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Crosetto between budget and reforms: 2026 key year for Defense

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The **Defense Budget 2026** is increasing, but the turning point might come more from **Brussels** than from Rome. The numbers approved with the 2026-2028 Budget Law describe a continuous increase, but with a still **“provisional”** framework: two European instruments risk soon redesigning the expenditure.

The first is the **SAFE (Security action for Europe)** loan: **14.9 billion euros** are allocated to Italy. After the approval of the national plan by the EU Commission and pending the final green light from the European Council, the central question remains political and industrial: **how will the 14.9 billion be used**, on which programs and with which European partners?

The second element is the **“National escape clause” (NEC)**, a mechanism that would allow increasing Defense spending up to **1.5% of GDP** in derogation of the Stability and Growth Pact rules (for a maximum period currently indicated as **four years**). For Italy, the key step is exiting the excessive deficit procedure, after which the activation request could come. If **SAFE + NEC** were really combined, the government aims for a “real” increase path up to **+0.5% of GDP**, equal to about **12 billion** "at regime" from **2028**, although the issue of structural sustainability remains.

Von der Leyen: "Europe must be ready for hybrid warfare. We have invested 800 million in Defense."

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The Defense Function rises to 23.7 billion

Meanwhile, the more solid numbers are those of the State forecast of the Ministry of Defense. The **Defense Function** (Army, Navy, Air Force; **excluding Carabinieri**) in 2026 is worth **23,687.3 million euros**, with **+842.3 million** over 2025, that is **+4.5%**.

It is the **ninth consecutive increase** and, since 2017, the Defense Function has grown by **over 10 billion**. However, 2026 shows a **slowdown** compared to more recent years: not due to a change of course, but because the system is awaiting new flows (also European) and a clearer definition of the overall perimeter.

Indeed, the reconstruction of total expenditure remains complicated: in addition to Ministry funds, resources come from other departments. Estimates indicate about **3 billion from Mimit** for investments and about **1.3 billion from Mef** for military missions abroad, but precise quantification can only come during 2026.

After the Panzers, the Samurais are back: Japan will become the 3rd country for Defense Spending

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Inside the chapters: Record Personnel, Exercise recovery, Investments almost stagnant

The breakdown of the Defense Function confirms where the spending is concentrated.

- **Personnel**: in 2026 it reaches **11,763.8 million**, with **+418.2 million** over 2025 (**+3.7%**). It is a constant growth over the years and weighs because it happens while the overall organic consistency has decreased: a delicate balance, especially if the hypothesis of increasing the staff returns.
- **Exercise**: rises from **2,302.3 million** to **2,573.8 million**, that is **+271.5 million** (**+11.8%**). Crucial items such as **training** and **maintenance/support** grow, but the decisive question remains: **real increase or accounting shift** between ministries?

- **Investment**: goes from **9,197.1 million** to **9,349.8 million**, an increase of **+152.7 million** (**+1.7%**). Inside there is also **Research and Development** with **112.8 million**. The increase appears limited, but it comes after years of strong growth; moreover, with the contribution of Mimit, the overall estimated investment would exceed **12 billion**.

On 2026, however, not only finance weighs. It could also be the year of **reforms**: Minister Guido Crosetto is working on a draft law for a comprehensive reform of the Armed Forces (operational capabilities, administrative simplification, reorganization, **Reserve**, **cybersecurity**), with the aim of reaching the Council of Ministers by **March** and then Parliament, where times and contents could slow down.

In summary: the 2026 budget **grows**, but the “real” acceleration depends on **SAFE**, a possible **NEC**, and the ability to transform resources and announcements into **programs, priorities, and reforms**.