Conscription and Operational Reserve: Italy and Europe Take Action

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With the balance of European security tested by the war in Ukraine, the loss of global influence of the United States, and the geopolitical rise of the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), more and more countries are considering a return to **mandatory conscription**, in some cases even extending it to women.

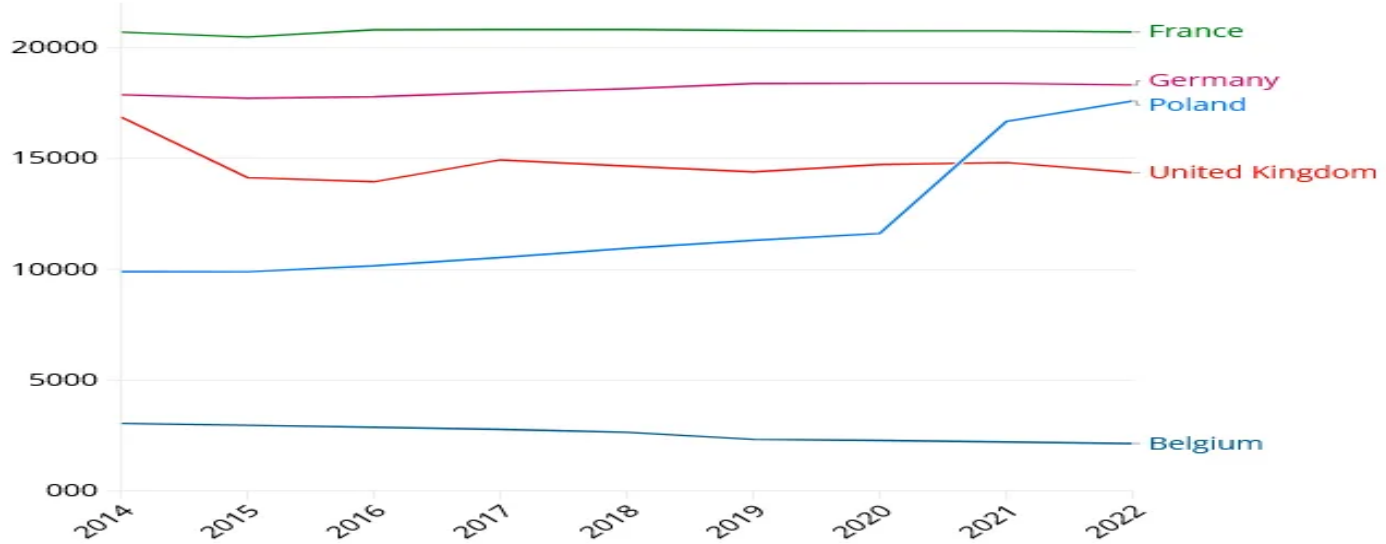
The President of Latvia **Edgars Rinkevics**, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, reiterated the need to seriously discuss the return to mandatory military service and the restoration of spending levels similar to those of the Cold War era. A stance that reflects the fear of an unprepared Europe in a new consolidating global disorder.

Confirming the alarm is the record figure of **global military spending**: in 2022 it reached **2.240 trillion dollars**, the highest level since 1949, with an increase of **3.7%** compared to the previous year.

After Post-War Disarmament, a New Need for Critical Mass

Since the end of the Cold War, many European states have drastically reduced their armed forces. Countries like **France, Germany, and Italy** have suspended mandatory conscription, reducing personnel by up to **38%**. Only a few nations – including **Finland, Greece, Norway, and Switzerland** – have maintained active military service.

Today, however, the scenario has radically changed. “The point is not necessarily to fight the Russians, but to demonstrate a sufficient presence to **deter** any aggression,” stated Alexandr Burilkov, a researcher at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. According to Burilkov, the collective strengthening of European military capabilities is not a luxury, but a necessity “affordable if done together, especially considering the consequences of a lack of preparation.”



Military Personnel of Some European Nations from 2014 to 2022

Pressures from the Home Front: “More Men Needed”

The alarm is not only coming from analysts. The **Italian Armed Forces** themselves, now under increasing pressure, are urgently calling for a **strengthening of personnel**.
The latest was **Admiral Enrico Credentino**, Chief of Staff of the Navy, who in an interview with *la Repubblica* stated:

> *“The Navy's resources are sufficient... but for a limited period. This effort can last three to four years, no longer.”*
> *He then called for an increase in personnel from **30,000 to 39,000 units**, claiming to have*

> *the support of the Minister of Defense **Guido Crosetto**.*

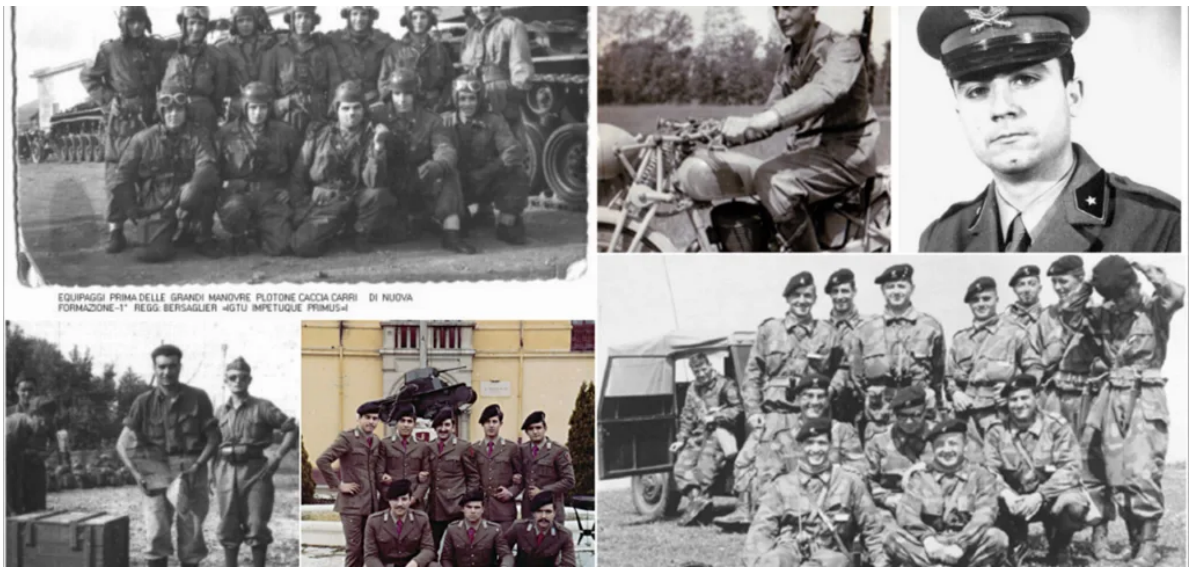
Also, the **Chief of Staff of the Army,** Carmine Masiello, emphasized in a parliamentary hearing the need to increase personnel to **between 133,000 and 138,000 units**, well beyond the current target of **93,100 by 2033**, highlighting how the numbers provided by current legislation are **inadequate** to face high-intensity conflicts and sustain NATO missions.

Minister **Crosetto** has also revived the idea of an **Operational Reserve** capable of dealing with prolonged conflicts:

> *"It is necessary to be able to defend the State at any time, from any threat, and for as long as necessary."*

Former Chief of Defense Staff, Admiral **Giuseppe Cavo Dragone**, now president of the NATO Military Committee, also stated forcefully:

> *"We are absolutely undersized. Even with 170,000 men, we would be **at the limit of survival**."*



Conscription Returns to the Table in Europe

Despite reassurances from **Vladimir Putin** – who in March called the idea of an invasion of Europe "a total absurdity" – several European countries are taking action.

- In **Germany**, Defense Minister **Boris Pistorius** has requested a plan by April 2024 for the return to **Wehrpflicht**, mandatory conscription, abolished in 2011.
- In **Denmark**, where conscription is already in place, it will be extended to women from 2026 and will last **11 months** for both sexes.
- In the **Czech Republic**, there is a discussion about reintroducing military service or alternative forms of recruitment.
- **France** is focusing on reservists: the goal is to reach **100,000 reservists** by 2024.

Completing the picture are countries where conscription is already active: **Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Austria, Cyprus, and Greece**.

EU Defense Ministers

The Cultural Obstacle: Few Willing to Fight

One of the most critical issues is public consensus. According to a **Gallup** poll, only **32% of EU citizens** would be willing to fight in case of war. In Italy, the percentage drops to **14%**, while it is **23% in Germany** and **29% in Spain**.

As researcher **Linda Slapakova** of RAND Europe points out, the return to conscription cannot be separated from a **massive investment in infrastructure**, selection and training systems, and a reflection on the role of the armed forces in modern society.

Disposti a difendere il proprio Paese?

Paese	Si	No	Nessuna risposta/ Non so
Austria	20%	62%	18%
Canada	34%	37%	29%
Germania	14%	78%	8%
Italia	9%	14%	41%
Giappone	29%	50%	41%
Spagna	33%	53%	18%
UK	33%	50%	27%
Svezia	47%	25%	28%
Polonia	45%	32%	23%
EU	32%	47%	21%

In Conclusion

With an increasingly aggressive Russia, a NATO demanding more from Europe, and an America perhaps less involved, the future of European defense could also involve a return to **mandatory conscription**, along with a **comprehensive strengthening of the military model**.
It's not just about numbers: it requires **resilience, regeneration and adaptation capabilities**, and a defense culture that involves citizens, institutions, and businesses.

News link: https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/defending-europe-without-us-first-estimates-what-needed