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USDOS – US Department of State

2017 Report on International Religious Freedom - Italy

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and the right of religious communities to establish their own institutions. The constitution specifies the state and the Catholic Church are independent, their relations governed by treaties, which include a concordat granting the Church a number of privileges and benefits, as well as financial support. Other religious groups must register to receive tax and other benefits. Registered groups may request an accord with the state that provides most of the same benefits granted the Catholic Church. Muslims continued to report difficulties in acquiring permission from local governments to construct mosques or keep them open. In February the Ministry of Interior (MOI) signed an agreement with the country's largest Muslim organization with the stated purpose of preventing radicalization and promoting the training of imams to manage funds transparently and deliver sermons in Italian. Following the ruling, Milan municipal officials continued to withhold authorization to build two new mosques and a Protestant church, citing limited capability to identify proper venues as required by the law. Local governments closed Bangladeshi informal “garage” mosques in Mestre and in Rome, and a group sought a referendum to block a new mosque in Pisa. In separate rulings, a Lazio court ordered authorities to reopen the five garage mosques that Rome officials had closed down in 2016.

There were anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents, including threats, hate speech, graffiti, and vandalism. In 2016, the most recent year for which data were available, the quasi-governmental National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) reported 240 cases of discrimination based on religion, compared with 28 the previous year. UNAR attributed the large increase in the number of reported cases to an increased awareness on how to report discrimination online. An Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) report cited 32 incidents against Christians, 11 against Jews, and eight against Muslims in 2016, including two attacks against Jews and two against Muslims. According to the Jewish Contemporary Documentation Center Foundation (CDEC), a nongovernmental organization, there were 109 incidents of anti-Semitism reported during the year, compared with 130 in the previous year. Online hate speech constituted more than half of the incidents. The head of Rome's Jewish community protested a Rome court's acquittal of two men on charges of incitement and racial hatred for chanting anti-Semitic slurs at a soccer match in 2013. On October 22, individuals posted anti-Semitic stickers of Holocaust victim Anne Frank and anti-Semitic

slogans during a soccer match at Rome’s Olympic Stadium. A Milan appeals court overturned a 2016 conviction by a lower court and acquitted a former editor of the newspaper *Libero* of instigating racial hatred for printing a 2015 opinion piece with the headline “Muslim Bastards.”

Representatives from the U.S. embassy and consulates general met with national and local government officials to encourage respect for religious freedom and equal treatment for all faiths. Embassy and consulate general representatives discussed the integration of asylum seekers and newly arrived migrants, many of whom were Muslim. They also discussed the state of efforts to reach a formal agreement governing relations between the state and Muslim groups. The embassy and consulates met with civil society groups and religious leaders to promote interreligious dialogue and social inclusion of immigrants, including those belonging to religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 62.1 million (July 2017 estimate). According to a 2017 survey by the Pew Research Center, approximately 77 percent of all residents identify as Roman Catholic. Religious groups together accounting for less than 10 percent of the population include other Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Bahais, and Buddhists. Non-Catholic Christian groups include Eastern Orthodox, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Assemblies of God, the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and a number of smaller Protestant groups. The remaining 13 percent have no religious affiliation. According to estimates by the Foundation for Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity, an independent research center, of the approximately five million resident foreigners, there are 1.6 million Muslims, 1.6 million Eastern Orthodox Christians, one million Roman Catholics, and 250,000 Protestants. The government estimates the Jewish population at 30,000.

According to the MOI and the national agency for statistics, the Muslim population is composed of native-born citizens, immigrants, and resident foreigners, but most of its growth comes from large numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the majority of whom live in the north. Moroccan and Albanian immigrants are the two largest groups. The MOI reports Muslims are overwhelmingly Sunni.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all citizens are equal before the law regardless of religion and are free to profess their beliefs in any form, individually or with others, and to promote them and celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality. According to the constitution, each religious community has the right to

establish its own institutions according to its own statutes as long as these do not conflict with the law. It stipulates the state may not impose special limitations or taxes on the establishment or activities of groups because of their religious nature or aims. The constitution specifies the state and the Catholic Church are independent of each other, and their relations are governed by treaties, which include a concordat between the government and the Holy See.

The law considers insults against any divinity to be blasphemy, a crime punishable by a fine ranging from 51 to 309 euros (\$61-\$370). The government generally does not enforce the law against blasphemy.

The constitution states all religious groups are equally free and relations between the state and non-Catholic groups are governed by law based on agreements (“accords”) between them. Representatives of a non-Catholic faith requesting an accord must first submit their request to the Office of the Prime Minister. The government and the group’s representatives then negotiate a draft agreement, which the Council of Ministers must approve. The prime minister then signs and submits the agreement to parliament for final approval. Once parliament approves the implementing legislation, the accord governs the relationship between the government and the religious group, including state support. Groups with an accord include the Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Jews, Baptists, Lutherans, Mormons, the Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate, the Italian Apostolic Church, the Buddhist Union, Soka Gakkai Buddhists, and Hindus.

The law provides religious groups with tax-exempt status and the right to recognition as legal entities, as long as they have completed a registration process with the MOI. Legal recognition is a prerequisite for any group seeking an accord with the government. A religious group may apply for recognition of its legal status by submitting to a prefect, the local representative of the MOI, a request including the group’s statutes; a report on its goals and activities; information on its administrative offices; a three-year budget; certification of its credit status by a bank; and certification of the Italian citizenship or legal residency of its head. To be approved, a group’s statutes must not conflict with the law. If approved, the group must submit to MOI monitoring. The MOI may appoint a commissioner to administer the group if it identifies irregularities in its activities. The Catholic Church is the only legally recognized group exempted from MOI monitoring, in accordance with the concordat between the government and the Holy See.

An accord grants clergy automatic access to state hospitals, prisons, and military barracks; allows for civil registry of religious marriages; facilitates special religious practices regarding funerals; and exempts students from school attendance on religious holidays. Any religious group without an accord may request these benefits from the MOI on a case-by-case basis. An accord also allows a religious group to receive funds collected by the state through a voluntary 0.8 percent set-aside on taxpayer returns. Taxpayers may specify to which eligible religious group they would like to direct these funds. The government set aside 986 million euros (\$1.18 billion) via this mechanism in 2017; of that total, more than 81 percent went to the Catholic Church.

On June 27, the Veneto regional council adopted a regulation banning the use of burqas and *niqabs* in public institutions such as hospitals.

The law allows the Catholic Church to select teachers, paid by the state, to provide instruction in weekly “hour of religion” courses taught in public schools. The courses are optional, and students who do not wish to attend may study other subjects or, in certain cases, leave school early with parental consent. Church-selected instructors are lay or religious, and the instruction includes material determined by the state and relevant to non-Catholic religious groups. Government funding is available only for these Catholic Church-approved teachers. If a student requests a religion class from a non-Catholic religious group, that group must provide the teacher and cover the cost of instruction, but it is not required to seek government approval for the content of the class. Some local laws provide scholarship funding for students to attend private religiously affiliated schools, usually but not always Catholic, that meet government educational standards.

Hate crimes, including those motivated by religious hatred, are punishable by up to four years in prison. The law applies also to denial of genocide or crimes against humanity.

All missionaries and other foreign religious workers must apply for special religious activity visas before arriving in the country.

This country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Summary paragraph: The government and groups representing 70 percent of the country’s Muslims signed a text pledging cooperation to combat radicalism and promote social cohesions and integration among Muslims, to include training of imams to manage funds transparently and deliver sermons in Italian. In a precedent-setting decision, the country’s highest court upheld the conviction of a Sikh man for carrying a kirpan (a ceremonial knife), who had defended the action due to its religious significance. Muslims continued to encounter difficulties obtaining permits for new or existing mosques. The city council of Sesto San Giovanni blocked construction of an Islamic cultural center and mosque, and Milan municipal officials continued to withhold authorization to construct two new mosques, as well as a Protestant church. Mestre and Rome each closed a Bangladeshi “garage” mosque, and a citizens’ group sought a referendum to block construction of a new mosque in Pisa. In Rome, a regional court in Lazio ordered authorities to reopen five garage mosques police had shut down 2016. In Bologna, for the first time in 20 years, authorities barred Muslims from using the local stadium to celebrate Eid al-Adha. Politicians from several parties made statements criticizing Islam, and one called for the expulsion of an imam for statements he made about women.

Although the government had reportedly negotiated draft agreements with the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the Episcopal Church governing its relations with those groups, the government did not submit the draft agreements to parliament for approval.

Muslim groups had also not reached an accord specifying their relations with the state. In February the MOI reached a preliminary agreement with Muslim groups but failed to finalize an accord, reportedly due to the absence of a single legal group representing all Muslim communities. Paolo Naso, an academic and independent advisor who acted as chairman of the committee that drafted the agreement, stated it was an important step toward a formal accord between the government and the Muslim community. There was no further progress on a final accord after the preliminary agreement. As a result, mosques remained ineligible for state funding through the taxpayer set-aside program available to religious groups with such agreements, and Muslim employees were not guaranteed the right to take the day off on religious holidays. According to government and other officials, a formal accord was unlikely to be finalized absent the establishment of one umbrella group representing all the Muslim associations. At year’s end, the only Muslim group legally recognized as a religious entity by the MOI was the Cultural Islamic Center of Italy, which ran the Great Mosque of Rome. Other Muslims groups were recognized as nonprofit organizations.

On February 1, Minister of Interior Marco Minniti and nine Islamic federations and associations, including the three largest federations – the Union of Italian Muslim Communities, Italian Islamic Confederations, and Italian Muslim Youth Community, collectively representing almost 70 percent of Muslims in the country – signed an agreement to jointly combat radicalism and advance social cohesion and integration of Muslims, especially the second generation. It included provisions for training imams to deliver sermons in Italian, but without specifying who would fund the training, and stipulated that communities must transparently manage funds and donations from domestic followers and from abroad.

On May 15, the Cassation (Supreme) Court upheld the conviction of a Sikh man, an Indian citizen, for carrying a kirpan. The defendant, who had been sentenced to pay a 2,000 euro (\$2,400) fine, argued that wearing a knife, like wearing a turban, amounted to respecting a religious precept sacred to Sikhs. In what judicial analyst Alessandro Negri said was an important, precedent-setting decision, the court disagreed, arguing that a “multiethnic society is a necessity, but cannot be conducive of conflicting cultural visions, as in the cultural and judicial context of a country [Italy] where public security is a general goal to protect by means of banning arms.”

Muslims continued to encounter difficulties acquiring permission from local governments to construct mosques. As of November there were five officially recognized mosques, one each in Ravenna, Rome, Colle Val D’Elsa, Milan, and Forlì (inaugurated in May), compared with more than 800 unofficial, informal places of worship for Muslims, known colloquially as “garage” mosques. Local officials, who were entitled to introduce rules on planning applicable to places of worship, continued to cite

a lack of zoning plans allowing for the establishment of places of worship on specific sites as a reason for denying construction permits. Although municipalities, such as Milan, could and did withhold construction permits for other religious groups, the shortage of formal places of worship appeared to be most acute for Muslims. Local politicians from the Northern League Party, including Jacopo Alberti, a Lombardy regional councilor, expressed concerns for Muslim communities that hoped to build their own mosques.

On October 10, the city council of Sesto San Giovanni near Milan blocked the construction of an Islamic cultural center and mosque, on the grounds that the center did not comply with all the requirements stipulated in two documents signed in 2013 and 2015. In particular, the council said the center failed to allot funds to build parking and other services, as previously agreed.

On September 1, local authorities in Bologna prohibited the use of a stadium for the celebration of Eid al-Adha. The President of the Islamic Cultural Center, Boubakeur Gueddouda, expressed his regret and disappointment, stating the Muslim community had used the arena to celebrate Eid al-Adha for the previous 20 years.

On March 20, Milan Mayor Giuseppe Sala stated the Lombardy regional law requiring strict construction standards for places of worship, as part of urban planning codes, significantly limited the possibility of municipal authorities to authorize new mosques.

On April 7, the Constitutional Court upheld the provision of a 2016 Veneto regional law restricting the location of new places of worship to urban peripheries. The court overturned another provision of the same law that required use of the Italian language during religious services, ruling the provision affected freedom of worship.

In Florence, Mayor Dario Nardella and Imam Izzeddin Elzir continued discussions but did not identify a suitable location to construct a mosque for the Muslim community. The estimated 30,000 local Muslims continued to pray in three small locations across the city, which were not large enough to accommodate demand. In June the mayor proposed to the local Muslim community that they could establish a mosque in a former barracks on the outskirts of the city in Scandicci, but the local authorities there blocked the initiative. The local Muslim community was also looking into raising private funds for acquisition of space for use as a mosque, but the community leaders stated lack of authorization remained the main impediment to mosque construction. On December 22, Archbishop of Florence Giuseppe Betori signed an agreement with Imam Elzir for the construction of a mosque on land the Church sold to the Muslim community in Sesto Fiorentino, outside of the Florence city limits. According to press reports, if built, the mosque, with a capacity for several hundred worshippers, would not be able to accommodate all of greater Florence's Muslim community, which numbered approximately 30,000 persons.

The city of Milan continued to withhold authorization, as it had in 2016, to build two new mosques and a Protestant church, citing limited capability to identify proper venues, as required by Lombardy regional law under which local governments may apply urban planning rules to restrict the location of places of worship.

The Muslim community of Thiene in the Veneto region began the construction of a mosque for which they had received a building permit in 2015 in accordance with the region’s legal requirements. The mosque was still under construction at year’s end.

Citing a lack of construction permits or inadequate safety standards, the city of Mestre, on April 5, and the city of Rome, on October 6, each closed down a garage mosque run by a Bangladeshi religious community. Community representatives organized public demonstrations of 100-200 persons in Mestre and Rome in October, stating they had no legal means of establishing new places of worship. The city of Mestre pledged to authorize the community to open a new mosque elsewhere but had not done so by year’s end.

In separate decisions, a Lazio regional court ordered Rome authorities to reopen five garage mosques police had closed in 2016 because they lacked proper authorization. The mosques reopened.

Local governments continued to rent out public land at discounted rates to religious groups, usually Catholic, for constructing places of worship. Government funding also helped preserve and maintain historic places of worship, which were almost all Catholic.

An association of local citizens requested a referendum on the construction of a new mosque in Pisa on the grounds that there was already an Islamic place of worship and “the money for the new mosque might come from Qatar, which funds the Muslim Brotherhood.” The referendum request was pending at year’s end.

On April 29, Veneto Regional Council member Elena Donazzan of the Forza Italia Party called for the expulsion from the country of Nuhi Krasniqi, an imam and head of the Sunna Muslim association in Bassano del Grappa, after Krasniqi called for the submission of women to God and the Prophet Muhammad during a television interview. Referring to Krasniqi, Donazzan said, “If the imam does not like the idea that a woman ... can stroll on the streets of her city without a veil, he can pack up his bags and go back to where he came from.”

Politicians from several political parties, including the Northern League, Brothers of Italy, and CasaPound, made statements critical of Islam. Interviewed by the daily newspaper *Die Welt* on January 3, Northern League leader Matteo Salvini said, “The culture of Islam is backward, and not compatible with our society.” CasaPound organized a September 27 march in Rome calling for the closure of garage mosques. Giorgia Meloni, President of the Brothers of Italy Party, tweeted on October 9, “We can’t deny there is a process of Islamization going on in Europe.”

The government held a series of events in commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp on Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27. President Sergio Mattarella hosted a ceremony in which he stressed the need “to learn, study, and think. Nothing can stop our will to remember.” On January 18 and 19, Minister of Education Valeria Fedeli accompanied a group of 100 students to visit Auschwitz in cooperation with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI). She also signed an agreement with the union to promote training for teachers and programs for students to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. On January 19, Mayor Sala led a ceremony by the Milan city government to dedicate a *stolpersteine*, a commemorative cobblestone for Holocaust victim Dante Coen, the first of six such commemorative cobblestones for Italian Holocaust victims.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2016, the most recent year for which data were available, the contact center of UNAR received approximately 240 calls concerning cases of discrimination based on religion, compared with 28 calls in the previous year. UNAR did not report details on the types of incidents or the religious groups targeted. UNAR attributed the large increase in the number of reported cases to an increased awareness on how to report discrimination. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

An OSCE report on hate crimes in the country in 2016, which relied on data reported by international organizations, civil society, and the Holy See, cited 32 incidents involving bias against Christians, 11 anti-Semitic incidents, and eight anti-Muslim incidents. Most incidents were against property, but there were two attacks against Jews, two against Muslims, and one threat against Muslims. In one of the incidents of violence against Jews, a group insulted and attacked a Jewish youth wearing a kippah, and in the other, a group assaulted another group of visibly Jewish students as they left a soccer field. In one of the incidents against Muslims, a Muslim woman wearing a veil and her daughter were insulted and the daughter slapped when she responded to the insult. In the other, a Muslim woman was insulted and spat upon while walking her children to school. In the third case, the OSCE reported a bullet was left as a threat in a Muslim prayer room.

CDEC’s Anti-Semitism Observatory recorded 109 incidents of anti-Semitism during the year, compared with 130 incidents in 2016. Reports of anti-Semitic incidents published on CDEC’s website included discrimination, online and verbal harassment, particularly at soccer matches and other sporting events, and derogatory graffiti. Internet hate speech and bullying were the most common forms of anti-Semitic attacks, according to CDEC, which continued to operate an anti-Semitism hotline for victims of, and witnesses to, anti-Semitic incidents. Noemi Di Segni, President of the Union of the Italian Jewish communities and Ruth Dureghello, President of Rome’s Jewish community, stated they

were disheartened and concerned about the anti-Semitic incidents but encouraged the government was taking the incidents seriously. Di Segni reported she was unnerved by the rise of “sophisticated” anti-Semitism.

On April 12, police in Bologna confronted a man shouting curses in Arabic, who yelled, “You are Jews; I will kill you all,” and then wounded two police officers with a knife.

A survey issued in September by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, which looked at discrimination reported by Muslims living in 15 EU member states, found that 25 percent of Muslims in Italy reported feeling discriminated against because of their religion over the previous five years – the second highest percentage among the 15 countries surveyed – and only 16 percent said they had knowledge of at least one organization offering support in cases of discrimination. Muslims in the country tied for the lowest levels of trust in the police reported among the 15 nations. They also reported the lowest levels of attachment to their country of residence (3.3 on a five-point scale) of any of the countries surveyed.

On July 4, journalist Stefano Cassinelli and Orthodox priest and former Member of Parliament (MP) Alessandro Meluzzi founded the Milan-based Anti-Islamization Party. The party platform emphasized informing the public of what it described as risks associated with the growth of Islamic communities.

In September MP Massimo Corsaro, member of a political faction that broke away from the Forza Italia Party, targeted Jewish MP Emanuele Fiano, who proposed the criminalization of Holocaust denial, by asking on a Facebook post if Fiano had bushy eyebrows in order to “cover the marks of the circumcision.” Corsaro reportedly denied any anti-Semitic intent – only that he intended to insult Fiano with an offensive slur.

There were continued reports of anti-Semitism at sporting events involving the Lazio soccer team. On February 7, a Rome court acquitted two Lazio fans filmed in 2013 chanting “yellow-red Jew” and “Jewish Roma supporter” at a match in Rome of charges of incitement and racial hatred. (Yellow and red are the colors of Lazio soccer rival AS Roma.) The court ruled the chants did not rise to the level of a crime as they were “made in the context of a sports rivalry.” Rome Jewish community President Dureghello stated in a letter protesting the dismissal of the charges that it was a “dangerous precedent for justice,” as it “lends legitimacy to using the word ‘Jew’ in its most negative form.”

On October 23, national police and soccer authorities opened investigations after an October 22 soccer match between AS Roma and Cagliari. Authorities stated they believed Lazio fans were responsible for posting anti-Semitic stickers of Holocaust victim Anne Frank wearing the jersey of city rivals AS Roma and writing anti-Semitic slogans such as “Roma fans are Jews” on glass barriers, walls, and bathrooms in a section of Rome’s Olympic Stadium used by Lazio supporters. Rome Jewish Community President Dureghello tweeted, “This is not football, this is not sport. Anti-Semites out of

the stadiums,” and posted a picture of the stickers. She also reportedly said, “Stadiums cannot be places that are beyond the law and places where anti-Semitic, racist, and homophobic people can find a place to show themselves.”

In response, the national soccer federation governing body, after consulting with Minister of Sport Luca Lotti and UCEI, issued a statement announcing that a passage from “The Diary of Anne Frank” would be read aloud before all games for the following week to “condemn the recent episodes of anti-Semitism and to continue to remember the Holocaust.” Lazio executives also expressed their disappointment and regret, and club President Claudio Lotito laid a wreath of white and blue flowers (the team’s colors) outside the Great Synagogue of Rome. Lotito announced the team would send 200 youths to Auschwitz every year to educate them about the Holocaust. The team later wore T-shirts depicting Anne Frank that said, “No Anti-Semitism.”

In July press reported police raided a beach near Venice, which had “No Entry, Gas Chambers” on one of the doors. The Venice prefect ordered “any references to fascism” to be removed. UCEI President Noemi Di Segni expressed outrage at the insult to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

On December 18, a Milan appeals court acquitted Maurizio Belpietro, the former editor of the daily newspaper *Libero*, of “instigating racial hatred,” overturning a 2016 conviction by a lower court. The lower court had sentenced Belpietro to almost 11 months in prison for publishing an opinion piece under the headline “Muslim Bastards” in 2015 after the Bataclan terrorist attack in Paris. Belpietro had been free while appealing his case.

CDEC stated there were 44 books in circulation containing anti-Semitic language, 21 new books and 23 reprints of older publications. The groups did not identify the titles of the books they said were anti-Semitic.

The press reported examples of anti-Semitic graffiti and posters including depictions of swastikas on walls, anti-Semitic stereotypes, and praise of neo-Nazi groups in cities, including Rome, Milan, and Reggio Calabria. On September 3, authorities found swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans reading “No Jews” at a bus stop near a Jewish school in Milan. On July 27, authorities found swastika graffiti exalting Hitler on benches in front of the Shoah Memorial in Milan. In Milan on January 21, the daughter of Holocaust victim Dante Coen found black paint defacing a commemorative cobblestone honoring him that had been installed two days earlier. On January 28, thousands of persons marched to protest the vandalism, linked together by a red cord, which organizers said symbolized their link to “the chain of memory” of Holocaust victims. Milan Mayor Sala and Minister of Justice Andrea Orlando joined the march, and media quoted Orlando as saying, “A quick and immediate reaction is important, so that whoever intends to eliminate the signs of the past may achieve the opposite result.”

On April 4, the leaders of the Islamic community of Bologna found graffiti reading, “You

are not welcome” and a cross near the entrance of the local mosque.

According to the OSCE report on hate crimes in 2016, all 32 anti-Christian incidents were against property and almost all against the Catholic Church. Incidents consisted of theft, desecration of graves, vandalism, and graffiti. There was also one incident of arson against a Catholic church. There were several incidents of vandalism against Jehovah’s Witnesses’ kingdom halls.

The OSCE report cited nine anti-Semitic incidents against property in 2016. They involved the writing of neo-Nazi or other anti-Semitic graffiti, theft, and vandalism. In one incident, a Jewish cemetery was vandalized and religious items stolen or damaged. In another incident, hackers added anti-Semitic content to a Jewish group’s website.

The OSCE reported five anti-Muslim incidents involving property in 2016. There was an arson attack against a Muslim-owned butcher shop and a pig’s head left next to a Pakistani-owned kebab shop. The other incidents involved vandalism and the writing of anti-Muslim graffiti.

In January the Catholic Archbishop of Palermo, Corrado Lorefice, transferred to the Jewish community a Church-owned facility built atop the ruins of the Great Synagogue of Palermo.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Representatives from the U.S. embassy and consulates general met with national and local government officials in Rome, Sicily, Naples, Milan, Turin, Bologna, Florence, Modena, Reggio Emilia, and Colle Val d’Elsa to encourage religious tolerance. During these meetings, embassy officials and government officials also discussed integration of asylum seekers and migrants, many of whom were Muslim. Embassy officials met with the MOI and the presidency of the Council of Ministers on the issue of establishing an agreement formalizing relations between the Muslim community and the government.

U.S. embassy and consulates general officials continued to meet with representatives of civil society groups including Caritas, Sant’Egidio, Integra, and Anolf, as well as Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish leaders in cities throughout the country. The U.S. officials urged the social inclusion of immigrants, many of whom were Muslim, and dialogue among various religious groups, and monitored groups’ ability to practice their religion freely. Embassy officials met with Jewish community leaders to discuss anti-Semitism among soccer fans. The embassy continued to host speakers and events focused on integrating newly arrived, largely Muslim migrants and second-generation immigrants.

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