2004, according to European criteria, was about 0.5 per cent, while the deficit, according to Maastricht, was 4 per cent in 2005, which is quite high. By the end of 2008, it is expected to be 2.4 per cent.

The Islamic center, a nucleus of the Palestinian community which had settled in Rome for study or work, provided valuable assistance, like teaching Arabic. The individuals of this nucleus were not linked to any Islamic parties, but were themselves faithful and committed to the national Palestinian action without being members of any of the Palestinian factions. This stance later gave them the reputation of being independent and enabled them to be active in the period of Islamic-Christian dialogue and in constructive discussions about cooperation between civilizations. They also won the respect of religious Italian circles.

Among the foreigners in Italy, Muslims were the majority. However, this Islamic presence did not have a defined identity or a clear organizational or institutional form. The Iranians, in a strict Islamic definition, were the greatest in number.

We can confirm that the phenomenon of the Islamic presence in Italy is not separable from the same phenomenon in Europe. Historically, the Islamic presence in Italy goes back to the 11th century when an Islamic emirate was founded in Sicily and continued there for 350 years. In 1939, in his book, 'Storia dei Musulmani in Sicilia', the Italian scholar Michele Amari wrote about it saying that Sicily was part of Dar Al-Islam. Muslims there were not only expatriates, but also Sicilians, which made distinction difficult, especially that the Emirate of Sicily lasted for over three-and-a-half centuries.

Practically, the Islamic presence in Italy started to take shape in the early 1980s, following the influx of a great number of immigrants from various Arab and Islamic countries, like Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Senegal. This presence, therefore, was due to an increased immigration that carried with it many spiritual and cultural issues that attracted attention.

According to the latest statistics, the number of Muslims in Italy, the majority of whom are Arab, reaches 1.5 million people. In the country, Albanians form a majority, followed by Moroccans, Egyptians, Tunisians, Senegalis and Pakistanis. Economic factors were not the only reason behind Muslim immigration to Italy; other factors were globalization, market movement, permanent labor, political crises, regional wars in places like Kurdistan and the Balkans, together with the prevailing circumstances in Eastern Europe and Africa.

The Palestinian presence started immediately after WWII when the then-burgeoning Italian republic, in spite of the trauma of war, granted a few scholarships to students coming from Jordan to study at Italian universities in the regions of Toscana and Lazio. Part of this first group were some Palestinian students and a number of them became intellectuals, ambassadors and high-ranking officials.

Ever since then, the Palestinian presence in Italy was characterized by Palestinians who came to Italy for one purpose only: university education. After the first group were granted scholarships in the 1950s, another group arrived. Some came from refugee camps in Syria, others from Lebanon and a very small number from Jordan or the West Bank. All came to two cities, Perugia and Siena, where chances for university admission were better than elsewhere. The opportunity to learn Italian was there. In addition to students, some Catholic Palestinians came to the Vatican to be qualified for service in the Palestinian Catholic churches when they returned home.

Three major waves of Palestinian immigration may be identified. The first started between 1967 and 1969; the second between 1970 and 1978; and the third after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon between 1982 and 1985. The number of incoming Palestinians then dwindled and the student characterization changed.

During these stages, many Palestinians came from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Gulf countries, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There were also Palestinians from Iraq, Libya and some East European countries, like Romania and East Germany during the Cold War period. The major sources, however, were Jordan and Palestine. Before 1967, Palestinian activities took place through Arab political gatherings.

After the 1967 War, the major Palestinian and Arab gathering point was in the city of Perugia of the Umbria Region in central Italy. This city, that has the oldest university for teaching Italian to foreigners, became the 'foreigners' university', the metropolis for receiving Arabs and the center for Palestinian and Arab political activities.

Arab expatriates in Italy, all of whom were students, carried with them all the political, cultural and social contradictions of the Arab World. The question of adaptation, not to say assimilation, in a country whose people do not know foreign languages and strongly adhere to their Italian language became everybody's major problem, especially the Palestinians.

As the general impression of Italian society towards Arabs and Muslims has changed, the impression left on public opinion is based on ignorance. Sadly, the new immigrants are committing unlawful acts, such as distributing narcotics, committing thefts, counterfeiting documents like residence permits, etc. All this had led to the negative image described above and to arousing feelings of enmity towards foreigners, in general, and Arabs and Muslims in particular. Still, we can say that even after the events of September 11, this negative image has not reached the level of racial discrimination. Indeed, Italy remains a country of freedom, culture, democracy and a real bridge between the Arab Orient and the European Occident.