

## Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte met Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens on Tuesday, 26 November 2024, to discuss security challenges, support to Ukraine, and Greece's "crucial role" in supporting NATO's collective defence.

During the meeting, they discussed the priorities of the next NATO cycle with a view to the Hague Summit to be held in June 2025, as well as the latest developments in Ukraine.

They also discussed EU-NATO cooperation. The Prime Minister stressed the need to strengthen European defence and the European defence industry. Moreover, he briefed Mr Rutte in detail on the proposal to develop a European air defense shield, a project which would strengthen the collective security of the EU and NATO member states.

After their meeting, the two leaders made statements to the press. The Prime Minister's statement follows: "Good morning. Today we welcome my good friend Mark Rutte in Athens, in his new capacity as NATO Secretary General. I am absolutely confident – we had the opportunity to work together for five years in the European Council – that this combination of experience, knowledge and skills will enable him to successfully lead the Alliance, which is particularly crucial in the difficult period we are going through.

And in our first meeting we had the opportunity to address all the critical issues of international current affairs, as well as, of course, NATO's strategic priorities. We discussed in particular the constructive role of Greece, because indeed our country is recognized as a

strong pillar of security, stability and democracy in this sensitive and troubled southeastern wing of the Atlantic Alliance. And with Greece's special interest obviously directed towards the Southern Neighbourhood, in the shadow of the tragic developments in the Middle East. Let me also express my hope that this time the negotiations for a ceasefire in southern Lebanon will be successful so that at least this front can be closed as soon as possible.

Of course, we looked at what is happening on the frontlines regarding the war in Ukraine, with a common position that support to Ukraine must continue, especially in the winter which has already started, and that means that we are staying consistent with the package of measures adopted at the Washington Summit. Our country stands firmly on the side of the defenders, for more than a thousand days that this illegal invasion has been going on. We also converged on one of the fundamental priorities for all allies, the need to strengthen our collective defence. An objective that requires, of course, a strong defence industry, significant investments.

However, I believe that we have had the opportunity to discuss many times in the European Council a more functional relationship between NATO and the European Union, in order to further strengthen the European pillar of the Alliance. Greece invests just over 3% of its GDP in defence. We are one of the leading players in Europe and I want to remind you that we invested more than 2% in defence during the very difficult times of the memoranda, when other European countries invested much less than that.

We have, of course, submitted specific proposals to Brussels on strengthening European defence, especially on finding budgetary space, especially for those countries that want to invest more in this sector, so that all member states can be more effectively shielded and the need for a common missile defence. After the recent developments in Ukraine, I think that this is more relevant than ever.





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It is an initiative that would strengthen and complement the role of the Alliance on our continent. And I think the time has come to discuss how to make this necessity a reality.

And certainly, in our meeting we had the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the valuable legacy of 72 years of our presence in the Alliance and, at the same time, the strong will of our country to continue on the same path.

Finally, we collectively recognised that in the face of the complex challenges that are emerging in our time, in our world, we must build bridges of cooperation with our partners. We must move forward together, with faith in the fundamental principles of freedom, democracy and solidarity, with a necessary and unwavering commitment by all to respect international law and, I would stress, international treaties. International treaties form the basis of the international security architecture, something which, of course, is particularly relevant to the sensitive region of the Western Balkans.

Dear Mark, your presence here in Athens today, in your new capacity, seals our common commitment to these values. That is why I welcome you back to Greece with the words of the Dutch philosopher Spinoza, which have remained relevant for almost four centuries: “Men will find that they can prepare with mutual aid far more easily

what they need, and avoid more easily the perils which beset them on all sides, by united forces”. He said it very well four centuries ago. Again, welcome to Athens”.

Mr Rutte welcomed the fact that Greece invests 3 percent of its GDP in defence saying it had “long made security a priority”. He also commended the country for its “highly skilled military and increasingly advanced capabilities” and its efforts to modernise them further.

The Secretary General thanked Greece for its support for Ukraine’s fight against Russia aggression. Just last month, Athens signed a bilateral security agreement with Kyiv and announced it will accelerate F-16 training for Ukrainian pilots and technicians “strengthening their hand in this brutal war”. “Our support for Ukraine has kept them in the fight, but we need to go further to change the trajectory of this conflict,” the Secretary General added.

Mr Rutte underlined that Russia’s use of North Korean weapons and troops, Iranian drones and Chinese dual-use goods contributed to an “increasingly dangerous” security environment and represented a “challenge to global peace and security”.

During his visit to Athens the Secretary General also met the Greek Minister of National Defence Nikoalas Dendias and Minister of Foreign Affairs George Gerapetritis.