

**Developing a Civilian Peace Corps:  
Does Italy Offer a Model for the EU?<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this paper was presented at NUPI, Oslo, in the framework of the RTN project "Bridging the Accountability Gap in ESDP", 20-22 April 2002, where the author is engaged on behalf of the Universite' Libre de Bruxelles.

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**Introduction**

Traditionally, the notion of security has been associated with the presence of a military capability and power that enables the state to dissuade potential aggressors and protect its interests. As an extension, the concept of defence referred to the capability for “armed defence” against threats to the military security<sup>3</sup>. More recently this classical concept of security has been redefined. There is a new awareness, particularly since the end of the Cold War, that security threats to a country are no longer of a military nature only.<sup>4</sup> Instead, a multidimensional view of security can be adopted that includes five core dimensions: military, political, economic, social and environmental security<sup>5</sup>. Crucially, however, whilst the concept of security has adjusted to the new realities, the concept of defence was not as readily re-elaborated<sup>6</sup>. This “de-coupling” of the concepts of “security and defence” has produced a tendency to emphasise military responses to new security threats with evident consequences for conflict management strategies. Furthermore, there has not been a thorough consideration or elaboration of the “strategic” role that civilians could play in these emerging defence scenarios.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Francesco Tullio (a cura di), *La Difesa Civile e il progetto Caschi Bianchi. Peacekeepers Civili Disarmati*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> A concrete acknowledgement of this came in 1999 when the NATO Alliance, on the occasion of its Fiftieth Anniversary, issued the new NATO *Strategic Concept*. This adopts a multi dimensional view of security that includes terrorism, organised crime, sabotage, population movement, and the control of resources vital to the functioning of a state as contemporary security issues.

<sup>5</sup> See: Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Francesco Tullio, *op cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> In the recent experience of intervention in Kosovo, various analyses have demonstrated that the Kosovo population was not “defended” by NATO’s military intervention, that the costs of such strategy for conflict management are immense, and that its application is always too risky in conflicts where big powers are involved. Far from being controlled, the conflict there escalated dramatically, destabilised the whole region, and had serious repercussions for the relationship between the West and Russia.

It is the contention of this paper that if we want to achieve an appropriate level of security for the 21st century, one that ensures that “states and societies (can effectively) maintain the independence of their lives and identities”,<sup>8</sup> it becomes necessary to identify new actors, new competences and new mandates which would allow for a more efficient response to the newly identified threats we are bound to experience in the modern international system. The paper will first identify the roles that civilian actors can perform in crisis or conflict situations. It will then describe international efforts to institute the concept of a Civilian Peace Corps. Finally, the paper will examine whether the experience of Italy constitutes an instructive example of steps undertaken in the direction of a civilian peace corps.

### **New Civilian Roles in Support of Crisis Management**

John Mackinlay states that we can identify eight causes for conflicts and humanitarian emergencies. These are:

- 1) An increase in the population and consequently in the demand for resources and territorial spaces;
- 2) An increase in the number of people that are living below the poverty-line and are subject to violence and natural disasters;
- 3) An increase in the gap between rich and poor;
- 4) Environmental disasters;
- 5) Competition over primary resources, including water;
- 6) An erosion of the unity of the state, particularly in multi-ethnic states;
- 7) Violence affecting civil society, fostered by groups fighting for the recognition of their ethnicity and the right to self determination;
- 8) Large migration flows<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> See: Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup, Pierre Lemaitre, Elzbieta Tromer, and, Ole Waever, *European Security Reconstruction: Scenarios from the Post-Cold War Era*, Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, University of Copenhagen, 1990 and London: Pinter Publishers, 1990, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> John Mackinlay (ed), *A guide to Peace Support Operations*, The Thomas J. Watson Institute for International Relations, Brown University, 1996, p. 12. For a definition of modern conflicts see: Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases*, Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990. p. 12.

This list suggests that traditional methods adopted for the management of violent conflicts have to be complemented by approaches that do not neglect their root causes and that facilitate processes of socio-economic and democratic development.<sup>10</sup> It is also clear from this list that military responses alone would prove inadequate in these complex situations.

In order to respond to the changes identified in the nature of contemporary conflicts, UN intervention in violent disputes has developed to include civilian personnel engaged in the following activities:

- 1) Monitoring and management of election processes;
- 2) Protection of regional areas where civilians were targeted by armed forces (including those of their own government);
- 3) Establishment of safe zones (as in the case of Bosnia);
- 4) Observation of weapons confiscated or handed in by combatants;
- 5) Distribution of humanitarian aid and/or support to humanitarian agencies in war zones;
- 6) Partial demilitarisation of selected areas (as in the case of Sarajevo);
- 7) Assistance to the re-installation of legitimate governments and police activities in intra-state conflicts;
- 8) Monitoring violations of international law regulating conduct in conflict<sup>11</sup>.

In early peacekeeping missions, civilian personnel were mainly recruited from among the UN ranks and were tasked with providing logistic and administrative support. During more recent operations – i.e. in Cambodia, Somalia and Former Yugoslavia - civilians have carried out humanitarian operations such as delivering food and medical aid. They have also taken up roles that would normally be carried out by the civilian components of an effective government: monitoring of local elections, training of police personnel, fact-finding missions and so on. Following on from the

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Woodhouse and Oliver Ramsbotham, “Terra Incognita: Here be Dragons. Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution in Contemporary Conflict: Some Relationships Reconsidered”, Paper presented at the INCORE Conference on *Training and Preparation of Peacekeepers*, University of Ulster, 13-15 June 1996, pp. 5/6.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Roberts, “The Crisis in UN Peacekeeping”, in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (eds), *Managing Global Chaos, Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 300-301.

UN's experience, civilians employed in such contexts are now also recruited via other international organisations like the OSCE and the European Union who have participated in important missions in the Balkans<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, from the early 1990s, civilians engaged in field operations have included personnel from non-governmental organisations, sometimes working in parallel with governmental programmes.

In addition to the increased number and diversity of civilian personnel, the roles they perform have also expanded, ranging from providing a simple presence (such as carried out at the moment in Palestine), to media monitoring (to affect the public discourse of escalation and de-escalation of a conflict), to conflict resolution roles (such as conciliation, facilitation and mediation and peace education)<sup>13</sup>. The introduction of civilians alongside governmental and military representatives involved in conflict management activities has contributed to a theoretical and programmatic shift from conflict resolution to conflict transformation<sup>14</sup>. This change has been reinforced by an increased awareness of the limitations of outside intervention: attempts to impose settlements on the conflicting parties and to take over the running of their affairs have often proved counter-productive. Instead, more emphasis should be given to the principle of local "ownership" of a peace process. The definition of the role that outsiders can or should play in such situations is of the utmost importance in order to avoid the suspicion that surrounds "do-gooders and war tourists" who arrive in zones of conflict to "help". This point applies to both military peacekeepers and voluntary civilian organisations<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> For an interesting critique of the OSCE mission in Kosovo see: Ulisse, "Come gli americani hanno sabotato la missione dell' OSCE in Kosovo". In *l'Italia in Guerra*, Quaderno Speciale di limes. "Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica", n. 1/99, pp. 113-119. The article touches upon the issue of recruitment of personnel for field operations by such organisations.

<sup>13</sup> For a more complete list and discussion of such roles see: *Enhancing UK Capacity for Handling Conflict: The Rational for a UK Civilian Peace Service*, Tim Wallis and Mareike Junge. Report available on [www.peaceworkers.fsnet.co.uk/report.htm](http://www.peaceworkers.fsnet.co.uk/report.htm)

<sup>14</sup> See for instance: Betts Fetherston and A.C. Parkin, "Transforming Violent Conflict: Contributions from Social Theory", in; Lee-Anne Broadhead (ed), *Issues in Peace Research 1997-1998*, Bradford University, 1997, pp. 19-57; Betts Fetherston, *From Conflict Resolution to Transformative Peacebuilding: Reflections from Croatia*, Working Paper 4, Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Bradford, April 2000.

<sup>15</sup> See: Christian Haarlem, *Civilian Peacekeepers – A Future Challenge*, The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, 1998, p. 7-9. See also: Tim Wallis and Mareike Junge, op. cit.

The presence of civilian personnel in conflict areas has contributed to a change in their status as actors engaged in conflict management activities. However, their presence in the field, although undoubtedly effective, is still very much dependent on a governments' will to welcome them or not. In such a perspective it is important that civilians develop a clear view of the type of relationship they intend to establish with military personnel, and with international as well as national governmental agencies; an understanding of the division of labour and the roles or functions that are appropriate to different actors; and most of all of the different theoretical underpinnings that drive their actions and their goals.<sup>16</sup> There is almost nothing civilians can do in the face of "spoilers" intent on destroying a peace process or escalating a conflict. Although military peacekeepers will have to take over in such situations, civilians may nevertheless retain a key role in reducing the level of violence.<sup>17</sup>

The (domestic) limitations affecting non-governmental organisations intervening in conflict situations are tied to a chronic lack of funds. Consequently, they are pushed to employ time, energy and personnel in order to raise money for their work. They must often accept the priorities set by donors, which may have repercussions for the type of activities performed (not always in accordance with the priorities determined by the evolution of the situation in the field) as well as on the project schedule (subject to the next "round" of fundraising). Alongside financial considerations there is the problem of political recognition: although governments have now come to accept the presence of non-governmental organisations in conflict areas, there is still a strong impression that they are regarded as "appendixes" of the more important political and military actors. For an acceptance of the role of civilians in conflict zones on an equal footing with governmental forces, it is important that governments review the "triadic" relation between security, defence and conflict management mentioned above and refine their understanding of the useful role that civilians can play in emergencies situations. Proposals for the development of Civilian Peace Corps – White Helmets -

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<sup>16</sup> Pamela Aall, "Nongovernmental Organisations and Peacemaking", in; Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (eds), *Managing Global Chaos, Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 440-443.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. See also: J. Lewiss Rasmussen, "Peacemaking in the Twenty-First Century: New Rules, New Roles, New Actors", in: I. William Zartman and J. Lewiss Rasmussen (ed. by), *Peacemaking in International Conflict*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1997, p. 30.

are an important step in this direction. The following is a brief review of international initiatives in this regard.

### **Civilian Peace Corps – White Helmets in UN Documents**

The term “White Helmets” was employed for the first time by the Argentinean Government in 1993 when the then President Menem decided to set up a “Commission for White Helmets” (also known as the Secretariat for international Humanitarian Assistance), with the aim of selecting Argentinean civilian personnel to employ in humanitarian and development tasks.

Following the initiative by Argentina, the UN General Assembly approved UN Resolution 49/139/B on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1994 in which it welcomed national initiatives to set up volunteer corps called “White Helmets” to be employed nationally in the prevention of humanitarian emergencies, and internationally to support UN humanitarian assistance operations. The General Assembly encouraged national volunteer corps to develop appropriate capacities that could support UN agencies. It also invited national governments to devise innovative instruments to financially support such initiatives, and requested that the Secretary General submit a report to the Economic and Social Council considering the feasibility of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Volunteers to co-ordinate all those activities undertaken by the national volunteer corps.<sup>18</sup>

On 27 June 1995, the UN Secretary General presented a report to the Economic and Social Council entitled “Participation of Volunteers: ‘*White Helmets*’ in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical co-operation for development”. This report proposed the institutionalisation of national volunteer corps and considered generalised standards of training to enable them to be usefully employed by the UN in various fields of intervention. The Secretary General again mentioned the Department for Humanitarian Affairs and the UNV as the appropriate UN institutions to coordinate the ‘White Helmets’ and listed the tasks where they could be of assistance (distribution of food and provision of relief and

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<sup>18</sup> Document cited by Francesco Tullio in: *La Difesa Civile e il Progetto Caschi Bianchi*, op cit., p. 86-87.

services; assistance in the compilation of a census of returned refugees and internally displaced people; assistance in the implementation and monitoring of human rights; confidence building activities and conflict prevention/resolution at the grass-roots level; assistance in the demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants; support for the re-organisation and activities of local services; organisation of initiatives to encourage the return of refugees to their country of origin, or their effective integration in the host countries)<sup>19</sup>.

On 10 November 1997, the General Assembly adopted resolution 52/171 in which it expressed appreciation for the progress achieved and recognised the potential of the concept of “White Helmets”. In this document the General Assembly encouraged “voluntary national and regional actions aimed at making available to the United Nations system, through the United Nations Volunteers, national volunteer corps such as the White Helmets on a standby basis, in accordance with accepted United Nations procedures and practices, in order to provide specialised human and technical resources for emergency relief and rehabilitation”<sup>20</sup>. More importantly, the General Assembly encouraged states to “identify and support their respective national focal points for White Helmets in order to...provide the United Nation system with an accessible global network of rapid response facilities...(par.6) and invited both the states and the “United Nation system to consider ways and means to ensure the integration of the White Helmets initiative into their programme activities, particularly those related to disaster and humanitarian relief assistance” (par. 7). The Assembly also requested that the Secretary General report to it at its Fifty-Fourth session on the implementation of the resolution (par.9).

Another document of fundamental relevance is represented by a report covering the period from January 1998 to June 1999<sup>21</sup>. In the document the Secretary General proceeded to review the UNV/White Helmets Programme developed between 1995 and 1999 and highlighted the regions where it had been implemented ranging from Rwanda and the Balkans, to Palestine, the Eastern Caribbean, Lebanon, Haiti, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> *Participation of “White Helmets” in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development*, UN Doc. A/RES/52/171, par. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *The “White Helmets” Initiative*, in UN Document A/54/217, 13 August 1999.



(par. 6-7). In his concluding observations Kofi Annan stated that a “number of Member States” were “willing to consider creating and strengthening their volunteer capacities in support of the White Helmets initiative” (par. 18) and that “for the UNV, the White Helmets Commission and other participating Governments to further build upon the successes and to enable replication of these experiences in other Member States” it was “hoped that additional financial contributions to the special financial window of the UNV” could “be mobilised” (par.19).

### **The European Civil Peace Corps**

The European Parliament has also been considering action in support of a European Civil Peace Corps, following the initiative of some members of the Green Party in 1995. On 17<sup>th</sup> May the European Parliament, in its plenary session in Strasbourg, recognised for the first time, that a first step towards a contribution to conflict prevention could be the establishment of a European Civilian Peace Corps.

Since then the proposal lay in a dormant state until it was revived at a conference held on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1998 entitled “European Civil Peace Corps: Towards Improved European Capacity for Conflict Prevention”. Soon after, in January 1999, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy of the EP developed a proposal for a recommendation to the Council on the establishment of a European Civil Peace Corps.<sup>22</sup> In February 1999, the Parliament adopted a recommendation for the Council to prompt the EU Commission to initiate a feasibility study (at the latest by the end of 1999) on the establishment of such ECPC and, in case of a positive response, to set up a pilot project<sup>23</sup>.

The first priority of the ECPC is the prevention of conflict escalation and contributions towards conflict de-escalation. However, the Peace Corps might also take up humanitarian tasks following natural disasters. The ECPC involvement should not, in the view of the Parliament, be confined to a specific regional area (i.e. Europe). The working approach of the ECPC should be holistic in nature and include political and economic efforts and the enhancement of political participation. As with the

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<sup>22</sup> Document of the EP A4-0047/99

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Annex “Recommendation on a European Civilian Peace Corps”, par. 1a.

‘White Helmets’, the tasks of the ECPC should be multi-functional to address all levels of protracted conflicts.<sup>24</sup>

The personnel of the ECPC would consist of a) a permanent group of experts employed full-time to fulfil management tasks and ensure continuity, and b) a group of specialised personnel to send in to field operations, adequately trained to operate in specific missions, recruited either on a part-time basis or as short-term field workers. With reference to the training and professional experience of the personnel employed, the EP’s recommendation specifically mentions the relevance of “conflict transformation” capacities. The document concludes by stating that

“the military response, though necessary to stop violent confrontation is not sufficient to bring parties to a real reconciliation. The idea of the ECPC, in this respect, should be taken into account by the EU as a further means to enhance and make its external action more effective. ... Civil diplomacy is softer and more flexible and should be used to side, continue or conclude military peacekeeping actions. The EU has an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen its Common Foreign and Security Policy setting up a new practical instrument that could be made available to warring parties for the prevention of the escalation of violence and the peaceful resolution of crises”.

To the author’s knowledge, the feasibility study recommended by the EP has not yet been carried out. It is remarkable that in the EU Council report on the 2352 Council meeting entitled “Development” - where amongst other things, the issues of building an effective partnership with the UN in the field of development and humanitarian affairs and linking relief, rehabilitation and development are debated - the term “White Helmets” or “Civilian Peace Corps” never appears, even in the chapter on conflict prevention (sic!)<sup>25</sup>.

### **White Helmets in Italy: the Law 230/98**

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<sup>24</sup> Concrete examples of ECPC’s activities could be mediation, confidence building between belligerents, humanitarian assistance; reintegration of ex-combatants, rehabilitation and reconstruction, monitoring and improving the human rights situation and help in the empowerment process of political parties (including through the monitoring of elections); interim administration to facilitate short-term stability; information and the establishment of educational programmes and structures designed to eliminate prejudices and enemy stereotyping; education and information campaigns for people about the peace-building activities at hand.

<sup>25</sup> See: Document C/01/191, Brussels 31 May 2001.

1998 was a particularly significant year for the Italian debate over the issue of civilian peace corps. In fact, in July that year a law on conscientious objection was approved (230/98) which included provisions on the research and implementation of non-violent civilian defence. The law dictated that conscientious objectors be employed in operations out of the national territory in four specific circumstances: 1) the civil service could be carried out in a country different from Italy (in organisations that would avail themselves of the work of conscientious objectors); 2) the service could be carried out in countries where Italy operated development aid projects; 3) the service could be carried out in humanitarian missions even where Italian contingents were not engaged; 4) the service could be carried out in operations where Italian personnel were employed<sup>26</sup>. The provision contained three novel elements: 1) the presence of Italian troops was no longer a condition; 2) conscientious objectors could be associated with governmental projects (whilst before the government had refused any direct involvement with and responsibility for their deployment); 3) the prospected use of the objectors with non-violent civilian interposition tasks in programs designed and implemented by the National Bureau for Civil Service and the Department for Civil Protection.

The Italian Parliament also approved a recommendation for setting up a consultative body to co-operate with all the main peace research institutes in Italy and Europe. Furthermore, the recommendation included reference to a “Research Institute for Non Violent Civil Defence” and support for the institution of a European Civil Peace Corps to be employed in conflict prevention tasks.

Recognising that civilian volunteers working in humanitarian contingencies can provide concrete help, the Parliament expressed the belief that they also retain a symbolic character and can help establish appropriate conditions for dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. The Parliament recommended the establishment of an Italian contingent of White Helmets to be made available to the UN and requested the Italian Government to conduct a feasibility study of the project<sup>27</sup>. Italy has thus

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<sup>26</sup> Francesco Tullio, *op cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> See: “Sulla Formazione Alla Difesa Non violenta” and “Sull’Istituzione dei Caschi Bianchi” disponibili nel sito: [www.peacelink.it/amici/apg23/cb/ccp/ita.htm](http://www.peacelink.it/amici/apg23/cb/ccp/ita.htm). Furthermore, see the report of the Chamber of Deputies, n. 340, 15 April 1998 pp. 125 and following pages at: [www.camera.it/dati/leg13/lavori/stenografici/sed340/31230015.htm](http://www.camera.it/dati/leg13/lavori/stenografici/sed340/31230015.htm)

formally agreed to constitute a contingent of White Helmets in collaboration with non-governmental organisations and voluntary organisations. The White Helmets' role would consist of supporting the defence and promotion of human rights and in helping to establish conditions conducive to dialogue between parties in conflict. The adopted working methods would privilege the creation and mobilisation of local capacities, as well as support for local non-governmental organisations and for the establishment of new peace constituencies<sup>28</sup>.

The law is well embedded in the provisions of Article 11 of the Italian Constitution which states that "Italy rejects war as a means of offence to other peoples' freedom and a means for the resolution of international disputes; it consents, in conditions of reciprocity with other states, to the limitations to its sovereignty that are necessary for the establishment of a system that ensures peace and justice amongst Nations; it supports and favours international organisations created to this end". The idea of the White Helmets is thus deeply rooted in the Italian juridical system and becomes one of the key routes through which the norm finds concrete application<sup>29</sup>.

### **Reform of the Armed Forces and Consequences for the White Helmets Project**

Obligatory conscription in Italy was abolished by a law approved on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2000 (n. 331/00). A year later, a reform of the Italian armed forces was introduced that allows the possibility of choosing civil as an alternative to military service, in view of the institution of a completely professional army and the abolition of obligatory conscription in 2006. Also new was the fact that civil service is open to women as well as men<sup>30</sup>. Significantly, the reform favours an increased specialisation and efficiency of the volunteers; the service is paid (433 Euros a month) and lasts 12 months and can contribute to the obtainment of university credits and grades for the national competitive exams for careers in the public sector<sup>31</sup>. The birth of the civil service on a voluntary basis (and no longer as part of the activities carried out by conscientious objectors who were obliged to make the choice between military

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<sup>28</sup> Marta Martinelli, "Volontari di Pace in Zone di Guerra: Contraddizioni e Prospettive", in: Fondazione Venezia per la Ricerca sulla Pace, *Annuario della pace. Italia /Maggio 2000 – Giugno 2001*, Trieste: Asterios Editore, 2001, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup> Francesco Tullio, cit., p. 101-102.

<sup>30</sup> La Stampa, "Servizio civile: arruolate anche le donne", 14 Febbraio 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Il Messaggero, "Servizio civile anche per le donne", 14 Febbraio 2001.

service and the civil service) will give rise to a pool of personnel to employ nationally - for instance in defence of the cultural heritage, assisting the poor, the ill and weak sections of the population - and internationally, by facilitating the establishment of an Italian contingent of White Helmets<sup>32</sup>. Importantly, the law contains provisions for a month of training offered to all volunteers, although it has not been specified who should provide such training. A National Agency for Civil Service should be set up within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to liaise with national and international institutions, to decide and monitor the work of regional offices and to monitor the training offered before specific missions. Furthermore, the Agency would be charged with research activities pertaining the civil service.

Whilst the law is quite well developed, and in spite of its well intended provisions, the National Agency for the Volunteer Civil Service has yet to be established. Contrary to the growing interest in the service by different sectors of civil society, the National Conference of Organisations for Civil Service notes a reduced interest of the national institutions in the future of the White Helmets project. Nevertheless, the shortcomings evident at the official level are balanced by the wealth of experience and expertise developed by Italian NGOs. It is to these that next section will refer to.

### **Italian volunteers in war zones: some experiences<sup>33</sup>**

With the unfolding of events in Former Yugoslavia, a significant number of Italian volunteers, including conscientious objectors, left in order to offer support to humanitarian operations under way in that area<sup>34</sup>. The association Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII<sup>35</sup> initiated, in 1992, a project called Operation Dove – Civil Peace Corps. The Operation included various projects implemented in different areas with a common methodology consisting in living in close contact with local populations and

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<sup>32</sup> La Repubblica, “Porte aperte alle donne, cambia il servizio civile”, 14 Febbraio 2001.

<sup>33</sup> The information provided was published in an article by the author entitled “Volontari di Pace in Zone di Guerra: Contraddizioni e Prospettive”, in: Fondazione Venezia per la Ricerca sulla Pace, *Annuario della pace. Italia / maggio 2000 – giugno 2001*, Trieste, Asterios Editore, 2001, pp. 263-277.

<sup>34</sup> See: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, *Progetto Caschi Bianchi: Obiettori di Coscienza in Servizio Civile a fini umanitari, tutela dei diritti umani, prevenzione dei conflitti, costruzione della pace, sostegno alle popolazioni vulnerabili e povere*, [www.peacelink.it/amici/apg23/dossier/Progetto\\_2000.htm](http://www.peacelink.it/amici/apg23/dossier/Progetto_2000.htm)

<sup>35</sup> The Association is a not-for-profit ecclesiastical organisation operating in Italy and internationally with various projects providing care for people affected by HIV, drugs, and prostitution.

looking for all forms of co-operation with the local civil society<sup>36</sup>. The operation took place in Croatia, Bosnia and later on, in Kosovo. Here the volunteers' presence worked as a deterrent against the violation of human rights by accompanying people at risk (following the operational model offered by Peace Brigades International). As volunteers engaged in the same activities with representatives from both the Serb and Kosovo communities, they helped to restore communication links between them<sup>37</sup>.

Amongst the tasks performed by the volunteers were<sup>38</sup>: Presence alongside the affected populations sharing their conflict experiences; support for humanitarian operations in collaboration with various agencies and facilitation of information exchange between such agencies and the local population; support to local peace constituencies; observation, monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions as well as information and education activities aimed at institutions charged with the protection of human rights; reconciliation work with the local population; Initiation of a process of inter-religious dialogue; Facilitation of dialogue processes between cultural, youth and family associations of both ethnic groups; helping the return of internally displaced people and refugees and the identification of divided families.

The White Berets are another Italian not-for-profit organisation with the expressed intention of acting as an instrument of peace with non-military means<sup>39</sup>. It aims at the prevention of conflict escalation through physical interposition and "people's diplomacy". It is organised in small groups of 20 people (all volunteers) and places its emphasis on impartially supporting groups with different ethnic, religious and cultural affiliations and helping them to establish/maintain contacts with each other. Amongst its most innovative projects was the opening of Peace Embassies in Pristina (1995) and Belgrade (1999). Pacifists from the Former Yugoslavia wrote to their "colleagues" in other countries and suggested that instead of sending large groups of people that were not committed to spending a long time in the area, they could send smaller groups who were willing to stay longer. The "embassies" contacted all non-governmental organisations or interested associations and encouraged them to create

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<sup>36</sup> The Association has worked in: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Croatia, Albania, Russian Federation, India, Bangladesh, Mexico, Kosovo, East Timor and Congo.

<sup>37</sup> Mauro Cereghini, "Operazione Colomba", in *Limes*, cit. p 120 e 121.

<sup>38</sup> Listed on: [www.peacelink.it/amici/app23/cb/dossier/Progetto\\_CB\\_2000.htm](http://www.peacelink.it/amici/app23/cb/dossier/Progetto_CB_2000.htm)

<sup>39</sup> Statutes of the Association available at: [www.peacelink.it/users/berrettibianchi/statutoberrettibianchi.htm](http://www.peacelink.it/users/berrettibianchi/statutoberrettibianchi.htm)

mixed commissions to work on issues of peace and solidarity. Apart from offering support in relief activities, the innovation of these embassies consisted in their stated aim of maintaining open channels of communication between the populations affected by violence; offering impartial information on the events; and devising proposals for mediation on relevant issues.

A different example, more relevant to the area of emergency relief, is represented by the *Conorzio Italiano di Solidarieta'* which has also been operating in the Former Yugoslavia. It has successfully co-operated with the World Food Program to send hundreds of tons of food there. Thanks to UNICEF, volunteers from the *Conorzio* have established a project in Tuzla providing food for children aged 0-5, and in Nis they have established a program of social integration for the refugees. The *Conorzio* has effectively managed to network with and co-ordinate various organisations - international and national (Italian), governmental (including military) and non-governmental - in pursuit of its objectives.

The examples above are not meant to portray all the experiences or complexities of the voluntary sector in Italy, but they do illustrate the operational potential of these civil initiatives. Furthermore, they show how NGOs can complement the work of governmental organisations particularly through their attention to the micro-aspects of conflict prevention and resolution activities, as opposed to the focus on macro-aspects (social, economic and political) privileged by governmental initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

On 20 April 2001 the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society organised a conference in Brussels entitled "EU Civilian Crisis Management Capability". In the subsequent report, Renata Dwan, of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), notes that there is no clear concept of what civilian crisis management is at the European level. Interestingly, she points out that the concept is defined more by negation, i.e. as non-military strategies,

processes, and tools than in any positive articulation of the term.<sup>40</sup> Since the EU first began to address the issue of developing a crisis management capability, discussions have focused primarily on the establishment of a common Rapid Reaction Force. However, there has also been a keen interest, especially in Finland and Sweden, to address the issue of a civilian crisis management capacity alongside the military one. The 1999 European Summit in Helsinki agreed that a “non-military crisis management mechanism will be established to co-ordinate and make more effective the various civilian means and resources, in parallel with the military ones, at the disposal of the Union and the Member States”. In June 2000, the European Summit in Feira identified four priority areas in which the EU would strengthen its capabilities to support field operations led by the OSCE, UN or the EU itself: Policing, the Rule of Law, Civil Administration and Civil Protection. By the Gothenburg Summit in 2001 the European Council had agreed concrete targets for Member States to contribute to these areas. Disappointingly, during the Laeken Summit Meeting in December 2001, the European Council declaration regarding civilian aspects of crisis management showed how the main emphasis remained on the development of Police capabilities whilst other areas, although considered priority areas, are left comparatively behind.<sup>41</sup>

With the emphasis currently placed on the achievement of the police targets set out at Feira, one has to wonder if the primary concern of the EU is the restoration of legal order in a country affected by conflict. Whilst this would be a laudable result it is very far from implementing the complex spectrum of the aspects entailed in the term “Civil Defence”. Furthermore, many observers have stated that the EU is uniquely placed to play a civilian role in crisis management. It is undeniably so, but we have to ask if this is a reflection of its structures and policies, or of an accurate understanding of crisis needs and the tools required to respond to them. It is my impression that the emphasis currently placed on the four priority areas agreed in Feira will postpone discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of civilian peace forces as well as on the modalities to contribute national volunteers to a European Civil Peace Corps more in line with the description of the White Helmets made by the UN (as described above).

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<sup>40</sup> Renata Dwan, “Themes to be Dealt With and Challenges to be Met”, in: Frida Blom, *EU Civilian Crisis Management Capability*, Conference Report, Stockholm: Swedish Peace and Arbitration society, June 2001, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> See: Catriona Gourlay, “The Spanish Presidency Agenda for Conflict Prevention and Civilian Crisis Management”; and Jamie Woodbridge “The Laeken Summit and ESDP: Much Ado about Nothing”, in *European Security Review*, No. 10, January 2002.



As the situation stands, it seems to me that the EU is “uniquely placed to play a civilian role in crisis management” simply because it is a civilian organisation. The abandonment of the debate over the institution of a European Civil Peace Corps shows that the Union is good at setting numerical targets and deadlines, but is struggling to acquire visible signs of power, and is still fighting with a superficial understanding of the programmatic implications of the term “civilian crisis management”. Where the EU engages in support of NGO initiatives in this field or in university training programs (such as in Austria and Italy), it does so in a sort of “subcontracting” mode, rather than with the aim of developing and adopting a multi-faceted European civil response to man-made crises<sup>42</sup>.

In spite of the lack of real progress at the supra-national level<sup>43</sup>, some achievements are evident at the national level where the debate over Civilian Peace Corps and services seems to be more varied and inclusive of different sectors of civil society. The law instituting the national peace service in Italy is the direct result of the national debate over such issues. It presents many innovative aspects and could be a step towards the creation of a contingent of Italian White Helmets to be made available to the EU (if it decides to avail itself of it) and the UN<sup>44</sup>. Although the law was only approved in 2001 - making it difficult to make an assessment of the real impact of its implementation (the call for a 1095 volunteers to recruit for next year, has only been made in the month of March 2002) - Italy represents an useful example for other countries. In fact, compared with other EU countries, it has set up an official process to develop a body of Civilian Peace Corps – White Helmets as an *alternative to military service*. By contrast, other national efforts have been limited to supporting civil society initiatives, creating rosters of civilians or training specific pools of

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<sup>42</sup> In this light I also consider the large sums of money made available by the EU for civilian crisis management and conflict prevention programmes.

<sup>43</sup> Opinions on this issue differ. For instance, Wallis and Junge state that “...governments and EU institutions are opened to new ideas and suggestions from NGOs for how they should act in conflict situations as they have never been before”. Tim Wallis and Mareike Junge, “Civilian Peace Services in Europe – An Overview”, paper presented at the *2nd Peaceworkers Seminar*, 9 May 2001. Available at: [www.peaceworkers.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.peaceworkers.fsnet.co.uk)

<sup>44</sup> To date, a National Agency does not yet exist and the co-ordination of civilian volunteers is left to the Agency for Civil Protection. This reflects a limited understanding of the needs of a civilian peace corps, especially one that could be made available to international institutions. Furthermore, the national debate about the character and organisation of a civil peace corps is receiving less attention by Italian institutions than was originally hoped for.

experts, without moving towards developing a national corps of civilians to be employed also in state-led initiatives<sup>45</sup>.

The Italian initiative is also fully consistent with the above mentioned UN Document (see p.6) where it recommends the institutionalisation of national volunteer corps to be made available to the UN for them to be employed in various field operations.

Italy, at the national level, has taken a clear interest in developing the operationalisation of a civil peace corps. It would thus be well placed to take a lead at the EU level in putting the issue on the agenda. This would re-invigorate the debate on the establishment of a European civil peace corps.

For its part, the European Union is in a good position to encourage national processes towards the establishment of such Peace Corps. It is also uniquely placed to support them and help their co-ordination within the framework of a Common Foreign and Security Policy. At present, however, the will to develop such European Civil Peace Corps seems to be painfully absent. It would seem time to at least revive the EP proposal for a ‘feasibility study’ that had as its objective the support of the UN and the establishment of an effective collaboration between international, regional and national initiatives on this issue.

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<sup>45</sup> Most notably in Germany, where the government pledges large sums of money each year for the Civilian Peace Service (CPS) but actually only employs senior professionals. These only have to undergo a four-month training course before being sent on peace-building operations.