

Political Islamism and the Role of Muslim Brotherhood in Italy

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اتحاد الهيئات الإسلامية في إيطاليا

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاونٹر ٹیرورزم

Summery:

On June 12th, 2020, the Secretary-General of the Great Mosque of Rome, which is also the headquarter of the “Islamic Cultural Center of Italy-CCII”, Dr. Abdellah Redouane, published a long statement on the organization’s Facebook page, accusing the Islamic organization “Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations of Italy-UCOII” of disseminating falsehood and being part of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The long post signed by Dr. Redouane is entitled “*Manifesto of Truth to refute slanders in circulation and defeat falsehood with the truth*” and it clearly expresses where it wants to hit.

This is an extremely important and unprecedented event since, in fifty years of organized Islamic presence in Italy, it had never occurred that a strong critic towards Muslim Brotherhood-related organizations came from other Islamic organized actors and, in this case, the most important at an institutional level as officially recognized by Italian authorities, according to the Presidential Decree no.712/1974. It is not a case that the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy is often indicated in academic and journalistic works as “the institutional Islam”, not only concerning the official recognition, but also because of its intense diplomatic activity involving embassies and governments. The CCII is in fact connected to the institutions of Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Summarizing the statement, in the brief introduction, Dr. Redouane goes straight to the point and indicates how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, some actors took advantage of the intensive web activity to spread false information and turn upside down the reality of facts regarding the Islamic matter in Italy.

In point 1, Redouane claims that the CCII is the only recognized Muslim institution in Italy and asks UCOII for evidence of official recognition, due to its claims.

In point 2, the Secretary-General criticizes UCOII’s Facebook claim of an agreement protocol ratified by the Italian institutions regarding the re-opening of prayer rooms after the Covid-19 lockdown; a claim that was accompanied by a photo of UCOII’s president, Yassine Lafram, together with Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese and Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

Dr. Redouane argued that the CCII was the first one to sign such a document and asked UCOII for proofs of presence at the signing event.

In point 3, UCOII’s claims of being the biggest Islamic organization in Italy are indicated as false. In such regards, the Secretary-General points out how the real UCOII representation within the vast and pluralistic Islamic community in Italy ranges between 5% and 10%, also stating how UCOII only indicated 160 worship places under its own management; now, considering that in Italy there are more than a thousand Islamic centers, the numbers speak for themselves.

In point number 4 and 5, Dr. Redouane challenges UCOII’s claims of being covering a major role in the burying of Muslims during the Covid-19 epidemic and within the Italian penitentiary system, adding that Muslim organizations should not brag about mortuary services provided to the community and about their role in prisons.

However, the most interesting part of CCII's statement is found in the final part, where UCOII's founder and president emeritus, Syrian doctor Mohammed Nour Dachan, is indicated as "the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Italy" and cites recordings where Dachan, while invoking unity, verbally attacks other Islamic actors unwilling to remain under the supremacy of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the conclusive part, Dr. Redouane recalls how UCOII did not manage to take control of the Islamic community in Italy when the organization was at its peak of strength; hence, it is utopic to still believe in the Ikhwani-Salafi hegemony today, as the Islamic phenomenon in Italy has become far more complex and pluralistic.

UCOII's Roots:

UCOII was founded in 1990 in the city of Ancona as an evolution of what was before known as USMI (Union of Muslim Students in Italy), a small group formed in 1971 by Syrian and Palestinian students attending the University for Foreigners in Perugia.

The Islamist ideology of this group immediately became evident from its publications, Italian translations of the works of radical Islamist thinkers such as Ala Maudoodi, Hassan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb, often inaccurate versions and translated from English.¹

The presidency had initially been assumed by the already cited Nour Dachan, indicated by many as a leader of the Syrian component of the Muslim Brotherhood, while Ali Abu Shwaima, had been appointed to the secretary position, before being taken over by Italian convert and former extreme left-wing "Autonomia Operaia" activist Roberto "Hamza" Piccardo.

In March of 2010, after 20 years of presidency, Dachan was replaced by Palestinian Ezzedin Elzir, who maintained the position until 2018, when he was replaced by the Moroccan citizen Yassine Lafram.^{2 3}

UCOII has often been accused of excessive attention to political issues occurring in the Middle East (Syria, Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon), with a consequent loss of sight of the many problems involving the Muslims in Italy. Even today, as perceivable in Dr. Redouane's statement, UCOII seems far more concerned about hegemony, rather than on dealing with the needs of Muslims.

As a matter of fact, UCOII's leadership has always been maintained by Syrians and Palestinians until 2018, while the majority of Muslims on Italian soil are Moroccans, Egyptians, not Syrians or Palestinians, as exposed by Paolo Branca, professor of Arabic Studies at the Catholic University of Milan.

The most notorious Syrian families who have been leading the Islamist arena in Italy are the Dachan, the Breigheche, the Kabakebbji, and the Ghrewati.

Among the Palestinians, the roles of Ezzedin Elzir (imam in Firenze), Mohamed Abdel Qader (imam in Perugia), and Ali Abu Shwaima (imam in Segrate, Milan) are known and chronicled.

1 As quoted by Paolo Branca in Cesrea - Fondazione Agnelli, Torino (2-3/12/2004). "The transmitted Islam": Muslim publications in Italy in relation to the various Muslim organizations and the various interpretations of Islam.

2 <https://www.toscanaoggi.it/Cultura-Societa/Islam.-Yassine-Lafram-nuovo-presidente-nazionale-Ucoii.-Succede-a-Izzedin-Elzir>

3 <https://moked.it/blog/2010/03/20/qui-firenze-izzedin-elzir-nuovo-presidente-ucoui-%E2%80%9Ccredo-nel-dialogo-e-nella-reciproca-comprensione%E2%80%9D/>



Islamist political activism and Arab Springs:

Leaving aside UCOII's complex, ambiguous and often stormy course of life, it is worth focusing on some factors that show how some of its members and individuals closely related to the organization are involved in activities that support Muslim Brotherhood-related political actors, preachers and intellectuals.

Dr. Abdellah Redouane refers to Mohammed Nour Dachan as “the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Italy” and, after all, the president emeritus' strong involvement on Italian soil in the anti-Assad “Free Syria” campaign is very well known, with plenty of conferences, street stands and demonstrations, broadly documented by photos and videos.

His son, Ameer Dachan, is also a known activist who has published posts in favor of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, against the Russian military intervention in Syria and in favor of the Arab Springs revolts.

Nour Dachan's daughter, Asmae, who operates as a journalist, is also active in the “Free Syria campaign” and in June of 2019 she received an Order of Merit prize by the Italian President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella; an act that enraged many politicians such as Giorgia Meloni and Maurizio Gasparri who denounced her links to two Syrian militants, precisely Ammar Bacha and Haisam Sakhanh, who were photographed fully armed, in Syria, together with the Chaddad brothers; all four coming from the city of Milan to fight against Assad's army.

As if it wasn't enough, Haisam Sakhanh was caught on video with a group of other militants while murdering seven unarmed Syrian soldiers. The story was published by the New York Times in February of 2017 and Sakhanh is currently serving a life sentence in Sweden. ⁴

Asmae Dachan was caught on video in March 2013 at a “Free Syria” demonstration in Milan, speaking right next to Haisam Sakhanh. As if it wasn't enough, Asmae also publicly defended Sakhanh on Facebook in relation to the charges brought against him for the February 2012 assault against the Syrian embassy in Rome. ⁵ Additionally, several news sites such as Tempi and E-Police indicated how one of Dachan's daughters had been Ammar Bacha's girlfriend. ^{6 7}

The ITCT retrieved the link of a Parliament Interrogation presented by congressman Francesco Catanoso, member of Berlusconi's “*Popolo della Libertà*”, where he asks for clarification on the issues that link the Dachan to Ammar Bacha and Haisam Sakhanh. ⁸

The Dachan family also managed a flow of human aid and ambulances directed to Syria from the busy port of Ancona, in central Italy's Adriatic coast, where the Dachan reside.

Leaving aside the Dachan, it is possible to identify other connections between UCOII and the Muslim Brotherhood area.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/world/europe/syrian-rebel-haisam-omar-sakhanh-sentenced.html>

⁵ https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/02/10/news/blitz_all_ambasciata_siriana_per_protestare_contro_le_stragi-29643906/

⁶ <https://www.tempi.it/siria-jihadisti-italia-cologno-monzese-califfato-assad/>

⁷ <http://www.e-police.it/2018/03/20/in-italia-ci-sono-organizzazioni-che-sostengono-i-terroristi/>

⁸ http://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic4_01996_17?output=text%2Fplain

For instance, among UCOII's directive board it is possible to notice Egyptian citizen Mohamed Abderrahman, who has covered the role of Treasurer for UCOII and who is President of Alleanza Islamica d'Italia (Italian Islamic Alliance), an association that was blacklisted by the government of the United Arab Emirates for being terror-related (no. 39 in the list) and that is considered by several analysts as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Italy.^{9 10 11}

Former UCOII secretary's son, Davide Piccardo, has been photographed on many occasions while taking active roles in demonstration in favor of former Islamist president Mohamed Morsy, in favor of Erdogan and against Israel.

Davide Piccardo had also been the coordinator of CAIM (Coordinamento Associazioni Islamiche Milano) and in July 2014 he had commented on Facebook the clashes outside synagogues in Paris with a "*è finita la pacchia*" (the good times are over), generating a wave of protests among the political arena and the Jewish community.^{12 13 14}

Piccardo Jr. is currently the editing director of the Islamist website "La Luce News", with a clear pro-Erdogan and pro-Muslim Brotherhood imprint. The website was heavily criticized in July 2020 in relation to a published article that distorted a Facebook post published by Prof. Paolo Branca of the Catholic University of Milan. As written by "*Il Giornale*", while Branca had exposed a curious situation where female worshippers attended prayer rooms in improper dress code, the article altered the message, passing on the idea that Prof. Branca was simply sitting in the back and looking at women's rears.^{15 16}

It is also worth mentioning the role of Sumaya Abdel Qader, currently a Milan councilwoman for the "*Partito Democratico*" who, in 2016, had filed legal suits for defamation against those who had accused her of being linked to the Muslim Brotherhood due to her former role in the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE). However, judge for preliminary inquiries Guido Salvini dismissed the accusation, indicating that "there is a wide academic literature showing the relations between FIOE and the Muslim Brotherhood".^{17 18 19}

Sumaya Abdel Qader was brought at the center of media attention on several occasions due to her mother's Facebook posts in favor of Hamas, her father shaking Mohamed Morsy's hand and her husband, Abdallah Kabakebbji, posting a comment that suggested "Ctrl-alt-canc" for Israel and referring to the Jewish State as a "fraud".^{20 21 22 23 24 25}

9 <https://www.iltempo.it/cronache/2014/11/18/news/alleanza-islamica-d-italia-nella-lista-del-terrore-960367/>

10 <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/11/15/UAE-formally-blacklists-82-groups-as-terrorist->

11 http://www.bdtorino.eu/sito/stampa_immagini.php?id=15380&data=13%20Marzo%202015&pubblicazione=Articolo%20scritto%20da%20Romana%20Allegre%20Monti

12 https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/14_luglio_17/quel-post-istiga-all-odio-tensione-ebrei-musulmani-7d75d08e-0d7e-11e4-9f11-cba0b313a927.shtml

13 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/pacchia-finita-lite-sul-post-minaccioso-leader-musulmano-1082963.html>

14 <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2014/07/17/buferia-su-piccardo-per-i-commenti-anti-israelianiMilano05.html?ref=search>

15 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/lincredibile-invettiva-sito-piccardo-contro-paolo-branca-1877461.html>

16 <https://www.laluce.news/2020/07/13/paolo-branca-shock-in-moschea-guardavo-sederi-e-slip-delle-rifugiate-siriane-e-ridevo/>

17 <https://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/cronaca/sumaya-fratelli-musulmani-1.4477976>

18 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/consigliera-velata-pd-che-sostiene-sala-legata-agli-1658010.html>

19 <https://www.milanotoday.it/politica/sumaya-fratelli-musulmani.html>

20 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/i-post-imbarazzanti-madre-sumaya-1272533.html>

21 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/imbarazzo-candidata-pd-madre-celebra-i-jihadisti-su-fb-1271344.html>

22 <http://www.ilpopulista.it/gallery/14-Giugno-2016/1907/Milano--la-madre-della-candidata.html>

23 <https://www.tempi.it/milano-il-caso-sumaya-e-il-problema-islamico-nel-pd/>

24 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/marito-candidata-pd-cancella-israele-dalle-mappe-1259778.html>

25 <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/milano/spunta-foto-che-inguai-a-sumaya-padre-stringe-mano-morsy-1263652.html>



Conclusion:

Going back to the initial statement published by Dr. Abdellah Redouane, Secretary- General of the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy-CCII, it is evident that by indicating Nour Dachan as the “founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Italy” he somehow “institutionalized” a situation that was already known on an informal level but that it had never been officially exposed from within the Islamic organizational arena. This is a heavy blow because, as initially exposed, the CCII is known as the institutional Islam, involved in high diplomacy and political relations. It could be a sign that the situation is changing for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Besides, the reports, articles and analysis made by research centers and the media in the last ten years have been backed by extensive material to back up the claims and this makes it harder and harder for the Islamists to use legal measures indicated by some as “jihad by court”. In conclusion, the situation for the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islamism in Italy is not looking good.

ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.

Photographic Archive:



Figure 1- Mohamed Nour Dachan at a "Free Syria" Demonstration



Figure 2- Mohamed Nour Dachan at another "Free Syria" demonstration



Figure 3- Asmae Dachan lecturing on "Free Syria"

Comunità Siriana a Roma الجالية السورية في روما
March 7, 2012

Il prossimo 15 marzo a Roma verrà giudicato il gruppo di attivisti per i diritti umani in Siria che il 10 febbraio scorso ha assalito l'ambasciata di Damasco nella capitale italiana. Il gesto, dall'alto valore simbolico, è stato fatto in nome del diritto alla vita del popolo siriano ed è stato dedicato alle donne, ai bambini, ai giovani, all'intero popolo, che sta pagando con la vita la scelta della libertà e della democrazia. L'ambasciata siriana rappresenta il governo siriano, quindi coloro che stanno massacrando il nostro popolo e, di conseguenza, non rappresenta chi crede nel diritto alla sacralità della vita umana. La bandiera dell'indipendenza, invece, ci rappresenta, mi rappresenta, rappresenta il futuro di pace e libertà della Siria. Asmae Dachan

Italian Syrians to face trial on 15 March – il 15 marzo vede il processo in Italia
This coming 15 March the group of human rights activists for Syria will be put on trial. Last 10 February these men assaulted the empty Syrian...

1 2 Comments 1 Share

Figure 4-Asmae Dachan's post defending Haisam Sakhanh



Figure 5-Haisam Sakhanh's mugshot



MANIFESTAZIONE CONTRO ASSAD MILANO - 11/03/2012 PARLA UNA GIORNALISTA ITALO SIRIANA ASMAE DACHAN

596 visualizzazioni

1 7 CONDIVIDI SALVA ...

Figure 6-Asmae Dachan and Haisam Sakhanh during a demonstration in Milan



Figure 7-Ammar Bacha and Haisam Sakhanh in Syria (the two at the center)



Figure 8-Haisam Sakhanh murdering unarmed soldiers in Syria