State Start-up: The NATO Lesson to Transform Italian Genius into Industrial Power

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The global defense landscape is undergoing a paradigm shift: superiority is no longer measured solely in terms of tonnage or troop numbers, but in the ability to scale civilian technologies to the battlefield with unprecedented speed. The announcement of the UNITE – Brave NATO (Ukraine-NATO Innovation, Technology and Engineering) program, officially launched at the end of 2025, marks the beginning of this new era.

For Italy, this system is not just an external support tool, but the **ideal model** to incubate a new generation of defense start-ups, ensuring both national security and economic growth.

UNITE: Beyond the Prototype, to the Battlefield

Unlike traditional research programs, UNITE – Brave NATO was born with a pragmatic goal: **to scale already tested and prototyped technologies** to make them immediately usable and,

above all, interoperable with Alliance standards.

The program, coordinated by the Ukrainian cluster *Brave1* and the NATO *NCIA* agency, offers an initial fund of 10 million euros, with the ambition to reach **50 million by 2026**. The challenge areas are the heartbeat of modern warfare:

- **C-UAS and Air Defense:** Countering the drone threat.
- **Secure Frontline Communications:** Ensuring data flow where conventional networks fail.
- **SIGINT and Navigation:** Electronic intelligence and positioning systems in environments where GPS signals are obscured or manipulated.

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The Model for Italy: Incubating Excellence

Italy, with its ecosystem of excellence in deep-tech, electronics, and precision mechanics, must look to UNITE as a "training" opportunity for its companies. This is why we suggest adopting this approach at the national level:

1. **Synchronization with NATO Standards:** Participating in these calls obliges Italian start-ups to develop solutions that speak the technological language of the Alliance. This means that a product born in Turin or Bari is instantly ready for the global market of the 32 member countries.
2. **Real-Time Learning:** As emphasized by NATO Deputy Secretary General Radmila Shekerinska, the Alliance is learning "invaluable lessons in real-time." Italian start-ups,

collaborating with Ukrainian and allied partners, would have access to an operational experience database that no simulator can offer.

3. **Agile Public-Private Partnerships:** The involvement of the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation and the NCIA demonstrates that defense bureaucracy can be streamlined. Italy can replicate this scheme, creating a "fast-track" for innovative small businesses towards Defense contracts.

An Advanced Defense Architecture

Ukrainian Minister Mykhailo Fedorov described this initiative as the pillar of a "more resilient, adaptive, and technologically advanced defense architecture." For Italy, being a protagonist in this process means not only protecting its borders but securing a place at the table of technological leaders of the next century.

Italian start-ups have the ingenuity; the NATO system provides the method and capital. Uniting these two worlds is no longer an option, but a strategic necessity. The goal is clear: to transform Italy into the Mediterranean hub of *dual-use* innovation, capable of exporting security through software, artificial intelligence, and robotics.

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