



Statement by President von der Leyen with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte

Brussels, 2 September 2026

Dear Mark, it is always a pleasure to welcome you.

We meet today to discuss Russia's attack in Leipzig. The German government has identified Russia as behind an attempt to attack cargo planes at Leipzig/Halle Airport. Had this attack succeeded, this would have resulted in enormous damage and possibly even loss of life. So I want to be very clear about what this was. This was an attack using military-grade material, carried out by Russian operatives on EU soil. And we will not tolerate it. We stand in full solidarity with Germany. And if the intention was to make us think twice about supporting Ukraine, I can tell you, it has only strengthened my resolve. Intimidation will not work. And this is why I am meeting with NATO's Secretary-General today. We are united. Europe and NATO will not just maintain our pressure on Russia. We will increase it. And we will not stop. Not until Russia stops bombing and killing innocent children, men and women in Ukraine.

Leipzig marks a new escalation on European soil, directly attributed to Russia. But it is part of a broader pattern of increasingly dangerous incidents. Repeated incursions into our airspace. Drones that paralyse our airports. Interference with our critical infrastructure. Europeans are faced with a hard truth that this is the new normal. We have to step up. And that means being ready to respond to Russia's recklessness faster and better. We must treat our everyday infrastructure as frontline targets and protect it accordingly. And we will support any Member State - Russia targets. Europe already has Rapid Response Teams which can respond to these styles of attacks whether they occur inside or outside our Union. Our strength, our preparedness, our resolve, is our deterrence.

We also do this by using the power of our Single Market. Our sanctions have weakened Russia's economy. We can use more sanctions and have them ready to impose, as soon as such dangerous, life-threatening acts are attributed. Every loophole Russia exploits, is one we must close. In Ireland today, European foreign affairs ministers are discussing new listings. At the Commission, we are looking at ways to cut even deeper into Russia's war chest.

My second point today regards our support for Ukraine. Today I can confirm that we have received a new payment request. It is worth several billion euros and would cover Ukraine's air defences, including the highly advanced PAC-3 Patriot air defence systems. Member States are currently looking at Ukraine's request, but I can say that it is going in the right direction. At the same time, we in Europe are working on FREYA with Ukraine. This is a European project to build our own anti-ballistic missile defences. All of this is on top of the '90 billion euro support loan' for Ukraine that is already at work. Since June, we have issued 8.5 billion EUR for drones and missiles for Ukraine. And this money would also buy fighter jets from European industry.

Finally, my third point. We do all of this together with NATO. Mark and I have repeatedly stood side by side to express this solidarity, and we do so today to show that Europe is united. And that Europe must mobilise its defence surge even sooner. Air defences are critical. We need a faster, more integrated alert system across Europe. And then we must intercept the threats faster. This is why we have put forward an 800 billion euro defence investment plan. Including 150 billion euro through SAFE, so we can invest more, but together and therefore smarter.

Mark, last time we met was at the NATO summit in Türkiye where we discussed these topics. As you said, the EU and NATO reinforce each other. And today our message is very clear. We are in a new era of European security. And European investment in defence strengthens NATO and re-energises our industrial base. We will continue; we will prevail; and we will deter anyone who attacks our freedom and security.

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