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Exchange of views with Mark RUTTE, Secretary General of the NATO: Opening statements by David McALLISTER, AFET Chair, Marie-Agnes STRACK-ZIMMERMANN, SEDE Chair, Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, and by Salvatore DE MEO, DNAT Chair

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Summary:

The Committees on Foreign Affairs and Security (AFET) and Defence (SEDE) and the Delegation for Relations with the National Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (DNAT) meet NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte for the first time. In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, and the incoming US administration, the topics discussed include efforts to strengthen NATO defence and deterrence as well as the delivery of military assistance to Ukraine. MEPs also inquire about other regional and global security threats that require close cooperation between the European Union and NATO.

Only the original language version is authentic and it prevails in the event of its differing from the translated versions.

TIME	DESCRIPTION	DURATION
00:00:38	SOUNDBITE (English), David McALLISTER (EPP, DE), AFET Chair, 'Dear colleagues, first of all, happy New Year. All the best for this year 2025. And I would like to welcome all of you to this exchange of views with the new Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. First of all, dear Mark Rutte, a warm welcome to the European Parliament and congratulations for your appointment to this important position in these challenging times.	00:00:25
00:01:03	SOUNDBITE (English), David McALLISTER (EPP, DE), AFET Chair, 'I think I can say on behalf of all our colleagues, we wish you every success in your new role and we look forward to productively working together with you. We have you today for the first time in your new position here in the European Parliament. And it is a good tradition that the the committees for Foreign Affairs and Security and Defence, together with a Delegation for Relations of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly,	00:00:32

	<p>Welcome the NATO Secretary-General. That's why I would also like to welcome you on behalf of the two Chairs, Marie-Agnes STRACK-ZIMMERMANN, is sitting here with me upfront.</p>	
00:01:35	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), David McALLISTER (EPP, DE), AFET Chair, I will not be long in my introductory remarks, because I have been informed that the Secretary General has to leave us at 17:30 because he is flying to Finland, one of our important Member States.</p>	00:00:20
00:01:55	<p>'SOUNDBITE (English), Marie-Agnes STRACK-ZIMMERMANN (Renew, DE), SEDE Chair, Thank you very much to make a long story short, great that you are here. I mean, it's a challenge in this job. It's really for tough cookies only. So, great. Welcome and also, happy New Year to all our friends here. And I think we have to start immediately because time is running.</p>	00:00:25
00:02:20	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, Thank you so much, good afternoon and very Happy New Year to you all. And it's great to join you today. And this is for me, the first time in this big room after so many years to be back now in the European Parliament in this particular room. I think I was here once before, 10 or 12 years ago for a big meeting between the European Council and the European Parliament. So, I have some memory of this room, but I didn't realise it was that big and it will be that many Members visiting. So, thank you all for being here and thank you very much for inviting me.</p>	00:00:36
00:02:56	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, 'Madam Chair, Mr. Chair, Marie-Agnes and David. As you know, I am a European through and through. So, I feel very much at home here. It's great to be here back here in the European Parliament. Since starting my job in October, I've had many meetings with European leaders. I had the pleasure of hosting the President of the Commission. European I had lunch in her office, and then she came for dinner at my residence.</p>	00:00:30
00:03:	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, I met with special European Council, Antonio Costa, with Kaja Kallas, the EU High Representative and the European Commissioner for Defence, Kubilius, And I had the honour to participate in the EU Foreign Affairs Council in</p>	00:00:33

26	November. And again, I am today very happy to meet with you. In the coming months, I intend also to have a much longer meeting with Roberto Metsola, your President, and the heads of the political groups in the European Parliament.	
00: 03: 59	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, And I think this marks the start of a dialogue, but also a continuation of all the efforts to bring NATO and the EU closer together. At this particular dangerous time for security stepping up of our cooperation, I believe, is essential. Russia's war, against Ukraine rages on. At the same time, Russia is accelerating its destabilisation campaign against our own countries with cyber attacks, with assassination attempts, acts of sabotage and more.	00:00:44
00: 04: 43	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, We used to call this hybrid, try to get rid of that word hybrid. I would call it, a destabilisation campaign. Russia is not alone. It has China, North Korea and Iran by its side. Meanwhile, many other, dangerous persist from terrorism to nuclear proliferation, disinformation and of course, climate change. And I've said it before, and I say it again, I'm deeply concerned about the security situation in Europe. We are not at war, but we are not at peace either. The good news is that we know what to do to protect our people and way of life, now and in the long term. We just need to do it.	00:00:47
00: 05: 30	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, That means we need to invest more in defence and produce more capabilities. This cannot wait. We need to boost the resilience of our societies and critical infrastructure, and we need to sustain and step up our support for Ukraine to change the trajectory of the war and detour further Russian aggression in the future. On all of this defence, resilience, Ukraine, NATO and the EU must work hand in hand. Since start of Russia's all out war against Ukraine, We have demonstrated, I believe, unprecedented political unity and unprecedented coherence. I have every intention to help keep this going.	00:00:42
00: 06: 12	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, And I know, there is the same level of commitment within the EU leadership in the Parliament, in the Commission, in the Council. Stronger defence is my top priority. And this is about spending more, spending better, but also producing more. Not to provoke war, but to prevent war. NATO allies have certainly increased defence spending. Two thirds are	00:00:44

	<p>now spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. And that's good and they're very much welcome to our efforts. But to be honest, 2% is not nearly enough to stay safe in the years to come at least we'll need to spend considerably more than 2%.</p>	
00:06:56	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, As parliamentarians, you know well, the security does not come for free. You have a powerful voice, and you have a critical role to play in the debates on the urgent need to increase defence spending. I know spending more on defence means spending less on other priorities. If you do not want to raise taxes. I'm a central politician, so I don't like raising taxes. But of course you could still do it. As long as some money is being delivered. But generally speaking, spending more on defence means spending less on other priorities. But it can make a big difference for our future security.</p>	00:00:40
00:07:36	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, On average, European countries easily spend up to a quarter of their initial income on pensions, health and social security systems. And we need only a small fraction of that money to make defence much stronger. So, I count on you to make sure we all invest more in defence, additional investment in our security and the security of our children and grandchildren. We also need to quickly ramp up the production of crucial assets and capability, including ships, tanks, ammunition and drones.</p>	00:00:44
00:08:20	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, European defence industry is doing truly impressive work and the capabilities they provides are essential. But the reality is that we are not where we need to be, not yet. Our industry is still too small, it is too fragmented and to be honest, it is too slow. I welcome and support that the EU is now redoubling efforts to remedy despair, enhancing our defence industrial base and with the European Defence Industry Program, we have an opportunity to bolster our shared security.</p>	00:00:38
00:08:58	<p>SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, 'I also here urge caution. I believe we must avoid creating new barriers between allies that would only increase costs, complicate production and hamper innovation. Involving non EU allies in EU Defence industrial efforts is vital, I believe, for the security of Europe. Transatlantic defence industrial cooperation makes us all stronger. At a time when Russia,</p>	00:00:43

	China, North Korea and Iran are increasing their defence industrial cooperation to unprecedented levels, it would be an act of self-harm to put up new barriers between allies within NATO.	
00:09:41	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, 'We must also avoid duplicating existing structures. We cannot afford to waste time and resources, but we are all well placed to complement each other. And that's exactly what we should work to do. NATO is great at the hard stuff. We have the structures in place to set military standards, to set capability targets and produce them jointly. On the other hand, the EU has the awesome advantage of the internal market. That's a huge soft power element. It's can help gets defence production going at a much higher pace. And therefore I believe that cooperation is truly a win-win.	00:00:42
00:10:23	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, My next point is on resilience, another area where both our organisations, EU and NATO already work closely together, which we can and we must do more cyber attacks, acts of sabotage, espionage, disinformation in this instrumentalized migration. Our countries are increasingly the target of hostile actions. The most recent example is the damage to an undersea power cable connecting Estonia and Finland on December 25th, and a communications cable between Lithuania and Sweden was damaged last November.	00:00:39
00:11:02	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, 'We must be more resilient to such hostile actions, and we must make clear that efforts to raise worthless sabotage and other destabilisation will not go unanswered. And that's why tomorrow, and that's why I'm travelling to Finland tonight. Tomorrow, together with Finnish President Stubb and Estonian Prime Minister Michal, I am co-hosting the first ever Baltic Sea Natural Allies summit in Helsinki.	00:00:25
00:11:27	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, At a summit, a group of Ally leaders will take further steps to prevent any further damage of undersea assets and to improve the resilience of energy and communications infrastructure. And we will also strengthen NATO's military presence in the region. And of course, we will discuss the shadow fleet and what to do about it. So we are responding and will continue to ensure no country can exploit us, control our infrastructure or disrupt our societies. This is not a job for	00:00:40

	NATO alone. We need to work together, leveraging our strength and expertise in tandem to keep our population safe.	
00:12:07	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, And then my last point on Ukraine, the future of European and global security hinges on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. We all want this war to end. But above all, we want a peace to last. I don't know how or when the war will end, but I do know peace will not last if Putin gets his way in Ukraine, because then he will press ahead. He has threatened to start wars in the past and he has started. Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and again in 2022. So, what is the next target to be?	00:00:40
00:12:47	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, Peace will not last, if war ends with a deal with Putin, Xi Jinping, Kim Jong Un and the regime in Teheran are high empowered. A deal in Ukraine that serves their interests paves the way to global instability. So I am convinced that peace can only last if Ukraine comes to the table from a position of strength. For this, it needs our continued help, more weapons and faster so it can defend itself better and negotiate a good deal for Ukraine, for Europe and for the world.	00:00:36
00:13:23	NATO allies are providing more, and the EU support continues to be crucial. Last week at the Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting in Ramstein last Thursday, the US and European allies announced further aid to Ukraine. And these additional contributions are vital. NATO and the European Union have a lot to do together, and I can count on you. I know, as members of the European Parliament to keep up to support for Ukraine for their freedom and ours to.	00:00:34
00:13:57	SOUNDBITE (English), Mark RUTTE, NATO Secretary General, And I can count on you to continue strengthening our own defences. We cannot afford to wait. We are safe now. We are not safe in five years. So we have to start today. Spending more, ramping up production, getting resilience right and supporting Ukraine. I will not stop. I very much look forward to our discussion. I will try to answer as many questions as possible. I know you cannot come back if you do not like my answer, but I will not give you, I hope, any reason to get back to me by answering the question in the first place in a correct way. So I will try to do my utmost. Thank you.	00:01:14
	SOUNDBITE (Italian), Salvatore DE MEO (EPP, IT), DNAT	

00: 15: 11	<p>Chair, Thank you, Secretary General for being here. I think it's a comfort that you're here. And your presence here shows that your institution wants to strengthen the European pillar within the NATO parliamentary Assembly. Last November, there was a parliamentary assembly, and our delegation clearly expressed its intention to cooperate, to ensure that NATO and the EU are two institutions who work in parallel and not in contradiction to one another.</p>	00:00:39
00: 15: 50	<p>SOUNDBITE (Italian), Salvatore DE MEO (EPP, IT), DNAT Chair, It's a difficult complex work. But I think that we're taking the first steps and you being here as well shows that we are going in the right direction. You referred to the need to invest more in defence. And I think we need to explain that defence is not just limited to the military side, but that it goes beyond the purely military aspect. It also includes international relations, economic social relations, and above all, diplomatic relations.</p>	00:00:36
00: 16: 26	<p>SOUNDBITE (Italian), Salvatore DE MEO (EPP, IT), DNAT Chair, 'And here I think the European Parliament cannot help. 23 of the Allied countries are European countries. And so we have to explain to the institutions and to ensure that we have this sensitivity to the fact that investment shouldn't be an obligation or shouldn't be seen as an obligation, but a reflection of the awareness that we have to pool our resources and our strengths. They're not substituting the national level, but that this is the only way to enhance capabilities to ensure well-being opportunities for all.</p>	00:00:42
00: 17: 08	<p>SOUNDBITE (Italian), Salvatore DE MEO (EPP, IT), DNAT Chair, There are political differences within the Allied countries, particularly, these could change in light of future elections as well. For example, there are going to be elections in partner countries such as Canada. And we need to be aware that this could risk solidarity and that there could be risks to the unconditional support that we've expressed towards Ukraine. Because we need to ensure a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine if we're going to ensure a peaceful future.</p>	00:00:36
00:	<p>SOUNDBITE (Italian), Salvatore DE MEO (EPP, IT), DNAT Chair, And so here I would ask you, are there any risks on other fronts? I'm talking about the Mediterranean or the Balkans. These are of course, important focal points. And we have to ensure that we pay the utmost attention to them. And to conclude, I would just ask you to make an effort to ensure</p>	

17: 44	that public opinion is not split. It's not divided. We can't simplify the discourse down to defence is arms. We could perhaps also have a youth council within NATO because I think we need their input as well. And we need to ensure that they understand that it's only together that we can make a difference. Thank you very much and all the best for your work.	00:00:56
00: 18: 40	End	00:00:05

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