



**EUROPE – NATO THREATS AND CONSEQUENCES**

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**Observatory against militarization of school**

***Activities of the Italian Observatory against the militarization of schools (and the increased presence of military in teaching (a contribution to peace in Europe)***

I am happy and honoured to be here today, representing the ITALIAN OBSERVATORY AGAINST THE MILITARIZATION OF SCHOOLS. Our association was born from the strong concerns felt by a group of militant teachers within the grassroots union COBAS SCUOLA regarding worrisome international developments and the dissemination of war and defence culture by the military in the world of education, vocational training and universities. These interferences did not occur until a few years ago but are by no means a product of the current right-wing Italian government. These policies were also carried out by centre-left governments and are now undergoing a worrying acceleration, in our opinion due to the current international situation.

Through the Centro Studi Scuola Pubblica- CESP (a training institution recognized by the Ministry of Education), run by our union, we have organized from May 2022 seminars for school personnel, in various provinces of Italy , entitled : "THE SCHOOL LABORATORY OF PEACE. MANAGING CONFLICTS, PREVENTING WAR". Historians, researchers, pacifist associations from the Catholic world, such as Pax Christi, have collaborated with us as speakers from the beginning.

These conferences, very well attended, have allowed us to begin building a database of people and associations in tune with our contents. From here the proposal to establish a national observatory in an effort to reach different kinds of cultural sectors in the country. Conference proceedings were already published in two volumes last May.

An appeal was then published, signed by many professors, teachers, intellectuals and well-known scientists, which is still open for signatures (on our website [osservatorionomilscuola.com](http://osservatorionomilscuola.com) ) and on March 9, the observatory was officially launched nationwide with a press conference at the Press Room of the Chamber of Deputies.

What are the founding principles of the Observatory?

- First: To oppose the presence of military personnel inside schools, to oppose what they proudly call the CULTURE OF DEFENSE, through which the military always present their role in the best light possible : in the citizens' service, as holders of values such as HOMELAND DEFENSE, COURAGE, STRENGTH, SACRIFICE, all values well rooted in patriarchal cultures of which armies are one of the expressions



- Second: Observe and try to change this reality "Demilitarize" schools and education means making schools as places of peace and acceptance, where racism and sexism are opposed, it means removing nationalist drifts within educational processes, eradicating models of force and violence, and the irrational fear of an "enemy" (inside and outside national borders) created ad hoc as a scapegoat.

"Demilitarize" schools means putting them back in the social role envisioned by the Italian Constitution.

I'd like to give some concrete examples to better understand what military invasive presence consists of: In Italy, since 2017 work experience is compulsory for every student in the final three years of secondary school: there are many cases in which students carry out the compulsory school/work experience in collaboration with military forces. This entails visits to military bases (including NATO bases) or barracks; there is even an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education to this end.

Marines of the U.S. NATO base of Sigonella, in Sicily, regularly invite in schools of all levels and American military personnel take the place of teachers for teaching English, physical and nutritional education, computer science, history, geography, prevention of bullying and drug use.

The Metropolitan City of Rome Capital, which manages six Training Centres in the Lazio Region, has recently entered into an agreement with a company called Leonardo Spa to launch a three-year Vocational Education and Training program (IeFP) with the aim of "preventing school dropout." Leonardo Spa is a large state owned co-partnership company involved in aerospace and military high-tech! Some subjects will be carried out directly by Leonardo personnel. This protocol is perfectly in line with the logic denounced by the Observatory, namely the introduction of a pervasive and consistent militaristic narrative in the areas of Education and Vocational Training. The aim is to create manpower to be immediately employed in the production of weapons, a goal disguised by the prospect of finding easy employment at the conclusion of the three-year training course.

In elementary school and kindergarten , military narratives are expressed in different ways (play activities during military corps festivals, or the involvement of the little ones in flag-raising ceremonies singing the national anthem with hand over their heart).

I'd like to spend a few words on the ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ACTIONS OF THE OBSERVATORY

The active members (so far about one hundred, many from Cobas Scuola and other grassroots



unions , Pax Christi, or the Italian section of WILPF the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Centro Studi Sereno Regis, in Turin) are divided into working groups focusing on research, data collection, teaching, developing dissemination and content materials: significant work has been done, for instance, by the group working in Universities to expose the growing synergy between academic research and the lavishly funded military industry. At the moment we are working on a petition for the resignation of as many as 15 university chancellors who sit on Leonardo's cultural foundation.

It is important to underline that our method of work is intended to be horizontal and equal, each person choosing the contribution she or he wants to make to the cause.

While this is a fundamental part of our work, we are not just observing and denouncing .We also want to bring about change; therefore, we are creating a guide which could work as a concrete tool for teachers, students and families to fight the presence of the military in each and every school, a guide that will also include concrete proposals for a teaching philosophy grounded in peace .

School is a place for education and training, where no military culture is acceptable, but increasing resources are being spent on bringing citizens closer to the military, because of a growing international tide of belligerence and militarism .

They come to our schools because they want to recruit our boys and girls; since the form of war has changed, we are not facing an asymmetrical war (for which highly specialized military personnel are needed); nowadays war is coming back to the ground and there is need for large numbers, those we see dying every day in Ukraine. In Italy, a new law has been drafted proposing large concessions to those who decide to undertake even a short military career and then stay on as reservists. This law will also include schooling, probably in the form of school credits.

We have to stand between these policies and our kids. We are teachers of peace, and defenders of our Italian Constitution. The path is long, but we cannot afford to give up. We would like to help in the reconstruction of a great peace movement in Italy, but also internationally. And this can only succeed through young people, education and culture. We would like to know if similar phenomena are happening in schools in other countries, and invite anyone who could contribute to stand up or reach out. We invite you to pay attention to your schools: check if your government also sees schools as a privileged ground for propaganda and recruitment. We invite you to embark on a path of nonviolent/peaceful resistance and reaction and to coordinate ourselves in order to try to become more and more numerous and stronger together.

No to War, No to NATO