

**NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE — CHAIRMAN'S
SPEECH**

ROTARY CLUB BRUSSELS

**WHERE NATO STANDS — AND WHERE IT IS
HEADED**

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Military Committee**

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Dear President of the Rotary Club,
dear President of UNUCI,
distinguished guests,

I have a confession to make.

When I was asked to speak here today, I looked up the Rotary motto. « **Service Above Self** ».

Three words. And I thought — that is exactly the problem NATO has been trying to explain for seventy-seven years.

Because that is what an Alliance is. Not a bureaucracy. Not a building. **Thirty-two nations that agreed, a long time ago, to put something larger than themselves first.**

I will keep this short. Not because the subject is simple — it is not. But because I believe the best conversations happen when the speech ends. So I will give you the essentials, and then **I want to hear from you.**

Let me start with the basics, because NATO is one of the most

misunderstood organisations on the planet — and it is **headquartered three kilometres from where we are sitting.**

NATO is an Alliance of thirty-two democracies, founded in 1949 on **one idea**: that an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. That is Article 5. It has been invoked **exactly once** in seventy-seven years — after September 11th, 2001, when all thirty-two Allies stood with the United States.

> One attack. Thirty-two responses. **That is the most powerful solidarity clause in history.**

And NATO is not an army. We do not own a single tank. What we have is something more powerful: **a common commitment, a common plan**, and thirty-two nations willing to back it with their own forces when it matters.

Now — the world. I will not pretend it is reassuring.

A war in Ukraine, **now in its fifth year**. Undersea cables sabotaged. Disinformation campaigns that corrode public trust **as systematically as any missile**. A growing number of actors who have decided that the rules-based order is optional — if it ever applied to them at all.

What is new is not the danger. History has always been dangerous. What is new is **the simultaneity** — everything happening at once, across every domain, by design.

So what are we doing?

At the Hague Summit last year, **all thirty-two Allies** met the 2% GDP defence spending target — for the first time in Alliance history. And we committed to going further: 3.5% for core capabilities, plus 1.5% for critical infrastructure and resilience. **Five percent by 2035.**

In 2024 alone, European Allies and Canada invested **574 billion dollars** in defence. A **twenty percent increase** in a single year.

> We are turning billions into battalions. **With method, with accountability, and with urgency.**

But money and battalions are not enough on their own. The threat is moving faster than traditional procurement cycles were ever designed to handle. That is why **the defence industry must be part of this plan** — not as a supplier waiting for a contract, but as a **strategic partner** in the security of our democracies.

We need industry to invest ahead of demand. To innovate at the speed of the threat. To understand that producing the capabilities our societies need is not just good business — **it is a civic responsibility**. The firewall between the boardroom and the security of this continent is thinner than most executives would like to admit.

> If you make the systems that defend us, **you are part of the Alliance too.**

Now — and this is the part I most want you to hear.

UNUCI exists to keep alive **the memory of those who served** Italy in uniform. The Rotary exists to serve the communities it lives in. Both of you are, in your own way, doing what NATO does: **building trust across borders, across generations, across difference.**

That is not a metaphor. It is a fact. The infrastructure in your organisations, the networks you maintain, the trust you build in your communities — all of this is part of what we are defending. You may not think of yourselves as part of the security architecture. **But you are.**

Security is not a spectator sport. It cannot be delegated entirely to those who wear a uniform. It is **a whole-of-society commitment**. And civic organisations like yours — people who show up, year after year, in service of something larger than themselves — are what gives that commitment its depth and its durability.

> **NATO is not a building in Brussels. NATO is you.**

There is one more thing I need to say — and I say it with some urgency.

We have a generation growing up in Europe that has known **nothing but peace**. That is a triumph. It is the whole point of everything we have built. But it has also produced a dangerous illusion: that peace is the natural state of things. That it maintains itself. **That it is free.**

It is not free. It has never been free. Every year of peace on this continent has been paid for — in political will, in defence investment, in the readiness of men and women to stand on a line and say: not here, not on my watch.

Our universities and schools **need to teach this**. Not to frighten young people. Not to militarise classrooms. But to give the next generation **an honest account of the world they are inheriting** — and of the effort required to keep it liveable.

If a twenty-year-old student today does not understand why Article 5 exists, why deterrence matters, why their country's defence budget is a moral as much as a financial question — then we have failed in our most basic duty as a society: to pass on what we know.

> Peace is not a gift from history. **It is a choice we make, every day, together. And it must be taught.**

I have visited many capitals, many bases, many operational theatres. I have seen Italian, Norwegian, Polish, American, German soldiers sharing **the same cold, the same risk, the same sense of duty.**

And every time I return to Brussels, I think the same thing: this Alliance — with all its imperfections, its tensions, its difficult moments — remains **the most extraordinary act of collective service that modern history has produced.**

Seventy-seven years. Not one centimetre of Allied territory lost. Thirty-two nations deciding together. **One billion people living in freedom.**

The Rotary has a word for it. **Service Above Self.**

We have a Latin expression for it:

> **Si vis pacem, para bellum.**

If you want peace, **prepare for it — together.** Because nobody can do it alone.

Thank you to the Rotary Club of Brussels, thank you to UNUCI, and thank you to each of you for your attention — and for everything you do in service of this community.

Thank you. And now — the floor is yours.