

Associazione Luca Coscioni and the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research: An Italian Experience of Resisting Religious Fundamentalisms

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The Associazione Luca Coscioni per la libertà di ricerca scientifica (Luca Coscioni Association for Freedom of Scientific Research, ALC) was founded in 2002 with the aim of resisting religious, dogmatic and morality-based interventions against the freedom of scientific research, and attacks on self-determination in choices concerning life, health treatment, reproduction and the family. Diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) in 1996, Luca Coscioni used his experience to draw political attention to the lack of appropriate regulation of, and public funding for, scientific research in Italy, particularly on human embryonic stem cells. He founded ALC alongside Emma Bonino and Marco Pannella, founders of the Radical Party (RP, Partito Radicale), a bastion of liberalism in Italy.¹ Later emerging as the Nonviolent Radical Party, transnational and transparty (Partito Radicale Nonviolento, transnazionale e transpartito, NRP), the RP includes several political associations that have inherited its campaigns and methods, including ALC.²

ALC brings together political and scientific figures, along with civil rights advocates and representatives of patients' associations, to address a range of issues related to human rights and science.³ Initially established as a non-profit organization in Italy, ALC quickly branched out into a permanent international forum with the launch of the [World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research](#) in 2006. ALC currently has over 2,000 members from Rome to Boston, including parliamentarians, researchers, students, academics and citizens who are active in its campaigns.⁴

This paper will highlight several aspects of ALC's work that are directly affected by religious fundamentalisms, with a particular focus on issues affecting women, such as therapeutic and pharmacological abortion, assisted reproduction and emergency contraception, as well as issues such as stem cell research, cloning, euthanasia and the right to die, a highly controversial subject in Italy.

A Systematic Assault on Knowledge and Democracy

The first meeting of the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research was held in 2006 in Rome, drawing together scientists, researchers, politicians and advocates from all over Europe and the United States. With his opening remarks, Luca Coscioni, ALC's President and founder,⁵ outlined the organization's understanding of religious fundamentalism and its impact on scientific research. He described it as "a culture of power, a culture of class ... imbued with anti-scientific dogmas and prejudices, which exclude scientific knowledge and which exclude individual freedom to benefit from knowledge. Indeed, it is democracy itself [that] is at stake when the pursuit of knowledge is denied."

In Italy, as in many other countries with social disparities, well organized communities like the Catholic Church are usually well resourced and have solid constituencies, allowing them either to influence government or to command strong oppositions. Bioethics professor Miguel Kottow describes how, despite the severe erosion in observance and church attendance, and the longstanding constitutional separation of church and state, "Catholicism has continued to wield enormous social and political power. Issues concerning family planning, contraception, abortion, voluntary sterilization and artificial reproduction have all been fiercely opposed by a religious doctrine that remains oblivious to the social consequences of its campaigns."⁶

Bioethics professor Alex Mauron observed two areas of conflict between science and belief systems:⁷ first, the opposition to specific research practices (e.g., derivation of human embryonic stem cells), and second, the attempt to marginalize science in contemporary life by making it subservient to religious and other dogmatic ideologies. Mauron describes the fundamentalist strategy of creating pseudo-scientific discourse to critique science on its own terms. Creationists,⁸ for example, seek to challenge evolutionary and modern biology using three approaches: (1) biblical literalism; (2) natural theology and "intelligent design" arguments in biology; (3) the purported existential, moral and political implications of evolution. Unlike earlier anti-science movements, creationist theorists try to mimic the processes of real science. They set up institutions intended to resemble scientific establishments, for instance the Discovery Institute in the United States or the Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris.⁹ Such institutions do not produce research data but rather concentrate on what Mauron calls "dead science,"¹⁰ which neither formulates new insight nor generates further work. Creationists argue that science is a religion or belief system like any other, in which case public health policy, educational policy and scientific research policy become a matter of freedom of belief.¹¹

Prof. Gilberto Corbellini, co-president of ALC, emphasizes the role that religious fundamentalism plays in destabilizing democracies and in preventing a more comprehensive transition towards democracy in totalitarian and authoritarian states.¹² "In democratic societies today," he argues, "scientific research is subject to the designs of an ideological and fundamentalist nature."¹³ As fundamentalists seek to prove that human beings should expect to find the solution to health and economic problems in religion, rather than science and technology, the space for scientific research and innovation is gradually narrowed. In Corbellini's opinion, religious fundamentalisms launch a systematic assault on knowledge that promotes freedom, tolerance and economic development.

Unmasking the Power of the Catholic Church

In Italy, attempts to curtail the freedom of scientific research are made by the Vatican along with socially conservative politicians and conscientious objectors. Among the most prominent religious fundamentalists involved in the debate is the Pope himself and the high prelates of the Catholic Church.

According to the RP, the power of the Catholic Church over public policy in Italy can be traced to the concordat between the State and the Church, which might also be true for other countries such as Poland, Portugal and Austria.¹⁴ The Lateran Treaty of 1929 between Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and Pope Pius XI formally recognized the Vatican City as a sovereign state and addressed the status of the Catholic Church in Italy. The result was a peculiar form of Italian "secularity." For example, marriages performed in church were recognized by the State. Holy days were also recognized, and religious education was extended from grade school to secondary school for all children whose parents did not insist otherwise. On the other hand, the Italian government was to be consulted before the Pope could confirm the appointment of bishops and, according to the agreement, the clergy was to abstain from political activity. Much of this concordat was retained in the post-fascist amended version of 1984 although the RP (and now the NRP) consistently demanded its "total abrogation."¹⁵

The RP has a long history of involvement in questions of scientific freedom and women's rights.¹⁶ In 1974, when a public-opinion poll showed that 59% of women considered abortion to be a matter of private conscience, not to be mediated by the State or the Church, the RP supported civil disobedience, such as a network of clandestine clinics that organized about 6,000 abortions in Italy, as well as abortions by Italians abroad. In early 1975, nearly 750,000 signatures were gathered and presented to the authorities, leading to a referendum on the issue and the legalization of abortion in 1978. Opposition to women's sexual

and reproductive rights continues to come from the Church, along with Catholic prelates and socially conservative politicians who work against the adoption of laws (or the enforcement of existing ones) recognizing the self-determination of women in the reproductive field. For instance, in October 2007 Pope Benedict XVI launched an appeal for pharmacists to refuse to dispense drugs such as the morning after pill if they objected to it on moral grounds. In May 2008, he reiterated the Church's ban on artificial birth control as well as its more recent teaching against the use of assisted reproduction techniques. For example, Carlo Casini, president of Movimento per la Vita (Movement for Life, MPV) and a former member of the European Parliament, is known for his opposition to the Italian abortion law (1978) and was said to go around with a foetus stored in formalin.¹⁷ During this period, a Catholic lobby group sought to modify the Civil Code of the Italian Constitution, which states that the individual acquires rights at birth. The group managed to attract the support of parties, academics, jurists, physicians, scientists and members of Parliament and succeeded in having the embryo considered a rights-holding human person under Article 1 of Law No. 40¹⁸ regarding the limits of assisted reproduction in Italy.¹⁹

Non-governmental organizations also play a role in obstructing women's choices—for example, the widespread and well-organized network of Centri di Aiuto alla Vita (Help to Life Centres, CAV) in Italy. The first CAV was established in 1975 in Florence, and there are now more than 300 centres across the country. CAVs position themselves as voluntary, apolitical and non-confessional associations, and they claim to help pregnant women in crisis, such as those facing unwanted pregnancies and young mothers without the means or skills to care for a child. In reality, however, the main goal of the CAVs is to prevent voluntary abortion. Today, these associations are mostly dedicated to foreign women, who in many cases have no documents and come from developing countries. CAVs offer free pregnancy tests, friendship and support for women or couples in crisis, accommodation for the mother and baby in the centres, and help to continue schooling or to find a job. They also provide accommodation for young mothers, babysitting in emergency cases, and clothing and equipment for babies, including food. For women in precarious situations, these services can be particularly attractive.

Women's Rights and Restrictions on Scientific Freedom

ALC addresses a wide range of issues related to scientific freedom, and in its encounters with the Church, it also finds itself addressing matters such as sexuality and civil unions. This section will begin with a description of issues more closely related to women's rights before discussing questions such as cloning and euthanasia.

Assisted Reproduction Technologies (ART)

Each year, about 40,000 new couples in Italy encounter procreative difficulties.²⁰ The battle against assisted reproduction started in 1987 when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) published *Istruzione Donum Vitae* highlighting the ethical problems related to assisted reproduction technologies (ART). It continued in 1995 when John Paul II wrote *Evangelium Vitae*, dedicated to the protection of life from conception until death.

In 2004, Law No. 40 on assisted reproduction introduced a number of restrictions in Italy. Its first article declared for the first time that a fertilized cell (the so-called “conceived”) was a citizen and had to be defended. The law prohibits assisted reproduction for those without a partner or for homosexual couples, stating that only “adult pairs of heterosexual people, be they married or living together, of a potential fertile age and both alive” can apply for ART. It also prohibits heterologous fertilization (involving the donation to the couple of either sperm or eggs from a third party) as well as research on supernumerary embryos. According to Law No. 40, ART are only permitted for those suffering from otherwise incurable sterility or infertility.

In 2005, a referendum for the abolition of Law No. 40 was defeated. This referendum had been demanded by 500,000 people endorsing a petition to support pre-implantation genetic and observational diagnosis, heterologous insemination, assisted reproduction for singles, sick people and genetic and viral disease carriers, as well as the lifting the ban on research on supernumerary embryos.

Only after the guidelines integrating Law No. 40 were revised in 2008 were in vitro fertilization (IVF) and the washing of semen permitted for people suffering from viral diseases, e.g., potentially fertile HIV-positive people. In many European countries, these procedures are permitted to any couple suffering from genetic or viral diseases in order to prevent transmission to their children (and, for HIV-positive people, to prevent them from infecting each other). On the contrary, in Italy, couples affected by genetic diseases are still excluded from ART if they are fertile.

Law No. 40 originally set a production limit of three embryos per cycle of ovarian stimulation and called for embryos to be implanted at the same time, given the prohibition of cryo-conservation. In 2009, the Italian Constitutional Court recognized that this limit hindered the effectiveness of the technique and compelled women to bear many ovarian stimulation treatments, which was deemed a violation of medical practice. Moreover, the ban on cryo-conservation meant that all embryos, even the unviable ones, should be implanted, forcing women to resort to therapeutic abortion after becoming pregnant.

According to ALC, assisted reproduction should be the right of every adult male or female citizen. The organization's website provides information about European centres offering treatments that are otherwise forbidden in Italy, although these are extremely expensive. ALC is also available to institute proceedings toward overcoming the prohibition. Indeed, in April 2009 the Italian Constitutional Court recognized the priority of women's right to health—although without contesting the so-called status of the embryo—and the right of the physician to choose the best therapy for the patient. Other writs by regional courts throughout Italy have recognized the extent to which Law No. 40 impinges on the rights of couples. Since the approval of this law, a consistent decrease in the success of assisted reproduction rates has been recorded in Italy, while the trend in Europe has been the opposite. Moreover, triplet deliveries have also increased to the second highest rate in Europe (2.7%).

RU486 and Pharmacological Abortion

Mifepristone, currently named RU486, is an orally administered drug used to induce pregnancy interruption. As compared to traditional abortion, RU486 has the following advantages: no surgical intervention or anaesthesia is required; the possible complications of surgical intervention are avoided; it can be used during the first weeks of pregnancy while suction is usually performed after the 7th week; and embryo development is interrupted early enough that one can hardly argue that a human being is being killed.

ALC advocated for the full adoption of RU486 and its supply by the Italian National Health System. Commercially available in France and the United States, RU486 is used in every EU State except Ireland. In July 2009, Italy's drug regulation agency authorized its use despite protests from the Roman Catholic Church, which threatens to excommunicate doctors who prescribe the drug and patients who use it.²¹

Emergency Contraception

The morning after pill is an orally administered drug used for emergency contraception within 72 hours after unprotected sexual intercourse. Like all hormonal contraceptives, it works by inhibiting or altering ovulation. It thus cannot be characterized as abortion, as it neither interrupts an ongoing pregnancy nor interferes with the destiny of a fertilized egg.

In other countries, emergency contraception is available over the counter without prescription, yet in Italy, it can only be obtained by prescription from a physician. A non-binding opinion of the National Committee for Bioethics also suggests that conscientious objection can be extended to prescription of the morning after pill under Law No. 194.

In 2008, ALC's network of student members launched a campaign to make emergency contraception available without prescription in Italy. ALC also offers support to those willing to expose or denounce either breaches or malpractices in this field. Where a public facility refused to prescribe the morning after pill, women could call ALC's volunteer doctors to obtain the prescription and the assistance required to denounce the physicians and institutions in question.²²

Cloning

In 2001, when the governments of France and Germany attempted to persuade the UN and UNESCO to adopt a binding convention banning all forms of cloning, with no distinction between reproductive and therapeutic cloning, ALC and the Radical Party launched a counter-campaign. International mobilization, coordinated with the US-based Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research and the Genetics Policy Institute, succeeded in substantially watering down the proposal into a non-binding declaration, although it was endorsed in 2005 by some 80 UN members, headed by the Vatican.

In 2006, as the European Parliament was discussing the 7th Framework Program for Research (7FP) which would establish the allocation of European funds for 2007-2013, a bloc of Catholic-majority countries opposed funding for research on human embryonic stem cells (hESCs).²³ In response, the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research launched a petition calling on the European Parliament to ensure that the 7FP at least confirmed the funding of research projects on stem cells obtained from supernumerary embryos and projects on nuclear transfer. Several scientists, policy-makers and representatives of patients associations, as well as 11 Nobel Prize winners signed this petition.

In the finalized 7FP, research projects on stem cells would only be funded after a scientific and ethical evaluation, and any research activities aimed at human reproductive cloning, human genetic modification which could become hereditary, or the creation of human embryos for research purposes or for the derivation of stem cells, even through nuclear transfer, would be excluded from funding. In addition, funding would not be available for any activity in a member state where such activity was banned. Research on hESCs, while not officially prohibited, was thus to be very much hindered in the bloc countries.

Euthanasia, Right to Die and Living Will

Italy does not permit euthanasia. While patients have a right to refuse treatment, they are not allowed to give advance directions on the treatment they wish to receive if they become unconscious. Moreover, since some people consider nutrition and hydration not as a treatment but rather as vital support, doctors or relatives attempting to withdraw

them may be charged with homicide. Since 2006, ALC has been involved in a campaign to promote the legalization of euthanasia in Italy. A petition supported by over 20,000 signatories to date demands that Parliament conduct a survey on the practice of clandestine euthanasia in Italy.

A leading figure in this campaign was Piergiorgio Welby, a long-time member of the Radical Party and a co-president of ALC. Diagnosed with muscular dystrophy in the 1960s, Welby's struggle for the right to die provoked national debate. In 2006, Welby sent a video message to Italian President Giorgio Napolitano demanding his right to die: "If I were Swiss, Belgian or Dutch," he said, "I could escape from this extreme suffering. But I'm Italian, and here there is no mercy."²⁴ Napolitano was moved by the appeal and began a public debate on euthanasia. When the Italian Parliament started hearings on legislation regarding living wills, the process was obstructed by the socially conservative wing of the Left government. In the last days of his struggle, Welby's ordeal drew international attention and solidarity, and several international media outlets covered his story.²⁵ Other associations struggling for legalization of euthanasia, such as the World Federation of Right to Die Societies, gave space to the Italian debate.

As Marco Cappato, ALC's secretary-general, argues, "[r]egulating euthanasia means fighting against clandestine euthanasia. Everyone has the right, the freedom to decide on their body and their life." When Dr. Mario Riccio, who terminated Welby's life support, was investigated for the murder of a consenting person, the judge for the preliminary hearing recognized that artificial ventilation and artificial nutrition were therapies and, as such, could be rejected with clear and informed consent by the patient. Therefore Dr. Riccio had performed his duty by suspending it in this case. This ruling also made clear that the rule of law should not be confused with personal ethical beliefs.

In March 2009, however, the Senate approved a bill that overlooks both the Italian Constitution²⁶ and the self-determination of patients. Still to be approved by the Chamber of Deputies, the bill assumes that artificial

nutrition and hydration are not medical treatments, and thus cannot be denied even if one has required it in his or her living will.

The bill emerged after a right-to-die case had divided the nation. Eluana Englaro had been at the centre of a legal battle since entering a vegetative state following a 1992 car accident. She died in early 2009 after her family cut off her



food and water. The bill is being pushed by Premier Silvio Berlusconi's conservative government, which had supported the Vatican's position that Eluana should be kept alive.

Analysis of ALC's Strategies

ALC's strategy builds upon the 50-year experience of the RP (now the Nonviolent Radical Party, transnational and transparty). This strategy can be summarized by the three attributes to the party's name: non-violent, trans-national and trans-party. It entails:

- continuous dialogue with all political factions;
- direct and popular action by an activist network at international and national levels, along with mobilization of massive citizen support through petitions, appeals, and the direct involvement of several Nobel Prize laureates;
- promoting knowledge as a necessary pre-condition of democracy and freedom of choice;
- non-violence according to Gandhi's precepts, e.g., hunger strike (which Radicals prefer to call "dialogue fasting") and civil disobedience, such as distributing marijuana to challenge its criminalization; and
- some provocation, e.g., demonstrating in front of the Senate by holding a ten-metre long cloth spelling out "Euthanasia" with the names of signatories to the petition demanding the survey on clandestine euthanasia.²⁷

Some of ALC's activities illustrate this strategic approach. For example, in the area of knowledge building, information sharing is designed to empower citizens as well as challenge dogma. In 2007, ALC launched an initiative to help patients and citizens to safeguard their rights and liberties through a self-help, interactive manual entitled *Soccorso Civile - Manuale di autodifesa dal proibizionismo sulla salute* (Civil Rescue - A self-defence manual against health prohibitionism). ALC hopes that this initiative will grow into a network that operates on the model of the American Civil Liberties Union. The portal provides information, suggestions, and at times ALC's concrete support for those seeking to address the negative effects of fundamentalist influence over Italian law. It also evolves continuously, addressing new issues and adding content based on user contributions. A dedicated email address and a comments section on each page ensure interactivity and encourage sharing of practical experiences. ALC plans to translate the portal into English and

other languages spoken by immigrant communities. This information-sharing function serves to raise public awareness of rights and their practical applications. The organization also publishes *Agenda Coscioni*, a monthly newspaper, and launches appeals and gathers signatures through an indefatigable network of activists who set up informal stalls in city squares and at public meetings.

Building alliances is also vital to ALC's strategies. The organization fights alongside infertile patients' associations, women's rights associations, university students' associations and gynecologists for the overall adoption of ART, RU486 and non-prescription access to emergency contraception. Its allies also include advocacy associations and representatives of minority religious groups, along with international scientists and politicians. ALC has recently reached out to directors of UNESCO's Red Latinoamericana y Caribe de Bioetica (Latin American and Caribbean Bioethics Network), which faces similar political, economic and religious challenges in the promotion of scientific freedom. Thus far, ALC has engaged members of the network to write on the bioethical situation in the region and to take part in the World Congresses on Freedom of Scientific Research.

ALC also seeks the support of Nobel laureates. Jose Saramago, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998, has been honorary president of ALC since its establishment, and from 2001 to 2006, a total of 96 Nobel laureates have supported Dr. Coscioni and ALC. Such high profile alliances are critical to effective advocacy, but above all, ALC is committed to engaging citizens, who may be also believers, in its campaigns and actions.

Until recently, young people under 25 made up less than 1% of ALC's membership, and the organization gave little weight to youth-related issues. In 2007, the organization moved to address this situation by creating the Studenti Coscioni, a network of high school and university students from all over Italy. The network was funded to boost the membership of those under 25 and promote youth-related issues. Along with the on-going campaign for emergency contraception, this network has been conducting a campaign for condom distribution and sexual information programs in secondary schools, universities and public squares. Younger ALC members have taken part of the Scuola estiva Luca Coscioni, ALC's summer school on liberalism and free research. ALC is also actively promoting Scolarmente, a project targeting high schools and aimed at improving knowledge of neurobiology and of the scientific method as an instrument for critical thinking and democratic processes.

ALC is currently attempting to address a number of internal challenges to its work. According to some, one of the main weaknesses of ALC is its affiliation to a traditional political party. While the creation of a formally independent body might be useful, ALC is wary of the depoliticization of its activity. Traditionally the RP had lower national representation than other parties and wealthier organizations, and in spite of its transnational nature and the creation of the World Congress, ALC's campaigns still suffer from a kind of Italian-centrism. This is due to the lack of human and financial resources needed to enhance the organization's monitoring and communication system, which would enable ALC to take an active part in wider bio-diplomatic action. To improve its presence in Italy and worldwide, over the last three years ALC has been promoting Cellule Coscioni (Coscioni Cells), groups of at least eight members working together in cities from Rome to Boston with the aim of promoting ALC's concerns. Using the framework of the World Congress, ALC has also attempted to promote alliances with foreign organizations such as the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, the Genetics Policy Institute and the ALS League in Belgium.

Looking Ahead

Religious fundamentalists manipulate religious obligations and attempt to control scientific freedom by issuing purportedly universal prohibitions. Granted power by Italy's particular form of "secularism," they directly interfere with the country's political life. Fundamentalist organizations with a more discrete religious agenda also challenge freedom of scientific research. An expert on Vatican issues, Prof. Sandro Magister carried out a mapping of organized faith in Italy and found this to include a set of Catholic groupings that have been flourishing since 2000, with explosive growth in 2005 following the election of Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI.²⁸ These associations are transversal, that is, they originate from the Catholic stable but are willing to qualify themselves as "not exclusively Catholic." They are often firmly oriented toward influencing public opinion and are increasingly acting as lobby groups. Some media outlets such as *Avvenire*, *Osservatore Romano* and to some extent also *Giuliano Ferrara's Il Foglio* are part of this process.

Finally, it must be noted that some limitations to scientific freedom which are justified as "religious" and moral are in fact sometimes due to economic factors. Take for instance conscientious objection in the case of abortion. Before the legalization of abortion in Italy, doctors who performed clandestine abortions were known as "golden spoons" (*cucchiai d'oro*, i.e., "spoon" after the most harmful, traditional abortion practice, and "golden" in reference to their extortionate charges). Although abortion is now legal, conscientious objection is still used by

doctors to push women into their expensive private abortion clinics. In addition, “procreative tourism” has recently proved to be good business for clinics abroad (e.g., in Spain and Croatia) that welcome infertile Italian couples and fertile couples affected by genetic diseases who are searching for reproductive freedom outside Italy.

ALC’s detractors in the Catholic Church and Catholic groups that seek to impose absolute bans on controversial issues accuse the organization of starting down a slippery slope towards the chaos of total de-regulation. On the contrary, however, on issues like euthanasia or research on embryonic stem cells, ALC is not in favour of total de-regulation. Rather, it promotes a legal framework to control clandestine abuses, while taking into account the right of patients, infertile couples and human beings to determine their own lives without restrictions based on fideistic or other non-rational arguments.

While ALC is not a feminist organization, it is aware that churches traditionally attack women because they are mostly concerned by reproduction and related issues (abortion, contraception, research on supernumerary embryos, etc.) and also because of a certain phobia about sex. Italian women can hardly afford fundamentalist attacks on their rights, not only because they are traditionally underrepresented in political institutions, but also because political and social vulnerability prevents women’s organizations from raising adequate funds and individual women from negotiating fair wages. Continuous psychological attacks often compel women to seek out clandestine services. Procreative and abortive tourism to countries with more relaxed laws erode their earnings and threaten their health, and seeking solutions outside of Italy erodes the sense of trust in political processes in their own country.

In Italy’s history, there have been periods of detachment between society and religion as well as periods when the Catholic Church and its allies have been able to mobilize on issues affecting life and death. Although it is difficult to predict what future challenges religious fundamentalism will bring, one of ALC’s primary concerns will remain the promotion of the scientific method in Italy and worldwide as a means of strengthening critical thinking and democratic processes. According to Prof. Corbellini, “the current phase of global economic crisis should be taken as an opportunity for stimulating a cultural debate ... about the educational factors or variables that have been demonstrated to improve human individual and social capacities.”²⁹

Endnotes:

¹ Its policy of “double membership” means the NRP’s ranks are also open to members of other parties.

² Since 1995, the NRP has also been a non-governmental organization with consultative status at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Although still named a “party,” from 1989 on the NRP and its member associations generally do not participate in national, regional or local elections. “Special lists” usually do, i.e., Lista Bonino (Bonino’s List) or the Lista Pannella (Pannella’s List).

³ In addition to promoting the freedom of scientific research and medical treatment, its objectives include the promotion of projects and technologies for independent living, and advocacy regarding the civil and political rights of patients and people with disabilities. For example, the ALC campaign *Libertà di Parola* (literally “freedom of speech”) promotes funding for and effective regulation of independent living technologies for the disabled.

⁴ ALC also relies on a secretary-general, a treasurer and a coordinator of international activities, together with a dozen active volunteers.

⁵ Coscioni died shortly after the Congress in 2006.

⁶ Miguel Kottow (professor of bioethics, Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago, Chile and member of the board of directors of Red Latinoamericana y Caribe de Bioetica of UNESCO) *Colpo di chiesa in Cile* Italian translation reproduced in *Agenda Coscioni*, Year 3, no. 6: June 2008.

⁷ Alex Mauron (associate professor of bioethics, University of Geneva Medical School, Switzerland), [speech at Second World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research](#) (Brussels, Belgium, 5-7 Mar. 2009).

⁸ Creationism is the belief that the universe and all life were created in their original form by God. The term also refers to the religiously motivated denial of evolutionary theories.

⁹ “Despite what the name of the institute implies, the Interdisciplinary University of Paris (UIP) is not a public institution of a scientific, cultural and professional nature as defined by the Savary Law (Savary Law on Higher Education, 1984), and it is not recognized as a university by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research”. (From French Wikipedia article “[L’Université interdisciplinaire de Paris \(UIP\)](#)”; Author’s translation).

¹⁰ Mauron, *op. cit.*: “These institutions are busy producing critiques of mainstream science, but they generate no data. However much the Creationists purport to stand up to conventional science and claim success in terms of ordinary criteria of scientific truth, they utterly fail to transform their ideological commitments into actual research and the generation of new scientific insights. This illustrates the fact that, as is the case for other mimetic pseudo-sciences, Creationism is a dead science. In contrast, living science is akin to a chain reaction: one major discovery generates

more work to confirm or disconfirm it, which leads to new insights, new findings and so on... This snowballing effect never happens in a dead science, which merely expresses its bitterness against the 'Establishment', yet is incapable of formulating, much less implementing, a research programme of its own."

¹¹ Mauron, *op. cit.*

¹² Gilberto Corbellini (Full Professor, History of Medicine, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy), [Concept paper of the Second World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research](#) (5-7 Mar. 2009, Brussels, Belgium).

¹³ Corbellini, [Concept paper of the First World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research](#) (16-18 Feb. 2006, Rome, Italy).

¹⁴ A concordat generally refers to an agreement on religious matters between the Vatican and a national government.

¹⁵ Marco Pannella, "Una strada sola, via il Concordato," *Stampa Sera*, 15 Mar. 1976. "Quel che i "laici" nostrani, i "saggi" di questo caotico regime, i nostri partiti, anche di sinistra, stanno tollerando è ben altro. La Chiesa, i clericali, pretendono ancora una volta, letteralmente, di dettar legge. Di dettare articoli, emendamenti, pene e attenuanti di legge al Parlamento, ad onta dello stesso Concordato, con tutta la forza dei loro privilegi... Non intendiamo assistere a questo scempio inerti. Ci accingiamo, di nuovo, a chiedere l'abrogazione definitiva e totale del Concordato."

¹⁶ The following history is taken largely from Teodori Massimo, Ignazi Piero, Panebianco Angelo, "Direct action and popular action for abortion" in *The New Radicals: The History and Sociology of a Political Movement*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore: Milan, 1977.

¹⁷ Silvia Ballestra, *Piove sul nostro amore*, Serie Bianca, Feltrinelli Editore: Milan, 2008, p. 41: "Il cambio di strategia comunicativa del Movimento per la vita, passato dai feti in formalina alle belle pance di donne gravide circondate di margherite è evidente, ma non tutti dimenticano con tanta facilità, la campagna elettorale per il referendum indetto dal movimento e malamente perso."

¹⁸ See the original Italian text of [Law No. 40](#) at the Parliament of Italy website.

¹⁹ Ballestra, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42: "Questo eurodeputato del PPE, assieme al Forum delle famiglie, non fa che tessere alleanze trasversali con chiunque affinché venga sostenuto politicamente il tema della vita. Un lavoro da lobby cattolica capace di attrarre partiti e personalità accademiche, fini giuristi, medici, scienziati e parlamentari di diversi schieramenti, tutti uniti nel sostenere i diritti dell'embrione, e che è arrivato ad ottenere, nel primo articolo della legge 40, che il concepito sia considerato persona umana titolare di diritti. Prossimi obiettivi dichiarati di Casini & co. sono quelli di modificare la Costituzione (l'art. 1 del Codice Civile per cui i diritti si acquistano al momento della nascita che così risulta in contraddizione con quanto si afferma nella legge 40) e di avere coi suoi CAV uno spazio sempre maggiore negli ospedali e nei consultori."

²⁰ The condition of infertility is defined as the inability to procreate after two years of unprotected sexual intercourse. The problem seems to affect about 12-15% of couples of reproductive age.

²¹ Stephen Brown, "[Italy ok's abortion bill despite church opposition](#)," Reuters, 31 July 2009.

²² This assistance is still offered by ALC within the framework of the *Soccorso Civile* interactive manual; see the section on Analysis of ALC's Strategies.

²³ During a meeting of the European Council of Ministries of Science and Research, representatives from Germany, Austria, Italy, Poland, Malta and Slovakia opposed the funding.

²⁴ "[Euthanasia/The Italian and World-Wide Debate Continues after Death of Luca Coscioni Association's Co-President](#)," *World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research*, 19 Jan. 2007.

²⁵ In France, *Le Monde* and TF1 covered Welby's story, and in the United States, *International Herald Tribune* and *New York Times*. Al Jazeera later featured a documentary on Welby's life and struggle.

²⁶ The Italian Constitution states that no one can be forced to undergo medical treatment without his or her approval, and several doctrines declare that artificial nutrition and hydration are treatments since they require a feeding tube to be implanted into the stomach and usually extensive antibiotics to avoid infection. (The full text of the Constitution of Italy is available in [English](#) and [Italian](#) at the [Senate of Italy](#)).

²⁷ Photos of the demonstration are available at the [Associazione Luca Coscioni Flickr.com account](#).

²⁸ Sandro Magister, "[La mappatura della fede organizzata in Italia](#)," *Agenda Coscioni*, Year 3, no. 3: Mar. 2008.

²⁹ Corbellini, "For a UN Conference on Science, Freedom and Education," 22 June 2009, [World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research](#) website: www.freedomofresearch.org.

Author Bio:

Carmen Sorrentino is a graduate in International and Diplomatic Studies from the University of Trieste, Italy. Since 2005 she has been working for Associazione Luca Coscioni, coordinating international activities, including the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research. Her commitment to animal rights led her to apply for a PhD in scientific communication concerning alternatives to animal testing. She is fond of poetry and flamenco.

Organizational Bio:

Associazione Luca Coscioni is an Italian advocacy association founded in 2002 and named after Dr. Luca Coscioni, an Italian professor suffering from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis who passed away in February 2006 at the age of 38. In his life, Dr. Coscioni received support from a hundred Nobel laureates who endorsed his struggle to support freedom of scientific research, mainly research on human embryonic stem cells in Italy. "From the body to the body politic" is the motto of the association. ALC is committed to the assessment of the value of the scientific method, to freedom of scientific research and to the freedom of patients to choose their medical treatments without any interference by religion and any other form of fideistic approach to research and medical care. ALC is a member of the Nonviolent Radical Party, transnational and transparty, which was founded in the 1950s and has consultative status at the ECOSOC of the United Nations. Since 2004 ALC has served as the operational secretariat of the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research. www.lucacoscioni.it