

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

ITALIAN ARMY AND SOCIETY: FROM
“SEPARATION” TO A RELATIONSHIP OF
TRUST TOWARDS MEN IN UNIFORM,
STRATEGIC VALUE OF COMMUNICATION.

by

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ABSTRACT

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The relations between the Italian public and the Army were difficult and characterized by mutual distrust until the end of the 1980s. In the 1990s, very few would have bet on the efficiency of the Italian Army in the new peace missions, but the decision to send troops outside the national borders has improved the image of the Institution. Today it is perceived useful, gaining the attention of the mass media. The Italian Army has succeeded in deleting the negative image when compared to other more organized and efficient armies. Today, in fact, it has the image of a modern armed force, professionally well prepared, efficient and reflective of the best values of the nation.

The journey that led our Army to enjoy the widest appreciation for its work was favored by the non intrusive approach of our soldiers and by their capability of positive interaction with the local populations. In this sense, the empathetic characteristic of the Italian spirit emerged on all occasions. The Italian servicemen revealed very special talents and characteristics, including the capability of socializing, of entering into relations with others, of integrating within the operations without being "cumbersome". On the contrary, they were a precious support in the little and great difficulties suffered by people emerging from conflict or humanitarian disaster. This new image is also the outcome of fundamental changes in the way the institution approaches public affairs.

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ITALIAN ARMY AND SOCIETY: FROM "SEPARATION" TO A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST TOWARDS MEN IN UNIFORM, STRATEGIC VALUE OF COMMUNICATION.

The last decade began with the promise of a long period of peace after half a century of Cold War, but it revealed itself as a turbulent one. The end of the U.S.-Soviet balance of power has given way to a series of increasingly more chaotic and ill defined crises.

In this context, military forces have been frequently called to assist in promoting or restoring peace. This means that the military organization not only defends the integrity and sovereignty of a nation, but also supports the national foreign and security policy in a much broader sense than before.

There is no doubt about the decisive role played by the land forces. The above consideration comes from the features of the crises of the twentieth century and probably of the twenty-first century that are: conflicts of identity, culture, religion, ethnicity; conflicts which can be prevented, appeased and solved mostly by the presence of military units on the disputed territory. Therefore, land forces have proved to be invaluable because of their ability to influence the three factors that most affect the successful outcome of these kinds of conflicts: territory, factions and populations. These forces are flexible enough to change their missions as the development of the situation requires.

The Italian Army has been able to demonstrate these qualities in its recent involvement in the peace operations (POs). While POs have stretched the Army, they have also resulted in more widespread recognition of its unique capabilities.

Thanks to its more traditional role in defense of the national territory, the Army has projected a different image of itself which is more operational, more apt to the military nature than what has been made before, and even praiseworthy. The participation in the POs has increased, moreover, the public esteem of its operational capabilities illustrating the value of the military identity, which was not very clear in the past. Simultaneously, public opinion has appreciated the capacity shown by the Army leading to a rebirth of national identity.

While civil-military were characterized by mutual distrust, the decision to send troops outside the national borders has improved the image of the Institution. Today, it is perceived useful, thereby gaining the attention of the mass media.

The Italian Army has succeeded in deleting its negative international image. Today, in fact, it has an image of a modern armed force, professionally well prepared, efficient and reflective the best values of the nation.

This paper analyzes the changing attitude of the Italian public towards its men in uniform through a review of articles written in some of the more important newspapers during the “Alba” and “Joint Guardian” operations - the principal military operations in the Balkan “theatre”.

With this analysis we want to show, moreover, how this new image is the outcome of a relatively recent reorganization of the Army, and of fundamental changes in its approaches to public affairs. In fact, it is because of its presence abroad that the Army has learned how important it is to inform and to communicate, both as an essential element of any type of operation and because of the need to influence political and strategic decision-making.

The moment had come to correct the stereotyped image of a closed military world and to give to the international community a more realistic image by dealing with those media till then considered by Army personnel to be insensitive to military problems.

THE DIFFICULT RELATION ARMY–SOCIETY

The relationship between the Army and Italian society has never been easy. Why? The first answer could be probably that there has never been direct contact between the two, but only via a third party, which has made the relationship not fluid.

Under the monarchy, the most important problem was the separation between the Army and society. It's true that in a reality in which “once Italy had been made, it was necessary to make the Italians”¹ the Army was in a position to carry out an important role in uniting local identities in order to make a nation. But it's also true that the soldiers were more bound to the king than to the nation; all this established a barrier between the men in uniform and society.

From this point of view, World War I broke this pattern and Italy became an authentic “armed nation,” committing the people and the armed forces to ultimate victory.

Nevertheless, after the war everything reversed. Fascism left the Army in the hands of the monarchy, which used the Army to distance itself from the fascist regime. Afterwards, the defeats of World War II shattered whatever tenuous relationships existed between the Army and society. This gap continued through out the Cold War.

In the 1990s, with the intervention of the Army in the Balkans, however, a cultural change took place. Italians had the opportunity to see a military force moving in the right direction, led by wise commanders.

Public opinion began to think in positive terms of their Army which could set a favorable example for other national forces, because of its leaderships and performance. The Army proved to be capable of providing a stabilizing presence which did not mean occupation and did not interfere with the life of the citizens and, moreover, was impartial.

All this allowed the Italian people to identify themselves with those men in uniform. It followed that the separation between the Army and the Italian public almost disappeared and a constant dialogue with them was instituted. Therefore, the Army no longer had to seek the attention of the mass media, but had the more difficult duty to manage it, having become a protagonist. The resulting cultural change was of great importance even inside the Army's organization since the public information services were no longer viewed as enemies to fight against or as a powerful men to pay homage to. As a result, the Army began to provide the media with news of itself in a "new" way.

This paper analyzes the moments which have characterized Army's communication, from the second post war period until today. It will demonstrate how the use of troops abroad has provided both the impetus and the means to end conclusively the "great divorce" between the Army and society. The Army, at last, began to tell its own story.

THE "ABSENCE" OF COMMUNICATION

The second post war was a dark period of military communication - a long period of "non communication" which was the outcome of a deep crisis of legitimacy. It was in those years that the fundamental disconnects in the relationship between the Army and society which would give birth to important communicative challenges took shape. The Army felt it was important to gain social consent and understood that it had the capabilities to do so, on the basis of a superiority of culture in comparison with the society. In spite of all that, the Army refused to communicate openly with the media. It may seem a paradox, but the reasons can be understood. Until the 1940s the Armed Forces had been legitimized by strong values, such as: "fatherland," "national identity," "history;" values accepted in an absolute way by the military world and for this reason it wasn't necessary to communicate them. But after the war many certainties disappeared and a deep loss of trust in government institutions followed. Public opinion no longer believed in the merits of the Armed Forces and held a negative perception of them. All this was born of the difference between the military image of itself and its performance in battle.

The idea of conceiving and starting a particular communicative strategy in order to regain the lost approval was set aside owing to a kind of pride which couldn't accept the idea of an Army with a mere economic-social function. Because of its dignity and pride the Army didn't accept responsibility for the defeat, and, thinking it had accomplished its duty fully, it withdrew into itself.

Soon disputes about the military function began, started by political parties. And this happened not because of opposite opinions but because of a wish to give birth to their feeling

against the military world. "A kind of convention took body between the majority and the opposition on not negotiating the problems of the Armed Forces with the seriousness and the strictness which they deserved, maybe not to drag them through the political fight..."² The necessity to communicate the value of national defense was set aside. Owing to these factors, opinion leaders spoke about the separation between the Armed Forces and society.

THE "COMMUNICATIVE CLARIFICATION"

The absence of communication has lasted at least until the 1970s. The Army gained public visibility through relief operations following natural disasters, like the earthquakes in Friuli in 1976 and in Campania and Basilicata in 1980. This visibility reached the maximum with the mission in Lebanon (26 August 1982 - 03 April 1984). The significant efforts of Army units in support of the civilian population had a positive effect on public opinion, now more convinced of the usefulness of the military instrument. The Army showed itself capable to provide security and to defend the citizens' safety. The organization, in this way, was able to demonstrate its heritage of technical and organizational knowledge, social and moral values, and means and materials of good quality.

Notwithstanding all this, emotionally the Army presented these operations with language more in the form of "propaganda" than of "information;" a sort of self praise, perhaps an instinctive reaction to the long period of communicative frustration. The idea of a strategy which foresaw the use of the excellent results of the units as a means, like a sounding box, got lost. It might, for example, have made evident that the Army could effectively intervene in other situations of emergency only if well structured.

Emerging events, especially the Lebanese operation, allowed the Army to open a dialogue with the mass media, giving birth to a period of "communicative clarification". The mission in Lebanon represented the beginning of true communicative progress. The units were led by the best commanders who were assisted by efficient public information officers. At last, the Army projected an image of an institution which devoted particular attention to public information, and which was capable of managing news and events. The success of the mission was internationally recognized. It is enough to remember "The Times" (of London): "If someone ever had to attribute military honors to the soldiers of the Multinational Force, arrived in Lebanon two years ago in order to defend the peace, these honors would have to go to the Italians."³

These should have been, therefore, the best conditions for the beginning of a new policy of institutional communication. But the Ministry of Defense did not estimate the situation

correctly and failed to establish either an effective public communication strategy or a coherent internal information promulgation policy.

As could have been foreseen, mass media once again took interest only in the tensions of military life. The negative image became the main theme for the opinion makers. The more favorable of them limited themselves to reproaching the Institution and criticizing the draft:

We don't think it is an exaggeration to affirm that the draft has multiplied the distance between the Army and the Country and has contributed to the declining legitimacy of the Italian military Institution, by sending every year into the Society true 'negative communicators', tens of thousands of young men who had only known in the Army the most macroscopic disorders, the internal loss of organization, the unpleasant episodes of what was called '*nonnismo*'⁴ and the absence of ideals of any kind.⁵

FROM "PROPAGANDA" TO "INFORMATION"

The reality was very different. The vast majority of young people lived very positive experiences during their military lives. To prevent the exploitation of the news and the diffusion of the stereotypes it was necessary, therefore, to face and solve the problem of how to communicate the draft. Very large differences existed between the values of society and the Army. Because of these, the Army could not hope to gain a consent based upon its strong values, or on a mass acceptance of its traditions, or of the symbols respected by soldiers.

Afterwards, it could no longer seek to legitimize the draft on claims that the Army provided important functions, such as socialization, and the formation of the character and education. These tasks had been assumed by other social structures. Therefore a new communication strategy was necessary.

The Army conceived and implemented a communicative campaign designed to present itself as an efficient organization, managed with simple and transparent rules. The evolution from "propaganda" to "information" was put into action. However, the definitive passage from the simple "clarification" to true communication was obstructed by at least two factors. The first was internal resistance. In fact, as Fabio Mini (former spokesman of the Army) said "There still wasn't a "culture of the institutional information and of the image."⁶ Second, external criticisms towards the new communicative campaign added to internal resistance. Opinion makers recognized as experts of military problems criticized every kind of change.

THE "COMMUNICATIVE REBUILDING"

A phase of "communicative rebuilding" begins in the 1990s.

A series of big events produced a favorable environment. Changes in the international picture put defense in the spot light. The new tasks for the Armed Forces emotionally struck the public opinion, either for the novelty in itself, or because the soldiers were working intensely and well: Kurdistan ('91), Albania ('91-'00), Mozambique ('93-'94), Somalia ('92-'94), Rwanda ('94), Bosnia (from '95), "Forza Paris" (Sardinia, '92), "Vespri Siciliani" (Sicily, '92-'98), "Riace" (Calabria, '94-'95), "Partenope" (Naples, '94-'98), "Testuggine" (border between Italy and Slovenia, '93-'95), "Salento" (Pugliese coast, '95-'96). Public opinion followed these activities carefully and respectfully. They were operations which served to eliminate distance that separated the military organization from the community.

The Army reached high visibility. A strong process of elaboration of the soldier's image began in the public opinion. The soldiers' professionalism was recognized in Italy and abroad. It is enough to cite the American sociologist Charles Moskos who praised the Italian conscripts in Somalia and Albania, judging them much more effective than western professionals. Therefore, it started shattering the hard clog of the uninformed public opposition. The Catholic culture had to think again positively about the effect of the strict positions of the Pope on the theme of the "just war," of the "humanitarian intervention," of the value of peace-keeping missions.

However, the deeply rooted scars of dislike for military personnel still existed in society. The prejudice of "published" opinion started colliding with the real consent of the public opinion which was assuming a more active role in communication. At the beginning of the operation "Vespri Siciliani,"⁷ for example, "published" opinion was hostile. The journalists were still talking about a militarized territory and a political superficiality in conceiving uses of the Italian soldiers. It was public opinion that repressed these exploitations; the consent was immediate. Sicilians perceived the soldiers in the roads, called to defend and guarantee the citizens' rights, as a completely natural presence. All the soldiers communicated, catalyzing the consent.

Another big development was the strong search for values with which citizens could identify. And so the public opinion started elaborating again the soldier's image as bearer of true values.

The leadership of the Army heard the new steps. The evaluation of the situation, in fact, induced the Army to conceive a precise communicative strategy: to act directly on public opinion in order to generate a heavy information demand, using television as the primary means to generate public support. In substance, the Army devised ways to activate its own "cycle" for generating this support using, rather than the classical cycle (cultural and political elites-mass media-public opinion), a new way to communicate: public opinion-mass media-cultural and

political elites. In fact, it appealed directly to the public opinion, forcing, in this way, the media to influence political leaders.

The "new" public opinion, which asked for more precise information, was the lever to obtain the attention of the mass media. If this challenge could be met, ultimately the right consideration of the military condition from part of the new Italian political class would be obtained. It was an opportunity not to miss. It was possible to pass from a "need" to a "right" of communication from the citizen, and to a "duty" of communication from the Institution.

FROM "INFORMATION" TO "COMMUNICATION"

Therefore, the passage from "information" to "communication"⁸ had its beginning. The participation of the Army in many operations outside of the national territory, such as in the Balkan area, had as a consequence the passage of the Armed Forces from a role of scarce visibility to an active one in which it was a principal actor. But this alone is not sufficient to explain the renewed public interest towards the men in uniform. Surely it was chiefly due to the new communicative policy used by the leadership of the Army; prosecuted with determination, constancy and clear vision.

Managing the news was conceived as a daily operation; information was offered continuously. "After years of monotonous and granted references to the Armed Forces world, these are finally evident in a great number of points of views never imagined before."⁹ The relationships with the public and academic worlds were intensified. The rule was: manage public relations with absolute transparency, avoiding individual interests which might prevail over the institutional.

After a few years the situation changed completely. The humanitarian missions abroad and the contribution of the Army in the struggle against organized crime (within Italian territory) helped people understand that the whole country was involved in the military missions. Public opinion perceived at last that the men in uniform were citizens who were generous in accomplishing their duty; men who needed the approval of society.

The results of the transfer from "information" to "communication" can be seen clearly enough even today. Research conducted in October 2003 by the "Archivio Disarmo", an authoritative pacifist organization shows that now the "pair of scissors" existing between the Army and society has been almost completely reduced. From 1994 to today the trust in the Italian Armed Forces has risen from 36 to 67%; in particular 87% of the public believes that the Italian soldiers are effective above all in human relationship.¹⁰ This data have been, moreover, confirmed by a survey in December 2004 by Eurisko,¹¹ which states that 73% of Italians have "a

lot or enough confidence" in the Army. The positive image of the Army is reconfirmed, also, among the youth. In a survey conducted on a representative example of 5 million young people between the ages of 18 and 25, "the military profession is attractive for approximately 1,740,000 persons: 1,061,000 males and 679,000 females." These data show an important truth: the capital of trust given to the military forces from the whole nation must be firmly protected.

ITALIAN ARMY IN ALBANIA AND IN KOSOVO: KNOCKING DOWN THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER

The Army has been operating in the Balkans since December 1995, when the government, because of the deep crisis of former Yugoslavia, decided to send a contingent of about 2,600 men to Bosnia. Because of the geographical proximity of Italy and Bosnia, the Italian government indicated¹² that Italy plays an important role in the Mediterranean. Another reason was NATO membership.

The missions in the Balkan area are a routine fact, while public attention is concentrated towards other "theaters", such as Iraq or Afghanistan. Nonetheless it is important not to treat the situation in the region lightly because it can degenerate rapidly. The international community has, in fact, forgotten that the causes which brought about the disintegration of Yugoslavia are very deeply rooted and could still ignite a new fire in the Balkans. In fact, the persistent and deep antagonism among the different ethnic, cultural and religious components are not easily solved.

It is said "During the Cold War Europe had forgotten the Balkans."¹³ Georges Prevelakis, a writer on the region, summarizes the absolutely peripheral content of the Balkan situation, and the image of the region that was arriving in western countries up to 1989: "Instead, the deep Balkan crisis caused a series of emotional reactions and participation to events that until then were only bad memories for Western and European (in particular) people."¹⁴ So, the events of the last ten years caught the attention of European public opinion. To the images of tourism, of fabulous cultures, and different ethnic groups were added graphic images of bombing, of ethnic cleansing, of destruction, of mass rapes. These images were tragically inside Europe itself.

It followed that international public opinion, the Italian included, waited and seriously demanded peace operations. But there was also the fear that if the first days of a military intervention were to go badly, everything would become more difficult and the prospects for performing similar missions in any other part of the world would be compromised. People could ask: "Is it worth spending so much money and sacrificing so many lives to enter into unknown lands whose inhabitants speak unknown languages, into the ashes of unjustified conflicts?"¹⁵

This was the climate that accompanied the political discussion about the participation of Italian troops in military operations in the Balkans.

"ALBA" OPERATION: THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE FUNCTION AND THE INSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF THE ARMY

About 2,000 Italian soldiers were serving in Bosnia for 16 months, in a powder-magazine at the point of bursting. 2,800 more were preparing for a mission in Albania with an uncertain future. Two simultaneous military missions would have been difficult to manage for any country in Europe, and even more so for Italy which during forty years had kept its Army in "naphthalene" (for preservation). It was, therefore, reasonable for the Italians and the Allies to ask themselves how capable were those soldiers who had grown up on the "threshold of Gorizia,"¹⁶ waiting for a probable attack from the East.

Edward Luttwak, an expert in military affairs, on the pages of a national magazine voiced his vision of the departure of Italian soldiers towards "the land of the eagles." He wrote: "The Italian soldiers have had few occasions to show their ability in actions of war. There are very many reasons for this, from the '*mammismo*'¹⁷ to the antimilitary consensus felt by the left and the Catholics together. Among the armies of the developed countries, the Italian one is the least well trained. Ceremonies and parades excluded, the recruits are able to do nothing. There is a pro-forma Army supported by a state which has no interest to better it."¹⁸

Luttwak was echoed by "The Times" (of London) which asked Italy to give up the idea of the mission because "In Albania there are all the ingredients for a disaster. Among the causes it is possible to remember the military's scarce expertise and a doubtful past, not to speak of the public's frail support. The Italians are not credible either from a military view point or a political one."¹⁹ Was it possible, the English asked themselves, to believe in the military virtues of a population without national feeling, a population that likes to celebrate its own defeats and lessen the merit of its victories; to believe, moreover, in the capacity of the Italian government to decide, organize and lead so difficult and dangerous a military mission with slight support from the Italian public?

The inability of the Italian government to exert an adequate policy, verified to the allies by the needed support denied by one political party was confirmed by the fact that, while the Spanish and the French ships had left their harbors, the Italian ones, which were for the first time at the head of an international mission, remained anchored in their harbors. Technical problems? Damages? No. They were simply waiting for the approval by Parliament. As regards the military's reputation for poor reliability, it seemed to be, at the eve of the departure, a stereotype still deeply impressed not only abroad but also in Italy. Notwithstanding the excellent

services of the Italian Armed Forces in Lebanon, in the Gulf, in North Iraq, in Mozambique and in Bosnia, public opinion polls still showed that Italians didn't believe in the ability of the military units to perform their duty correctly; the same opinions held for the professional capability of their commanders. The "Alba" operation, on the contrary, as Indro Montanelli said: "It is also a good occasion to show to the world that we are better than they think."²⁰

The Italian military operations in Albania began on March 3rd, 1997, with a secret, last minute blitz, when the soldiers came unexpectedly in Valona and evacuated twenty one compatriots together with four Germans, one Dutch citizen and ten reporters from different nations. The operation lasted little more than three hours, with only eight minutes in Albania. On March 4th, the newspapers wrote in headlines: "Our soldiers have arrived in Albania: 36 persons have been rescued. Blitz of the Italian Army and Navy: our compatriots, held in Valona, have been rescued in eight minutes" (Il Tempo); "Italian blitz in Valona; Europeans rescued. Helicopters and infantry soldiers of San Marco Battalion in action. In eight minutes tens of citizens have been evacuated" (Corriere della Sera); "The first military blow of our soldiers, in a period of peace. An absolute success thanks to efficiency, timely measures, Army-Navy coordination" (La Nazione, Il Giorno, Il Resto del Carlino); "A brilliant rescue operation" (L'Umanita').

Afterwards, the Italian Armed Forces, according to the reporters, began to symbolize, in concrete, a possible form of intervention where Italian interests had to be protected:

The blitz has been a valuable example of joint coordination, managed without useless superimposition of Headquarters and with an essential abundance of equipment. In this way, the first blitz in a period of peace by our Armed Forces in an area of international crisis has been crowned with success. A success which should induce the Government and the Parliament to examine the modern role of the Armed Forces, molded to face frequent military operations and speedy interventions out of its own area with appropriate equipment and weapons.²¹

Reading the newspapers published in those days it seemed that Italians, for the first time, had suddenly recognized an efficient capability kept secret for so many years: "Our military forces have reached the factory and have also been compelled to fire bursts of machine gun fire to relieve the tension. All around, in fact, the fights were raging and explosions and shots of kalashinov were reechoing. In less than eight minutes, the Italian soldiers and the thirty six rescued persons were on board the helicopters of Army Aviation."²² The Italians also recognized the value of the commanders who were considered worthy to be entrusted with the operations: "A short time ago the ride of the Italian Armed Forces in Albania ended with success. Venturoni²³ organized the operation."²⁴

But just how capable were these men? The reporters described a military capacity never before demonstrated: "An over equipped task force is ready to go towards the Albanian coasts, in aid of the numerous Italians still present in the "land of the eagles." At this point the Italian soldiers will have to keep themselves ready to perform a series of lightning operations: true raids in the areas where there is a civil war."²⁵ "The soldiers' duty will be to protect the main lines of communication for distribution of food, medicines and other indispensable materials. The soldiers will, also, have to guarantee adequate security for the next phase of the operation: that of the distribution of the humanitarian assistance - a delicate task in which the use of weapons is not foreseen unless for legitimate defense. Our contingent is made of the best men chosen from the Armed Forces."²⁶

The allies recognized the professional competence of Italian commanders so that, on April 10th in Rome, they accepted Italian Joint General Staff's carefully prepared plan. On April 15th, 1997 the Italian landed in Albania. Eleven states took part in the operation but only eight²⁷ of them contributed with infantry troops to the 7,000 man Multinational Protection Force (FMP).²⁸ Italy contributed the majority of the soldiers to the multinational contingent and also logistic support to the entire force. "They are highly specialized soldiers and the Lieutenant General in command, Luciano Forlani, is known as a firm man, highly prepared and efficient."²⁹

The professionalism of the Italian soldiers from the beginning gave way to a kind of patriotism never seen before:

Look at these soldiers on the approach march and you'll see self-possessed, serene and sober men. Professional men on equal terms with the French, who, when they meet us, show off a little smile of satisfaction that makes you wish to push it back in the throat with slaps. All summed up, this is the best part of the Army to be sent around the world with a kind of pride.³⁰

Today's soldiers have fine berets, camouflages which don't muffle, automatic weapons like strip-cartoons, the attitude of a legionary, deep feeling for their units. So expecting "*bonnes nouvelles*" is allowed.³¹

Many soldiers of ours have already had equal experiences in Somalia, Kurdistan, Mozambique, and Bosnia. They are, therefore, well trained for operations in which it is necessary to defend the population, well trained in discovering snipers, in mopping up quarters and buildings in search of well hidden weapons; well trained in reoccupying the territories taken by bands, in using the techniques to maintain or to compel peace, in solving situations of danger.³²

Fully aware of the delicacy of their own duties, the units of the Italian Army have been trained with particular care. The Italian Army confirms its own efficiency and shows an Italian presence which wants to become a real model.³³

Along with the development of the military operation, Italy was held in high esteem internationally. The esteem grew day by day, so that Nicholas Burns, the spokesman of the American State Department said: "The United States applauds because at last Italy enters into the group of members able to guide difficult military missions. In Europe there were only Great Britain and France until now."³⁴

Also the allies began, at last, to revise their judgment of Italian soldiers. An English reporter, John Simpson, wrote on the "Sunday Telegraph:" "If I were the General Secretary of United Nations, I would call the Italian troops for every peace mission. In fact, in Albania Italians are quietly settling down and are thanked for being there. What is the Italian secret? They are not aggressive with the population. Result: everywhere they happen to go, things are kept quiet, which is the chief aim for sending troops to maintain peace..... Then there was the operation in Somalia: where the Italians were present it was possible to walk up and down the streets without any danger, while the American helicopters, in the zones under their control, made use of rockets, apparently shot by chance. A different approach: having understood that the inhabitants might be hostile to them, Americans did not use half terms. Instead, the Italians kept on teaching the children to cultivate the vegetables."³⁵

The Italian soldiers' ability to immediately build excellent relationships with the population could be seen from the behavior of the population who received our men: "In Valona, with the presence of the Italian soldiers, serenity comes back, a serenity which has given once again joy of being still alive. In the South they were warmly met."³⁶

The Multinational Force began to redeploy on July, 18th, with an end to the operation on August 12th, 1997. "Alba" operation represented a moment of great responsibility for Italy and its Armed Forces. For the first time Italy was the leader in an operation characterized by complexity and novelty in comparison with the preceding operations. The efforts of the Armed Forces, and of the Army in particular, allowed the Multi National Force to achieve all of the assigned military aims and contributed to the attainment of the political objectives of the operation.

The success of "Alba" was unanimously voiced: "The General Secretary of United Nations, Kofi Annan, in New York has congratulated Romano Prodi (Italian Prime Minister) and Dini (Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs) for the 'Alba' mission;"³⁷ "Clinton says: 'Thank you Romano for what has been done in Albania,'" "Chirac is prodigal of praise: 'Very good.'"³⁸

Once again it was clear that the military victory on the ground had contributed to the political success of an intervention. From the reading of published articles, the birth of closeness between the national community and its Armed Forces and the reinforcement of the recognition of their particular capacity for safeguarding national interests shines. The President of the

Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, so defined the operation: "Wonderful action of the soldiers, a concrete example of solidarity among States, Governments and People, a lesson of civility and humanity for which Italy is grateful to its 3,400 soldiers."³⁹ And the Prime Minister voiced to the gratitude of the Italians with these words: "We have honored our engagement. Many considered the operation impossible, instead we have given hope to the future of Albanians."⁴⁰

The results obtained by "Alba" were the most important answer to those people who doubted the trust placed in the Armed Forces and the Italian Army. The answer was well uttered by Alberto Flores D'Arcais, a reporter of "La Repubblica": "It must be recognized that our soldiers engaged in the Alba mission have fulfilled with good results and capacity the difficult task that Italy was assigned by the international community."⁴¹

After having read how much all Italian politicians appreciated the work of their troops in Albania, one can conclude that for the first time, in Italy, there was no different vision between "the majority" and "the opposition" about the Italian Armed Forces, who symbolized the prestige of Italy abroad. To confirm the different view of public opinion concerning the military organization, let's look at a public opinion survey.⁴² Of 1,070 Italian citizens polled in July 1997. 72, 2% of the interviewed considered the military career "a well qualified profession, full of prestige." 78, 4% declared "to be interested in knowing everything about the Armed Forces." Only a minority, 20, 6%, had no interest in these questions, while almost a half of those who had been interviewed (47.5%) taught that the information about the Armed Forces was "inadequate". Because of these answers the researchers came to the conclusion that: "The judgment of the Italians concerning the Armed Force is almost completely based on esteem and admiration; a positive image (...) which derives from a kind of trust coming out from a deep acknowledgment of a function and an institutional role."

THE INTERVENTION IN KOSOVO; ITALY FINDS ITS PRIDE AGAIN

When in 1990 the gravity of the crisis in Yugoslavia appeared manifest, the Bush Administration considered it a European problem in which America should have no role. This rule had an exception: Kosovo. In fact, from the beginning of the Yugoslavian crisis the United States had sent a clear message to Milosevic: "If Serbia uses strength to repress the Albanian population in Kosovo, the Americans will answer with strength."⁴³ This happened for two reasons. First, pro-Albanian groups in Washington pressured the government to interpret the situation in Kosovo in light of the human rights of Albanians.⁴⁴ Second, the United States saw in Kosovo the detonator for an explosion of a larger crisis, since Kosovo was at the centre of the Serbia-Albania question. The Albanian question would have ended up directly involving

Macedonia, where about a third of the population were Albanians, and as a consequence, Greeks and Turks.

As for the Europeans, they thought that Kosovo was a question to be left to Serbia itself. At most it was possible to speak about autonomous⁴⁵ government, never about independence. The fear of a "domino effect" in Greece and Turkey dominated. There was, therefore, the fear that any actions taken to encourage the independence of Kosovo might give way to separatist movements working in Western Europe.⁴⁶ As a result, policies were made in reaction, rather than in anticipation of events.

The crisis of Albania in spring 1997 reverberated in Kosovo by means of the arrival of arms through the Albania-Kosovo frontier for the first units of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). The offensive carried out by Serbia in summer 1998 seemed, however, to deal a heavy blow to the guerrillas. In reality this was for Serbia the beginning of the end, because at that moment United States and Europe together decided to come onto the field. Once again Serbia was defeated in its war propaganda: the bloody repression emphasized the climate of anger in the western countries. The first sign of this change of climate was evident in the language of American diplomacy: those who in the January 1998 were known as "terrorists"-the UCK members- suddenly became "insurgents." The American choice to support the UCK resulted in an unceasing spiral toward war between NATO and Serbia.

Because of the air operation against Serbia ("Allied Force" Operation, from March, 24th to June, 10th 1999) on the 4th of June 1999, Belgrade accepted the points of the plan imposed by the international community, and eight days after NATO forces entered Kosovo. The territory was divided in five areas, each guarded by a brigade: one by United States, one by United Kingdom, one by France, one by Italy and one German-led. The Kosovo Force (KFOR) had the duty to enforce the terms of the Military Technical Agreement (MTA): to garrison Kosovo; to protect the citizens from injustice; to watch over the withdrawal of the Serbian forces and over the disarmament of the UCK units; to cooperate with United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), European Union (EU) in order to rebuild the civil administration; to take part in the reestablishment of normality; to locate mines and to cooperate with the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in rebuilding infrastructure and helping the population.

The seventy-eight days of NATO war against Serbia coincided with seventy-eight days of war in the newspapers of the nineteen members of the Atlantic Alliance. In Italy the humors of the people, the position of the Government, the comments of analysts, the political debates and the mass-meetings gave way to unprecedented comparison.

We now begin a synthesis of what was written in the newspapers⁴⁷ in those days about the image of the "new" Army. The period begins on March 1999 and includes the six following months, which were the most important for the Army and for Italian military engagement in the last sixty years. Those were, in fact, months of big debate between the political parties and the people on the nature and the internal and outside tasks of the Army. They also provided an opportunity for reflection within the Armed Forces. Never before had the Italian Army been the subject of so much debate.

The Army was able to project a different image of itself which was more operational and more professional than ever before, and even praiseworthy. In the newspapers "good guy" image of the Italian soldiers disappeared, and was replaced with an image of a well trained and well motivated soldier, "armed" with enough humanity to enable him to succeed in the management of humanitarian missions. This new professionalism led to the success of Italians in the management of peace operations. This is an image which echoes in the words of the Prime Minister Massimo D'alema, "I trust in you. You have shown to be a modern Army: not only are you efficient as the NATO Allies recognize, but you have still the Italian capacity to speak to people. I trust in your capacity to establish yourself in a wounded territory. We Italians, also from the humanitarian view point, must give back to these people the *joie de vivre*." ⁴⁸

In the national press articles which deal with the humanitarian actions conducted by our soldiers prevail. Moreover, the image of an Army professional, efficient and representing the best moral values, is also evident. It turns out, therefore, that this "humanitarian-warrior" dichotomy is, to all the effects, the trade mark of the Italian soldier of the new millennium.

The newspapers give to the public an image of the Italian "warrior" ready to fight, but at the same time endowed with a rational prudence necessary to limit, as much as possible, violence and force. "At last, in the afternoon also for the Italians the operation of the formation of the columns begins. To cross the Macedonia–Yugoslavia border at the Jancovic passage is foreseen to be fulfilled at night. Then, the Italian soldiers will go towards the north till Rogovo, where the first check–point will be set up by the Bersaglieri."⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ Out of these few words the mention of the martial bearing of our soldiers, who initiate a mission to set up a check–point on the border of their area of responsibility to oversee territory and maintain security, can be gleaned.

Just as important as their effectiveness, is our soldiers' humanity. From the reading of the published articles at the time a more positive image of our Armed Forces gleams in the welcome, accompanied by tears of joy, reserved for ours Bersaglieri by the inhabitants of the town of Djakovica: "The Garibaldi Brigade soldiers' journey stops. The Italian soldiers have just

been celebrated as liberators of Kosovo. A moving scene, thousands of people in the square celebrate the arrival of the Italian Armed Forces, with tears in their eyes, with bunches of flowers, with children who were trying to kiss the drivers, with the women in tears, with men who were embracing each other.¹⁵¹

The reporters confirm the sense of security provided by Italians towards the local population, showing the confidence of the Albanians in our contingent of troops: "We are pleased with the presence of the Italians here, who more than everybody, including Russians, have helped us to finish this war."¹⁵² This was what the mayor of Pec said to Brigadier General Del Vecchio, the Commander of the Italian contingent. The typical Italian soldier, therefore, is able to build a profitable cooperation with the population while effectively performing his operational tasks: "There is for the moment the tale of one mother, Sonila Lipay. She found out about the slaughter. It's she who has gone to the nearest Italian detachment and has taken Colonel Masiello by hand, saying one only word: "come". She has brought him in front of her house, to the entrance of the well, where some men were being lowered with old gas masks on their faces. The men engaged in the pitiful recovery work have found a lime layer, below which there were bodies."¹⁵³

From these words an image that is present in the imagination of the local people emerges -the image of the typical Italian soldier always ready to help anyone; a soldier preferred for his moral values. To complement the tremendous humanity that lodges in the heart of the Italian soldier is also his rigid impartiality towards the factions in the struggle. These are the words uttered by the Brigadier General Del Vecchio: "This crawling ethnic cleansing leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. But it would be much worse without us; hatred is too deep-rooted in the population". This is an appearance which positively contributes to our soldiers' reputation, men who are shown, through their commander, as obedient to the laws imposed by the international organizations concerning impartial behavior with the parties in conflict, laws that impose a distinct impartiality.

The reporters also show the important role developed by the Italian soldiers in the international world of public opinion: "A huge common grave with the remnants of 350 bodies killed by the troops of Milosevic. The terrible discovery was detected last night by the Italian soldiers in Pec. The area has been already fenced in and the Italians are ready to investigate together with the experts of the international Court of the Hague."¹⁵⁴ These lines are testimonies of the important role of the Italians in the international field, also for having taken active part together with the experts of the International Court in the investigation. They, in fact, did not limit

themselves to escort duties but also helped them. This clearly demonstrated their ability to carry out any kind of engagement they might be entrusted with in peace operations.

The newspaper "La Stampa" also mentioned in the same article two big risks run by our soldiers: "An anti-personnel mine has been detonated by an armored vehicle of the 18° Bersaglieri Regiment. No damage to it and no soldier was wounded. Moreover, a fighting man of UCK, who was caught while he was busy building an illegal road block in the Kulina passage in West Kosovo, attempted to throw a grenade at an Italian patrol but he has been immediately immobilized and arrested". This helped the Italian public to understand that the troops engaged not only had to take care of those who are in need of help, like the name "peace mission" would lead one to believe, but also had to deal with situations and moments of high tension and danger.

The article which is analyzed below, speaks of an episode during a patrol between Pec to Kljina. An anti-tank mine blew up and hit an Italian armored vehicle. It's of interest to note that the public could see, in that difficult moment, the behavior of our field officer who was able to keep his balance, to mind his men's tranquility, being impartial and not having recourse to force. "When I heard the rumble, the smell of powder, I thought: Who are these men? This or that faction? But we are a peace-keeping contingent of troops with precise orders. We cannot shoot at random. Therefore I said to the personnel to be quiet. "Everybody out". It was the most difficult moment. We ran towards a dark place and set ourselves in a circle. I recognized three shots. So I shouted "Italians! NATO! If they had insisted we would have started shooting too."⁵⁵ The newspaper "La Repubblica," gives a hint at the whole story: "Yesterday was the turn of an Italian convoy because of a burst of machine-gun fire on the way from Pec to Pristina."⁵⁶

Both the newspapers exalted the "warrior" component in the dichotomy which characterizes the Italian soldier; a component which appeared in the sentence of the "La Stampa": "The soldiers have reacted shooting [...] they have launched themselves to the attack[...]" ; this enhances completely this dichotomy, demonstrating the soldiers' professionalism, training, which complement their ability in socialization; returning fire only after provocation by the enemy shows, once again, an utmost respect by our troops for the rules of engagement in fire encounters.

But this is not all. Once again the impartiality toward the conflicting parties comes on the scene. Notwithstanding the victims of this absurd war are Albanians, there are episodes of ethnic cleansing against the Serbs; in these cases the soldier engaged in peace-keeping must provide assistance to victims belonging to the other side in the struggle. This is what appears in the same article of "La Stampa:" "Yesterday in the afternoon a patrol of Italian special forces

were ordered to rescue a Serbian family who had barricaded themselves in their home. All around there were armed Albanians in search of revenge. The Italian commandos went there with two armored vehicles, and an orthodox priest. The priest entered the house with the soldiers, reassured the four Serbians and took them away with the Italians."

Also the "La Repubblica" writes: "The zone of Pec, under the control of the Italians, is full of risks. Yesterday, the Garibaldi Brigade rescued a family of Serbians besieged by UCK, and began to assemble in the city jail all the robbers caught on the spot or the people found destroying Serbian houses and holy places."⁵⁷

All this emphasizes the fundamental importance of being neutral in such cases. Neutrality, in fact, is necessary to avoid every dislike, felt by one of the factions, towards peace-keeping soldiers and also to give the image of an Italian Army that maintains order and peace. In this kind of operation the Italian soldiers are very good. Once more the image of the Italians is professionalism and capacity.

KFOR was a peace-keeping force and as such entered into the imagination of both the Albanian and the Serbian people, who didn't think of the troops as enemies. In fact, "La Stampa" wrote:

In the beginning the UCK guerrillas garrisoned only the centers inhabited by the Albanians where, of course, they were received as winners. This happened in Prizren and Djakovica. But yesterday they also arrived armed in the small towns inhabited by Serbians. This refers to Pec where the Italian soldiers are. This caused a terrible fear among the people. While women and old men went back home in a hurry, about fifty men, all Serbians, in a procession of cars, went to the Italian headquarter asking for protection against the terrorists. The Bersaglieri were all mobilized. From that moment the town was garrisoned with tanks and armored vehicles; infantry soldiers patrolled the center of the town.⁵⁸

The fact that the Serbians had asked for help from the Italians, who were responsible for their residence zone, demonstrated their success in fulfilling their task to supporting only and exclusively the peace and not one of two parties involved in the war.

All this is confirmed by a part of the following article in "La Repubblica": "...at Gnjilane and Pec the Albanian guerrilla came in direct contact with the soldiers of Kfor. And if the (US) Marines disarmed the guerrillas in a blatant way, even using the Cobra helicopters once they refused to hand over their guns, in Pec the Italians made recourse to more soft manners: advertisements and armored vehicles put in front of the headquarter of the guerrilla who entered the town all of sudden."⁵⁹ "La Repubblica" has underlined the less aggressive and more diplomatic behavior of the Italians, who had chosen the preliminary way of deterrence with the

aim to intimidate the Albanians, and this was a successful operation. This behavior was different from the American's more unrestrained one.

We can find again the new image of the Italian soldier in the words of an authoritative opinion leader, Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema:

In the moment when Italian people think everything is over and that war is something belonging to the past, for you soldiers the greatest difficulties begin now. Not only Italy but also the whole world is looking at you with anxiety and sympathy. You have deserved the general esteem. You go to take peace to a people who have been driven away and humiliated. A people that we have welcomed. Now they can go back home. Now Italian soldiers are in Bosnia, Albania, and Macedonia. But now, in Kosovo, the most difficult operation begins. You will go into a zone upset by bombardments, but still more from ethnic cleansing. There will be the mines and the signs of fear. It is necessary to start relationships with a population divided by the hatred. We go to defend all the factions. You soldiers have shown a big capacity to be a modern Army: you are not only efficient, as the Allies recognize, but you have preserved the Italian ability to speak to the people. I trust in your capacity to install you in a wounded territory. We Italians, speaking also from the human point of view, have to take back to these people the *joie de vivre*. In these three months, we have done things which deserve the respect of the Allies and even of the enemy, who has appreciated our position.⁶⁰

What is important, here, is the reference to the admission from the Allies of the combat power of the Italian Army; this means that the image of our institution both within Italy and, above all, in the international community has improved and reaffirms the definite break with the past when the Italian Army was not taken into consideration; it confers, moreover a new face to an institution for so long not held in esteem at home and judged useless and ineffective.

Another confirmation of what was said above comes from a reporter who has provided a positive image of Italian soldiers never given before. These words consecrate the "new" Italian soldier. A month after the entrance in Kosovo, he wrote:

The Italian soldiers are simply marvelous. Their faces like those of a neorealist film. For example they happened to face a crowd of Albanians intending ransack an Orthodox church. Not knowing what to do, a soldier cried out that there were mines in the church: "It's dangerous, don't get near and go away". The Albanians went away and on the day after, beginning a false operation of clearance, they put altar cloths and holy vessels in a safe place. This means: efficiency and creative ability. We all know the creative ability of the Italians, as well as their sensitivity and goodness of heart. But in this case efficiency is really remarkable. Compelled to undergo exhausting turns, in places where there is a very limited support, our soldiers succeed in being disciplined and informal. The credit must be given to Brigadier General Del Vecchio, who is the commander of our troops; he, in fact, acts like a trainer who coaches a team, or like a teacher who prepares his pupils for a difficult exam. In Kosovo, by night, our soldiers patrol the streets, prepare roadblocks and confiscate arms. You can see them lighted by the headlights dispelling darkness, small in their large camouflage uniforms and their

big helmets; see them near their tanks, somewhat confused, very young. The contrast with the American soldiers of the cinema, enormous and muscular soldiers, is striking. This is, probably, the real image of the Italian soldiers: a small face a little dismayed in the dark night of Kosovo.⁶¹

These words need no comment. They demonstrate the high quality of our troops and their efficiency in the peace-keeping missions.

The sense of these words reflects an effective process of integration of the Italian Armed Forces in society. A society that, in the years of the Cold War, had not missed an opportunity to throw mud, in varied circumstances, at national defense. About this, the former Chief of the Joint Defense General Staff, General Mario Arpino said in a television interview: "The use of force in the crisis of Kosovo must be condemned, but now I see the birth of a positive step in the relations between Italian Armed Forces and Society. It seems to me that this crisis has given the Italian military back to the Country: we are conscious, cautious, professional people who behave in a civilized way. We are a state institution, not a separate one, which has shown efficiency, that efficiency which other institutions should show."

These words are just the contrary to what Professor Fabrizio Battistelli said about the invisibility of the Armed Forces and testify to their showing, in the last years, to civil society a new face. This is a new dimension, if compared with the one of the past, made of defeats. As President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi maintained: "In Kosovo Italy has found pride again" and the Italian Army has gained the esteem of the people.

RADIO WEST: A MILITARY RADIO, A MEANS TO KEEP PEACE AMONG THE VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS

The importance of communication as an element of dialogue between the various people and as an aid in assuring peace has been appreciated by the "new" Army. In fact, to support the stream of news about its operations and quicken the process of peace construction, it invented Radio West in Kosovo.

The radio started its activity on the 12th of August 1999. "Good morning, Kosovo! Music and news will be broadcasted from tomorrow in Italian, Albanian, Serbian languages, following a successful tradition experienced during the UN mission in Somalia: Radio Ibis. Radio West, the first military station in Kosovo will be managed by the soldiers of Garibaldi Brigade under the direction of Lieutenant Fabrizio Centofanti, the spokesman of the military contingent. Radio West will be an ideal bridge connecting Kosovo to Italy."⁶²

Being born thanks to the collaboration with Italian state television (RAI) and "Corriere della Sera" it began its activity, at first, only in the area under the responsibility of the Italian

contingent of troops; later, it expanded its activity to include 70% of Kosovo. Thanks to the collaboration with the national communication company (Telecom), Radio West, has at its disposal a "toll-free number" to give the opportunity to the relatives of the military personnel in Kosovo to send messages to the soldiers.

On the 22nd October 1999 Roberto Zaccaria, President of RAI, officially presented the Army with the studio equipment and transmitters, so that Radio West became a "little jewel" at the height of private Italian sending stations. The equipment will be left in Kosovo when the Italian Army goes back home. There are two important aims of the Radio. The first is to help to maintain the high morale of military personnel; an aim to be reached by broadcasting music, news, interviews, messages of political and military authorities in the languages of the various nations that work in the multinational brigade and in the languages of the different ethnic groups: Albanians, Serbs and Romanians. The second aim is to facilitate the reconciliation process between the various ethnic groups and consolidate trust between the contingent of troops and the population. "A radio is useful to help in rebuilding the country, help in favor of a Land just coming into the world. Radio West, a broadcasting station created by the Italian soldiers is going to rapidly become an engine for the normal way of life."⁶³

The radio has a program devoted to children, because, as the Italian soldiers explain "Today even the Serbian and Albanian children hate each other and peace must have a start from them". This is an example of how Radio West strengthens the "service" communication. The programmer foresees a repeated broadcast in Italy, thanks to a link with the national radio station R.T.L. 102.5 and "Radio RAI". The editors of important newspapers, the members of Parliament with the "Military Bishop" make it possible to carry out the program with their interviews.

The importance that Radio West has in Italian communication is shown by the words of the Vice-Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini, written in the preface to the volume entitled "Radio West, the voice of the Italians in Kosovo":

.....while I was reading the book, images of sufferings, courage and atrocities, of sense of duty and of humanity thronged; and I seemed to hear the voice of Radio West telling all these things, live; that is when they were still living, in the flesh, before being softened and buried by the sand of time. Radio West has been a bridge which has united different cultures and opposite sentiments difficult to overwhelm; it has been the image itself of our military operation in Kosovo, as felt by the local communities. Now that other difficult engagements must be carried out by our Armed Forces, that radio experience can be useful to confirm the efficacy of the Italian "style" that we love so much.⁶⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Over forty years of inactivity in the Italian Army had flattened the identity of the soldiers to the point that the public associated the Army with only ceremonial functions. This caused a lack of communication between citizens and their Army.

The condition of frustration in which the Armed Force lived is confirmed by the Chief of the Army General Staff, General Goffredo Canino: "In the people the image of the Army has remained like that of fifty years ago, although these have been years of democratic engagement, loyalty and institutional fidelity. But these years have no weight in comparison with the rooted preconceived ideas. Today we must still justify our presence in every situation"⁶⁵.

After only ten years we can affirm that the observations of the Chief of the Army have lost meaning. Now the Army enjoys a new period of popularity after having remained for about half a century almost invisible to the eyes of the public and political opinion. The missions far from the national territory have provided the public with a new vantage point from which to measure the Army. At last, we can say that separation from civil society has been abandoned in favor of a renewed and ample trust, openly shown towards the men in uniform. This is the peculiar element of the new relationship between the Army and society.

This clearly comes out from the manner in which the press has portrayed the participation of Italian troops in military operations in Albania and in Kosovo from which a positive representation of the performed deeds, of the leadership and of the behavior of the soldiers emerges. And while the Italians know from the newspapers what the soldiers do abroad and recognize their efficiency, the Army, free from isolation and having broken down the wall of its invisibility, begins to compare itself with other armies, and to appreciate its own ability and its military attitude.

The image of the soldier which emerges from the articles written during the "Alba" and "Joint Guardian" operations no longer is the image of a "soldier for war", nor the image of a "maladjusted soldier" but the image of a new "soldier for pacification", an active participant in the process of reconciliation.

The words of the reporters also underline the Italian soldiers' military qualities - characteristics that they always possessed: discipline, spirit of sacrifice, ability to manage difficult and uncertain situations through a rigid hierarchical organization and other cultural qualities such as a spirit of adaptability and empathy.

The analyzed newspapers show how flexibility, adaptability, ability to communicate with the environment, necessary qualities in the new scenario of intervention, don't derive simply from being a soldier, but are also due to the ability, a characteristic of the Italian soldiers, to

apply, once again, cultural codes and models of behavior learned in many social fields. As Charles Moskos, an important American sociologist in military matters and former consultant for Bill Clinton, says: "In peace operations Americans should take care only of logistic problems, leaving the engagement on the field to the Europeans and above all, to the Italians."

The newspapers also demonstrate how the internationally appreciated "Italian way" of peace-keeping belongs to all Italians, who for the first time recognize themselves in the thousands of soldiers who serve abroad. For this reason the President of the Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, has remembered: "International peace-keeping missions have become a true source of social legitimacy and have made the reinstitution of the parade on the second of June⁶⁶ possible in an environment of civil harmony, of love and pride." ⁶⁷

The punctual description of the new soldier can be found once again in the words of the President of the Republic and the President of the House of Commons, Luciano Violante:

It has been possible for me to make myself certain, once more, of the professional ability, the force of passion with which you fulfill your duty. It's something more than to the duty that tells you to wear the uniform. You prove that we are, not only, capable of inventiveness and courage, but also to know how to organize and act resolutely. With your job you are the vanguard of a huge design of European peace meant to include the Balkans in the place of freedom, rights, security, economic and social cooperation that makes the European Union a civil community, an example for the entire world. With effectiveness and humanity you demonstrate a value of respect for human rights that is the basis of our democracy. ⁶⁸

These last days", Luciano Violante says, "I have visited all the Italian troops scattered around the world. I saw how they worked for peace in an Italian way, basing their activity on resolution, respect and kindness. We are respected because we respect and I think that this behavior is typical of our Army who operates all over the world with tremendous dignity. In the past the Armed Forces were an organization separated from the State, but now they are at the center of the Italian political map. There are many ways to give the image of a Country to the world: with one's own culture, its own music, its own books, its own products, but also with one's Armed Forces. I would say that owing to what I've seen, our Armed Forces represent the best moments and culture of the Country. ⁶⁹

The authoritative recognitions and the evidence of esteem are concrete signs of how the men in uniform have succeeded, with their behavior, in giving a true image of themselves.

The awareness of having at their disposal soldiers capable of effectively completing a mission has also impacted the attitude of the Italians towards the use of national troops far from the national territory. According to a research by "Eos Gallup Europe" in October 2003 (on account of the European Commission), 60% of Italians favor sending troops to Iraq for a peace

operation.⁷⁰ The Italian data contrast that of the remainder of the European Union: 44% favorable; 54% contrary.⁷¹

This new image of the military organization is, in any case, the result of a new, and more courageous public affairs campaign, carried out by the Army since the operation "Alba." It can be asserted that for decades the Army had downplayed the role of public affairs since it thought it was sufficient "to show the uniform" through ceremonial functions. Its taking part in the missions out of the national territory has, on the contrary, helped the military recognize the importance of communications with the Italian public as essential and valuable elements of the management of every kind of operation, since public opinion has weight in both political and strategic decisions.

The moment had come to:

- Cancel the stereotyped image of a military world closed in itself, free from any criticism because it was basic element in the organization of the state.
- Get rid of the tendency to consider information as an "absolute enemy or as a "mighty force to pay respect to".
- Establish a dialogue with those media previously considered by military personnel to be insensitive to the military problems.
- Give to the national and international communities a true image of the military world.

The first signals of these courageous reforms in the field of communication can be found in the military operation carried out in the Balkans.

Being aware that a constant, positive, open dialogue was a strategic objective, the Army held daily press conferences and chose well trained public information officers (PIOs), capable of reacting in time usefully and effectively. These PIOs were chosen with the full recognition that information required quality, experience and training which do not necessarily coincide with strictly military qualities.⁷²

The careful research made by the Army General Staff concerning the previous experiences abroad, inspired the planners to insert, for the first time in FMP and after in the contingent in Kosovo a "Public Information Cell", with the mission to inform the Italian public about the objectives, tasks and development of the military intervention in order to foster a positive "image" of the Armed Force.

Such structures of information, composed of well experienced and intelligent personnel, capable of meeting the demands of the media and of public opinion, were inserted in the organization because the Army recognized that:

- Public information is a chief activity for a modern Armed Force and a serial responsibility.
- Modern military operations, especially peace operations, are carried out 50% through active operations and 50% through public information.

The media coverage about "Alba" and "Joint Guardian" operations shows clearly that the "Public Information Cells" worked properly, providing accurate and timely information about the soldiers' activity, while also assuring the security of the operations.

This relationship between military units and the media was born, moreover, because there was a new perception of the value of the interaction with the journalists, now considered important partners in the achieving mission' success. The journalists, being in Albania and Kosovo before the military units, were perceived by the soldiers as vital members of the peace missions: at first, in fact, they represented the allies in order to understand and to interpret the local reality better; later they were an indispensable means to inform the public on the progress of the operations; all this in order to accelerate the process of reconstruction of the peace. The Armed Force recognized, formally, the journalists as true professional men, indispensable and critical elements, able to help them in the Army's transformation process.

Radio West is a proof of the attention paid by the Army to information about "the missions" aimed at giving the public new image of the Army; Radio West is important, above all, for relations with the local inhabitants. Above all, it has provided people messages of peace and news useful to the restarting of civil life. To the Army, the Radio meant that it was possible to have at its disposal a rapid means of communication through which our friendship and democracy could be known.

Information has become, in short, a chief operation, no longer a secondary one.

Based on this research we can conclude that the engagement in the Balkans has allowed the Army to portray itself as a modern organization, professional, and efficient, and representative of the best societal values. In this way it is possible to say that the Italian Army is today one of the hinges of national unity, besides being an interlocutor absolutely necessary for national and international security and defense.

WORD COUNT=11,625

ENDNOTES

¹ As Cavour said. Camillo Benso Count of Cavour (1810-1861) was the figure who forged the Kingdom of Italy, designed the constitutional structure of the unitary state and served as its first Prime Minister.

² Carlo Jean, "Preface," in *Forze Armate, mass media e opinione pubblica nell'Italia attuale*, ed. P. Visani (Roma: UDAP SMM, 1994), VIII.

³ Bruno Vespa, *Italia/Libano. Una storia di pace* (Roma: Edizioni Fotogramma, 1984), II.

⁴ The physical and psychological maltreatment of recruits.

⁵ Crescenzo Fiore and Bruno Zoldan, *Esercito e Società* (Roma-Latina: Edizioni UNA/Pb&B, 1994), 148.

⁶ Fabio Mini, *Comandare e comunicare* (Firenze: Alinari, 1989), 24.

⁷ In summer 1992, the "mafia" killed two judges (Giovanni Falcone on May 23, and Paolo Borsellino on July 19) who had started to fight this criminal organization through a new investigative approach, directed against its illegal monetary flows. These brutal events forced the Italian Government to assume the initiative and show the will to oppose organized crime by using any available means. In a ministerial meeting, on July 24, 1992, the Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato decided to deploy in Sicily 9,000 soldiers, in order to increase dramatically the number of police officers available to fight the "mafia". On July 25, the Government approved Decree Law 349, giving to the soldiers a particular status which allowed them to act independently as police officers.

⁸ "To inform" is to transmit news; "to communicate" is a complex two way process of conversation with the public.

⁹ Sara Bentivegna, "L'immagine delle Forze Armate nelle trasmissioni televisive", in *Giovani e Forze Armate*, ed. Fabrizio Battistelli (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1996), 119.

¹⁰ Archivio Disarmo. *Percezione e atteggiamento dell'opinione pubblica italiana nei confronti delle Forze Armate*. October 2003.

¹¹ EURISKO. *Percezione e atteggiamento dell'opinione pubblica italiana nei confronti delle Forze Armate*. December 2004.

¹² Carlo Santoro, State Undersecretary for Defense, during the discussion in Senate, on 25 January 1996.

¹³ George Prevelakis, *I Balcani* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 13.

¹⁴ Pasquale Iuso, Adolfo Pepe, and Maurizio Simoncelli, *La Comunità internazionale e la questione balcanica* (Soveria Mannelli (CZ): Rubbettino, 2002), 31.

¹⁵ Toni Capuozzo, "Come si racconta un'operazione di peace-keeping?", in *Nel cuore dei Balcani. Le missioni dell'Esercito ed il cammino verso la pace*, ed. Andrea Nativi (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2003), 72.

- ¹⁶ The border between Italy and Slovenia.
- ¹⁷ The attachment to the mother.
- ¹⁸ Marco De Martino, "Ottimi generali, pessime reclute," *Panorama*, 11 April 1997.
- ¹⁹ Article without signature, *The Times*, 12 April 1997.
- ²⁰ Indro Montanelli, "Missione fantasma," *Corriere della Sera*, 06 May 1997.
- ²¹ Marco Tavasani, "Il primo colpo dei nostri in tempo di pace," *La Nazione*, 04 March 1997.
- ²² Article without signature, *Il Tempo*, 04 March 1997.
- ²³ Chief of the Italian Joint General Staff.
- ²⁴ Carlo Mercuri, "La mia prima volta da super-comandante," *Il Messaggero*, 04 March 1997.
- ²⁵ Antonio Negro, "Partono i nostri," *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 05 March 1997.
- ²⁶ Antonio Negro, "I nostri soldati si godono le ultime ore di licenza," *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 30 March 1997.
- ²⁷ Slovenia and Belgium contributed with medical units, respectively of 25 and 15 men, while Portugal participated with a C130 aircraft.
- ²⁸ 2,800 Italians, 1,000 French, 400 Spanish, 800 Greeks, 800 Turks, 70 Danishes, 120 Austrians, 400 Rumanians, 30 Slovenes, and 20 Belgians.
- ²⁹ Enrico Pugnaletto, *Oggi*, 23 April 1997.
- ³⁰ Luciano Gulli, "Pronti a usare le armi chimiche," *Il Giornale*, 18 April 1997.
- ³¹ Giorgio Torelli, "Albania, terra di incognite piu' che di aquile," *Il Giornale*, 22 April 1997.
- ³² Franz Maria D'Asanzo, "Ma i lacci e laccioli imposti dall'ONU rischiano di vanificare questa missione," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 07 May 1997.
- ³³ Michele Dodde, "Operazione Alba," *La voce del Sud*, 13 May 1997.
- ³⁴ Andrea di Robilant, "Il fratello minore e' cresciuto," *La stampa*, 27 April 1997.
- ³⁵ Alessio Altichieri, "Poco guerrieri, bravi a mettere pace," *Il Corriere della Sera*, 21 April 1997.
- ³⁶ Ilaria De Bernardis, "In Albania arrivano i nostri, salvi in 36," *Il Tempo*, 22 April 1997.
- ³⁷ M.Mo., "In Albania un Italiano uccide tre rapinatori," *La Stampa*, 24 June 1997.
- ³⁸ Vittorio Monti, "Complimenti a Prodi sull'Albania. E dopo il ritiro di Alba, aiuti in altre forme," *Corriere della Sera*, 09 July 1997.

³⁹ Vincenzo Rutigliano, "Scalfaro: in Albania una lezione di civiltà", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 30 July 1997.

⁴⁰ Gianluca Luzi, "Prodi accoglie a Brindisi i militari di ritorno da Alba," *La Repubblica*, 30 July 1997.

⁴¹ Alberto Flores D'Arcais, "Non e' finita l'emergenza Albania," *La Repubblica*, 02 July 1997.

⁴² EURISPES. Osservatorio permanente sulle Forze Armate. *Percezione e atteggiamento dell'opinione pubblica italiana nei confronti delle Forze Armate*. July 1997.

⁴³ The so-called "Eagleburger" doctrine, named for the Under Secretary of State, previously U.S. Ambassador in Yugoslavia.

⁴⁴ Led by the Republican Senator Bob Dole.

⁴⁵ UK and Germany proposed in 1998 the idea of the third Federal Republic in Yugoslavia, nearby to Serbia and Montenegro.

⁴⁶ The Basques (in Spain and France), the Flemish (in Belgium), the Scots (in Great Britain), the Southern Tyrolese (in Italy).

⁴⁷ "La Repubblica" and "La Stampa", which are the most widely read newspapers, having circulations of 820,000 and 560,000 copies respectively, have been examined.

⁴⁸ Massimo D'Alema went to Macedonia on 11 June 1999.

⁴⁹ A branch of the Italian infantry, literally sharpshooters.

⁵⁰ Renato Caprile, *La Repubblica*, 13 June 1999.

⁵¹ Francesco Grignetti, *La Stampa*, 14 June 1999.

⁵² Francesco Grignetti, *La Stampa*, 15 June 1999.

⁵³ Francesco Grignetti, *La Stampa*, 29 June 1999.

⁵⁴ Ingrid Badurina, *La Stampa*, 10 July 1999.

⁵⁵ Francesco Grignetti, "Agguato al blindato italiano," *La Stampa*, 18 June 1999.

⁵⁶ Renato Caprile, *La Repubblica*, 23 June 1999.

⁵⁷ Raffaella Menichini, "Pec, rischio per gli Italiani," *La Repubblica*, 23 June 1999.

⁵⁸ Francesco Grignetti, "Il controesodo: in diecimila verso casa," *La Stampa*, 17 June 1999.

⁵⁹ Renato Caprile, "Kosovo: il giorno dell'UCK," *La Repubblica*, 17 June 1999.

⁶⁰ Francesco Grignetti, *La Stampa*, 12 June 1999.

⁶¹ Fabrizio Rondolino, "Mitra, solidarieta' e fantasia a Pec," *La Stampa*, 11 July 1999.

⁶² Article without signature, "Kosovo, arriva la radio dei bersaglieri," *Il Tempo*, 12 August 1999.

⁶³ Alberto Guarnieri, "Kosovo, una radio per portare la pace," *Il Messaggero*, 23 October 1999.

⁶⁴ Arcangelo Moro, *Radio West. La voce dei militari Italiani in Kosovo* (Roma: RAI ERI, 2002), VI.

⁶⁵ Antonio Longo, "Esercito e Stampa", in *Esercito e comunicazione*, ed. C. Fiore (Roma-Latina: Edizioni UNA, 1993), 217.

⁶⁶ 02 June: the birth of the Italian Republic (officially on June 2, 1946).

⁶⁷ 04 November 2003.

⁶⁸ The President of the Republic speaking through "Radio RAI" to the Italian soldiers in Kosovo, 02 November 1999.

⁶⁹ Luciano Violante speaking through "Radio West" to the Italian soldiers in Kosovo, 30 April 2000.

⁷⁰ Eos Gallupe Europe. *Indagine sociologica realizzata per conto dell'Unione europea*. October 2003.

⁷¹ The research was based on a sample of 7,500 people in the 15 member states. After the Danish (77%), the Dutch (69%) and the Irish (67%), the Italians are the most favorable of the European Union citizens to send their troops to Iraq.

⁷² A good officer can be a very bad communicator. A good communicator does not necessarily need to be a high ranking officer.

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