Scramble in the Black Sea: Italian Eurofighters Protect NATO Airspace

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Constanța (Romania) – Two Italian Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon jets, belonging to the Task Force Air – 51st Wing, took off on April 29 from Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base in response to an **immediate take-off order (alpha scramble)** issued by the NATO Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Torrejón, Spain. The intervention was necessary following the sighting of suspicious aerial activities conducted by Russian drones near the southwestern Ukrainian border, close to Romanian territory.

The operation is part of the NATO Enhanced Air Policing – Southern Area mission, named **"Black Storm II"**, which aims to ensure the security and integrity of the Alliance's airspace in the southeastern quadrant, a strategic area for Euro-Atlantic defense, especially after the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

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Scramble, joint patrol, and collective defense

The two Italian Eurofighters operated in close coordination with Romanian Air Force F-16s, which had previously taken off from Borcea Air Base. After refueling the Romanian jets, the Eurofighters took control of patrol operations along Romania's northern border, particularly in the Tulcea region, following the directions of the Control Reporting Center (CRC) in Balotești.

The activity continued throughout the night, with the two allied countries alternating in airspace surveillance, until normalcy was restored around 5:00 AM. No direct violation of NATO airspace was recorded, but the episode highlighted the effectiveness of the rapid response system and the synergy between allied forces.

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The Italian deployment in Romania, now in its **third rotation**, involves the use of **four Eurofighter Typhoon** jets from the Air Force, equipped with next-generation armaments and advanced detection and tracking capabilities, even for small and slow-moving aircraft.

The Task Force Air – 51st Wing recently achieved **Full Operational Capability (FOC)**, certified by CAOC Torrejón, which praised its excellent readiness level and rapid deployment of operational capabilities. For the next four months, the Italian aircraft will be ready to take off for **quick reaction alert** duty, alternating with Romanian assets and contributing to NATO's integrated air and missile defense system (NATINAMDS).

The Italian contribution to the NATO mission

Italy participates in Air Policing activities with its own assets and personnel, under the direction of the **Comando Operativo di Vertice Interforze (COVI)** for national aspects, and under the operational control of the **NATO CAOC in Torrejón** for all missions of interest to the Alliance.

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Air Policing missions, active 24/7, 365 days a year, are an essential pillar of **NATO's collective defense**, contributing to deterrence and immediate response against any potential threat to the airspace of member countries. In particular, in the context of the Black Sea area, they assume fundamental strategic importance in light of geopolitical instability and increasing threats from the East.

Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO has strengthened its defensive capabilities along the eastern flank, integrating the presence of air forces in the Baltic States,

Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. The Italian contribution to the “Black Storm II” mission is thus part of a broader international effort to ensure the security of European skies.

The first scramble of the new Italian rotation confirms the effectiveness of the operational readiness system, full interoperability with allied air forces, and Italy's constant commitment to supporting the collective missions of the Atlantic Alliance.