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## Policy Watch

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# The Post-Cold War Environment for National Service Policy

## Developments in Germany, Italy, Russia and China

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### SUMMARY

In Germany and Italy, the governments have debated the need for mandatory military service. In Germany, debate about ending mandatory military service has been met with great concern because of the impact this would have on how social services would continue to be delivered, since many welfare organisations are almost totally dependent on the labour of conscientious objectors. In Italy, the government recently passed legislation that will phase out the draft by 2005 and create an all-volunteer army. At the same time, the

government adopted legislation to establish a civilian national service programme.

On the other side of the former Cold War divide, Russia and China have long maintained conscription policies for staffing their military forces. As the countries undertake political and economic reforms, policies are changing toward military and voluntary service. In Russia, a law was adopted in 2002 to support the choice of alternative service for army conscripts, but it has been widely criticised as punitive. Both countries have also eliminated some forms of politically-related voluntary service. In doing so, they face similar challenges in formulating policies which attract youth to voluntary service that they are no longer compelled to perform.

## Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the political and economic transitions that have resulted, have changed the environment for military and civilian national service policy. This chapter analyses some of the effects of the political and economic transitions in Germany, Italy, Russia and China. In each of the four countries, the elimination of the Cold War threat, political and economic liberalisation and the transition to free market principles have had an impact on the decisions these nations have made about appropriate policies needed to support national civilian service.

In Germany and Italy, the governments have debated the need for mandatory military service in a post-Cold War Europe. Many Western European nations have confronted the same issues with different results: Belgium, the Netherlands and France suspended conscription; Spain and Portugal seem poised to do the same. In Germany, the fifty-year history of mandatory military service has a parallel history of alternative civilian national service. Debate about ending mandatory military service has been met with great concern because of the impact this would have on how social services would continue to be delivered, since many welfare organisations are almost totally dependent on the labour of conscientious objectors. In Italy, the government recently passed legislation that will phase out the draft by 2005 and create an all-volunteer army. At the same time, the government adopted legislation to establish a civilian national service programme.

On the other side of the former Cold War divide, Russia and China maintain conscription policies for staffing their military forces. These practices have long histories, but as the countries undertake political and economic reforms, policies are changing toward military and voluntary service. In Russia, a law was adopted in 2002 to support the choice of alternative service for army conscripts, but it has been widely criticised as punitive. Both countries have also eliminated some forms of politically-related voluntary service. In doing so, they face similar challenges in formulating policies which attract youth to voluntary service that they are no longer compelled to perform. At the same time, Russia and China are seeing the emergence of new Third Sector organisations, many of which are interested in the role of volunteers to advance their work. In China, efforts to design the appropriate national and Third Sector support for volunteering are being discussed at the 2003 National People's Congress.

## Germany and Italy

### Germany

Germany, unlike most other Western European nations, maintains a conscription policy that requires all able-bodied 18 year old men to serve in the military or in alternative civilian service (Zivildienst). Conscientious objector status is easy to establish, and the majority of young men who are conscripted after passing their high school exam now serve in civilian rather than military service positions (Klein 2001: 5). As a result of the large number of men performing alternative service each year, many welfare agencies in Germany have become dependent upon the Zivildienst.

As in other western and eastern European countries, debates are taking place in Germany about the need for, and cost of, maintaining a large military force in the post-Cold War environment (Klein 2001: 9). German army officials argue that

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conscription is necessary to ensure that the army retains a professional force, and because they fear that not enough youth would choose military service if it were voluntary (Klein 2001: 10). Other government officials, including the Greens, Democratic Socialists, and the Liberal Party (Free Democratic Party/FDP) have demanded the abolition of universal conscription and the introduction of an all-volunteer army (Klein 2001: 10). Non-governmental actors also play a role in this debate. A report of the German Peace Research Institute argued that 'since military service ceased to be defensive service, the state can no longer call for it *qua* legal compulsory service.' (Klein 2001: 10)<sup>2</sup> Others believe that conscription will end before long. Colonel

Gertz, the Chairman of the Military Professional Association, conceded that despite his own belief in conscription, it could end before the end of this decade (Klein 2001: 12).

The Zivildienst currently involves young people aged 18-25 for ten months of service – a term equal to that of military service (Eberly 2001). Participation in the Zivildienst since its inception at the end of World War II has grown dramatically: 2 447 youth claimed conscientious objection to military service in 1958; estimates for applicants in 2000 are 172 865 (Klein 2001: 5). Participants in civilian service receive the same monthly 'salary' and social security benefits as military service members. In addition, participants in civilian service receive academic course credit and hiring preferences in the workforce. Zivildienst servers support Germany's disadvantaged populations, particularly in the areas of health services and environmental development.

In 1964 the Federal Law on the Promotion of a Voluntary Year of Social Service was adopted, through which two voluntary civilian service programmes were created – the Voluntary Social Year and Voluntary Ecological Year programmes. These programmes provide young men and women with opportunities to volunteer in the social sector involving work with culture, sports, and cultural preservation organisations. In June 2002, more youth gained access to the programme when a new amendment to the law was adopted allowing young men to perform their alternative service in the Voluntary Social/Ecological Year programmes (Mathieu 2002: 4). This change expanded options for conscientious objectors and helped strengthen overall support for voluntary national service. Significantly, the creation of these two new programmes provided the first opportunities for women to serve in comparable ways to their male peers.

The government and many welfare organisations have argued that the services provided by the conscientious objectors are so valuable, and so widely employed in emergencies, that it is no longer possible to envision replacing these services at market value for labour if mandatory national service were ended (Klein 2001: 6).

## Italy

Since 1972 almost 500 000 Italian men have served as conscientious objectors within the scope of Civil Service (Servizio Civile) alternative to the military draft. A strong network of non-profit organisations and municipalities has developed to provide placements for conscientious objectors and, in turn, to support the Italian welfare state.

In November 2000, the Italian Parliament passed the Armed Forces Reform Act to make the transition from conscription to an all-voluntary army by 2005.<sup>3</sup> The transition was viewed by policy-makers as necessary to reduce costs and to meet the challenges facing Italy's Armed Forces, including participation in the European Defence Forces, peacekeeping missions and the defence of interests beyond the national borders. The decision to move to an all-volunteer force was matched with a decision among Italian policy-makers to preserve and expand significantly the civilian service programme which had developed, as in Germany, for conscientious objectors. This desire was codified in a National Service law adopted by the Italian Parliament on March 6, 2001. The law defined civilian service as 'defence of the nation through non-military activities' and at the same time as a 'contribut[ion] to the civil, social, cultural, [and] professional training of the youth through activities carried out at institutions and administrations in Italy and abroad.'

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In the period between the passage of the legislation and 2005, the new civilian service will include both conscientious objectors as well as men and women who voluntarily elect to serve. As in Germany, the new civilian service programme provides the first opportunity for women to serve in positions comparable to their male peers.<sup>4</sup>

The first pilot programmes in the new civilian national service programme began on December 20, 2001. Two hundred young people were employed in volunteer national service projects managed by four Third Sector organisations and one municipality, while in 2002 almost 6 500 women and men took part in local programmes. National service participants work an average of twenty-five to thirty hours per week for twelve months in exchange for 434 Euros per month (approximately US\$472) plus insurance and leave. Under changes passed in March 2002, only Italian citizens between 18 and 28 may serve, not citizens of other European Union (EU) countries. Despite a provision in the law to provide university credit for service, currently no participants receive credit. This is due to the absence of a structured formal relationship between national service and the universities, which has made obtaining credit for the service experience virtually non-existent.

One of the most difficult challenges to the new civilian National Service has been posed by the officials of the new professional army. When, in 1999, the Italian Government decided to terminate the draft and introduce the voluntary model, which would be open to women, the Military Academy was swamped with applications from women. But two years later the number of applicants for military service decreased

dramatically.<sup>5</sup> This decrease in the number of people applying to join the new professional army provoked an attempt to abolish the new civilian National Service by the Minister of Defence. In order to increase the number of recruits, the government increased pay and benefits, including a guarantee that army recruits would receive preference for jobs in the public or private sector upon completion of military service.

Another important issue that has emerged involves the division of responsibility for the civilian service programme between regional and national government. Based on the Constitution, recently reformed along federalist principles, the regions argue that a centrally-managed national service would be less legitimate than one organised locally by the regions. The issue remains unsettled at this time, and only three of 20 regions have shown interest in locally organising national service. The national office establishes the goals for the programme, it liaises with central government entities and national service organisations, manages the national budget for the programme, and approves the service projects. Regions are responsible for training national service personnel, conducting outreach to volunteers, and establishing associations of social service placement agencies. They have limited budgetary authority and retain only enough authority to approve social service organisation projects at the regional level.

## New challenges

Both Germany and Italy face new challenges as they attempt to redefine their military service needs in a post-Cold War Europe. Discussion about the appropriate role of mandatory military service in a post-Cold War climate have been linked to developments in civilian service programmes and policy.

## Russia and China

The post-Cold War environment has brought about significant political and economic changes for both Russia and China in the last 20 years. The transition continues in both countries from authoritarian states with controlled economies toward more democratic societies with free market economies. One of the changes this transition has brought about is the emergence of Third Sector or non-profit organisations and the development of new programmes and policies to engage volunteers. At the same time, changes are being debated, especially in Russia, about military service and alternative service for conscientious objectors.

### Russia

In Russia, national military service has been compulsory for more than two centuries. Until recently, two years of military service was required of every healthy male aged 18-27. In 1939, a law was passed which abolished civilian service as an alternative to military service, but changes in the last ten years have begun to shift attitudes towards

service in the army. Starting in 1991, the Russian public began advocating for the re-institution of alternative service in place of military service. The poor conditions of military life, the practice of *dedovshina*,<sup>6</sup> the ongoing war in Chechnya, and dissent among young conscripts, helped stimulate discussion on the need for an alternative to military service. In 1993, the new Constitution of the Russian Federation re-established the right to alternative civil service "because of religious beliefs and convictions or other cases specified by the Law." (Zakharova 2000) It took until July 28, 2002 for President Putin to sign *On Alternative Civil Service (ACS)*, a bill enabling this practice. The law was created with strong influence from the army lobby, and many human rights activists contend that it has many problems. These make service in general, and alternative service in particular, extremely unattractive to conscientious objectors. The law has been challenged for not being consistent with the standards for alternative service established by the Council of Europe.

By law, ACS is defined as "a specific type of work for the benefit of society and state performed by the citizens as a substitute for military service by conscription." (Russia 2002) Jurisdiction for the performance of ACS is retained by military bodies for the most part, and there are strict standards for qualifying for this kind of service. To qualify, a person must prove that military duties are in conflict with their convictions or religious beliefs, or that they are members of small indigenous populations that follow a traditional lifestyle, practice traditional economic activities, and engage in traditional trades and crafts.

ACS applicants face a rigorous screening process that tests the credibility of their claim of conscientious objection. Applications are considered at a public session of a draft commission in the presence of the applicant. Those young men who are permitted to perform alternative service serve for 42 months, almost twice the length of the 24 months required for military service, usually outside the conscript's native town or city.

Criticism of the new law has taken several forms. The law provides very few actual opportunities for civilian service as an alternative to military service. It also does not permit conscripts to choose the organisations in which they serve, and some conscripts may be forced to perform their alternative service through military organisations. While the law requires service 'outside the area where the person permanently lives', there are exceptions which can be arranged through local military commissars. This practice, according to the Secretariat of the NGO Coalition for Democratic ACS, 'breed[s] corruption' as most conscripts prefer not to leave home. Finally, the term of service – the longest in Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union – is considered punitive: 'given the rapid technological development and changes in the market, separation from one's professional occupation for such a long period at a very productive age places those in alternative service at a disadvantage in terms of career and professional development.' (Levinson 2002)

The new law will take effect on January 1, 2004. In the meantime, legislators and NGO representatives are collaborating on proposing changes to the law that would improve conditions of service for conscientious objectors and bring the law into partial compliance with Council of Europe standards. For example, State Duma Deputies A Barannikov, B Nadezhdin, and E Vorobjov submitted motions to permit

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service in servers' native towns or cities, to shorten the term of service to 36 months, and to disallow the practice of placing conscientious objectors under military control for their alternative service without their consent.

As in Italy and Germany, the non-governmental sector has played a very important role in the debate about alternative service. Research organised by the Social Partnership Foundation (Sozidanie) shows that the major obstacle to alternative service is the general lack of information available to the public. The Foundation supports various programmes for conscientious objectors by organising information campaigns about ACS, interacting with state and government bodies on ACS-related issues, creating pilot programmes in several

Russian cities, and funding local NGOs to promote civilian and voluntary service.

In addition to the developments related to ACS, there are other important service developments in Russia. KOMSOMOL and Young Pioneers were the two government-operated organisations through which all young people were required to serve in the Communist era. With their demise, participation in community volunteering and service by school and college students dropped sharply. In the past five years, several NGOs have developed programmes to reintroduce the idea of service through service-learning and volunteering projects. For example, Sozidanie has provided funding for local service-learning projects teaching 'Education and Democracy'. The Association For Civic Education supports school teachers, principals, journalists, and researchers from across the country through the creation of service-learning curricula and textbooks. Attempts are also being made by NGOs to engage youth in voluntary service beyond the classroom. The Association of Young Leaders, Vladivostok Young Volunteers Corps, Dauriya (a centre of environmental volunteers), and many others promote programmes that collaborate with young volunteers and state authorities to tackle local issues. These programmes have been developed by NGOs with little or no government support.

## China

In the last twenty years, China has undergone dramatic economic and political transformations resulting from the promotion of economic liberalism and the transition from a controlled economy to free enterprise. In addition, there have been some democratic reforms, although the political activities and the organisation of daily life is still strongly centralised around the Communist Party. The Communist Party remains the dominant influence on voluntary service in China. As in Russia, there is an emerging NGO sector, and many new non-profit organisations are interested in engaging people as volunteers in their work.

During the Cultural Revolution, service was politically oriented and coercive. After the Cultural Revolution, youth service was used for economic development.

Presently, service organised by government targets poverty reduction in rural areas, community development, and the transition to a market economy (IANYS 2000).

The Communist Youth League of China is the leading organiser of youth service. In 1994, the CYLC created the China Youth Volunteers Association, which operates the Young Volunteers Programme through its network of 34 provincial and 738 associations, 15 018 service centres and 21 569 service bases (Perold 2000: 86). Seventy million young people have participated in the programme, the majority of whom are between 17-25 and have completed secondary school (Perold 2000). The Central Committee of Chinese Youth League asks every youth between the ages of 16-18 for 48 hours of community service. Some schools require students to have performed community service before graduating (United Nations Volunteers 2001: 26). According to the 2001 UN survey, another source of volunteers is through service organised by the workplace (United Nations Volunteers 2001: 22). Of those polled in the survey, 44 per cent stated that their major reason for volunteering was their willingness to fulfil their obligations as citizens (United Nations Volunteers 2001: 37). The traditions of service in China as well as current policies and programmes reflect a general attitude that service is an obligation. Peer pressure, social group membership, education and access to professional opportunities are the tools the Chinese government has used to ensure mass volunteering.

The emergence in recent years of non-governmental organisations is important to the development of programmes that are not functions of political organisations. The sector is growing in visibility, especially on issues of environmental protection and human service. However, their work is challenged by a lack of political independence, including a requirement that they register with the government (United Nations Volunteers 2001: 32<sup>7</sup>). According to a survey conducted by the Institute of NGOs at Tsinghua University, out of 104 NGOs surveyed, 24 per cent had leaders appointed by the government (United Nations Volunteers 2001: 32).

Despite its civil service traditions, China lacks a clear national policy to support voluntary service. A United Nations survey argued that the government should play a more prominent role by making policy that would provide recognition, funding, and programme development to support stronger communities and create 'an enabling environment' for the generation of volunteers and voluntary organisations (United Nations Volunteers 2001: 41). In 2003, it is likely that the tenth meeting of the National People's Congress will spend time considering proposals for volunteering and service-related legislation.<sup>8</sup>

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## Political and economic reforms

Post-Cold War reforms in political life and economic policy have been unfolding in Russia and China over the last twenty years. These developments have been characterised by a move away from central control toward more democratic societies. In Russia, these changes have affected policies for alternative conscription in the military and in the role of non-governmental organisations. In addition to their role in challenging the policies and practices for Alternative Civil Service, the NGOs are providing a new generation of Russian youth with opportunities to volunteer to serve. Previously, in Russia as in China, youth service was compelled as part of youth political training and civic participation. In China, policy-makers are just beginning to build a policy infrastructure to support voluntary youth service. While the military remains one of the largest providers of civilian service, there is an emerging non-governmental sector of organisations whose aim is to provide meaningful voluntary service activities.

## Conclusion

Post Cold-War changes have affected Italy, Germany, Russia, and China in very different ways. In many Western and Eastern European countries, military service is no longer required. Germany and Italy have debated the continued need for military conscription given its cost in the context of reduced security threats. Italy ended its draft, but established a new policy with which to support civilian service opportunities for men and women. Germany has kept its draft, and maintains civilian service opportunities through alternative service for male conscripts and voluntary service years for men and women. In Russia and China, political reforms have resulted in the elimination of some forms of mandatory service. While both nations still have conscripted military forces, mandatory civilian service for youth has been cut back. In its place, China's emerging Third Sector is slowly establishing programmes to attract youth and older people to service that is now voluntary. In addition they work with the government and international organisations like the UN to adopt a policy infrastructure for supporting service outside the traditional government/political organisation. Similarly, in Russia the non-governmental sector provides opportunities for youth to participate in service, service-learning, and other experiences to foster civic participation. In addition, this sector works with the military and the government on improving the law on alternative conscription services. These developments promise to help strengthen civil society and will result in the development of new policies to support the development of the NGO sector and service.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Innovations in Civic Participation has designed, implemented and distributed a policy survey to more than 200 service specialists around the world. To date, 40 country representatives have responded with detailed information on policies for national service. Some of their responses have been used in this article.
- <sup>2</sup> See the German Peace Research Institute's *Peace Report* released in 2000, cited by Beste R & Priessler I, *Friedensforscher fordern Ende der Wehrpflicht*.
- <sup>3</sup> Major sources of information for the analysis of developments in Italy were Palazinni (2002), and ICP's policy survey.
- <sup>4</sup> Because conscription only affected men, national civilian service has, up to this point, only been an option for men conscientiously objecting to their required military service.
- <sup>5</sup> According to personal correspondence with Licio Palazzini.

- <sup>6</sup> *Dedovshina* involves second-year conscripts bullying new conscripts. According to a recent report released to mark the establishment of the non-governmental Foundation 'Say No to Dedovshina', 1 200 conscripts died in 2002 because of the 'non-statutory relations' (official euphemism for *dedovshina*). The army officials deny these numbers ([www.NEWSru.com](http://www.NEWSru.com), February 21, 2003).
- <sup>7</sup> Citing the UNDP, China Human Development Report, 1999.
- <sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence between Susan Stroud and Yuanzhu Ding, Director of Research Centre for Volunteering and Welfare, Peking University, June 2002.

