

**The Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies
The Department of History and Archaeology
American University of Beirut**

Cordially invite you to a lecture

Rome's approach to Syria, in the 21st Century



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Abstract:

Of the various international actors which have been involved in recent years in the Levant, one founding member of the European Union is often left out of the spotlight. Still, at least since the war in the summer of 2006 in Lebanon, Italy has increased its outreach in this part of the world. How can its policy in the region be defined and has it been coherent in regards to the institutional turmoil the country itself went through after the end of Berlusconi's second government in May 2006? Moreover, should the proximity in Rome of the Vatican be considered a defining factor? The initial anti-clerical nature of the Italian institutions, born in the second half of the 19th century, seems something of a distant past, but can one speak of a joint-venture in the field of "politique arabe"? Obviously, since the fall of Şaddām Ḥusayn in 2003 the popes have had to redefine their approach. Furthermore, how is this complex Levantine involvement of Italy discussed in its domestic media and reflected in its public debate? And have the national uprisings in the Arab world which started at the end of 2010 had an impact on Italy's policy and its business community? This way we can inform the public about what the Italian government, the shadow actor in Rome (the Catholic church), and different civil actors have all done in the last decades or so. Furthermore, it will allow us to talk more generally about the international equilibrium around Syria (from the uprising and State repression onwards).

Biography:

Prof. Johannes Waardenburg is presently teaching at the University of Milan (IULM) and responsible for the field of general history of the Arab world (from the 6th to the 21st Century). His recent monography in two volumes about the history of independent Syria (1963 - 2018) *La Siria Contemporanea: ridisegnando la Carta del Vicino Oriente* (Rome, Ipocan, 2021) has become the reference text in Italy on the subject. The Syrian Studies Association's *Bulletin*, in its Fall 2022 issue, considers this work a milestone which will encourage historians internationally to renew their approach to the recent history of the *Bilād al-Şām* in general.