



# Ursula von der Leyens tale om europæisk forsvar og sikkerhed på Hærens Officersskole

**Taler**

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Formand for EU-Kommissionen

**Dato**

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**Sted**

Hærens Officersskole,  
Frederiksberg Slot

1 Thank you, Prime Minister, dear Mette,

Dear Cadets,

5 Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here today with you. There is no more inspirational group of people to speak to than women and men who have chosen to devote their careers and their lives for the security and freedom of others. Your mental and  
10 physical fortitude – your sense of duty and honour – are a testament to yourselves, your families, and to your nation as a whole. This historic Academy is one of the reasons I chose Denmark to speak about security. And to make the case that if Europe wants to avoid war, Europe must get ready for war.

15 Denmark is acutely aware of its own security and threats. Not least because of its unique and strategic geography but also because of recent events: I am of course talking about the ongoing war in Ukraine and conflicts in other theatres but also the repeated and continued attacks on critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. And, of course, the ongoing competition for influence in the Arctic  
20 region, including Greenland. To all the people of Greenland – and of Denmark as a whole – I want to be clear that Europe will always stand for sovereignty and territorial integrity. And it is against this complex backdrop that I salute the Prime Minister's decision to increase defence spending to 3% of GDP in the next two years. This is true leadership.

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Dear Cadets,

If we look back over each generation of cadets who have graduated from this

30 institution, they have each faced their own challenges. For those in the postwar  
years, it was about finding their way in that dangerous time. It is almost exactly  
on this day in March 1948 that Denmark stationed naval assets on your islands  
of Anholt, Læsø and Samsø. It was done because of very real fears of an  
imminent attack from the East. These events ultimately led to Denmark's  
35 historic decision to join NATO the following year. And being part of NATO  
meant that for generations that followed, their duty was also about protecting  
peace across the world to help secure our own freedoms. But somewhere along  
the line, the era of the peace dividend gradually set in.

40 The idea took hold that spending on defence should be ramped up during  
conflict eras – but should just as quickly be driven down in times of relative  
peace. With the help of NATO and the transatlantic alliance, these times of  
relative peace seemed to be a permanent state. The truth is we quickly  
convinced ourselves that this truly exceptional period that saw the Iron Curtain  
45 and Berlin Wall come down and entire nations and people set free was a new  
norm. This led to underinvestment in defence and, frankly, to over-  
complacency. Our adversaries used that time not only to re-mobilise but also to  
challenge the rules that govern global security.

50 And that brings me to today. The era of the peace dividend is long gone. The  
security architecture that we relied on can no longer be taken for granted. The  
age of spheres of influence and power competition is well and truly back. Just  
take Russia. We already know its determination to deny other countries their  
right to choose their own path. And now Russia is on an irreversible path to  
55 creating a war economy. It has massively expanded its military-industrial  
production capacity. 40% of the federal budget is spent on defence. 9% of its  
GDP. This investment fuels its war of aggression in Ukraine while preparing it  
for future confrontation with European democracies. And just as these threats  
increase, we see our oldest partner – the United States – move their focus to the  
60 Indo-Pacific.

Dear Cadets,

We may wish these things were not true. Or that we did not have to say them so  
65 bluntly. But now is the time to speak honestly so that every European  
understands what is at stake. Because the discomfort of hearing these words  
pales into insignificance with the pain of war. Just ask the soldiers and the

people of Ukraine. The point is that we must see the world as it is – and we  
70 must act immediately to face up to it. Because a new international order will be  
formed in the second half of this decade and beyond. So as we stand here today,  
Europe faces a fundamental choice about its future. Do we keep reacting to  
each challenge in an incremental and cautious way? Or are we ready to grasp  
this opportunity to build a more secure Europe? One that is prosperous, free  
75 and ready, willing and able to defend itself.

Dear Cadets,

The answer is clear. The choice is none. Europe is ready to step up. We are ready  
80 to take control of the change that is inevitable. Because we cannot afford to be  
pushed around by history. This means, acting now is a must. Acting big is a  
conditio sine qua non for speed, scale and strength by 2030. This is what  
Denmark and others are doing. This is what Germany is deciding on today.  
These decisions are both historic and necessary. By 2030, Europe must have a  
85 strong European defence posture. “Readiness 2030” means to have rearmed and  
developed the capabilities to have credible deterrence. “Readiness 2030” means  
to have a defence industrial base that is a strategic advantage. But to be “2030  
ready”, we need to move now. And that is where the EU comes in. To be clear:  
Member States will always retain responsibility for their own troops, from  
90 doctrine to deployment, and for the definition of the requirements of their  
armed forces. But there is a lot that is needed at European level. And tomorrow  
we will present a roadmap for “Readiness 2030”. I would like to briefly touch  
on four key priorities.

95 The first and overarching priority is a surge in defence spending. We all know  
there was an under-investment in defence for too long. Member States' defence  
spending has now increased by more than 31% since 2021. That is better – but  
not enough. Still far lower than that of the US, Russia and China. Rebuilding  
European defence will require massive investment over a sustained period, both  
100 public and private. This is why the Commission put forward a plan to unleash  
EUR 800 billion investment in European defence. This includes a new  
instrument – called SAFE – that can quickly unlock EUR 150 billion for  
Member States. This will help us buy better, buy faster, and buy more  
European. And it will facilitate joint procurement. A good example is the  
105 Danish lead-nation model. It delivers fast and reliably. Investments should go  
into priority capability domains for which action is necessary at European level,

in alignment with NATO. But we also need to support Member States to increase their own defence budgets. This is why we are proposing to activate  
110 what we call the National Escape Clause. This will give countries much more flexibility to spend more on defence without falling foul of fiscal rules. This holds the potential to mobilise additional defence expenditure of up to 1.5% of GDP. Or some EUR 650 billion over the next four years. And we are working to draw in also private financing – whether from the EIB or on the capital  
115 markets.

To my second point: What we invest in – and how we invest – is just as important as how much we spend. We must close our capability gaps. And we must do this in a European way. That means large-scale, pan-European  
120 cooperation to address gaps in priority areas. That starts with fundamentals like infrastructure and military mobility. By 2030, we need a functioning EU-wide network of land corridors, airports and seaports that facilitate the fast transport of troops and military equipment. At the same time, we need to invest in air and missile defence, artillery systems, ammunition and missiles. And we have to  
125 learn the lessons from the battlefield and the changing nature of modern warfare. We have seen the importance of drones and counter-drone systems in Ukraine. Europe needs to develop all types of unmanned systems and the advanced software and sensors behind them. The same goes for cyber, or using military AI, or quantum computing. The scale, cost and complexity of projects  
130 in these areas go far beyond any single Member States' capacity. But together as Europeans, we can master this challenge. This is why we must develop large-scale projects and step up collaborative procurement in these areas. That means pooling demand, shorten lead times and ensure interoperability.

135 Ladies and Gentlemen,

The third priority for European defence is perhaps the most strategic. And that is increasing support for Ukraine. This is what we call the steel porcupine strategy. Because we need to make Ukraine strong enough to be indigestible for  
140 potential invaders. So we need to invest in Ukraine's strength in deterrence through denial. We have done a lot already. We have supported Ukraine with about EUR 50 billion in military support alone and trained more than 73,000 Ukrainian troops. And our support for Ukraine's accession to the European Union remains as strong as ever. But there is a lot more that we can do. To help  
145 make this a reality, we will set up a joint Task Force with Ukraine to coordinate

the EU's and Member States' military support to Ukraine. But Ukraine can support us too. In fact, there is a lot that we can learn from the transformation of Ukraine's defence industry. The innovation, speed and scale of its industrial base is remarkable. It is a huge asset for Ukraine, and it is a blueprint for Europe. So we need to speed up Ukraine's integration in the European defence equipment market. And our industry is learning from Ukraine's defence industry. Ukraine's industry has the daily battlefield experience, how to innovate just in time and produce faster, cheaper, and more intelligent.

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This brings me to my fourth priority: strengthening Europe's defence industrial base. We have many competitive and world leading defence companies. And many SMEs that are developing new technologies at the cutting edge of innovation. But our industrial base still has structural weaknesses. It is not yet able to produce defence systems and equipment in the quantities and speed that Member States need. It remains too fragmented with dominant national players catering to domestic markets. We need to turn the tide. It starts with investment in Europe. Today, the majority of defence investment goes outside Europe. In other words: good jobs outside Europe. Research, development and innovation outside Europe. This is not sustainable. We must buy more European. Because that means strengthening the European defence technological and industrial base. That means stimulating innovation. And that means creating an EU-wide market for defence equipment. In addition, companies need a steady stream of multi-year orders to steer investment and ramp up capacity. Pooling our demand and joint procurement is therefore even more important. We will set up a European Military Sales Mechanism to help make this happen. Member States need to be able to fully rely on European defence supply chains, especially in times of urgent need. And a European market would deliver that. It will be a driver for our prosperity and industrial competitiveness as much as for our security. It will unleash innovation, research and skills. We will put forward a Defence Omnibus to simplify rules and regulations – from certification to permitting to joining existing contracts. And we will convene a Strategic Dialogue with the Defence Industry to look at all the obstacles they face.

180 Dear Cadets,

I know that my message to you today was stark. I painted a picture of a world fraught with danger. But we are stronger than we think. And we are not in this alone. Europe is more united than ever. It is more determined than ever. And it

has partners, friends and allies that it can work with and count on. Security challenges often have global implications. What happens elsewhere can quickly happen over here and vice-versa. And most of the threats we face are cross-border, whether that is a Russia determined to regroup; or hybrid or cyberattacks; or threats in space or at sea.

So that is why we are fully committed to working with NATO and the United States. Our security is indivisible. That is why we are working to break new ground on security with the United Kingdom and other partners within Europe, in our neighbourhood or within the G7. From Canada to Norway. And even as far afield as India and other parts of Asia.

Like all young cadets in all of those countries, your lives and careers will be devoted to building and securing peace, freedom and prosperity. But I would like you to remember that freedom is not a process. It is a constant struggle. I am not sure whether I have the right English word. But there is a word in Ukrainian. The word “volia”. “Volia” means freedom, but it also means courage and will to fight for freedom. That is every generation’s duty. That is what we are working for, because Europe is more than a Union, it is our home.

Thank you and long live Europe.

**Kilde**

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215

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220