

Hearing of the Minister of Defence before the Joint Chamber of Deputies
and Senate Defence Committees on the Guidelines of His Ministry

The text is valid as actually delivered

Rome, Oct 30, 2019

Ministry of Defence Guidelines
The Hon. Lorenzo Guerini
Oct. 30, 2019

Chairpersons, Honourable Colleagues,

In the first place, let me thank the Hon. G. Rizzo and all the members of the Defence Committees for this opportunity to share my message.

Today marks my first speech before the Chamber of Deputies and Senate Defence Committees in my position as Minister of Defence. I would like to thank you right now for the work that we will carry out together.

Let me also, first of all, express my most sincere appreciation to the servicemen and servicewomen and Carabinieri members that every day, in Italy and abroad, guarantee our security.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to them and the civilian personnel of the Ministry of Defence for what they do and how they do it: thanks to their every-day work and dedication the Defence Ministry is an outstanding reality and a valuable resource for our country.

Before illustrating the Guidelines of the Ministry of Defence, i.e. the basis according to which we will develop the actions of my Ministry, I would like to share with you a few considerations on the sensitivity of the international context.

We are deeply aware of the current global security environment and of risks and challenges before us. We live in a time when uncertainties exceed certainties and the speed of change does not allow any distraction or delay.

For thirty years, i.e. from the end of the East/West controversy, we have been engaged with Allied countries to build a peaceful and fair international order. We have done that by using political and diplomatic tools, enlarging the space and competences of International Organizations – the EU in the first place- and implementing military actions when common peace and security are faced with extremely urgent large-scale threats.

For thirty years therefore, military operations aimed at re-establishing peace have been a fundamental tool to bring back order and security. Italy has tackled this situation for a long time: it has assumed responsibility and ensured its contribution. Politics, in its turn, proved able to develop the necessary solutions to adapt our

national military capabilities to the requirements of a specific period, while complying with the Constitution.

Recently, however, a further change in the security framework has emerged with increased clarity. While some of our major challenges were ongoing – the fight against international terrorism in the first place – a few international actors have gradually assumed an increasingly assertive posture, openly challenging the tenets of our shared security.

Russia has clearly become a competitor for the Euro-Atlantic Organizations of which Italy is a member, and its competition assumes at times the characteristics of an open confrontation, but I will dwell on this later on.

Concurrently, China has been following an almost similar path, as testified by the countries in that region. China's growth rate, also in the military sector, is a challenge to our security.

The activism of a plurality of geopolitical subjects adds up to this scenario, and international attention is focused on some of them due to risks connected with the proliferation of arms of mass destruction.

To respond to this concerning changes in the geo-strategic picture, in the last few years NATO has adopted a new posture, kick-started a deep review of its collective defence mechanisms and restored higher operational readiness levels.

The time for international mission is far from being over. On the contrary, NATO operations in the Western Balkans, Mediterranean area and Afghanistan remain of fundamental importance, as well as EU and UN-led peace-building operations, in many of which Italy is engaged with its Armed Forces.

However, these kinds of operations are no longer the only way in which Italy and the West are called to express their military commitment: the new strategic paradigm includes the need to make available wide-spectrum military capabilities.

The global impact that the new reality has upon us is therefore easy to understand in terms of the decisions we must make to adapt our Armed Forces to the requirements of our time. We – the Government and Parliament- must be fully aware of the crucial time we are going through. We must be ready to assume our responsibilities in an increasingly complex world.

That means the country must also have at its disposal Armed Forces commensurate with the position and responsibilities it intends to assume.

The Armed Forces, like I said, are constantly in the front line to ensure our security, both in international engagements and in the national territory.

In this regard, I think we all feel we must pay homage to all those who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

At the same time, let me underscore that our military is a national excellence of which we can be rightly proud.

As it is well-known to the Parliament, over 13,000 men and women in uniform are committed every day in the conduct of military operations: over 6,000 operate within the framework of 37 international missions, while approximately 7,000 are engaged in the national territory.

We must therefore ensure they have the necessary capabilities to operate in the best possible security conditions, in all kinds of contexts.

We must, in other words, ensure that the Armed Forces are able to implement all the fundamental tasks assigned to them by the Constitution and law, that is:

- Defending the Italian State;
- Sharing collective security and defence duties with Partners from NATO and the EU;
- Contribute to achieving international peace and security.

Added to this are activities implemented in favour of other State departments in order to safeguard our free institutions and conduct specific tasks in case of public calamities.

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As I have anticipated at the beginning of my speech, in fact, the dimension of the challenges we have to face is especially demanding.

New, continuously evolving and transversal -and therefore particularly insidious- asymmetric and hybrid threats were added to traditional ones.

International terrorism makes the picture even more complex, as it continues to be a widespread and immanent threat also in connection with the return of so-called foreign fighters to their countries of origin, with potential implications for Europe and Italy.

As you know, this threat has recently worsened also due to the Turkish intervention in northern Syria.

Last week, during the NATO ministerial meeting, I had the opportunity to underscore that Italy is following the developments in that region carefully and with concern. The ceasefire was welcomed by all actors, but the alert threshold is still very high, in particular with regard to humanitarian and security consequences.

In this context, I reiterated that Italy supports seeking a political solution and that every decision must be taken in agreement with the Allies, in order to both safeguard the unity of the Alliance and reflect the firm condemnation already expressed by the International Community.

As regards the presence of our anti-aircraft battery in Turkish territory, we have provided for its return to Italy by the end of this year, and activities aimed at its withdrawal have already been planned and will start soon.

Going back to the security picture, let me underscore that we also have to face technological challenges.

The unbelievable speed of development and dissemination of the increasingly pervasive technologies to which we entrust such a large part of our lives exposes us to cyber threats of unprecedented proportions.

The cyber dimension of conflicts, in fact, adds up to the traditional one, making it even more dangerous.

All of this happens when the speed of digitalization is increasing in every sector, thus implying opportunities and challenges. In fact, on the one hand sharing of processes, information, ideas and behaviours is much faster. On the other hand, maintaining the Defence traditional technological advantage is increasingly difficult. In this regard, we must invest in the digital dimension to be able to process a larger and larger amount of information to take the right decisions at the speed of relevance.

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With problems of this magnitude, tackling the theme of national security coherently requires a clear identification of our priorities and immediate defence interests.

There is no doubt that the latter are rooted in the enlarged Mediterranean and coherently reflected in the current international projection of our Armed Forces, at both the national and Euro-Atlantic level.

In order to combine our security requirements and the strengthening of lawful local institutions by promoting stabilization and development, I would like to prioritize capacity building, in particular in the partner countries that are more engaged in the fight against international terrorism in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) area and the Sahel. Within this context, our Armed Forces have developed training and educational capabilities implemented on the ground that have gained global recognition and appreciation. They include the specific contribution provided by the Carabinieri which, within the context of military tasks, is an essential element for re-establishing governance and legality in areas of crisis.

In fact, stabilizing Libya is impossible without cooperating with neighbouring nations, for example Tunisia and Niger. We must help those countries to tackle criminal and terrorist organizations that, for clear economic interests, are involved in the management of migrants' flows directed toward North Africa and the Mediterranean area.

However, in addition to the theme of immigration, we cannot ignore problems connected with energy security and the supply of raw materials indispensable for our industry. In this regard, stability in the Mediterranean is a vital requirement.

Given increased tensions in the Gulf area, we are carefully assessing current maritime security initiatives, in particular the ones promoted by our European partners. I also think that we need a more regular Italian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, where exploitation of energy resources is severely impacted by the ongoing maritime dispute between Cyprus and Turkey.

Stabilization and peace/building in Libya remain, however, our national strategic priorities.

We will therefore continue, in synergy with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to support efforts aimed at an inclusive political solution. The commitment of the Italian Defence at the bilateral level takes place within this context. It supports Libyan institutions and civil society through our Bilateral Assistance and Support Mission "MIASIT" and our field hospital deployed in Misrata.

Moreover, the situation in Libya is connected with the continuation of Mission Sophia, whose effectiveness has been recognized by Member States and proven by the recent decision to further extend its mandate. We hope that the naval component, indispensable also to implement tasks linked with the embargo on the flow of weapons to Libya in the high seas, will resume its activities. However, it remains linked to EU decisions regarding the allotment of migrants and asylum seekers quotas, as I had the opportunity to share with my colleagues from Germany and Spain on the occasion of recent bilateral meetings.

Moreover, consistently with the previously mentioned strategic interests in Africa, I intend to review – of course in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs- the overall geography of our ongoing commitment in the Maghreb, Sahel and Horn of Africa.

The aim is to make it more effective and increase synergies with our partners and International Organizations operating in that area. More specifically, with regard to Sahel, we want to strengthen our synergies with France, a country with a long-standing commitment in the region.

Based on positive results achieved during the ADRION Initiative Ministerial meeting, which brought together in Venice the representatives of Balkan Adriatic and Ionian coastal countries, I would also like to call your attention on the strategic importance of the Western Balkans.

In fact, in the meetings held with my counterparts on that occasion, Italy's role as a reference country for those nations and their will to further strengthen our level of cooperation was fully recognized, also in light of the support we have always expressed on their integration within the Euro-Atlantic dimension.

Those are important recognitions that Italy has gained thanks to its commitment of over 20 years in stabilization missions, in particular KFOR, where we will be in the lead also in 2020. We must be able to enhance this capital of trust and, in this regard, I deem appropriate for Italy to promote a Conference so that all relevant countries may sit at the same table to tackle the regional security theme together.

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Turning to the wider picture at the global level, as I said in my foreword, let me underscore in particular NATO's concern for Russia's growing assertiveness.

In this regard, our national position is based on the so-called double-track approach, i.e. using our contribution in initiatives aimed at strengthening the Eastern flank of the Alliance to show our determination, while remaining open to dialogue in order to promote détente and a less competitive relationship.

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The Euro-Atlantic dimension and our membership in the main Organizations which concur to establish international peace and stability complete the picture of our international position. Italy traditionally plays a protagonist role within such Organizations.

The strong European and Euro-Atlantic vocation that is a priority for Italy's foreign policy is, therefore, consistently mirrored in its Defence policy which sees NATO and the EU as the pillars of our system of alliances.

The North Atlantic Alliance, in particular, is the fundamental point of reference in terms of deterrence and defence against all threats.

Consistently with this assumption and with responsibilities linked to our role as a founding country, the Government will therefore continue to provide Italy's significant contribution to NATO initiatives.

This, however, does not mean that we have an established national agenda within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Italy, in fact, deems the southern flank to be fundamental for the adaptation of NATO's deterrence and defence posture. Within this framework we welcome the approval of our offer of two Divisional Commands.

All this with a view to implementing a real 360°, well-balanced approach.

Our NATO membership, however, requires also a more timely compliance with commitments made - besides capability and operational contributions- in terms of financial contributions.

I refer, in particular, to the theme of financial resources. The amount of resources invested in the respective Defence Ministries by NATO member countries, in fact, is constantly and carefully monitored.

Our high-quality military capabilities and especially our high level of participation in NATO operations where, let me underscore it again, we are the second contributing country, as NATO Secretary General fully recognized last week, has so far protected us from receiving more severe comments as regards our national level of expenditure.

Our 1.22%, however, is still far from fulfilling NATO's objectives.

Within this context, Italy remains committed to moving toward the parameters set by the Alliance. We are aware of the central role that the burden-sharing theme will play during next December Summit of Heads of State and Governments.

We will therefore field all necessary efforts to move forward on the path of gradually increasing our investments, aiming at progressively aligning the defence expenditures/GNP ratio to the average ratio of other European allies.

However, we remain convinced that all three burden sharing dimensions are equally important, and allow drawing a clear picture with regard to the quality of defence expenditures only when assessed together.

Furthermore, we will continue to support including investments made by single nations in new operational domains -in particular those connected with cyber security- in the collective security expense items. Investments incurred by countries for their participation in EU security and defence initiatives should also be considered.

In this regard, while highlighting that both NATO and the EU are focusing on the theme of increasing their resources, we must however be aware that this is in the first place a national requirement aimed at guaranteeing the effectiveness of our Armed Forces.

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Moving on to the European Union, you all know that our Government is characterized by a strong European vocation. Europe, for us, is a qualifying strategic choice, and strengthening it is an indispensable condition to tackle the challenges before us.

I deem we must incorporate the European Defence theme within this context not just to respond to an operational or financial requirement, but rather as a fundamental and necessary element to finally build a political Europe. That is indispensable to compete as a single entity whenever we decide to do so, in a global scenario characterized by actors who are stronger than us economically and demographically.

The dimension of the challenges that I have illustrated, in fact, goes beyond the scope and capabilities of single countries. Solutions can only be common and, from our point of view, they fall necessarily within a European horizon.

I think by now we are all aware that we are and will increasingly be called to take on more responsibilities within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy.

Today, giving up the European dimension of our main dossiers – which inevitably include the Defence- would for sure slow down, or even cause a setback in, the EU integration process.

In this regard, I will continue to support strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy in the wake of the EU aspiration – looking ahead and in close synergy with NATO- to achieve greater strategic independence both in industrial and economic terms and with regard to our intervention capabilities.

In concrete terms, this means moving forward toward an increasingly sizeable integration of resources and capabilities, taking full advantage of all the incentives fielded by the EU in the sector of defence: for example, the Permanent Structured Cooperation and European Defence Fund.

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Our country plays a protagonist role also within the framework of the United Nations, in particular in peacekeeping operations, in particularly sensitive contexts: for example Lebanon, where, as you know, Italy has for the fourth time in absolute terms assumed command of the UNIFIL Mission.

Also within a UN framework the Defence will continue to provide its significant contribution – not only in terms of human resources but also from a financial and logistical support and training perspective- that allowed Italy to keep the primacy among the western UN contributing countries, while scoring eighth at the global level.

Before illustrating the Defence updating process, let me conclude this part of my speech, focused on the international projection of our Armed Forces, by taking into consideration their national engagement.

I refer to Operation Safe Roads which -as my honourable colleagues know- has been ongoing since 2008 and currently engages approximately 7,000 servicemen and servicewomen.

The operation provided a significant contribution to achieving a safer environment, besides making our citizens feel closer to the Armed Forces thus further increasing their prestige. However, this is also a demanding commitment in terms of personnel engaged, which currently exceeds the number of personnel deployed in out-of-area missions.

Considering the provisions recently approved by the Government – which will allow increasing the overall number of police forces- I deem the time is now ripe to start, in agreement with other relevant Ministers and while conducting a careful assessment of the domestic security framework, a reflection on Safe Roads aimed at updating the mission.

In any case, based on experience accrued, we will continue to provide the incredible commitment of our Armed Forces in cooperation with other State agencies in the field of crisis and emergency management.

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Chairpersons, Honourable Colleagues,

I will now move forward to the theme of the reform and modernization of different defence sectors.

In fact, having defined our priority interests, I deem that a coherent discussion on the theme of national security includes considering the problem of modernising our Armed Forces and discussing the resources necessary to their support.

As the Parliament knows, given the delicate scenario outlined at the beginning of my speech, a long time ago the Defence kicked off a deep transformation process in order to have a modern and increasingly joint military, able to operate in a credible and synergic way with our European and NATO allies in all contexts of crisis.

Based on these premises, even within a still critical economic environment, I therefore intend to continue on the path of the ongoing modernization.

However this renovation, based on carefully balancing the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the military, must rely on a certain and constant development of its capabilities, which must be accompanied – as I said earlier on- by a gradual increase of investments in the medium-to-long term, based on certain and stable funding.

As shown by the 15-year Investment Funds for the Central Administrations established by the Budget Law for the last three years, sure investments guaranteed over the entire timeframe of program's development, in fact, allow for significant economies of scale and foster an harmonic growth of the national industrial sector, with relevant positive repercussions on the development of new technologies, competitiveness and employment levels.

In brief, resources allotted to the Defence must be seen as an incredible economic driver for the country's economic system, as well as an investment that provides security to our citizens.

I think that the following data are important to provide a picture of the relevance and impact of the aerospace, defence and security industry on our economy, and of the advantages, in both occupational and technological terms, it produces.

With orders amounting to approximately € 14 billion – where export sales significantly account for 70% of that amount- which translate into 4.5 billion in direct added value and 160,000 jobs for the entire supply chain, the defence industry has for sure a multiplier effect on the Italian economy.

The relevance of the defence industry, however, rests especially on quality, since advanced technology is one of our country's most effective industrial sectors.

Actually, annual R&D investments in that sector amount to approximately 1.4 billion, i.e. 11% of Italian industries' global investments.

As you know, the 2020 Draft Budgetary Plan defined a framework where room for manoeuvre will be significantly reduced due to the removal of VAT safeguard clauses.

Over the next three years – subject to the agreement of your Commissions- I would however like to establish the conditions to create a favourable climate to ensure funding levels closer to the actual operational and modernisation requirements of the Armed Forces.

Moreover, I share the concern expressed by military leaders with regard to the consequences of the gradual reduction of available resources, especially in the operating costs sector.

As for the latter, I can only observe that decisions made at the time of Law n.244/2012 – which aimed at increasing resources dedicated to the functioning of the military while impacting on the personnel sector- have not achieved the desired effect for various reasons.

Further along I will return to Law 244, when addressing themes connected with personnel. What I want to clarify here is that we must identify new resources to finance operating costs. In fact, the constant reduction of the “operating” item in the Armed Forces balance sheet – currently mostly taken over by fixed costs- has a direct impact on the general effectiveness of the military. To maintain appropriate training and readiness levels, the latter is increasingly bound to *ad hoc* funding allotted for implementing international and domestic commitments.

Within the framework of our constant efforts aimed at harmonizing budget availability with modernization requirements – made even more urgent by growing international instability- I then intend to support, within the framework of policies aimed at re-launching public investments, the establishment of a multiannual tool aimed at increasing defence investments. This will ensure both resource stability and Parliament's appropriate political supervision on the most relevant decisions.

Meanwhile, the numerous programmes currently before these Committees are the tangible proof of the effort that all Defence departments are implementing to ensure the immediate use of resources as soon as they become available, besides the swift implementation of the above-mentioned modernization process. Thus, also the

workers and companies involved in that process will be able to work within a context of certainty.

The development of an increasingly solid and competitive industrial base – including both large and medium and small enterprises- is, in fact, a strategic component of our national sovereignty: it allows us to avoid depending from foreign technology and products, and puts Italy in the small circle of nations which, boasting a defence industrial sector of proven experience, are able to play a protagonist role within the framework of crucial international programs.

That is why, in the wake of the ongoing action aimed at to re-launching the Defence Industrial and Technological Strategy, I intend to proceed with the practical implementation of those efforts in consultation with major stakeholders, other relevant administrations, industry, research centres, academia and business operators.

This, also to allow our industry to maintain the necessary technologic edge as compared to emerging industrial powers, while enhancing all the supply chain made up of large industrial groups and a dense network of medium and small enterprises located across all the national territory.

Within this context – where national excellencies are rooted especially in the aerospace and shipyard sectors- it is necessary to move in the direction of increasing industrial capabilities also in the land sector, in order to foster an harmonious development of the entire industry.

With this in mind, I would like to underscore how most of the countries in our industrial and commercial environment use cooperation tools to support the defence industry export sector, the so-called G-to-G. As you know, we have implemented the necessary adaptation of the current legal framework in the tax decree, in order to avail ourselves of similar instruments.

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My mandate will also focus on rationalization, optimization and enhancement policies aimed at the existing military real estate property. Their first objectives will be to contain operating costs and improve life and work standards of personnel employed in our infrastructures.

They will foster broader agreements with local authorities and relevant public entities, in order to stimulate and incentivize regeneration, requalification and enhancement projects for decommissioned or still operating military sites. Thus we will contribute, all together, to the recovery of a fundamental sector: our real estate property.

In this context, the Armed Forces are also called to express their innovation abilities by adopting a stronger -as compared to the past- dual use approach in assessing their infrastructures. This would benefit the effectiveness of the organization and, more broadly, the entire national economic system.

Referring especially to the residential sector, I want to promote an innovative policy aimed at focusing on the Armed Forces' operational and functional requirements, avoiding however to neglect the expectations and needs of all the different kinds of users, especially those on active duty, by seeking a cost-effective management of our residential property based on engaging other subjects, both public and private.

As regards constraints on military real estate property, we intend to follow a double track: on the one hand by enhancing sites that are necessary and strategic for our national defence by making them more efficient; on the other hand, by identifying - in cooperation with the Defence Staff- all non-necessary facilities to decommission or enhance them in a dual-use perspective.

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Chairpersons, Honourable Colleagues,

I will soon conclude my speech with my remarks on our civilian and military personnel, because I am absolutely sure that the whole defence system hinges on them.

Human resources, in fact, are strategic for all macro-organizations. That is even truer for the Defence, where they assume special importance due to the incredible sense of duty and spirit of self-sacrifice required.

The military is characterized by the values and ideals that inspire and shape this profession. I therefore will pay the greatest attention to the essence of the military spirit. With this in mind, we will implement a new coordinated effort aimed at providing continued education to all and upgrading all our specialities, without neglecting the legitimate and understandable expectations of each single soldier.

As you know the Armed Forces, today more than in the past, have visibly aged, especially due to the professionalization and gradual decrease of personnel numbers enacted by Law n. 244/2012 for budgetary reasons. Within this context, I think we can start considering the proposals recently made by the Armed Forces on the recruitment of Fixed Term Volunteers (VFP), moving on from a 1+4 to a 3+3 year model. We would thus also respond to the requests of those who wish to pursue a career in the military.

Moreover, we need to initiate a productive process able to adapt military salary levels on the basis of the well-established specificity principle. In this regard, based on the guidelines developed within the defence and security sector, recent corrective actions applied to legislative decrees on the reordering of roles and careers have achieved significant results.

The need to field appropriate concrete solutions, allowing the military to perform their demanding service tasks in greater serenity without neglecting everyone's needs is a further challenge. I therefore intend to initiate virtuous processes able to balance, on the one hand, the operational tasks of the Armed Forces, adapting them to the changing security scenario, and, on the other hand, personnel's legitimate expectations. It must be a synergic effort, that will necessarily rely on the staunch engagement of other state departments (the Ministries of Health, University and Education, Interior, Labour and Social Policies), due to both the specific nature of the Armed Forces service and the need to adequately support military families. I am referring to the possibility to define organizational and engagement solutions by adopting specific Memorandums of Understanding, aimed at combining military requirements with the broader and ever-changing needs of the employment and work contexts.

Nevertheless, safeguarding the health and safety of our personnel in the working environment remains the focus of the defence. The issue was recently tackled by a Technical Table established within the Defence, that produced interesting proposals which will be submitted to the Parliament shortly.

I want to pay due attention to the worrying issue of suicides in the military. I therefore will not hesitate to support the agencies established at every Service and, at the central level, at the Defence General Staff, enabling them to implement their analysis, monitoring and advising action appropriately and effectively.

Turning to the recruitment of new personnel, we must identify innovative procedures able to combine appropriate quantitative and qualitative criteria, using more modern and effective processes to reintegrate temp personnel into the workforce. To this end, we will also exploit the potential offered by internal organizational tools such as Agenzia Industrie Difesa (Defence Industry Agency) as a training facility and Società Servizi Difesa S.p.a. (Defence Services co.), overcoming possible current legal constraints.

Moreover, we must strengthen the integration of Single Services into a joint force also by using our resources in a more functional and effective way, increasing synergies and harmonizing the operational, logistic and training and education sectors.

With specific regard to the latter, I want to promote higher studies courses for personnel intended to cover top executive roles by establishing educational curricula increasingly dedicated to developing strategic thinking. This also in order to have at our disposal qualified and competitive personnel to cover inter-agency and especially international positions. Thus, we will be able to hold relevant positions to promote and safeguard our national interests.

Moving on to the civilian personnel, I want to give further momentum to the generational turnover -in particular in the technical and industrial sector- also to provide development opportunities at the local level and guarantee employment levels.

In this regard, I think we must recruit new staff while guaranteeing the implementation of an enhancement process, including in economic terms, consistent with the increasingly relevant tasks assigned to civilian personnel. I wish, in the short term, to kick-start the hiring of a first quota of personnel and, moreover, promote solutions that will further motivate the civilian component. Initiatives to be taken include the increase of ancillary cash benefits (currently one of the lowest among central administration agencies). I encourage working in that direction. I am thinking in particular of a check, similar to the incentive provided for by 2018 Budgetary Law, aimed at providing appropriate remuneration to the civilian personnel component, within a symmetrical framework and in complementariness with military personnel.

Before concluding my speech I wish to ensure you that I am determined to support the parliamentary process aimed at enacting the decision of the Constitutional Court on Professional Associations having a trade-union nature for members of the Armed Forces and Police Corps with a military status. I hope we will achieve shared solutions suiting everybody's interests as soon as possible.

Furthermore, considering the specific character recognized to the Defence sector, we can no longer delay tackling the issue of complementary pension funds for our personnel. Twenty-four years after the enactment of the contributions-based system, despite reiterated declarations of intent and firm commitments, it is still not possible for our personnel to use pension funds to compensate the inevitable reduction of their pensions introduced by new calculation methods.

As regards Military Courts, given the draft law currently before the Parliament, I intend to support – within the framework of powers conferred on me by law- a qualified reform program originating from the requirement to rationalize military courts and implement saving of costs, while safeguarding the specificity and cohesion interests of the Armed Forces. Besides, the competent offices of relevant Ministries are working at a general proposal on the power of legislative delegation that will include also the military dimension.

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Chairpersons, Honourable Colleagues,

The issues I have tried to illustrate cannot be tackled solely by the Armed Forces: they need a global political approach in the broadest sense of the word.

We must play our part to ensure an acceptable common security framework, i.e. the necessary pre-condition for every further hope of development for our communities.

At a time like this, when the speed of change seems to be increasing, it seems necessary to kick-start a new “maintenance” and “requalification” action of the complex Defence mechanism in order to make it consistent with the requirements of our time and to avoid being found wanting.

Parliament, over time, was able to tackle effectively and with foresight the decisions which time and the geostrategic scenario showed to be unavoidable. Transformation moving toward a joint direction and the professionalization of the Armed Forces are two emblematic examples.

All the conditions are in place to effectively tackle themes connected with Italy’s defence within the new international framework. The Defence Ministry and I personally guarantee our maximum commitment and support to the Parliament in order for this to happen.

Thank you for your attention.

