Italy will reach 2% of GDP in military spending by 2025

Published on 18/04/2025

After years of delays and controversies, Italy has officially announced that in 2025 it will spend 2% of its GDP on defense. A symbolic threshold, certainly, but one that carries enormous political weight, especially in relations with NATO and the United States.

The announcement was made by the Minister of Economy Giancarlo Giorgetti in Parliament, just hours before Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni flew to Washington to meet Donald Trump. *“We are fully aware, especially in light of current tensions, of the need to increase this spending in the coming years”*, Giorgetti declared. And from Washington, Meloni wanted to emphasize: *“Italy honors its commitments. We are a serious nation.”*

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The announcement came on the same day as the meeting between Giorgia Meloni and the President of the United States Donald Trump in Washington - © Ansa

A choice not shared by everyone

Behind the announcement, however, differences in views are evident, reflecting diverse sensitivities within Parliament and beyond. It is not just an economic or technical issue, but a topic that touches delicate political balances and sparks a wide debate, even among the forces supporting the government.

While on one hand, Prime Minister Meloni has decisively reaffirmed Italy's commitment to NATO, not all of the majority initially seemed united. Matteo Salvini had previously expressed doubts about increasing military spending, but in recent days he has revised his position, stating: *"Defending Italy and Italians, yes, even more than 2%"*.

In the opposition, the Five Star Movement continues to lead the protest against the increase in military spending, making it a political battle of principle. Even the Democratic Party, although internally divided by different sensitivities, has expressed strong reservations, demanding that any increase be discussed in Parliament with seriousness, transparency, and attention to the country's priorities.

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Matteo Salvini, initially opposed, has now expressed full support for defense investments. Giuseppe Conte remains critical of the increase in military spending, while Elly Schlein calls for transparency and parliamentary debate.

Yet, international pressure has prevailed. Italy, historically among the NATO members that spend the least in proportion to GDP, could no longer afford to lag behind. Even though 2% is still far from the 5% invoked by Trump, or the likely new target of 3% that the Atlantic Alliance will present in June.

The cost of defense: 8.7 billion more

In 2024, Italy spent about 29.18 billion euros on defense, equivalent to 1.54% of GDP. To reach 2%, about 8.7 billion more is needed this year, bringing total spending to nearly 38 billion. A significant surge, considering that in 2020 investments in armaments stopped at 5.45 billion, compared to 9.31 billion last year.

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Percentage of military spending relative to GDP in NATO countries – Source: NATO

Meanwhile, attention is also on Europe. Brussels has proposed a loan package of 150 billion euros to support military spending by member countries, in addition to the possibility of excluding up to 1.5% of GDP in defense spending from deficit calculations. A “escape clause” requested for years by Rome, but which now, paradoxically, the Meloni government seems intent on not using.

Between Washington and Brussels

Another crucial issue concerns how these billions of euros will be spent. The United States, historical partners but also Italy's main suppliers, have long pushed for Rome to continue purchasing “Made in USA” weapon systems. Just last year, our country allocated about 7 billion euros for the purchase of 25 new F-35 fighters, in addition to the 90 already planned, and invested in Gulfstream aircraft specialized in surveillance and electronic warfare.

Yet, Italy is not – and must not be – just a buyer. Our country has a solid, innovative, and strategic defense industry, which represents a national asset to be protected and enhanced. At the forefront is Leonardo S.p.A., a true Italian excellence and a recognized reference at the European and international level in the aerospace, defense, and security sectors.

Through Leonardo and its industrial collaborations, Italy is a key player in major projects: from the assembly of new tanks in partnership with Rheinmetall, to the construction of high-tech military ships thanks to Fincantieri, to the adoption of SAMP-T air defense systems, optimized with the AESA Kronos radar made by Leonardo itself.

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The AW249 combat helicopter represents one of the latest creations by Leonardo. © Leonardo S.p.A.

Leonardo is not just a supplier: it is a driver of innovation, highly qualified employment, and strategic autonomy for the country. In a context where the pressure to purchase military technology from abroad is increasingly strong, supporting the Italian defense industry means strengthening Italy's security and sovereignty itself.

Precisely for this reason, the European Union proposes a strategy that could offer a virtuous balance: allocating at least two-thirds of defense funds to European technologies. A condition that, if well managed, could represent a concrete opportunity to enhance Italian excellence and grow the entire national industrial chain.

Balancing between American pressure and European opportunities, Italy now has the possibility – and the responsibility – to choose a strategic path that puts its own skills, companies, and national interest at the center. Because the defense of a country also depends on the ability to build, innovate, and decide with the head and heart within its own borders.