

# **From Gandhi to Alex Langer: ideas and proposals for a «Peace Corp»**

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Through series of historical and semantic references from “Mahatma” Gandhi to Alex Langer and beyond, it is possible and necessary to update the profile of Civilian Peace Corps in the European perspective, advancing a proposal to formalize it within the “constitutional” Treaty of Lisbon (2009), this becoming even more relevant on the circumstance of the 2013 European Year for Citizens.

## **Gandhi: *Shanti Sena***

Fore-runner of the Peace Corps, the *Shanti Sena* (“Peace Army”) is, in Gandhi's view, the application of Satyagraha into the conflict dynamics and, by extension, the nonviolent intervention, carried out by civilians, prepared and willing to sacrifice themselves, for the interposition inside the conflict situation and the cessation of violence escalation. More than a proper “Peace Corp”, the *Shanti Sena* was conceived as an instrument of social mobilization, a genuine mass claim movement, inspired by real “soldiers of non-violence”, pure of heart and hardened in spirit, able to act for the improvement of social conditions of the people in the vast sub-continent. It is not a coincidence that only after India's Independence (1948) such “Peace Army” began to be conceived as a real “Peace Corp” and Gandhi prefigured for such an organization functions of real non-violent peace-keeping, whose task, among others, should be civilian interposition in the context of the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir. This intuition, which can be placed at the origin of the modern vision for Civil Peace Corps, was continued by Gandhi's successor, Vinoba “Baul” Narayan, who formalized the creation of such a structure during the first organizational conference of 1957, and, still later, by Narayan Desai, under whose direction, since 1962, the *Shanti Sena* came to count up to six thousand members, thus operating as a mass-based structured organization in various local contexts of crisis and conflict.

## **Narayan Desai and *Shanti Sena* evolution**

What, in the frame of the *Shanti Sena*, is meant by “work of peace” and how the *Shanti Sena* wishes to operate for non-violent interposition and constructive management, can be illustrated through Narayan Desai's words, when he points out that “the Shanti Sena, from the beginning of their history, have dealt with the conflicts between communities. Gandhi said that organized units of Shanti Sena should be arranged to solve problems, initially political ones, and even religious ones, that were creating. In Bombay, at that time, we asked people to organize non-violently between them and to intervene in situations of violence or conflicts”. Later, he recalled “the Shanti Sena, in some cases ... predicted and avoided violence insurgence, while, in other times, this was not possible”. These words are turning out the profile of a proper non-violent popular organization, conceived to be very flexible, adaptable and, above all, modern, capable of non-violent interposition into inter-community conflicts and able to match the effectiveness of the intervention with the key-capacity of the “early warning”.

## **From *Shanti Sena* to International Peace Brigades**

A limit and a strength: this may be, in short, the legacy that the great and pioneering experience of the *Shanti Sena* leaves. Its strength is to build-up a social process of non-violent nature through a mass organization capable of working with the principles and the tools of Gandhian non-violence, on the causes of social injustice and on the pre-assumptions of violence at the base of conflicts. It was precisely to overcome the limit inherent to their very nature, the one to be so deeply rooted in the context of the sub-continent and so firmly committed to the local-based action, that, since 1961, some activists of the *Shanti Sena* (including Jayaprakash Narayan and Michael Scott) decided the establishment of genuine “World Peace Brigades”, especially active between 1962 and 1965 to promote non-violence and the principles of constructive transformation in different contexts of liberation struggles, mostly among African post-colonial emancipation movements. These “Peace Brigades”, inspired by the non-violent lesson and structured on the basis of non-violent Gandhian

equips, were conceived as an “organization of equals” or a “peer-organization” and worked as a horizontal unit, able to act at grass-roots level in international conflict contexts. On their formation epiphany, the PBI (Peace Brigades International), representing the evolution of that community, testified, at the Conference of Grindstone Island, Canada (1981), their will to be “an organization with the ability to mobilize and deploy volunteers in areas of tension and crisis, in order to prevent the outbreak or the insurgence of violence. These “Brigades for Peace”, designed to meet and to face specific needs and appeals, will be activated in non-partisan missions including positive initiatives for peace, non-violent peace-keeping and humanitarian civil service; they set themselves grounding on a heritage of non-violent actions: such commitment of mind and heart ... can really make a difference in human affairs”.

### **Alex Langer and Ernest Gülcher: Civil Peace Corps**

If the war catastrophe and the nuclear holocaust had meant, with the end of World War II, the point of no-return of the war plans by the imperialist powers, thus paving the way to the United Nations, the Charter of San Francisco and the formal banishment of the war as an ordinary instrument for the States to solve conflicts at international level, finally launching, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948), the most powerful tool available so far for peace-work, the neo-liberal turning point and the new arms race, in the late Eighties and Nineties of the century, would have been the main cross-road, along with the euro-missiles and the star wars, the end of the factual experience of Socialism and the disintegration of multi-ethnic States. The fall of the Berlin Wall (9 November 1989) symbolically could re-allocate on the scene the primacy of non-violent claims, but ran back to represent, instead, the most blatant denial of the hopes of renewal which had meanwhile established in the hearts and the minds of peoples in Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the tragedy of Yugoslavia, the resurgence of nationalism from one side to another in the continent did show, at the same time, the ferocious face of capitalistic globalization and the crucial challenge for the non-violent forces, called, on international level and country-specific, to re-invent and re-define themselves. In his appeal “Europe is dying or born again in Sarajevo” (25 June 1995), Alex Langer listed the guide-ideas for the same development of the European Peace Corps:

- a. the reality, the meaning and the value of “right”;
- b. the offer of integration: more than any... peace plan, this simple invitation: «Come with us, join us», does work;
- c. the highest support to those deciding to dialogue and able to reintegrate: [...] to support the forces of dialogue and for the search for common solutions;
- d. the highest support for networks re-creating ties: coming from students' and professors' networks to Committees for Human Rights;
- e. conflict prevention: mostly, pre-war situations, where the violent explosion of a conflict can be avoided (Kosovo, Macedonia, Vojvodina ... ), but where we need to concentrate a great attention, a strong international presence, an intense civil work.

### **Civil Peace Corps in the European perspective**

The Civil Peace Corp is therefore created as a civilian permanent tool, made up of volunteers and professionals from civil society, financed and managed by a legitimate central or official authority (in the European case like an Executive Committee, in any National case like a Public Agency), with the following tasks:

- a) monitoring,
- b) interposition,
- c) network building,
- d) confidence building,
- e) communication.

At a European level, although the debate on this issue is dating back, as we have seen, since 1995, following a European Conference focused on the main theme of “Civil Peace Corps” and supported, at that time, by the efforts, in particular, by Alex Langer (President of the European Greens) and Ernest Gülcher (Coordinator of the European Intergroup for Peace, Human Rights and Human Security), a significant progress has been made only since 1999, first with the approval of two resolutions (the Recommendation of the European Parliament, 10 February 1999, about the establishment of a European Civil Peace Corp and the Resolution of the European Parliament on the Communication from the European Commission, 13 December 2001, about the establishment of a Civil Peace Corp inside the Rapid Reaction Mechanism, RRM) and then with the drafting of two feasibility studies, the first of the European Parliament in January 2004 "On the European Civil Peace Corp" and the second of the European Commission in November 2005 "On the Establishment of a European Civil Peace Corp", finally with the adoption of the "Instrument for Stability", then entered into force January 1, 2007, with purpose to confer functionality, effectiveness and efficiency to the civilian intervention instruments of the EU in contexts raged by emergency, crisis and conflict.

### **Some feasible innovations starting from lessons learned**

The European Commission, after delaying the chance to establish a Civil Peace Corp, conducted a feasibility study in 2006 which, however, was not ensued by any follow-up or indication for the Member States. The only element emerging, among those constituting the Civil Peace Corps' profile, is about training; it is yet to define the relationship with national governments and international institutions “on the field”, but the “phase-related relevance” of this task is heightened at all today in the aftermath of the transitional deployment and the lessons learned by the application of the most important and most challenging civilian mission in the history of the external projection of the EU, namely the EULEX (*European Union Rule of Law Mission*) in Kosovo, set up in order to monitor the situation after profiling the regional final status (2008 established and April 2009 entered into operational force). Today, at European level, the planning structure for civil intervention is the so-called Civ.Com (*Civilian Commission for Crisis Management*), linked to three funding lines [2007-13]:

- 1) the “Stability Instrument” for the multi-level cooperation with Third Countries, especially in crisis areas;
- 2) funds for the being established “European Peace-building Agency” (EPA), with specific operational goals;
- 3) funds from the “European Peace-building Liaison Office” (EPLO), link-and-interface structure between civil society and EU institutions on peace-action programs and peace-building measures.

Now, within the *European Peace-building* concept, the main objectives are:

- 1) to prevent violent conflicts;
- 2) to strengthen prevention capacity and
- 3) to professionalize deploying teams;

while, within the broader international institutional interface, constituted by the so-called GPPAC (*Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts*), the open-issues are as follows:

- 1) the role and the contribution offered by Civil Society Organizations;
- 2) the adequacy and the competence of the already said organizations of European "Third Sector";
- 3) the autonomy and the independence of the latter by the official authorities of sending Countries.

### **Civil Society Engagement**

The already fixed *agenda* by the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2005) has identified five *focuses*, then basically captured by the civil society movement in the EU Member Countries, including the Italian movement, who translated them into three guide-lines:

- 1) to define a “peace chain” (with a ministerial charge for peace-building, a central structure and defined funds to ensure profile, continuity and effectiveness of the civilian peace interventions);

- 2) to create a central institution in order to coordinate civil actions for conflict transformation (modeled upon the example of IPRI, “International Peace Research Institute”; the structure in Italy closest to this configuration is the one named IPRI-CPC NET, which includes the most of Italian civil society organizations working in the field of constructive conflict management and research);
- 3) to consolidate a “community of practice” and an experiential literature in the field, experiencing civil action projects "on the ground" through the framework provided by the laws 49/1987 and 180/1992.

As a part of the Table for Civil Peace Corps - established in 2007 and operational until 2008, parallel with the end of the XV Deputy-at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the initiative fostered in charge of F. A. deputy minister account for International Cooperation, Patrizia Sentinelli, two experimental network projects were presented, firstly an action-research monitoring different already developed experiences and secondly a comprehensive action for peace education and peace promotion, by making use of different funding streams, with reference to financial sources from Local Authorities and the funding sources available from the Ministry itself.

If it's still open, among the various expressions of civil society, the debate about the designation, the mandate and the cooperation with other actors (civil and military) of international intervention in conflict and post-conflict areas, though significant strides have been made so far in this direction, both through defining criteria of Italian Civil Peace Intervention by the Italian Table named ICP in June 2012 and through the program of set-up of Civil Peace Corps in Kosovo developed in huge partnership inside the IPRI - CPC NET (2011-2012); in the same way, a “work in progress” is the reflection about the professional profile, so that is not yet established a shared designation (the most common one is "peace operator / peacemaker" in its different acceptations) and has not been yet put forward a specific proposal for the definition of the job profile based on the different stages of conflict escalation rather than on the different areas of feasible intervention. In other words, if Civil Peace Corps are known as tasks, neither the mandate nor the fields are yet well defined. As regarding the latter, they can especially be identified through the following ones:

- a. “Human Security”: civil escort, civil protection, accompaniment/protection of the weak/exposed;
- b. “Peace Work”: confidence building, dialogue building, community building and empowerment;
- c. “Human Rights”: rights protection and promotion, civil and electoral monitoring, rule of law.

Besides these acquaintances, the Civil Peace Corp is defined as a civilian equip composed of not-armed personnel engaged in conflict contexts, with a mandate depending either on the level of violence escalation and the relevant tasks for the target context. The contingent is made up of volunteers and professionals, on the basis of a training stage providing one basic introduction to cross-cutting contents as the “core of reference” and one specific training on content issues shaping on function (e.g. along the three above mentioned macro-areas); so to traduce and to reflect the mandate, in order to avoid that the composition and the mixture of volunteers and professionals shall result into an internal hierarchy between "A level" and "B level" staff.

### **A proposal for the European future**

If the European context represents the privileged scenario to test the Civil Peace Corps, surprisingly, not only among professionals, after a huge care and a not-episodic juridical history, is not following, up to recent years, any coherent and proper legal recognition for the CPC (Civil Peace Corps) frame or any consequent and formal “constitutionalization”, even if, in accordance with the so-called "Petersberg Tasks", the European Union external action is one of the pillars of its institutional architecture. It is therefore - more than ever - necessary and urgent to include, in the consolidated version of the Treaty of Lisbon (GU C 83 30.03.2010) inside the Chapter III dedicated to Humanitarian Aid, governing through art. 214 c. 1 the humanitarian actions of European Union as:

[they] shall be intended to provide... assistance and relief and protection for people in third countries who are victims of natural or man-made disasters, in order to meet the humanitarian needs resulting from these different situations

a specific comma, after c. 5 establishing

a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps ... to establish a framework for joint contributions ... to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union

in order to ensure, through this further formulation, the institution of the European Civil Peace Corp as non-military contingent, based on resources from civil society and public authorities, made available by the Member States with task of crisis management in third countries who are victims of conflicts and task of conflict prevention in countries exposed to risk of instability, crisis or escalation.

This, after all, is the basic idea of the Civil Peace Corp: in Alex Langer's words, a “peace corp” as recognized and organized, taken by the European Union to carry out tasks of prevention, mitigation and mediation of conflicts, through actions of monitoring, dialogue, promoting reconciliation or at least actions of resumption of contacts, communications or negotiations. Coming out from a long story and tested by lots of trials of civil society and, sometimes, institutional authorities, the European Civil Peace Corp is a goal to be achieved, which try again for, still, in many ways, in front of us.

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