

Country Visit: Italy

Report of the Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Issues Rabbi Andrew Baker, Dr. Massimo Introvigne and Ambassador Adil Akhmetov

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Civic Society and the Jewish Community

The Italian Jewish Community dates to Roman times and encompasses immigration from the Spanish expulsion in the 15th Century and from Ashkenazic communities in Central Europe throughout the centuries. For much of this time its condition reflected its relationship with the Church and Church policy regarding Jews. This frequently meant restrictions and indignities but also protection from the worst manifestations of anti-Jewish persecution. During the Holocaust Italian fascists imposed increasingly severe burdens and restrictions on the Jewish community and interned some in concentration camps. After Germany invaded Italy in 1943 many were deported to death camps where some 7,500 perished. Reestablished after the Holocaust, the Jewish Community today numbers about 45,000.

The Jewish Community remains vigilant at the presence of neo-fascist elements in Italian political life. Its analysts admit that they are not overtly anti-Semitic but still exhibit strong xenophobic views. They note a parallel “whitewashing” of fascist history in Italy.

Jewish Community leadership maintains good relations with both government and opposition parties and receives support for their cultural programs. They cite the new, positive attitudes of the Vatican toward Jews and the State of Israel which were part of the legacy of Pope John Paul II as providing a significant contribution to their well-being. Italy has designated January 27th as an official date of Holocaust remembrance.

Since suffering a lethal attack on the main synagogue in Rome by Palestinian terrorists in 1982, the community has rightly been quite concerned about its physical security. But today’s community leaders also voice the need to counter the impression this conveys by being more open to the general public. One expression of this has been the recent participation in the annual European Day of Jewish Culture, a day on which synagogues, museums and cultural centers are open to visitors.

Community leaders see positive trends in the declining support for extremist parties, but—as in other countries—they note the presence of anti-Semitic invective on the Internet. The Italian Government’s positive relationship with Israel may mitigate some of the anti-Semitism relating to the Jewish State and the Middle East conflict that is present elsewhere in Europe.

Muslim Civil Society

There are approximately 1.5 million Muslims in Italy according to the Muslim community itself, although most scholarly estimates put the figure at 1.25 million. The majority are of Moroccan descent. Despite many second generation Italian Muslims (and Italian converts to Islam), they are still perceived as an outside community. They report discrimination—based on their Muslim names—in employment and an almost total absence in political life and in managerial posts in government and the military. Job discrimination appears to be most acute among young Muslim men.

There appears to be less discrimination directed against Muslims of Italian origin, which may be a result of their greater familiarity with the language and culture. However, the lack of a formal agreement between the Government and the Muslim Community creates some anxiety and makes them feel vulnerable.

Muslim community representatives report that Muslim women frequently have difficulties in the area of employment usually because of their religious garb, and they also face difficulties when seeking public health and social services.

NGOs report that there is no general school mandate to teach students about Islamic culture and civilization, which further impedes integration. It is also reported that many of the schools with Muslim children do not provide Halal food.

Roma Issues

A visit to the Roma settlement on the edge of Rome close to Ciampino city provided a depressing picture. The Ciampino settlement is semi-authorized and its conditions are described by residents as better than those in the abusive settlements but worse than those in the authorized ones. However, some residents mentioned their reluctance to move into the authorized settlement because of what they describe as over-regulated access and intrusive video and audio surveillance. Others described the bureaucratic difficulties in securing traditional apartments and incidents of violence within the settlement. Education projects transport Roma children to schools outside the settlement, but little attention is paid to their actual education. As a result, it appears that many of them do not learn to read or write even after eight years of schooling.

It is reported that new “authorized” settlements for Roma have been built, and others are planned, which should meet the basic sanitary needs of the community and also increase their living comfort. Both the central government and the City of Rome (where the largest contingent of Italian Romas is located) have significantly increased the funds allocated to these projects, but how this money is spent remains a matter of controversy. The City of Rome tries to convey help “directly” to the Roma bypassing the NGOs, but the process of identifying Roma leaders and representatives which would be able to indicate the most pressing needs is difficult.

One proposal calls for the Roma camps to elect their own representatives to deal with city authorities. But residents say that each camp should elect an adequate number so that the different ethno-linguistic groups will be adequately represented. Residents also lamented that families are often transferred from one settlement to another, requiring children to change the schools they attend and thus hindering their educational development.

Both residents and NGOs agree that moving to permanent housing would be the ideal solution, but many Roma families have acquired a “camp mentality” making this difficult. Residents acknowledge the recent efforts by NGOs, the government – though its “Nomads Plan” – and the City of Rome. However, they take issue with the term “nomad” and the implications of its use considering that most Romas are no longer “nomads.” They would like to be consulted directly about their problems, believing that government authorities and NGOs are engaged in social engineering programs without their direct involvement.

Italian Roma and Sinti would like to see greater emphasis on the public commemoration of the Roma genocide during World War II. Although public recognition of the Roma genocide is increasing in Italy, much remains to be done.

Addressing Muslim Concerns

Government officials indicated that Italy today faces an “emergency” regarding immigration, so the integration of minorities must naturally take a back seat. Many of these new immigrants are Arabs and Muslims primarily from North Africa, and the Ministry of the Interior has established a Committee for Islam to address the current problems. The Committee includes academic experts, policy officials and some moderate Muslim leaders and is a de facto vehicle to communicate with Italian Muslims and discuss community issues.

The Italian Government has negotiated and concluded formal agreements with the Roman Catholic Church and with other religious communities, including Jews, but not yet with Muslim representatives, due presumably to the diversity and divisions within the community. In discussion with members of the Committee for Islam various challenges were described. These included tensions between fundamentalist Muslims at odds with the more established and moderate Muslim leaders, hindering the path to integration. The second generation of Muslims in Italy is interested in developing a “European Islam” and is engaged in interfaith dialogue, unlike the more recently arrived immigrants. However, the lack of a formal agreement with Islam has meant that certain critical issues, such as the building of new mosques, are not properly addressed. Legal barriers have meant that mosques are opened under the guise of “cultural centers” which may incur popular resentment and opposition from local authorities. Government officials are sensitive to charges that what they see as “immigration issues” is claimed by some to be infringement on freedom of religion. The Committee for Islam has proposed a plan to facilitate the building of Moslem houses of worship in a “regular” way and the regularization of those currently “disguised” as cultural centers. The plan has been favorably received by most

Islamic organizations, but has not yet been converted into legally binding directives by the government or the Parliament.

Discussion with Foreign Ministry and Other Officials

Fundamental rights and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the constitution. One article of the constitution regulates relations with the Catholic Church, while another governs the relationship with six other religious communities. This is an open article, allowing the government to execute agreements with religious communities other than the Catholic Church. Six such agreements are in force, while agreements are now under consideration by the Parliament that would address six other religious confessions. There are specific benefits which as a result of these legal agreements accrue to the respective religious groups. These include the legal recognition of ministers and marriages they celebrate, the teaching of religion in the schools, the establishment of religious schools, and ministering to adherents in hospitals and prisons, for example. A draft law on regulating relations with religions more generally (which would replace the fascist-era law) has long been in circulation but never adopted. This is due, according to observers, to problems with the Muslim Community. Religious bodies without an agreement with the State may nonetheless operate with a degree of liberty most of them regard as satisfactory.

Following the European Directive on Racism and Xenophobia, an anti-discrimination office has been set up in Italy. It is tasked with responsibility for promoting equal treatment and collecting data, with the goal of preventing and responding to discriminatory acts. Both NGOs and officers report an alarming increase of hate crimes and acts of racism against immigrants, and against Roma and Sinti minorities. The independent office notes that five percent of its cases involve religious discrimination. They also focus on social media and the Internet where they report an increase in incitement to violence. There have been a few cases of anti-Christian crimes, including attacks against churches and ministers for a variety of ideological reasons. A yearly report is prepared for the Council of Ministers.

Educational Efforts

The Education Ministry can offer directions and propose guidelines in teaching including the promotion of non-discrimination, but the schools themselves are autonomous. Some European social funds have been secured which are primarily directed toward improving the situation in the Southern regions of Italy. However, there are insufficient funds to completely improve the situation and to apply needed policies.

In principle all students have the right to be granted religious teachings in their respective schools by religions having an agreement with the State. However, in practice there may not be sufficiently trained teachers. And there remain difficulties in identifying the right interlocutor for an agreement with Islam in Italy which may eventually open the doors to including Islam among religions taught in public schools on a voluntary basis.

Italy has developed a number of programs for teaching about the Holocaust, and it has signed a teacher-training agreement with Yad Vashem in Israel. Italy has also received funding from the International Task Force on Holocaust education and remembrance for developing teaching materials on the Roma Holocaust. Schools conduct art and essay competitions to mark the January 27th observance of Holocaust Commemoration. Additionally, Education Ministry representatives say there are national guidelines that mandate the teaching of the history of Jews in Italy beyond the limited period of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the success of these guidelines rest ultimately on “the goodwill of individual teachers.” There are also initiatives about including the Roma genocide in the history programs in schools, but not all schools have adopted them.

Recommendations:

- While significant efforts in the fight against anti-Semitism are acknowledged, closer attention and monitoring should be paid to anti-Semitism on the Internet. The Holocaust Day commemoration should be extended to all schools and municipalities and should be used as an opportunity for warning against old and new styles of anti-Semitism.
- The Committee for Islam should be strengthened, and the government and Parliament should be encouraged to make greater and more rapid use of its documents and recommendations. The Islamic community itself should work towards forming a representative body, which would hopefully be able to negotiate an agreement with the State.
- Urgent action should be taken with respect to those Roma and Sinti settlements which do not appear to meet the minimal standard for security, safety, and a decent living. A national review of the Roma and Sinti situation should be undertaken, with the aim of improving their integration through education and through housing solutions other than camps. This should include the Roma and Sinti themselves, and not only experts and NGOs. An institution similar to the Committee for Islam may serve as a possible a model.
- Teaching in schools and public recognition of the Roma genocide should be promoted. The memory of the genocide should also be an opportunity to address current problems of intolerance and discrimination.
- The agreements with minority religions already concluded, but awaiting parliamentary discussion and ratification, should be enacted. Efforts to adopt a new comprehensive law on religious liberty should be resumed, notwithstanding the political problems previous attempts have encountered.
- Authorities should improve their collection of hate crime data and the reporting of this data to ODIHR and to other, appropriate international organizations. Hate crime reporting should be disaggregated to reflect identifiable victim groups including Christians. Training of police officers, prosecutors and judges in this area should also be undertaken in cooperation with ODIHR.
- Although Italy has readily supported international efforts to combat intolerance, it must also be vigilant in confronting instances of intolerance and discrimination at home.

Annex: List of participants in meetings with the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office during the country visit

Delegation of Italy to OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

- Mr. Emerenzio Barbieri, MP
- Mr. Claudio D'Amico, MP
- Mr. Pierluigi Mantini, MP
- Mr. Matteo Mecacci, MP
- Mr. Riccardo Migliori, MP
- Mr. Guglielmo Picchi, MP
- Ms. Laura Allegrini, Senator
- Mr. Giuseppe Caforio, Senator
- Mr. Luigi Compagna, Senator
- Mr. Mauro Del Vecchio, Senator
- Mr. Andrea Marcucci, Senator
- Mr. Nino Randazzo, Senator
- Mr. Carlo Vizzini, Senator

Chamber of Deputies, Parliament, Fact-finding Subcommittee on Anti-Semitism

- Hon. Fiamma Nirenstein, President of the Inquiry Committee
- Hon. Enrico Pianetta, Member of Subcommittee
- Hon. Paolo Corsini, Member of Subcommittee
- Hon. Furio Colombo, Member of Subcommittee
- Hon. Matteo Mecacci, Member of Subcommittee
- Hon. Margherita Boniver, Member of Subcommittee
- Ms. Mirella Cassarino, Head of International Relations Department
- Mr. Mario di Napoli, Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Committee
- Ms. Francesca Piazza, Staff member of Chamber of Deputies
- Mr. Giacomo Birindelli, Staff member of Chamber of Deputies
- Mr. Stefano Murgia, Staff member of Chamber of Deputies

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Secretary of State Prof. Vincenzo Scotti
- Minister Roberto Natali, Chief of Cabinet of the Secretary of State
- Counsellor Agostino Pinna, Head of the OSCE Desk
- Ms. Raffaella Di Carlo, Deputy Head of the OSCE Desk

Presidency of the Council of Ministers

- Counsellor Anna Nardini, Coordinator of the Office for Studies and Institutional Relations
- Ms. Iole Mucciconi, Office for Studies and Institutional Relations
- Cons. Rosita D'Angiolella, National Office Against Racial Discrimination
- Mr. Roberto Berardi, National Office Against Racial Discrimination

Ministry of Education

- Cons. Amb. Sebastiano Fulci, University and Research Diplomatic Counsellor of the Minister
- Dr. Anna Piperno, General Inspector for School Systems Affairs, University and Research Directorate-General for School Systems
- Dr. Luca Giulietti, Counsellor of the Minister, University and Research Office of the Diplomatic

Ministry of Interior

- Mr. Alfredo Mantovano, Secretary of State
- Mrs. Sandra Sarti, Prefect – Central Director, Religious Affairs Department
- Mrs. Rossella D' Alessandro, Prefect, Head of the Technical Secretariat of the Committee for Islam
- Mr. Ugo Taucer, Head of Secretary of State Secretariat
- Mrs. Vaifra Palanca, Institutional Relations and Studies Department of the Prime Minister's Office

Italian Committee for Islam

- Ms. Anna Nardini, Head of Institutional Relations and Studies Department of the Prime Minister's Office
- Ms. Gulshan Antivalle, President of the Italian Ismaili community
- Mr. Gamal Bouchaib, President of the moderate Muslims in Italy, President of the Council of Foreigners of the town of L'Aquila
- Prof. Paolo Branca, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy, Department of Religious Studies, Catholic University Sacro Cuore-Milan
- Prof. Alessandro Ferrari, Associate Professor of Canon Law and Ecclesiastic Law at the Faculty of Law, University of Insubria
- Prof. Khaled Fouad Allam, Professor of Sociology and History of the Muslim world and institutions of Islamic countries, University of Trieste; Professor of Islamic studies at the University of Urbino
- Prof. Ahmed Habouss, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oriental Studies of Naples
- Mr. Ejaz Ahmad, Editor of "Azad"
- Mrs. Dounia Ettaib, President of D.A.R.I., Association of Arab women in Italy
- Mr. Mustapha Mansouri, Secretary of the Moroccan Confederation in Italy
- Mr. Abdellah Mechnoune, Imam of Turin's Mosque, Ambassador of Peace for the United Nations – Section inter-faith dialogue
- Mr. Andrea Morigi, Journalist, Writer, Assistant editor at the daily "Libero"
- Mr. Yahya Sergio Pallavicini, Imam, Vice-President of Co.re.is
- Mr. Carlo Panella, Journalist, Writer, newspaper "The West"
- Prof. Gianmaria Piccinelli, Professor of Islamic Law and Law of Islamic countries at the Faculty of Law of the Second University of Naples
- Mr. Abdellah Reouane, Secretary of the Grand Mosque of Rome
- Prof. Guido Bolaffi, Expert of immigration
- Mr. Mansur Tantush, Representative for Italy of the World Islamic Call Society

- Prof. Valentina Colombo, Professor of Geopolitics of the Islamic World at the European University of Rome

Representatives of civil society

- Mr. Yahya Sergio Yahe Pallavicini, Vice President, Islamic Religious Community COREIS
- Mr. Suleyman Durmaz, Chairman, Turkish Muslim Association DITIB (Diyanet)
- Ms. Erika Halima Rubbo, Muslim Youth and Gender Issues, Academia ISA
- Mr. Roberto Hamid Distefano, CEO HalalItalia
- Mr. Gorkhan Eller, Muslim Turkish Youth in Italy
- Mr. Graziano Halilovic, NGO Roma Onlus
- Ms. Monica Lanzillotto, NGO Geordie
- Mr. Alberto Di Consiglio, Member, Milan Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center (CDEC)
- Mr. Renzo Gattegna, President, Union of Hebrew Community of Italy
- Mr. Salvatore Fachile, ASGI Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione (Association for Juridical Studies non Immigration)
- Ms. Valeria Carlini, External Relations Officer, CIR Comitato italiano per i Rifugiati (Italian Committee for Refugees).
- Ms. Grazia Naletto, President, LUNARIA
- Mr. Mario Angelelli, President, Progetto Diritti Project "Project: Rights for All"
- Ms. Lisa Billig, Representative of AJC in Italy