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# Press conference: Prime Minister Luc Frieden, Minister of Defence Yuriko Backes and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte (02.09.2025)

# Participants

* Luc Frieden, Prime Minister of Luxembourg
* Yuriko Backes, Minister of Defence
* Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General
* Journalists

# Language

* English

# Transcription

[Luc Frieden]

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning, good morning.

It's a great pleasure for us to welcome here today in Luxembourg the Secretary General of NATO Mark Rutte, who is not only secretary general of NATO but a dear friend of Luxembourg and a friend of mine for having been my neighbour in the European Council of Ministers when he served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands and also before my time in government Mark Rutte was a close ally of Luxembourg in his previous capacity, but we welcome him here of course today as the still rather new secretary general of NATO.

And I must say for our country, NATO is a very important international organization.

You know, Luxembourg was neutral during the Second World War, but that neutrality was violated by Nazi Germany.

We were liberated by the Americans and quite naturally we became a founding member of NATO when NATO was created as an organization for peace but also an organization as the preamble of the treaty says: to defend democracy, to defend the rule of law, to defend all the principles we strongly believe in.

And those principles that are today being challenged by Russia, who illegally and in an awful manner attacked Ukraine three years ago.

So, NATO has become more, I would say, more trendy than ever.

A few years ago, people said why do we still need NATO?

You know, the world is in a different situation than it was in 1949.

No, we think that NATO today is extremely important and for a country like ours; you know, we are like other European countries next to Russia, not directly but indirectly and of course what happens in Ukraine could happen elsewhere in Europe as well.

And we are stronger together.

No country, even the larger ones, can't defend themselves.

And therefore, being a member of NATO, and also being a member of the European Union, protects our freedoms, protects our way of life.

And we know that if one day Luxembourg would again be attacked, we could count on the support of NATO, of the members of NATO.

And that is why this membership is so important.

And that is why it's important to welcome here today the secretary general of NATO, our friend Mark Rutte. The Luxembourg government has decided – the new government that entered into office at the end of 2023 – in the framework of all the discussions that we had with our partners, that we would increase our defence expenditures. I must say the previous governments did so as well. But we added to that and said that we would go to spend 2% by the end of this year, and then gradually also over the next few years move to the 3.5% that we agreed at the NATO summit. We don't do that just before we want to buy weapons. We want to do that because we want to be a loyal ally of NATO and because we want to defend the freedom of the people living in this country. Peace is not, never guaranteed. The rule of law is never guaranteed. You have to fight for it. And one aspect of that is the collective military defence. And that's why we have decided to do, to go that way. Um, it's a difficult way. I want to say here again that that will not go at the expense of social expenditures.

We will of course also continue to finance all the other duties that a country has to keep the social cohesion. But without freedom, you know, um, without security, without stability, all the other freedoms can be forgotten.

I also want to say here again that we stand closely with Ukraine for the reasons I already mentioned. We consider that war and that aggression by Russia to be completely against all the principles of international law, against the Chart of the United Nations. And again, out of the history of Luxembourg, we know how terrible it is if you are invaded by your neighbour. So that is why defending Ukraine is also making sure that tomorrow other countries are not attacked by Russia. And that's why we will continue to support Ukraine.

Now Ukraine needs weapons. It's difficult to find all these weapons and certainly the Ukrainians don't have them. They can't finance them, all of them. So we need to have a collective effort, and that's why the Minister of Defence and myself told this morning secretary general of NATO, that we will participate in the initiative that was recently launched under leadership of the NATO secretary general, which is called PEARL, which is the prioritized Ukrainian requirement list, which in short means that we will finance, together with other countries, which we still have to identify, a package of already available arms, to a large extent American arms, that we will provide to uh Ukraine, and we will of course in the next few weeks identify other countries that would be willing to do that with us together.

These are usually packages of 500 million. So, for medium and smaller nations, you need to have allies to do that with you and we will start those discussions. But today we agree that Luxembourg will participate in this.

Uh finally I want to reconfirm that Luxembourg is, yes, an ally of NATO, which is there by heart and by mind. And we will never have a huge army like some other allies, but we want to have two things: one is a close relationship also with the United States. We believe in the transatlantic relationship, sometimes a little bit bumpy, but if we look in the medium and long term, it is extremely important that we have the Americans with us. At the same time, we want to specialize within NATO, and it is our aim to provide NATO with what we are, in which we have a certain knowhow and that's certainly our satellite and space capabilities. The Secretary General and the Minister of Defence will visit SES this afternoon.

Uh I announced in the State of the Union speech a few weeks ago, as you know, that Luxembourg will buy another satellite for government communications. All that, we do that not only for ourselves. We do that for our partners and NATO allies.

So, in that spirit, again it's a great pleasure to welcome you, and it was particularly nice to welcome you this morning with your official NATO hymn, which was composed by a Luxembourg musician, and who was, also when I served as Minister of Defence, the “Chef d’orchestre” of the Luxembourg military music, Lieutenant-Colonel André Reichlin and we are proud, as Luxembourgers, that he composed an anthem that later became the official anthem of NATO. So, I think that was a “clin d’oeil” of Luxembourg for NATO, which I found, and together with Yuriko Backes, we found very nice. And I like the music. It is... so it's a piece of Luxembourg in NATO

[Mark Rutte]

And I hear it so often.

[Luc Frieden]

Yes.

[Mark Rutte]

And I always think of you.

[Luc Frieden]

So, again, Mark, Welcome.

[Mark Rutte]

So, thank you, Prime Minister, dear Luc, and Minister of Defence Backes, dear Yuriko.

Um it's always a pleasure to be in Luxembourg, indeed among friends. You are a founding member of NATO, a founding member therefor of the Alliance; 76 years ago, that happened. And you continue to provide support to our allies and partners, and I just want to list a few of these items.

For example, you are a key contributor to NATO's Innovation Agenda. You play a leading role in our work when it comes to space surveillance, and invest in critical satellite capabilities, as you mentioned; and we will visit this afternoon some of the industries to provide allies with secure communications.

Luxembourg hosts the NATO Support and Procurement Agency, the NSBA. That Agency plays a vital role in supporting the whole of the Alliance operations and procurement, including providing aid to Ukraine. Uh so that's important that you host that organisation here.

You contribute to KFOR, the Alliance's peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, and NATO's forward land forces in Romania, reinforcing our collective defence on the Eastern flank and beyond.

And you also invest in major equipment and multinational capabilities, including NATO's multirole-tanker transport aircraft, the MRTT. And this illustrates, and this is just some of what Luxembourg contributes to the NATO Alliance.

Uh of course I welcome your commitment to step up defence spending. It is really important, given the strategic context we are in. We know that Russia is there as a long-term threat to the whole of the Alliance. There is a massive buildup at this moment of the Russian armed forces and the Russian military, and not to only organise these parades in Moscow. It's there to be used and they use it as we speak in Ukraine, and they might use it in other places. So, it is crucial that our deterrence is such that they will never ever try to attack one square kilometre of NATO territory.

And then also Luxembourg's contribution is important. As you said, you will invest 2% of gross national income in defence by the end of this year. Thank you for that. And you are ready to go much further.

And, as I said, for our deterrence and our defence to remain strong, we need more capabilities and larger armed forces in the whole of NATO area. And that is why it was also thanks to your leadership, that in the Hague we were able to come to an agreement on this famous 5% commitment, including, as you mentioned, spending 3.5% of our in your case GNI on our defence, on core defence.

This investment, by the way, will pay dividends. Of course, greater security across the board. But it will also help in making sure that Ukraine stays in the fight as strong as possible.

You have already, let me also mention that, allocated more than €250 million euros in military support to Ukraine since 2022. Armoured, personnel carriers, drones, anti-tank weapons, and millions of rounds of ammunition.

I also welcome your contributions to NATO's comprehensive assistance package for Ukraine as well as NSATU. This is the command we have in Wiesbaden, that coordinates everything NATO is doing for Ukraine, including the delivery for aid. You play a vital role there.

Uh and I think all of this underscores the vital role Luxembourg is playing when it comes to commitment to Ukraine sovereignty, its security, but also its post-war recovery.

NATO's steadfast support for Ukraine is only growing stronger. You already mentioned that we are delivering essential US weapons directly to Ukraine with funding secured from NATO ally. Thank you so much for the announcement to participate in that program. It is critical to help Ukraine defend itself.

We have, in a few weeks, already been able to channel $2 billion of vital lethal; sometimes lethal, sometimes also more defensive systems, into Ukraine through this new program. It is ammunition but also advanced air defence and much more.

And again, thank you so much for be willing to participate in what probably will be the fifth package being delivered to Ukraine.

And of course, let me use this opportunity to urge all allies to follow Luxembourg's lead here uh to contribute to this program, but also other initiatives like investing in the Ukrainian defence industry and bilateral support many countries are delivering and the Czech ammunition initiative. But this new initiative is really key.

Uh finally, let me say that when it comes to Ukraine, President Trump, he has made ending this brutal war a top priority. He broke the deadlock with Putin from February onwards, sitting down in phone calls with him. But also, recently, a couple of weeks ago pledging US involvement in Ukraine security guarantees.

As you know we met in Washington two weeks ago with the US president and many European leaders to help him, to support him, to advance peace and security after so much suffering, but also to commend him for the fact that he is really taking leadership, a leadership role also when it comes to ending the war in Ukraine.

For peace to last, Ukraine needs not only its own strong-armed forces. That will anyway be the first layer for Ukraine going forward after a long-term ceasefire/a peace deal. There has to be a strong Ukraine, um strong Ukraine armed forces, strong Ukraine military. And NATO is helping to build, to help them to build up that future force.

But lasting peace also requires this second layer, and that is what we now call the security guarantees from Ukraine's friends and partners. Uh the US, Europe and others are defining them now. As you know, we are sitting together in many formats.

Also, this week, there's a lot of work going on, so that when Ukraine heads into these bilateral tile talks or trilateral talks, they do so with unbreakable backing and therefore ensuring that Russia will honour whatever deal is agreed and will never threaten Ukrainian territory again after the deal.

So again, thank you, Luc, Yuriko, for your leadership for Luxembourg's role in NATO.

It is highly valued. It is highly appreciated.

This is important for our collective defence and also to Ukraine.

Again, thank you so much. And for this wonderful day we'll spend here, the three of us together.

[Luc Frieden]

Thank you.

[Yuriko Backes]

Thank you very much.

Very briefly, a lot has been said.

Mr. Secretary General, Dear Mark, it's great to have you in Luxembourg. We have seen each other many times here in different capacities. Thank you for being here. Your visit to the Prime Minister and myself is extremely important in the current circumstances. I look forward to going to SES with you, and you will visit NSPA, which is a very important NATO agency. And we are a very proud host nation of NSPA.

But like you have said, the Euro Atlantic area is under profound threat. Russia is a long-term threat to our security. So, we must stand together, and Luxembourg is contributing to the collective defence, to the collective deterrence in many areas.

We have an absolute added value, as you have also mentioned, in space capabilities. We have added value, and we continue to work on this, also in cyber, cyber defence, cyber capabilities. So, these are areas where we are really working on to put these capacities and capabilities also at the disposal of our alliance and our allies. Not only are we also financing many NATO programmes, we also have our boots on the ground, as you also mentioned, not only in Romania, also in Lithuania, in KFOR. So, it really shows that we are in there across the ground.

NATO remains the bedrock of our security. Of course, the coordination, the collaboration with EU, also to make EU, angle of pillar of NATO, stronger will also make our alliance stronger. So, this collaboration will be fundamental also in the future.

So, we have very much stepped up our investment into defence, by the end of the year, as you said, 2%. We had a very important meeting in Washington, where we have a further “montée en puissance” across the Alliance over the next few years, fundamental for our collective security.

But I really want to say that it's not with the percentages that we will be defending our Alliance. It is with people; it's with women and men, it is with equipment, it's with capabilities. And Luxembourg will do its part as a solidary country. Thank you.

[Mark Rutte]

Thank you.

[Luc Frieden]

Okay, we take uh a few questions.

[Journalist]

Thank you very much. Mr Secretary General, I have a question for you that might break the ice for the very first question.

How – if there ever will be a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine – how can we prevent disasters and massacres, like for example in Srebrenica or Sudan or Rwanda, like we've seen so many times with peacekeeping missions in the last decades?

[Mark Rutte]

Yeah. The bad news is we are still at the early stage of all of this. We would love of course for the whole peace process to be much further.

The good news is that when President Trump was elected, and I visited him in Mar-a-Lago in November, and then when he was inaugurated as Trump 47 in January, and we met again in March, and spoke a lot on the phone, that he is absolutely committed to and he understands that for Putin to be willing to engage in talks, it's crucial that he, the President of the United States takes this leadership role. Because at the end of the day, he is over 50% of NATO. He is 25% US of world economy. By far, the most powerful military. And he has that personal commitment to end the war, to end the bloodshed.

Of course this is not easy. This is not done in a couple of days. So, what we now are working on is basically on two streams. One is to somehow bring the two leaders together, to start sitting down and discussing how to end the war. That's one trick.

And the other is to agree with the Europeans and the US on post, a long-term ceasefire or preferably a full peace deal.

How can we prevent the Russians from ever attacking again? And this is why we are discussing these security guarantees, because we have to take lessons from Budapest, 1994, the memorandum which has not delivered. We have to learn our lesson from, and this was done with the best of intentions, the Minsk agreements in 2014. But when it comes to preventing Russia from attacking again, it did not hold. And now we have to find a way that, when we have come to an agreement with the Russians in one sort of form or whatever, that they will never ever try again to attack Ukraine, as they will never ever try to attack NATO. And that's why that debate is so important.

Europeans are working very hard at this. We are in... They are in close... and NATO is involved in these talks. They're in close contact with the Americans. And the fact that President Trump three weeks ago said, "Hey, I am willing as the US, to participate, to be involved in the security guarantees”, of course again because of the might and power of that enormous country and economy and military and their value systems, was a breakthrough in itself.

So, to your question: it is impossible now for me to answer because that already... And I understand your question. It is a good question, and it is basically referring to potential forms of a peace deal, etc., and then how to prevent mistakes made in the past. But it will all depend of course on the exact form, formats and how we go forward. But of course, we have to take that into consideration.

Thank you.

[Journalist]

Hi. I'm Sam McNeel from the Associated Press.

I wanted to ask... let me look at my notes real quick. I wanted to ask about: yesterday, the Bulgarian authorities suspected that the plane carrying Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, was jammed by Russians.

Um and we've seen jamming happen all up and down the Eastern flank of the EU, from Sweden down into Bulgaria, including the Defence minister of the United Kingdom earlier this year, near Kaliningrad. Why isn't GPS jamming taken more seriously?

[Mark Rutte]

It is taken very seriously and thank you for the question. Um and this is exactly why NATO is stepping up when it comes to hybrid, cyber, etc. And uh we have agreed on policies there to really be more effective in this area.

Uh, I always hated the word “hybrid” because it sounds so cuddly, but hybrid is exactly this: jamming commercial airplanes with potentially disastrous effects... um an assassination attempt on a big industrialist in one of NATO allied countries, attacking the national health service in the United Kingdom. ...

So, these are not cuddly small incidents. These are huge incidents which have a huge impact.

And that is also why, when we found out about the cutting of the undersea C-cable between Estonia and Finland on the 25th of December last year, that Supreme Allied Commander launched his enhanced vigilance activity in the Baltic Sea Baltic Sentry within 10 days. So, I'm not saying that we have completely cracked this and solved this altogether. But to your question, I can assure you that we are working day and night to counter this, to prevent it and to make sure that they will not do it again.

[Journalist]

Hello. Joseph Gaulier from l’Essentiel Luxembourg.

Mr. Rutte: Many countries like Luxembourg have enhanced their defence expenditure. Um but currently the US policy is changing, sometimes difficult to follow. And how do you ensure that all NATO countries aim at the same goal, go to the same direction? Thank you.

[Mark Rutte]

Well, here I'm... I would not be worried about the United States. They are completely committed to NATO. They're completely committed to the NATO plans. And to what they need to contribute to the overall deterrence of the Alliance. There was one big problem, and that was that whilst they were committed to NATO, there was also an expectation for us, and us being Canada and Europeans, to at least spend what they are spending. Which I think is only fair.

And we have solved that in the Hague by saying we will work on this trajectory to make sure that we equalize our spending with what the US is spending. And I think again, to keep the Alliance strong, it is crucial that not one partner is spending so much more than the others.

But we are not only doing this for this audience of one. We are doing this because, and this is too what the Prime Minister was saying. Uh the threat from the Russians is increasing every day. Let's not be naive about it. This might also involve one day Luxembourg, my country, the Netherlands.

We are all safe now. We think we are far away from Russia, but we are very close by. And the latest Russian missile technology, for example, the difference now between Lithuania, on the front line, and Luxembourg, The Hague or Madrid is 5 to 10 minutes. That's the time it takes this missile to reach these parts of Europe. So, we are all under direct threat from the Russians. We are all on the Eastern flank now, whether you live in London or in Tallinn, that doesn't... there is no difference anymore, and he Americans are absolutely committed because they understand, and they also re-engaged again with the whole of NATO and also reconfirmed the long-term Russian threat to the whole of the Alliance, to the whole of the Euro-Atlantic. And they know deeply, and from all my conversations in Washington I sense this, it’s for a secure United States, you need a secure Atlantic, you need to secure Europe and you need to secure Arctic. Because otherwise the US is at threat itself, even the US mainland. And of course, they also have the challenges from the Indo-Pacific.

So, they are totally anchored in NATO, and since the NATO summit and the commitment on the 5% defence spending, including the 3.5% on core defence, that commitment is absolutely in every sense reconfirmed.

[Luc Frieden]

May I just add to what the Secretary General just said that I also feel that, due to this external threat, we Europeans are much more united. And I can feel that also in these numerous formats of conferences that we are attending. I saw that during the summer, you know, after Alaska, before Washington, after Washington, and we met online in many of these of these calls, I was... there was a feeling of being together. So we are, we have the same goal and that is to protect Europe, to protect our citizens, and I'm sure that our combined effort will make us safer.

So, it's protecting our people, it's protecting the principles we strongly believe in and that's why we spend more on defence.

At the same time, I confirm what the Secretary General just said: In one of these calls, Vice-President Vance was present, and he said: We are in the same team. So, these were his words.

So, I think indeed what we witnessed during the summer is that we are on the same track, that we go into the same direction and it's um an effort which we all have to share because we are stronger together.

So now the Secretary General has to leave because he will have an audience by His Royal Highness the Grand Duke. So, and you can't keep a monarch waiting.

[Mark Rutte]

No.

[Luc Frieden]

And so, therefore, thank you very much for your presence here today. And we a working meeting thereafter, so...

[Mark Rutte]

Absolutely. And we will get some food then.

[Luc Frieden]

... you have to come back from the Palace.

[Mark Rutte]

I will. I shall. See you later. Thanks.