



Reintroduction of Mandatory Military Service, a More Open Debate Than Ever

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The reflection on military conscription is gaining new momentum in Italy, influenced by tensions on the international scene and recent decisions by some NATO member states. Denmark has decided to extend the obligation of military service to women and to increase the duration of this service from 4 to 11 months for all genders, Greece in 2021 extended it from 9 to 12 months, countries like Lithuania and Latvia still maintain military conscription, while the Ukrainian crisis has rekindled, in other states, interest in this practice also as a response to recruitment problems affecting Western armies.

History and Legislation in Italy

Established in the unified Italian state with the birth of the Kingdom of Italy and confirmed with the birth of the Italian Republic, it was in operational regime from 1861 to 2004, for 143 years. The obligation of the service, provided by the Constitution of the Italian Republic in the ways

and limits established by the Law, has been ordinarily inactive since January 1, 2005, as established by the law of August 23, 2004, no. 226.

During the post-war period, the duration of mandatory service was progressively reduced through various legislative decrees:

- Until 1975: 15 months for the Army and Air Force, 24 months for the Navy.
- From 1976: 12 months for the Army and Air Force, 18 months for the Navy, with 15/18 months for reserve officers.
- From 1987: 12 uniform months for all forces, except reserve officers at 15 months.
- From 1997: 10 months for the Army, Air Force, and Navy, 12 months for auxiliary Carabinieri, and 14 months for reserve officers.

The process of overcoming mandatory conscription began on September 3, 1999, when the Council of Ministers, on the proposal of Defense Minister Carlo Scognamiglio, approved a bill to that effect. In parallel, the law of October 20, 1999, no. 380, granted the government the power to introduce voluntary female military service, a measure subsequently implemented with the legislative decree of January 31, 2000, no. 24, and the DPCM of March 16, 2000, no. 112.

Article 52 of the Italian Constitution establishes the principle of mandatory military service. **Consequently, recruitment into the Italian armed forces can be both "mandatory" and "voluntary".**

The Debate in Italy and Europe on Reintroduction

Mandatory conscription, a practice suspended by numerous NATO countries following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the diminished Soviet threat, is today at a critical crossroads.

In Italy, as in other European countries, the discussion on the potential reintroduction of military service is intensifying. Some prominent Italian political figures have highlighted in recent years how mandatory service could strengthen civic and patriotic values and offer civic training. Denmark, by expanding conscription to both sexes and extending its duration, demonstrates how a proactive defense approach can effectively integrate military preparation and the promotion of gender equality.

This makes it the third European nation, after Norway and Sweden, to apply military conscription to both sexes. In parallel, Germany is contemplating the return to semi-mandatory conscription, reflecting on Sweden's experience.

Germany is considering the reintroduction of semi-mandatory conscription, inspired by the Swedish model, after abolishing conscription in 2011. Minister Pistorius intends to prepare a proposal for rapid mobilization. France, on the other hand, aims to increase the age limit for military reservists, targeting a contingent of 300,000 soldiers in the long term, with 100,000 reservists.

All the Advantages of Mandatory Conscription in Italy

The strategies adopted by Denmark and other European countries could certainly offer valuable insights for Italy, where reintroducing military service would help solve recruitment problems primarily, issues, as mentioned, common to all Western armies and would allow professional forces to focus on more specialized tasks. Consider, for example, the Operation Safe Streets, which does not necessarily require the participation of professional soldiers and could be entrusted precisely to conscripted soldiers. This would also allow professionals to dedicate themselves more continuously to training, the *raison d'être* of the soldier in peacetime.

Furthermore, conscription could play a crucial role in national cohesion, contributing to integrating young people into society and the economy (conscripted soldiers would still have a salary and rights equal to current professional soldiers) while also strengthening the sense of civic responsibility and patriotism, in an era where many perceive a decline in such values.

Conclusions

In summary, the debate on military conscription in Italy is situated within a broader European framework, reflecting on how nations can balance national security needs with the social and civic benefits of military service. Inspired by cases like Denmark, Italy could consider the reintroduction of conscription as a tool to strengthen national defense, promote gender equality, and improve military recruitment and training, while also contributing to forging more responsible and united citizens.

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