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Conference 26th January 2018

Book Launch **“History of Arabs in Calabria”**

On January 26, 2018, the Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) hosted the second event of the series ‘Lessons from History.’ During this event, Dr. Antonio Maurizio Loiacono was invited to present his recently published book titled ‘Storia degli Arabi in Calabria’ (History of the Arabs in Calabria), an interesting research on the Medieval history of Southern Italy and the heritage left by the Arab presence in the area. The conference was attended by over 30 people, including Phd candidates, several professors and researchers, as well as students and journalists.

After initial greetings, Dr. Leone Radiconcini (Researcher at the EGIC) offered a brief historical introduction, focusing on the problematic interpretation of the Middle Ages as a period of regression, while, just as other periods, it has been a crucial age with many lessons to teach. In the main presentation, Dr. Loiacono discussed the importance of recent historical studies on Calabria and the Arab presence in Southern Italy. Such themes, neglected for far too long, are now finally catching the attention of the academic community, giving fresh insights into Medieval history, including on the Arab empires. During the historical excursus, Loiacono addressed several themes, from the Arabic heritage in the Italian language to the description of the Arab strategic plan for Southern Italy. A crucial part of the presentation was focused on the different sources which testified the status of peaceful coexistence between different peoples and cultures. The populations under Arab ruling were not forced to convert to Islam, and cultural exchange happened both at the level of everyday life and on an intellectual level. Dr. Loiacono closed his speech by referencing historical proofs of such coexistence, such as the Dolphins’ fountain in Stilo - a monument probably built to celebrate the alliance between Arabs and Byzantines against the Holy Roman Empire - and the presence of a mosque in the Byzantine city of Reggio Calabria. His conclusion that, arguably, is as relevant today as it was in the Middle Ages, is that religious differences were never the true motives behind war, that were fueled instead by mere political and economic interests.

The presentation was followed by a very lively debate, with several questions on different themes and discussions about the relevance of the rich and diverse Italian history today.

The EGIC is grateful to Dr. Loiacono for the careful analysis provided, which fitted perfectly in the format 'Lessons from History' and to the large audience which actively took part to the discussion.

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