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## Preface of H.E. Mr. Massimo Marotti Ambassador of Italy



I am grateful to CONNECTIONS Magazine for covering the rich and complex relations between Italy and Lebanon. This comprehensive overview focuses on the initiatives that better explain the sense of Italy and Lebanon cooperation, which has grown steadily during the last forty years, and highlights at the same time the fundamental reasons and value of Italy's constant commitment to Lebanon's security, stability and prosperity. The article turns the lights on Italy in Lebanon and on the mutually respectful friendship between two Mediterranean cultural powers, which marked the history of this unique common space.

### **AN ANCIENT FRIENDSHIP AND A RENEWED PARTNERSHIP**

Italy and Lebanon are linked by a friendship that predates the born of the two states and finds its roots in their common Mediterranean heritage and civilization. Thousands of years of common history, exchanges and intense trade relations accompanied and enriched the development of the two nations and of our own respective culture. Many in Lebanon like to mention the 16th century special relationship between Emir Fakhreddine and the dukes of Tuscany. As Rome and Venice before, the Medici family, the bankers who become rulers, interacted with the communities leaving on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Maronite College funded in Rome in 1584 is an important trace of the

historical Lebanese presence in Italy, fostering contacts between clergymen, researchers and young students, which today are being expanded within the framework of Inter-University cooperation. The role of this traditional friendly relation and the awareness that in a globalized world the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea share the same destiny, are constantly recalled during the many official meeting between Italian and Lebanese political leaders.

### **ITALY'S COMMITMENT IN LEBANON AND FOR LEBANON**

The Italian government and Italians are deeply committed in Lebanon and for Lebanon, in order to contribute to the stability of the country and of the region and to assist in the long process of reconstruction of infrastructures and



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economic development to improve the living conditions in Lebanon and to face the many crises and challenges of the last five decades. In 2006, in particular, Italy assumed a courageous diplomatic initiative which proved decisive in order to reach a cease-fire during the July war thanks to the dispatching of UNIFIL II reinforced contingent. Since then, Italy has ensured a critical role providing for more than seven years, during the last thirteen years, the leadership of the peace-keeping mission in the South of Lebanon and contributing to the social and economic development of the region. Italy is the main contributor in terms of troops, equipment, leadership and civilian cooperation. It provides security within the UN Mission spending € 120 million per year.

The Italian Military further supports Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Italy provides training programs for the LAF to accelerate the acquisition of modern capacities to better serve the state, the democratic institutions and the people of Lebanon. Italy hosted in March 2018 the second Rome Conference in support of the Lebanese security institutions. Forty countries and international organizations attended the conference committing donations, technical assistance and credits. After the conference Italy redoubled the training programs in favor of the LAF.

### **A STRONG PARTNERSHIP IN SEVERAL DOMAINS**

Since 1983, Italy is among the main donors working in Lebanon. Lately, its aid bilateral contributions aim at supporting Lebanon in the mitigation of the dire social and economic impact of the Syrian refugee crisis. The different projects and programmes are currently being implemented in several domains: institutional capacity building, social development, environment protection, water networks and wastewater treatment plants, rural and agricultural development, hydrographic scientific research, cultural heritage. The Italian Aid Agency works in coordination with central and local authorities, in a spirit of an equal partnership and on the basis of



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a constructive dialogue with the Lebanese counterparts (both at central and local level), in order to address important needs covering the whole territory and the various components of the Lebanese society.

The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) currently manages programmes and projects that absorb over € 440 million, including € 252 million in soft loans, € 80 million in grants, and € 117 million for initiatives related to the regional Syrian crisis. Since 2006, the total Italian contribution amounts at € 600 million. Together with AICS, which is responsible for the management of these funds, other important Italian actors, such as NGOs, the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and regional aid agencies, implement development policies throughout the country.

Lebanese companies are at the center of important trade relations with Italy, which ranks among the first commercial partners of Lebanon, with total exports amounting to over \$ 1,5 billion every year. Italy's exports consist of a variety of products, including refined petroleum products, machinery and mechanical appliances, ready-made garments, chemical and pharmaceutical products, metals, jewelry, textiles, and agricultural products. "Made in Italy" is synonymous of quality, design, comfort and reliability. It is highly appreciated in Lebanon, by traders and customers

alike. The able team of the Italian Trade Agency plays a key role in boosting the relations between Lebanese and Italian companies both in traditional and new lines of business. The new frontier is the energy sector, especially the renewable energy sources, and the nascent Lebanese oil and gas industry.

Italy and Lebanon, as powerful cultural influencers, are natural allies. They both rely on a rich cultural patrimony, ancient heritage and solid education system. Therefore cultural exchanges between Italy and Lebanon are the backbone of their bilateral relations. The Italian Cultural Institute in Beirut (IIC) is involved in language courses, assisted by the Dante Alighieri Association of Tripoli. The Embassy and IIC support a long-standing cooperation among Italian and Lebanese universities, promote art and cultural events and collaborations and encourage cultural exchanges which help strengthen the bond between the two peoples. Cinema, music, theater, dance, literature, art, architecture, cuisine are the many fields where Italians and Lebanese interact to produce and enjoy expressions of art and culture that belong to their respective identity. Expanding the horizon of this mutually enriching interaction between Lebanon and Italy is not difficult as the two peoples share similar values and approach to life; the not so secret mystery of the success story of the enduring relations between Lebanon and Italy.