

Italians on road back to Libya

Gaddafi's man confirms right to return for expelled thousands

By BRUCE JOHNSTON
IN ROME

TRIPOLI agreed yesterday to give visiting rights to thousands of Italians who were expelled from Libya after Col Gaddafi seized power 35 years ago.

"From now on they can make a request following normal procedures to obtain a visa like anyone else," said Shukri Mohamed Ghanen, the Libyan prime minister.

Col Gaddafi promised on Oct 7 that the 20,000 Italians who were thrown out a year after his 1969 coup would be able to go back. But this was not confirmed until Mr Ghanen's interview with the Italian newspaper *Corriere de la Sera*.

Many of the Italian exiles are delighted at the news, say-

applied for a visa, he caught Libyan authorities on the hop.

"I rushed to the Libyan embassy in Rome," he said. "But they still weren't ready, and said I would have to wait."

"I only hope the offer doesn't turn out to be just words."

"I would like one day to go back and forth to Libya as I please, and even to buy a place to live, especially if I can re-forge ties with old Libyan friends."

"We kept up for a while after I left, but then they broke off contact, probably because they were afraid."

Mr Volo, who lost £80,000 in business assets at 1970 values, is one of a long line of members of the Italian Association for Repatriation to Libya (AIRL) hoping to return.

Giovanna Ortu, the AIRL president, said property worth almost £280 million at the time was confiscated from Italian natives by Libya and they were still waiting to be reimbursed for more than half that amount by Italy.

But the main object of returning to Libya for most members was nostalgic, not economic, she said.

"We're foreigners even in Italy. Inside we're very Libyan. My heart is very much there," said Mrs Ortu, whose family lost extensive farming interests when they were forced to leave.

"It was a terrible wrench," she said. "I was 31 at the time, and celebrating my birthday on the day that news of the confiscation came. My baby was just a few months old."

Romano Cardinali, 63, who was born in Tripoli and now lives near Venice, said: "I want to go back to see my old friends and haunts, and to breathe in the aroma of spices and orange water gently wafting out of the houses."

"I yearn for the *ghibli*, the period of heat from the desert which brings with it the *simun* wind. We have a name for this burning nostalgia. We call it *Mal d'Africa*."

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ing they would like to return permanently despite the bitter circumstances surrounding their forced departure.

"I cannot wait to go," said Salvatore Volo, a former haulage contractor who was born near Tripoli.

Like many of those expelled during Col Gaddafi's Green Revolution, he has dreamed of settling down again in Libya, for which he feels greater affinity than for Italy. From 1911 to 1943 Libya was an Italian colony.

After being expelled and losing all his assets, Mr Volo moved to the Tuscan coast, "to remind me of being by the sea in Libya".

So eager was he to return after Col Gaddafi's announcement that days later, when he