

UVM SRC 2012 Abstract – Alex Lehning

During the Second World War, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were joined along political and ideological lines in an authoritarian 'Axis'. Despite common historical perception, this was not a strict alliance based on fully compatible theories and objectives. Rather, questions of policy and practice were often challenging or conflicting. This was true not only in a diplomatic sense, but in other spheres of European influence, including economic planning, military strategy, and even social policy. For both Hitler and Mussolini, the concepts of national and racial identity and belonging were a critical component in the ideology of their respective regimes. This presentation will address German-Italian relations in terms of cooperation and conflict regarding official antisemitism and the "Jewish Question" between 1933 and 1943. Utilizing archival material, memoirs, and other sources, I will outline the history of anti-Jewish thought in both Italy and Germany, the development of legislation and official actions against the Jews, and the key diplomatic figures in Rome and Berlin. During the early years of their alliance, antisemitism was an element of both foreign and domestic policy for both countries. Following the German decision to implement the "Final Solution" against European Jews however, Italian officers and officials were forced to confront the realities of the Holocaust. Despite the formal relationship between Nazism and Fascism, in fact some Italians were responsible for taking actions to save Jews in Italy, France, and Yugoslavia from their German allies. In conclusion, I will describe the private disintegration of the relationship between the Axis powers despite public assurances to the contrary, as well as the monumental impact this development had

on Jewish refugees throughout Europe.