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Overview Report on Anti-Semitism in 2012 for the Kantor Center

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This report provides an overview of the current situation of anti-Semitism in Italy within the broader framework of ongoing trends.

The information in this report has been drawn from a variety of sources: people directly involved (victims), news from the Jewish Community or other bodies, freely accessible sources (newspapers, radio, web, etc.), and studies and analyses carried out by CDEC and other institutions and organizations.

Social setting

The worsening economic crisis has extended a condition of decreasing economic wellbeing to broad sectors of the population who do not always coincide with the "traditional poor" of the past. People's lives are becoming more problematic, and employment more insecure. Senior citizens and the elderly represent a growing proportion of the population. And these phenomena are occurring against the backdrop of a shrinking public welfare system.

Uncertainty about the future is growing, as is social complexity, making it more difficult to interpret social reality and its systems of communication. The way we talk about things is changing progressively and entire swaths of society find themselves increasingly excluded from participation.

These are all factors that generate anxiety, uncertainty, incomprehension, bitterness and resentment. The social climate engenders uneasiness, prompting vigilance in the fear that the resulting frustration and search for scapegoats may lead to an increase in anti-Jewish prejudices and behaviors.

On the political level, the declining credibility of an entire political class has led to a crisis in the system of representation and delegation of authority, and to a generalized feeling of distrust.

Within this social setting, an anti-political thrust has gained momentum and extremist political views have gained a stronger foothold. Alba Dorata Italia, the Italian chapter of the xenophobic, anti-Semitic and extreme rightist Golden Dawn party in Greece, has entered the

Italian political arena. A Nazi-skinhead rally was organized last May in Rome, publicized on the web via an extensive racist grapevine.

The extreme right has taken the lead in a new social rebellion, riding the populist wave rising out of the devastation of the economic crisis. Their issues are immigration, the relations between majority and minority, and multiculturalism. For example, the Italian section of the anti-Semitic, neo-Nazi website Stormfront has attacked the Minister for International Cooperation and Integration, Andrea Riccardi, accusing him of wanting to interbreed the races and wipe out the Italians.

As in earlier years, **conspiracy theories** abound, the belief in the existence of a global Jewish power that controls the economy and is responsible for the world economic crisis. This has been evidenced in a number of episodes:

- ✓ The politician Fabio Granata, elected to the Chamber of Deputies with the party Futuro e Libertà per l'Italia (FLI), publicly defended an FLI militant who published a note on Facebook where Italian Jews are described as a powerful lobby working against the national interest;
- ✓ Beppe Grillo, leader of the new political power Movimento 5 Stelle, repeated his conspiratorial vision of the world in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* on June 24th;
- ✓ In a Facebook group with 48,000 "likes", an anti-Semitic comment is published with arguments based on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. One user writes: "If a war or revolution should break out, our first grenades will hit the Jewish banks". The post includes insults and threats against the presumed Jewish lobby dominating the world of finance. The author also cites statements attributed to a former officer in the U.S. army, according to whom "what the Jews did to the Germans during the Weimar period they are now doing to the whole world". Some forty people "liked" this post (August);
- ✓ On September 23rd, the journalist Enrico Sassoon, minority shareholder in Casaleggio Associati, a company associated with the Movimento 5 Stelle, published a letter in *Corriere della Sera* announcing his decision to leave the company following an anti-Semitic campaign against him conducted on the web:

"[...] The media have engaged in speculation, interpreting my role as being that of a representative of the dimly specified "poteri forti" [embedded powers – Translator's note] whose aim is to infiltrate Beppe Grillo's blog by means of Casaleggio Associati, and [his] political movement via Gianroberto Casaleggio [...] An avalanche of intensely violent defamation and slander has emerged on the web, based on deranged conspiracy theories, which have appeared and continue to appear on blogs and websites of different sympathies and connotations [...] In these places, the theory takes on the dark tones of a Plutocratic-Judeo-Masonic conspiracy harking back to Tsarism and Hitlerism. My being attributed the role of representative of the "poteri forti" originates here, and continues on with decidedly deranged and racist overtones."

- ✓ Radio Padania Libera, radio station of the Lega Nord in the Milan area, broadcast an opinion seeking to rehabilitate the anti-Semitic beliefs underlying the spurious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*: "[...] the realms dedicated to managing money, international finance, and mass communication are all in the hands of families of Semitic origin. This is a fact. Does this mean the New World Order and Bilderberg? I don't know, I don't think about it and I don't believe it. But I do say, let's start from this objective fact: the main families governing

international finance are of Jewish origin, this is a fact. The main bodies of the information agencies are occupied by men who are Jewish. The dominant entertainment machine, Hollywood ... go take a look at the names, they are all openly declared Jews... This is a fact; whether it's right or wrong, worrisome, terrifying or indifferent, I don't know..."

Through its Observatory on anti-Jewish Prejudice, the Fondazione CDEC has recorded 54 episodes of anti-Semitism in 2012, similar to the number recorded in the past two years. These have taken the form of acts of vandalism, offensive graffiti, emails to and posts addressed to individuals and institutions, public statements, anti-Semitic choruses in stadiums, jokes, insults, and, in one case, threats. One particularly serious episode was the arrest of a young Italian of Moroccan origin (Mohamed Jarmoune), accused of plotting a dynamite attack against the Via Guastalla Synagogue in Milan.

Anti-Semitic episodes and statements are generally the prerogative of political forces on the extreme right, and only more rarely attributable to those on the extreme left. This distribution is not shared however by anti-Jewish prejudice, which is spread across varying political, social and cultural groups.

The episodes recorded in 2012 show two peaks. One is associated with International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27th. The other coincided with Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza (November).

Approximately twenty anti-Semitic acts attributed to the radical right were registered in January, many of them taking the form of Holocaust denial. Many occurred in small provincial towns. Graffiti is a widespread phenomenon observed throughout the year, but extreme rightists tend to increase their activism in correspondence with Holocaust Remembrance Day:

- ✓ In Guastalla (province of Reggio Emilia), clearly anti-Semitic writings and markings appeared in the center of town. One of them stating "Juden Raus";
- ✓ In Cadorago (province of Como), a rabbi invited to a public meeting dedicated to International Holocaust Remembrance Day arrived to find the writings: "Your false memory obscures the true Palestinian holocaust" and "Zionist out of Europe", sealed with a Celtic cross;
- ✓ In Como on January 27th, Forza Nuova Lario and the Associazione Culturale Quattrocentodieci organized a Holocaust-denial conference. The meeting was publicized on anti-Semitic blogs and websites as the "Conference on Holocaust Revisionism". The meeting featured the screening of the video "*Wissen Macht Frei*", Italy's first Holocaust-denial documentary, created under the aegis of the Stormfront Italia website;
- ✓ In Arco (province of Trento), racist graffiti against the Jews appeared on walls near a popular supermarket;
- ✓ In Stradella (province of Pavia), there was an "assault" with distinct Neo-Nazi overtones: dozens of swastikas, Celtic crosses, and phrases praising Adolf Hitler appeared on walls, garbage bins and the surfaces of streets. The writings were also placed near plaques and stones commemorating local partisans killed during the Italian War of Liberation;
- ✓ In Sassuolo (province of Modena), two young men were stopped while writing the phrase, "six milion liers" [sic] on a wall;
- ✓ In Sacile (province of Pordenone), two writings were found on the walls of a high school:

“The Shoah is a hoax” and “Holocaust equals Zionist propaganda”;

- ✓ In Aquino (Frosinone), a swastika and a Celtic cross were drawn on the walls of the town hall with the words "Lest we forget" in support of some unspecified rightist movement;
- ✓ In Rome, three freshly placed stolpersteins (from the German for "stumbling blocks") were removed and replaced with ordinary paving stones. Set in the street in front of the house whence the Spizzichino sisters were deported, the brass markers bore the names, birthdates and dates of death of the murdered deportees.

A number of episodes took place in November in conjunction with the Israeli **Pillar of Defense** in Gaza:

- ✓ Giorgio Odifreddi, columnist for the newspaper *La Repubblica*, published a post on his blog (on www.repubblica.it) in which he accuses Israel of being "ten times worse than the Nazis";
- ✓ Numerous anti-Semitic comments are posted on Beppe Grillo's Facebook page;
- ✓ Anti-Semitic insults appeared in the blog of the leader of Movimento 5 Stelle, Beppe Grillo, calling journalist Gad Lerner a "Jewish worm" ["*verme ebreo*"]. One hour later, Lerner thanked Grillo for immediately removing the anti-Semitic comment from his blog. However, between the publication and removal of the post, dozens of comments were received by the blog under a single heading "Gad Vermer". A number of followers of the blog rallied around their leader and upped the ante: "When I saw the tweet (Jewish worm), I rushed to the blog to see if it was true. I thought it had already been removed. I hope, for Lerner's sake, that it actually does exist", and "Jewish worm? I don't think that slimy, third-rate people like Gad Lerner even have a conscience, let alone a religious faith";
- ✓ On the *Spinoza.it*, a website dedicated to information and satire, one post reads "The Israeli attack is so massive that Hitler will be remembered as the man who wanted to save the Palestinians";
- ✓ Numerous emails have been received by Jewish communities with messages like: "Remember that you are Zionists you are for a foreign power and thus hostile to my country. I remind the Italian Jews, that you are Italians ... and so your allegiance must be to Italy, you must not have relations with Israel ... we declare death upon the Zionists of the world!";
- ✓ The words "Israel Nazi state" were written on the main entrance to the synagogue in Genoa;
- ✓ During a general strike called by the unions CGIL and COBAS, the demonstrators marched peacefully, but the atmosphere became tense when a group of students, redirected by the police along a route passing in front of the central synagogue in Lungotevere Cenci, started up a chorus of hisses and offenses directed at the temple;
- ✓ The main door to the synagogue in Parma along with the doorframe, surrounding walls and pavement in front were all fouled with red paint. The words "Stop Bombing Palestine" were scrawled on the walls;
- ✓ During a conference on the Israeli writer David Grossman at the Elfo Puccini theatre in Milan, a group of anti-Israeli activists occupied the stage shouting slogans against the "murderous", "Nazi" Jews.

As well as these two peaks, a number of other episodes taking place in various periods are worth mentioning:

- ✓ In Pavia in May, an executive of the ASL [local governmental healthcare unit] made a gruesome joke during a meeting with representatives of the Municipality and Province: "What is the difference between cakes and Jews? Cakes don't scream when you put them in the oven." The executive defended himself during the uproar that followed by saying that it was just a silly joke, and absolutely no offense was intended;
- ✓ In Livorno, the street sign for 'Via degli ebrei vittime del nazismo' [Jewish Victims of Nazism Street] was altered by unidentified vandals who obliterated some of the letters and words so that it read 'Via gli ebrei' [literally 'away with the Jews', essentially: *Juden Raus*];
- ✓ In April in Rome, members of the tiny neo-Nazi group Militia wrote "6 million Jews?! I'd do it again", complementing it with a swastika;
- ✓ In September, the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Renzo Gattegna, received an anti-Semitic/Holocaust-denying letter from the principle of a high school in Teramo;
- ✓ In December in Catania, unidentified vandals removed a menorah that had been placed in Piazza Università.

The Web and Facebook

One of the most difficult and challenging problems is the spread of anti-Semitism online. Blogs and social networks are the main channels for the spread of racist and anti-Jewish propaganda. It is easy to find texts, videos or multimedia content published with no screening or oversight. Conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, demonization of Israel, racism, and hatred circulate freely on the web. Anyone can gain access and voice their opinions. The network easily becomes a media arena of violence, defamation and delinquency.

In 2012, the Observatory on Anti-Jewish Prejudice identified some 100 online spaces in Italy featuring anti-Semitic polemics. Of these, approximately 10 focus on Holocaust denial. The problem has persisted for years and it is very difficult to intervene and prevent them from spreading propaganda and false information.

In January, anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denial comments were posted on a YouTube page with the trailer for the French film *Elle s'appelait Sarah* (*Sarah's Key*, or *La chiave di Sara* in Italian): "hitler [sic] like stalin [sic] was a Jew surrounded by 'technical' Jews who used him and pushed him into the role of 'one-man shoah [sic]! mussolini [sic] was the poor child of a nobody (and the fable of 'Self Made Man' does not apply) put in power by Zionist Bankers from England and the USA! they are the BANKS and internaTIONal [in Italian: internaZIONal – Translator's note] high finance."

On January 27th, a student in a Roman high school offended victims of the Shoah on Facebook with anti-Semitic insults and neo-Nazi statements denying the existence of the concentration camps and singing the praises of the Nazi SS, termed "martyrs for Europe". At the end of an event featuring the testimony of a Shoah survivor with Roman mayor Alemanno in attendance, the student affirmed that a famous film on the tragedy of the Holocaust was "a

fantasy story".

In October, an article was published on the website Mosaico, representing the Jewish Community of Milan, dedicated to the law on Holocaust denial. Numerous anti-Semitic comments were posted in response to the article.

The Italian section of the white supremacist website Stormfront was very active in 2012. For years it has attacked Italian Judaism in a violent and also trivial manner, putting characteristically Nazi themes back into circulation. Stormfront attacked the Minister of International Cooperation and Integration Andrea Riccardi who "collaborates with International Judaism and says he wants to black-out antimondialisti [anti-global, fundamentalist Catholic Fascists – Translator's note] websites". On the website we read: "Andrea Riccardi, the minister for International Cooperation (international hypocritical moralism) and Integration (racial intermixing)" and "It is precisely his role to intermix the Italian race and make it disappear". The minister is accused of being a "servant of the Jews" and of the "big-nosed lords".

In June, the topic "the foster parents of the negro Balotelli: JEWS" is opened in a Stormfront discussion forum, with dozens of racist and anti-Semitic posts following in short order.

In October, the day after the death of Shlomo in Venice, the only Italian survivor among the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Neo-Nazi Holocaust deniers "exult": "One less faker", "a hundred of these days". Biomirko, a long-standing contributor to the forum, militant in Forza Nuova and author of a Holocaust-denying documentary spread via the web (titled "*Wissen macht Frei*"), states: "Pinocchio is dead... long live Pinocchio! Because in any case they're going to keep him alive through his tales, his crappy book, his recorded testimony", and "I love it—sooner or later all the phony survivors will bite the dust".

In one of the newest discussion lists, opened just before the police blacked them out, suggestions were made to attack the new kosher restaurant in Turin.

Countermeasures

In an attempt to combat anti-Semitism and cyberhate, the Italian parliament has drawn up two laws against Holocaust-denial, anti-Semitism and racism via Web (with the commitment to ratifying the Budapest Protocol).

On October 16th, 2012—during celebrations of the anniversary of the rounding up of the Roman Jews by the Nazis—a bill was introduced that would make Holocaust-denial a crime punishable by up to three years in prison should the action take the form of a "behavior having the potential to disturb the peace, or that constitutes a threat, offense or libel, an apology for the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, as defined by Articles 6, 7, and 8 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, or that denies the reality, dimension or genocidal character of said crimes". Promoted by the senator of the Italian Partito Democratico (PD) Silvana Amati, the proposed legislation was undersigned by 97 senators belonging to all the main political parties. However, the fall of the Monti government and the dissolution of Parliament aborted progress on the bill.

Minister Riccardi has stated on several occasions that the government must black out websites that preach hatred and incite racism and anti-Semitism.

The fight against cyberhate has achieved a number of victories:

- ✓ In January 2012, an instructor at a Turin high school was investigated by the police following publication of anti-Semitic, homophobic, racist and anti-disabled messages on his Facebook page. On December 29th, 2011, after publishing a photo of Mussolini and Hitler shaking hands, he addressed the Facebook administrators: "Notice to the filthy Jewish bastards who control us in that fucking faggot-filled land called California. If you take down this photo, I'm going to take my pistol to the synagogue near my house and take out some of those Jewish parasites that frequent it";
- ✓ In November, the Italian police arrested the Stormfront webmaster and blacked out the Italian section. The accusation was incitement of hatred based on race and ethnicity. The investigation and arrests were carried out by the Roman postal police;
- ✓ In May, Italy's highest court, the Cassazione, confirmed the sentence imposing a 4-thousand-euro fine on Pietro Melis, professor of educology at the University of Cagliari for a paper published in the 2004 annals of the Educology Department, where he called for "the Nazi gas chambers for the accursed Jews" who are guilty of practicing the rite of orthodox slaughter as prescribed in the Book of Leviticus. The judges rejected theses sustained by Melis in name of the animal-rights cause as scientifically unfounded;
- ✓ After a petition by the Jewish community of Trieste, a woman was sentenced to eight months in prison for having created a Facebook page titled: "For those who would like to reopen the Risiera di San Sabba" (a concentration camp for Jews and Partisans in operation near Trieste in the period 1943-1945).