

Paratrooper General Iannucci on Mission in Bulgaria: COVI Alongside Allies for the Security of NATO's Eastern Flank

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Novo Selo (Bulgaria), June 9, 2025 – The Chief of the Joint Operational Command (COVI), Paratrooper Army Corps General Giovanni Maria Iannucci, recently conducted an official mission in Bulgaria, where he met with Italian personnel deployed in the Italian-led Multinational Battle Group (MNBG) at the Novo Selo Training Area, and held important bilateral meetings with the leaders of the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

The activity is part of Italy's contribution to NATO's deterrence and defense posture along the eastern flank of the Atlantic Alliance, following the Russian aggression against Ukraine.



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Greeting to the Italian Soldiers of the Battle Group in Bulgaria

Welcomed by the MNBG Commander, Colonel Salvatore Abbate, and accompanied by the Commander of the Southern Operational Forces, Major General Andrea Di Stasio, General Iannucci met with the Italian soldiers engaged in the mission, bringing them greetings from the Minister of Defense, Hon. Guido Crosetto, and the Chief of Defense Staff, General Luciano Portolano.

In his speech, the COVI Commander expressed deep appreciation for the professionalism, dedication, and spirit of service demonstrated by the personnel engaged in the operational theater:

> *"The reason for your presence here is to strengthen the deterrence posture. This means that we are determined, capable, and ready to defend the Alliance's territory and our common interests. Your activity also represents a fundamental testing ground for training and international cooperation."*



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Operational Innovation and Digitalization

Particular attention was given to the ongoing technological integration process under the direction of COVI. The operations conducted by Italian and multinational units at Novo Selo are already interconnected with the command and control systems of the COVI Joint Operations Center, as part of the broader digitalization program of the maneuver space that integrates, in a single architecture, the land, maritime, air, space, and cyber dimensions.

> *"This training scenario allows us to identify strengths and areas for improvement, contributing to the development of new platforms, the refinement of procedures, and the strengthening of the overall operational capability of the Defense," highlighted General Iannucci.*



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Balkan Sentinel 25 and Balkan Wall 25: Joint Multinational Exercises

Continuing the mission, the delegation led by the COVI Commander reached the Koren training area, where they witnessed the concluding phases of the multinational exercises “Balkan Sentinel 25” and “Balkan Wall 25”.

The activities, which began on May 27, involved Bulgarian, Italian, Romanian, and U.S. units, with the integrated use of artillery, infantry, engineering, armored vehicles, logistics, psychological operations, and CIMIC (civil-military cooperation) teams, under the coordination of the 61st Bulgarian Mechanized Brigade.

The day dedicated to observers (Distinguished Visitors Day) was attended by numerous civil and military authorities, including the Bulgarian Chief of Defense Admiral Emil Eftimov, the Joint Force Command Commander Major General Stanimir Hristo, and the Land Forces Commander Major General Deyan Deshkov.



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Bilateral Meetings with Bulgarian Defense

On the sidelines of the training activities, General Iannucci met with the military leaders of the Bulgarian Defense, with whom he discussed topics of operational integration, bilateral cooperation, and the joint role of Italy and Bulgaria within NATO's deterrence posture on the eastern flank.

Since October 2022, Italy has held the role of Framework Nation of the NATO Battle Group in Bulgaria, as part of the Alliance's forward presence on the eastern flank. To date, over 40,000 troops have been deployed by NATO along the entire deterrence line that, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, ensures the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.

All operational and training activities conducted by the Italian Armed Forces in various NATO theaters are ordered by the Chief of Defense Staff and coordinated by the Joint Operational Command, which under the leadership of Paratrooper General Giovanni Maria Iannucci represents the pinnacle of national joint deployment in multinational contexts.

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