



In Lisbon the NATO NCO Summit: Italy at the forefront with Chief Warrant Officer Michele Romano

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From May 26 to 29, 2025, Lisbon hosted the **21st International Conference of Senior Enlisted Leaders (CSEL)**, an event that brought together over 35 delegations from NATO member and partner countries, including Japan, Kosovo, Jordan, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. A picturesque setting like the **Belém Castle**, a symbol of exploration and openness to the world, provided the backdrop for a crucial meeting for the future of military leadership.

Chief Warrant Officer Michele Romano, Corps NCO of the Italian Army, participated in the proceedings representing Italy and actively contributing to the discussions. The conference, promoted by the **Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)**, was confirmed as a privileged place for strategic dialogue among the enlisted leaders of the Atlantic Alliance.

The theme chosen for the 2025 edition, *“Where We Started, Where We Are Now”*, invited participants to reflect on the evolutionary path of the Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) within NATO, analyzing progress, challenges, and future directions in an international context marked by geopolitical crises and technological changes.

From Ukraine to Interoperability: The Evolution of the NCO Role

The proceedings opened with an inspiring message from **General Christopher Cavoli**, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who recognized the strategic importance of enlisted commanders. **“The role of our enlisted commanders, particularly our senior commanders, is essential** for all these objectives,” Cavoli stated. He then emphasized how cooperation and joint training among allies and partners are fundamental to building strong relationships and enhancing military interoperability.

A particularly heartfelt segment was dedicated to **NATO's response to the war in Ukraine**, where the contribution of NCOs proved crucial for the effectiveness and timeliness of operations on the ground. This theme highlighted the urgent need to consolidate interoperability among forces, strengthen operational capabilities, and share experiences through distributed and aware leadership.

Chief Warrant Officer Kevin Mathers, current CSEL of the Allied Command Operations, officially opened the conference by extolling the power of **shared experience**: “The strength lies in the basic understanding that exists in one of our operational areas, which then, if shared with the entire group, places us in a space where the collective boasts years of experience... a truly powerful deterrent position.”

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At the center of the debate was also the transformation of the concept of **mission command**, increasingly oriented towards **operational delegation** and the **strengthening of leadership at intermediate levels**. The common will that emerged is to value every single enlisted leader as a key figure for the reactivity, resilience, and cohesion of the armed forces.

Italy Leading a Modern and Cohesive Enlisted Leadership

The intervention of **Chief Warrant Officer Romano** confirmed Italy's leading role in building a modern, cohesive military leadership capable of facing present challenges. The Italian delegation presented ongoing initiatives to develop more inclusive career paths and to promote continuous and skills-oriented training.

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The open and direct dialogue among enlisted leaders was one of the strengths of the conference. **Sergeant Major Zoltan Kaszab**, designated successor to Mathers as CSEL of the ACO, enthusiastically emphasized: **“The thirst for perfection and the commitment to improvement that I see in the entire NCO community are fantastic.”**

Among the symbolic activities that enriched the event was the **commemorative ceremony** held in front of the monument dedicated to peace mission fighters, a moment of collective reflection that strengthened the sense of belonging and the value of shared service.

Italy, through its representative and the good practices presented, demonstrated not only technical and professional capability but also the willingness to actively participate in defining an increasingly strategic, interconnected, and decisive enlisted leadership in defending NATO's values.

In conclusion, the **21st CSEL Conference** was not just an opportunity for technical updates or a celebration of the enlisted career, but a true **laboratory of vision and shared commitment**. A confirmation that, thanks to the NCOs, NATO can look confidently at the global challenges ahead.