

## NOT OFFICIAL – COURTESY TRANSLATION

Dear Ursula,

Italy will continue to do its own part to strengthen European security and defence. It is a responsibility we take very seriously, in particular in the international context we are experiencing. We will continue to advocate the need for the European Union to invest more in its strategic security and defence capabilities.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of European citizens there is another emergency that today is just as real and immediate as the energy crisis.

The crisis in the Middle East and the tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, combined with the consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, are already producing extremely severe and often asymmetric effects on energy prices, on costs for households and enterprises, on the competitiveness of our production system, and on citizens' purchasing power. In Italy and several other European Nations, concerns are growing about having to cope with a new socioeconomic shock after the enormous sacrifices made in recent years.

That is why I believe Europe must send a message of consistency, common sense, and solidarity with its citizens.

If we rightly regard defence as a strategic priority such as to justify the activation of the National Escape Clause, then we must have the political courage to recognise that energy security is now also a European strategic priority. And, in particular, that the extraordinary increase in energy costs we are currently experiencing is an exceptional circumstance outside the control of the Member States with a major impact on their public finances.

We cannot justify to our citizens that the EU allows financial flexibility to be used for security and defence purposes in the strictest sense, but not to protect families, workers and enterprises from a new energy crisis that threatens to severely impact the real economy.

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H.E. Ursula von der Leyen  
President  
European Commission  
Brussels

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Europe's security is not measured solely through its military capabilities. It is also measured by its capacity to enable enterprises to continue to produce, households to cover energy costs, and States to ensure economic and social stability.

No one can fail to see that adequate defence production capacity necessarily relies on a sound and healthy economy. Supporting enterprises and households in coping with high energy costs would make our economies stronger and thus better able to enhance their own defence capabilities.

It is for this reason that Italy deems it necessary to temporarily extend the scope of the National Escape Clause, already in place for defence expenditure, to include the investments and extraordinary measures required to address the ongoing energy crisis, without altering the deviation thresholds currently in place.

In the absence of such necessary political consistency, it would be very difficult for the Italian Government to explain to public opinion possible recourse to the SAFE programme under the conditions envisaged at present.

I am confident that the Commission will understand the relevance and urgency of this request, which stems from the need to provide a concrete response to the real priorities of Italian and European citizens at such a delicate time.

Yours sincerely,

*Giorgia Meloni*