General Portolano: Defense requires spending capacity and production capacity.

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The international geopolitical and strategic framework is undergoing a period of radical transformations. **The challenges to European security are increasingly evident, and Italy, as an integral part of NATO and the European Union, finds itself facing various issues related to strengthening its defensive capabilities.** These difficulties are compounded by shortages in munitions and growing threats from the east, particularly from Russia. In an international context where the conflict in Ukraine has accelerated the need for greater commitment from allied forces, the Chief of Defense Staff, General Luciano Portolano**, raised crucial concerns** during his hearing on May 21, 2025, before the Defense Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. During this intervention, Portolano took stock of the national defense situation, the issues of ammunition stocks, and the need for greater production capacity, as well as the challenge of creating an integrated European defense, complementary to NATO's.

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Shortages in Ammunition

One of the main topics addressed by General Portolano concerns **the shortages in ammunition stocks, a problem that is becoming increasingly urgent.** Due to Italy's ongoing support for Ukraine, national stocks have been reduced, creating a significant "gap" in strategic ammunition reserves. Portolano emphasized that this phenomenon is not solely an Italian problem, but a difficulty that involves all NATO members. The conflict in Ukraine, which has seen strong involvement from the Italian armed forces and other allied nations, has depleted national military stocks, highlighting the vulnerability of a defense strategy that relies on limited reserves.

According to Portolano, the process to bridge this gap will not be quick and depends on two determining factors: **spending capacity and production capacity.** Spending on the purchase of new munitions is one of the main levers, but even more important is the capacity of production companies to supply the necessary quantities in a short time. Ammunition production must be scaled to meet demand, and this is where the main difficulty lies. The general highlighted that the combination of financial resources and the industrial capacity of manufacturing companies will determine how long it will take to restore stocks.

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Threats from NATO's Eastern Flank

Another crucial issue raised by the general concerns the growing threat along NATO's eastern flank. **Portolano expressed strong concern about the acceleration of Russia's military capability**, which is rapidly rebuilding its armed forces despite losses on the ground in Ukraine. NATO, in fact, finds itself facing a Russia that has expanded its conventional military force at a much faster pace than initially expected. This behavior represents a growing risk not only for Europe but also for global stability.

The conflict in Ukraine has indeed broad implications, as it directly involves major world powers and their security policies. Russia, despite suffering losses, is not only increasing the number of its forces but also diversifying and modernizing its military capabilities, with a strong commitment to strengthening its air defense and conventional forces. This scenario greatly concerns the Italian armed forces, as such an increase in Russian military capabilities could alter the balance of power in Europe and threaten NATO's security, especially in Eastern European countries.

Challenges for European Defense: An Inadequate Command Structure

Portolano also discussed the difficulties Europe faces in creating an adequate collective defense. According to the general, the European Union's defense is limited and fragmented. Although there are defense structures involving the 27 EU member countries,

these are extremely limited and not robust enough to face current global threats. **Portolano's proposal is clear**: to make European defense truly effective, it is necessary to **establish a "single European commander"**, a position that becomes the political reference point for the continent's defense.

This command structure would be complementary to NATO but would operate with greater autonomy within the European Union, being able to respond more quickly and effectively to emergencies. In particular, Portolano emphasized that NATO has a tested and well-structured command and control system, but Europe does not have a similar network, nor a unified defense strategy. The European Union has a planning and conduct structure, but with limited capabilities, which do not allow it to face a large-scale threat. The general suggested that it would be necessary to develop a network of classified information, which at the European level still does not exist, but which is essential for integrated defense.

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The Expanded Mediterranean: Renewed Centrality

Another fundamental point in General Portolano's vision concerns the strategic role of the Mediterranean. Portolano emphasized that the expanded Mediterranean is assuming increasing centrality in defense strategies, not only for NATO but also for the security of the entire European continent. This sea, which represents a crossroads of vital trade routes, has become a focal point for the vital and strategic interests of European security, and in particular for NATO's southern flank.

The expanded Mediterranean, in fact, has been the scene of regional conflicts that have further destabilized the area. The general recalled that the presence of authoritarian actors such as Russia, but also Iran, has made a stronger commitment to protecting this territory necessary, which not only intersects with important energy resources but also represents an area of potential geopolitical contention.

Proposed Solutions: Investments in Defense and Workforce

In response to these challenges, Portolano proposed a series of solutions to strengthen Italian and European defense. First, greater commitment is needed in the modernization of the Italian armed forces, not only with the adjustment of organic equipment but also with the strengthening of technological and industrial capabilities. Furthermore, the general spoke of the need to rejuvenate military personnel, making a career in the armed forces a more attractive option for young people, in order to ensure a reserve of trained personnel ready to be employed in peacetime, but also able to respond to needs in times of crisis.

Portolano concluded his hearing by reiterating that, in a context of growing global competition, **Europe must necessarily strengthen its defensive capabilities.** The creation of a European defense complementary to NATO's, the **establishment of a unified command structure, and the modernization of the armed forces are all essential steps to ensure that Europe can face future challenges**. The Mediterranean, as a focal point for European security, and the growing centrality of NATO's eastern flank require continuous commitment to regional and global stability. Italy, as an active member of NATO and the European Union, plays a crucial role in this process of strengthening collective defenses, and Portolano emphasized the importance of constant commitment to ensuring lasting security for Europe and the entire world.

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