

# Police Aviation News

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**F**or all attendees the first congress of the Union of Police Pilots in Beligirate northern Italy was an undoubted success. As a first of its kind however it may be some time before a wholly dispassionate assessment can be made of its worth.

The police pilots union is a young, not for profit, Professional Association representing the aviation personnel of the Italian State Police [PUBBLICA SECUREZZA Servizio Aereo Polizia Di Stato [PSP]. It is little more than a year since it was formed so the style and form of future events will undoubtedly change.

The core of UP Polizia was the police pilots of the PSP but representatives were invited from all shades of law enforcement – Carabinieri, Guardia Finanza, Vigili Fuoca etc. Unfortunately, the politics surrounding and pervading the event meant that not all thought it was expedient to attend.

## Motivation

Nominally the event was all about political pressure to improve the current poor bargaining position held by the PSP in the face of poor wages and poor equipment. Until a decade ago they were a military organisation, not unlike the Carabinieri and Guardia Finanza. The latter pair remains under the military umbrella but the PSP are now under the Ministry of the Interior.

It is clear from even casual study that the air elements of both the Carabinieri and Guardia Finanza have fared better in remaining as military organisations. There is an obvious disparity compared with the PSP in the level of new equipment and upgrades.

Where the Carabinieri and Guardia Finanza have regularly added new aircraft and technology to their fleets the majority of PSP aircraft remain decades old, a factor that unduly inflates maintenance costs and promotes inefficiency. The PSP has little in the way of modern role equipment; just a few Partenavia P68 Observers bought in from the new manufacturer Vulcanair. This purchase was politically expedient. It was not always so.

When still a military unit in the mid-1970s the PSP acquired the advanced Marconi Heli-Tele, a then state of the art surveillance system. These were disposed of long ago. Today there are

some modern flir/tv units but they are in short supply, leaving many units with no first hand experience of any 'modern' law enforcement practices. Similar concerns about other aspects of the operation of the air unit motivated the conference.

#### The venue

The 1° Congresso Nazionale was held at the Hotel Villa Carlotta, a well-known conference centre located on the shores of the beautiful Lake Maggiore north of Milan. Nominally held over two days, March 27-28, the core programme was concentrated into the 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### The programme

In keeping with the background of the gathering much of the programme was interspersed with the hot blooded rhetoric of supporters of the cause – mainly figures associated with the independent police union, Sindacato Polizia Indipendente – SPI. The rallying calls of the SPI President, Rachele Schettini, being most appreciated.

The equally popular and untiring President of UP Polizia, Antonino Viola was at the event throughout rallying the members and promoting the cause.

In a day limited in its length the small number of commercial presentations took up a significant length of time. AgustaWestland gave detailed technical presentations on the A109E Power and the AB139 helicopters. Delegates see these as the natural replacements of the existing A109A/AB206 and AB212 fleets although EU competition rules may well dictate otherwise. Neither of these important helicopters made its presence known during the Congress – although the production facility is a matter of a few kilometres from Lake Maggiore. In the days prior Agusta built aircraft on test had regularly overflown the hotel.

In the absence of the expected presentation of the Piaggio P.180 Avanti, potentially a replacement for the P68 fleet, the audience received an extended visual presentation of the Wescam aerial camera system from the Italian representatives, TEVERE.

The third commercial presentation broke the ice somewhat after some pretty intense technical material. Gareth Davies representing CAM, the German based European representatives of the US Broadcast Microwave Systems [[BMS - CAM](#)], left out the tricky technical material and simply showed his COFDM equipment in operation. The digital COFDM equipment is already proven in police service in Germany.

Just a few days earlier BMS had test flown the equipment over Rome using an Italian Sky Arrow light aircraft. Facing an audience unfamiliar with the day-to-day technology associated with airborne sensors, the sharp images produced by the digital equipment aboard a particularly economic airborne craft may well have had greater impact. Underlining the visual lesson, the equipment was available for inspection in the conference hall and footage recorded on site was shown.

#### PENSIONABLE SERVICE

*Unlike their UK counterparts the officers of the Italian State Police do not either have fixed contracts [typically 30 years in the UK] or a relatively low upper age limit prior to pension.*

*Where there is an upper limit of 55 years for most UK police, the usual retirement age in Italy is aged 60, regardless of the number of years in service. Whilst it is remarkable for UK police officers to serve 35 years it is not unusual for Italian officers to have 40 years in service.*

*The SPI union maintain that attaining a reasonable level of pension requires that additional period of duty.*



To widen the delegates' knowledge of police air operations in other countries UP Polizei had invited two other speakers, the Editor of PAN and Chief Inspector Herman Baeyens of the Federal Police Air Support Service in Belgium.

The Editor gave an overview of the principles behind the birth and growing success of [Police Aviation News](#) as a freely available International news organ for the airborne emergency services over a seven year span. He then went on to provide an overview of other groups and publications aspiring to the same aims before highlighting membership of the US based Airborne Law Enforcement Association [[ALEA](#)], its training and International membership aspirations. Regardless of its eventual form, one direction that UP can take is to follow the ALEA example of a mix of rhetoric with training.



*Was Northern Italy expecting P.A.C.E.? The flags were out across Italy for PEACE [right], but it was coincidence, not a precursor to the presentation by Herman Baeyens [above]*

Herman Baeyens introduced his own unit – it too was once a military formation - and detailed its formation as a civil unit at the military side of Brussels National Airport in 1993. The unit covers the entire territory of Belgium, about 30.0000 sq km, just 10% of the size of Italy with a handful of aircraft.

Herman also outlined the aims of PACE, the European variant on the ALEA theme. Herman is the President of P.A.C.E - Police Air Support Units Networking Centre Europe, a professional network of contact persons of European police air support units created in 1998 [[P.A.C.E.](#)] At the present time there are no active members of either ALEA or PACE in Italy.



Both in and out of the hall a succession of delegates from the length and breadth of Italy spoke of under-utilised PSP aircraft – and put forward various causes including inadequate finance, the failure of types to meet the operational needs and maintenance shortcomings. All these alongside calls in support of the aims of UP Polizia.



As ever the hosts of the Servizio Aereo Polizia Di Stato were generous to a fault in facilitating World access to the nature of their cause. A charming interpreter and a convivial atmosphere might have even brought about a temptation to forget the deadly serious nature of the PSP's plight. Although they need not meet again for another three years they are planning a similar event next year in Rome. [www.uppolizia.it](http://www.uppolizia.it)



PUBBLICA SECUREZZA (PSP) deploys ten squadrons with its central base at Centra Addestramenta e Standardizzazione (CASV), Aeroporto Mario De Bernardi, Practica di Mare, Roma. In 1994 the fleet numbered around 60 operational aircraft.

In addition to the police, both the PSP and a number of municipal forces, Italy is policed by the Carabinieri and Guardia Finanza [Customs]. The percentage of the population in law enforcement service is far higher than say the UK and the perceived street presence is significantly higher.

The three larger organisations each cover the whole 301,270sq. Km. area of the country and can call upon around 250 aircraft. Nominally Italy and the United Kingdom have a similar population around 58M, although Italy has a 20% larger landmass. It is these comparisons of the relative law enforcement aviation resources that highlight some of the differences.

Even without taking into consideration the additional resources operated by the Carabinieri and Guardia Finanza the nominal PSP fleet is three times that of the United Kingdom police. In terms of cost-effectiveness the Italian aircraft are less sophisticated, generally older and operated by a greater number of, lesser paid, officers. It is the pay that is at the root of the UP Polizia Conference. Overall it seems that the fleet probably gives the same level of law enforcement cover, but it is a moot point whether the lack of sophistication degrades the effectiveness. UP Polizia are claiming that it does.

# International Networking

