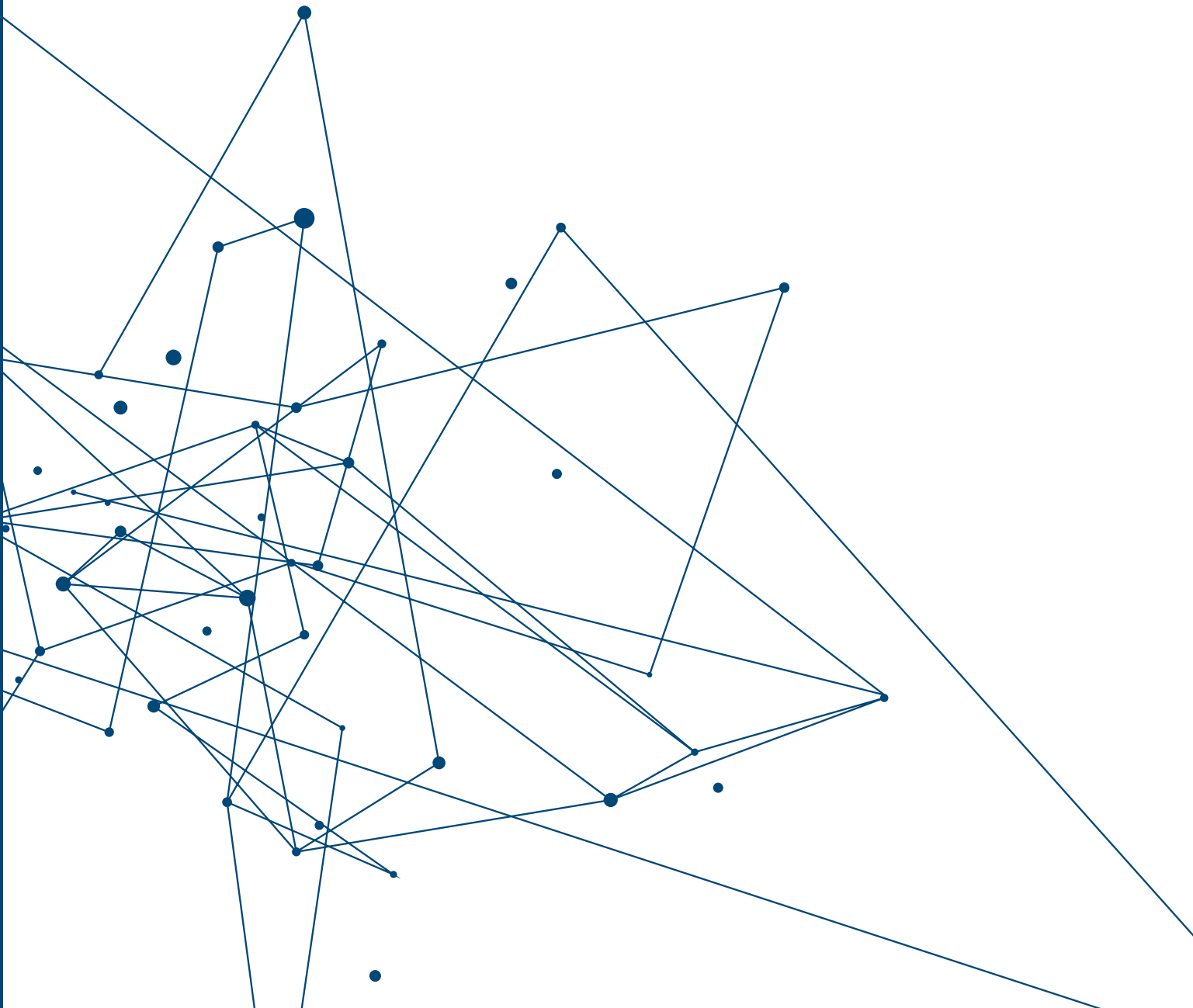


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Turkey's Presence in Italy's Re-Engagement with Africa

Federico Donelli



Led by economic and security concerns, Rome has renewed its role in Africa and unexpectedly found Ankara active across the continent.

This paper is part of a series of six CATS Network Papers assessing Turkey's engagement with Africa from the perspectives of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, complemented by analyses from Turkey itself and two major actors on the continent, Egypt and Ethiopia.

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1.

A Growing Cognisance

Although Turkish involvement across Africa is no longer a new phenomenon, the awareness of Turkey's actions in Libya and other locales south of the Italian peninsula only recently entered Rome's collective consciousness. This awareness of Turkey's potential impact on the Italian agenda in Africa has been made all the more important because Rome, for several years, has been working to revive its southward strategic projection. Africa is an arena then where Italian public and private actors interact with Turkish actors.

How do Italian interests in Africa perceive the growing Turkish presence? Do Italian policymakers see Turkey's forays into Africa as challenges or opportunities? Looking ahead, can we expect increased competition or cooperation in Africa between these two Mediterranean powers?

There is a general lack of knowledge in Italy about Turkish policy in Africa; its characteristics, objectives, strengths and weaknesses. This deficit implies both a misperception of Turkey's potential in Africa and a failure to assess the challenges and opportunities for Italian national interests objectively. Except for some private sectors, both myopia and ideological bias characterise the Italian response to Turkey's growing presence in Africa. The analysis of Italian policy toward Africa and toward Turkey highlights similarities. In both cases, the relationships have a pragmatic dimension driven by national interests. These same interests open up the possibility of collaboration with Turkey in the African context.

In order to understand the dynamic relationship and competition between Italy and Turkey in Africa, it is important first to examine Italian policies and interests in Africa. The primary areas of the Italian agenda in Africa revolve around diplomacy and politics, security cooperation, humanitarian and development aid and finally economics.

Recently, the relationship between Rome and Ankara has been volatile with periods of cooperation and closeness interwoven with times of coolness and divergences in strategic interests. By maintaining the division of the primary sectors—diplomatic, security, economic, humanitarian and development—in speaking with Italian policymakers a complete picture of Italy's relationship with Turkey in Africa becomes clear.

The interviewees are members of Italian public and private stakeholders active in Africa. Despite some difficulties due to the change of the Italian government -from October to November 2022- and the short time frame available, 25 interviews have been conducted. In some cases, the interviews take the structure of focus groups because more than one member of a public or private agency is involved.

In addition, several informal discussions have been held to supplement the interviews and public documents. Most of the respondents are Africa desk officers or executives within their respective public or private institutions. The interviews are supplemented by statements and official documents -reports and preparatory papers- produced over the years. A series of exchanges and discussions with Italian foreign policy experts from academia and leading Italian think tanks also have helped round out the interviews.

2.

The Past Decade of Italy in Africa

The Italian political agenda toward Africa entered a new phase in 2013. The government led by Enrico Letta from 2013 to 2014 opened a debate on the southern dimension of Italian foreign policy. Ten years ago, policymakers saw a need to consolidate Italy's strategic role in the wider Mediterranean. To that end, Italy decided it had to take advantage of its geographical southward projection to expand Rome's strategic presence from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Guinea. Such a posture, foreign policy thinkers postulated, would enable Italy to become more relevant within the two main pillars of its foreign policy: the European Union and Atlanticism.

The Macro-regional turmoil following the 2011 Arab uprisings and the resulting increase in migration flows on the South-North axis brought Africa to the forefront of public debate in Italy. In 2015, the government of then-Prime Minister Matteo Renzi set a new course in relations with African states. The revitalised foreign policy momentum toward Africa promoted the diversification of Italian engagement on the continent.

In the past, Italy's interest had only been limited to North Africa, with a focus on Libya. Over the last decade, strategic depth has increased. Italy has utilised multiple instruments, including support for economic cooperation, continental integration processes and contributions to European missions to train local security forces. Since 2015-while focusing on North African countries-Italy has increased its strategic depth in three main African regions forming a triangle whose vertices are the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, and finally Libya. For example, Italy is active in the Gulf of Guinea in the fight against piracy and for the protection of energy investments - particularly off the coast of Nigeria. The same applies to the Red Sea where Italy participates in multilateral anti-piracy missions aimed at securing maritime trade. Libya's geographical proximity, economic interests and colonial past make it a special case for Rome. Nowadays, according to Italian policymakers, Libya is at the centre of regional macro-instability.¹

¹ Ministero della Difesa, *Documento Programmatico Pluriennale della Difesa per Il Triennio 2022-2024* (Rome, 2022), https://www.difesa.it/assets/allegati/30714/dpp_2022_2024.pdf (accessed 06 June 2024)

Although it is too early to take stock of the new Italian approach to Africa, there is no doubt that it has gained greater credibility among African countries and international actors than previous policies. The path opened by the Renzi government – and continued by subsequent governments – aims to establish a dynamic, multi-level partnership between Italy and some African countries. At the forefront of Italian policy are selected regions and countries – such as Ghana, Niger, Angola and Mozambique – considered relevant in terms of geo-economic and strategic importance for Italian national interests. Beyond the promotion of national interests, Rome's ambition is to play a role in promoting peace, stability and development on the African continent. Italy has structured its African engagement around four interrelated dimensions or areas of action: political stability and diplomacy; security cooperation; economic growth and human development.

2.1

Diplomacy and Politics

Even during political periods marked by more active foreign policy initiatives – such as during the Craxi (1980s) and Berlusconi (early 2000s) administrations – Italy's relations with the continent remained limited to the Arabic-speaking countries north of the Sahel. Historically, two factors have prevented Italy from developing a comprehensive agenda toward Africa. The first factor relates to Italy's strategic position at the international level. Italy's dual foreign policy orientation (alliances with North American and Western European states) has brought the country many benefits, particularly in terms of security and international status. However, Italian foreign policy has been constrained by the boundaries of the alliance, limiting Italy's ability to act autonomously in neighbouring contexts, such as in Africa.²

The second factor that prevented Italy from becoming more involved in African affairs was its colonial past.³ The ties established during the colonial period have long been a double-edged sword for Italy. While mutual knowledge can facilitate the establishment of new relationships on an equal footing, those same relationships must overcome old grievances and open wounds. For many decades, Italian policy toward Africa has been crippled by the lack of a process to generate awareness of Italian colonialism and its impact on the countries affected by Rome's moves into the continent from 1869 until 1943. Although the Italian presence in the Horn of Africa lasted until 1960, the tendency of Italian politics and public opinion has been to suppress – or at least to omit – the historical colonial period. As a result, the country's

² Osvaldo Croci, “Not a Zero-Sum Game: Atlanticism and Europeanism in Italian Foreign Policy”, *The International Spectator* 43, no. 4 (2008): 137–155

³ Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, “Italy and Africa: How to forget colonialism”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 1 (March 2008): 41–57

establishment, including major parts of its civil society, has failed for many decades to reshape its approach to Africa.

There is a decisive difference between Italy and other European countries with a colonial past. Unlike other countries, Italy had never sent African troops to European fronts, nor had it allowed quotas of immigrants to live in Italy from African territories during the colonial period. As a result, no significant ties were inherited from the former colonies. The only exception was the ten-year trusteeship of Somalia between 1950 and 1960. Thanks to the reconfiguration of bilateral relations, cultural relations between Italy and Somalia rose during this decade. Italy fostered educational cooperation through a series of exchange programs. With ups and downs, cultural relations survived even during the Siad Barre regime. Nonetheless, in the decades following the end of the colonial period, Italian interest in its former possessions, and Africa in general, declined rapidly.

Italian attitudes changed around 2011. Even before the Libyan crisis increased the pressure of migratory flows on its southern shores, Italy had placed the stabilisation of Africa at the top of its political agenda. At the end of the first decade of the 2000s, Italy signed the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation or the Treaty of Benghazi with Libya in 2008. Despite its many grey areas, especially in the fight against illegal migration, the agreement with Gaddafi was crucial in revitalising Italy's role in North Africa. The political significance of the Italo-Libyan agreement was that it provided Rome with a strategic platform to better defend and promote national interests in the Mediterranean and especially in Africa. The long wave of the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent events, including the rebalancing of political power in the wider Mediterranean after 2011, created new international challenges for Italy. Domestically, the rise of new anti-establishment, populist and Eurosceptic forces and the lack of political vision of the traditional parties led Italy to rethink its foreign policy strategy.⁴

In light of this, Italy has changed its strategy since 2015 and launched a revised African agenda. The renewed approach of Italian policy has followed two tracks. On the one hand, Rome has sought to increase and consolidate Italy's contribution to the political and security stabilisation of Africa. On the other hand, the Italian government has worked to internationalise its national economy through an economic approach that has facilitated investment opportunities for Italian companies in Africa.

The new approach marks a break with the past by giving centrality to Africa's practical problems. Italy has focused its efforts on issues such as development cooperation and

⁴ Giovanni Carbone, "Italy's return to Africa: between external and domestic drivers", *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 53, no. 3, (2023): 293–311

the promotion of peace and security on the African continent.⁵ With the support of the EU, Italy has discussed with its African partners the need to adopt a structural and inclusive approach that could promote economic and institutional development. In line with these guidelines, Italy promotes integrated solutions that include investment in the countries of origin and transit of migrants. Rome has also insisted on greater burden-sharing among EU members to ensure the management of migrants and their socio-economic integration in destination countries.

In terms of geographic projection, the Italian agenda has been configured into a triangle (Libya-Gulf of Guinea-Red Sea) along the Horn of Africa and Sahel axis. Besides Libya, the Horn of Africa is a central area of interest. Italy had been present in the region for many years up until 1960. Since around 2011, policy makers in Rome have seen the Horn of Africa as a springboard for extending Italy's commercial and political footprint to Southeast Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean.⁶ While East Africa is a permanent feature of Italian Africa policy due to piracy, combating terrorism and new energy production, the attention paid to West Africa is a novelty. Like its European partners, Italy also considers the Sahel region-especially Niger, Mali and Chad-as the EU's southernmost borders since the collapse of the Libyan regime. The countries of the Sahel belt are crucial in combating the two most important security issues for Rome and Brussels: terrorism and migratory flows.⁷ For this reason, Italy joined the French-led Takuba Task Force by sending two hundred special forces soldiers, twenty ground vehicles and eight helicopters to maintain security in the Liptako-Gourma area, a frontier zone between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.⁸ So far, however, the long-term goals of the Italian initiative in the region have yet to be clarified. While there is no question that Italy has embarked on a new diplomatic course toward the Gulf of Guinea, doubts remain about the nature of this course.⁹

The Italian approach aims to improve the regional security framework and protect national interests on the continent in the medium to long term.¹⁰ This vision has been

⁵ Giuseppe Mistretta, *Africa's pathways. The future of the continent through Europe, Italy, China and New Actors* (Rome, 2021)

⁶ Silvia Strangis, *Italy's Renewed Interest in the Horn of Africa*, IAI Commentaries 22/ 61, (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali [IAI], December 2022), <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/italys-renewed-interest-horn-africa> (accessed 17 December 2022)

⁷ "Difesa, ministro Guerini incontra le autorità della Somalia e di Gibuti", *ANSA* (online), 24 March 2021, https://www.ansa.it/sito/videogallery/italia/2021/03/24/difesa-ministro-guerini-incontra-le-autorita-della-somalia-e-di-gibuti_04352f9a-b1ec-4b60-893c-dd98143aa757.html (accessed 08 April 2024)

⁸ "Mali: il contingente italiano raggiunge la Full Operational Capability (FOC)", *Report Difesa* (online), 15 January 2022, <https://www.reportdifesa.it/mali-il-contingente-italiano-raggiunge-la-full-operational-capability-foc/> (accessed 08 April 2024)

⁹ Mirko Molteni, "Le forze italiane nella task force Takuba mentre il Sahel si tinge di sangue", *Analisi Difesa* (online), 26 March 2021, <https://www.analisedifesa.it/2021/03/le-forze-italiane-nella-task-force-takuba-mentre-il-sahel-si-tinge-di-sangue/> (accessed 08 April 2024)

¹⁰ Giuseppe Dentice and Federico Donelli, "I rapporti Italia-Africa: un partenariato dinamico in un'arena frammentata e multidimensionale", *Africa e Mediterraneo* 28, no. 92-93 (2020): 28-36

confirmed by the Italian government's plan, the Operational Guidelines for Italian Development Cooperation in East Africa.¹¹ Since 2015, Italy has launched a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at helping to boost local economies. Improving general living conditions is seen as one of the best antidotes to the root causes of illegal migration. Such an approach is not without its drawbacks. Many concerns have arisen, particularly about human rights violations and the deprivation many migrants live in, in transit countries.¹²

In 2020, Italy released a new policy document titled the Partnership with Africa amid the pandemic crisis with guidelines for strengthening relations with Africa.¹³ However, the Partnership with Africa document soon became more of a statement of intent than a concrete implementation plan due to a number of factors both inside and outside Italy. The main doubts stem from the consideration that the proactive approach toward Africa appears more as a response to an emergency than as part of a comprehensive strategy for the continent. In general, Italian foreign policy exhibits a number of structural weaknesses such as a tendency to be overly influenced by domestic political moods and changes.¹⁴

2.2

Security Cooperation

Italy's involvement in Africa and African affairs has been limited to multilateral initiatives. The participation in Operation Restore Hope (1992-1995) in Somalia remained the only significant case of intervention in sub-Saharan Africa. Italy's involvement in Somalia has followed the principles adopted by Italy in the post-Cold War context: multilateralism as a framework, sensitivity to crisis resolution through negotiation, focus on the protection and needs of the civilian population and denial or

¹¹ The full text is available at: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI), *Linee operative della cooperazione Italiana allo sviluppo in Africa Orientale* (Rome, June 2014), https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Linee_Operative_Africa_Orientale_2014_06_25.pdf (accessed 05 June 2024)

¹² Martin Baldwin-Edwards and Derek Lutterbeck, "Coping with the Libyan migration crisis", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 12 (2019): 2241-2257

¹³ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI), *Information notice – The Partnership with Africa launch event – 15 December 2020, 11.00 am*, https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/notestampa/2020/12/nota-informativa-evento-di-lancio-de-il-partenariato-con-l-africa-15-dicembre020-ore-11-00/ (accessed 18 December 2022)

¹⁴ Pierangelo Isernia and Francesca Longo, *La politica estera italiana nel nuovo millennio* (Bologna, 2019); Emidio Diodato and Federico Niglia, *L'Italia e la politica internazionale. Dalla grande guerra al (dis-)ordine globale* (Rome, 2019)

concealment of the military aspects of its presence.¹⁵ Italy has participated in international anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, supported the complicated Somali institution-building process and focused its efforts in the fight against faith-based terrorism in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. In Somalia, Rome failed to pursue its strategy of reunification around the capital, Mogadishu. The decision to act cautiously forced Italy to follow the line of other European countries and it was quickly overtaken on the ground by new extra-regional players such as Turkey and the Gulf monarchies.

Since 2015, Italy has gradually increased its security cooperation with several African countries. Italian governments have welcomed any attempt to combat illegal migration, supporting cross-border operations led by European forces (in Niger and Chad). At the same time, Rome has developed bilateral agreements with African partners and ramped up cooperation with the African Union on the return of migrants. Italy has grown the resources devoted to working with African governments who appear to be fragile. States such as Somalia, Mali and South Sudan have weak institutions, are plagued by domestic crises, repressive political regimes and widespread corruption.¹⁶

In addition to important institutional and economic development plans, Italy is strengthening its security structures. Carabinieri units—the gendarmerie of Italy—are involved in training the security forces of many African states (e.g. Somalia, Niger, Namibia, Uganda, Djibouti and Rwanda) in specific stability-building programs.¹⁷ The U.S.-funded Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU) has become a flagship for training police forces in post-conflict scenarios. Buttressing the institutional and security structures of African countries is one of the objectives of the Italian agenda. While the migration issue remains central to Italy's Africa policy, another area related to the security dimension is Rome's role in anti-piracy and anti-terrorism operations in the Red Sea. Italy's involvement has grown over the years in international missions led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO (Ocean Shield) or the European Union (EUCAP Nestor, EUNAVFOR Atalanta, and EUTM-Somalia).

¹⁵ Fabrizio Coticchia and Andrea Ruggeri, *An International Peacekeeper. The Evolution of Italian Foreign and Defence Policy*, IAI Papers 22/06 (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali [IAI], April 2022), <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/international-peacekeeper-evolution-italian-foreign-and-defence-policy> (accessed 18 December 2022)

¹⁶ Giuseppe Dentice and Federico Donelli, “Reasserting (middle) power by looking southwards: Italy’s policy toward Africa”, *Contemporary Italian Politics* 13, no. 3 (2021): 331–351

¹⁷ Ministero della Difesa, *Missione in Somalia: i Carabinieri formano la Polizia somala* (Rome, February 2019), [https://www.stelladitalianews.com/ultima-ora/2019/02/27/77232_missione-in-somalia-i-carabinieri-formano-la-polizia-somala/#:~:text=MISSIONE%20IN%20SOMALIA%20I%20CARABINIERI%20FORMANO%20LA%20POLIZIA%20SOMALA,-Scritto%20da%20Redazione&text=Con%20l'avvicinamento%20degli%20Ufficiali,Somala%20\(Somali%20Police%20Force\)](https://www.stelladitalianews.com/ultima-ora/2019/02/27/77232_missione-in-somalia-i-carabinieri-formano-la-polizia-somala/#:~:text=MISSIONE%20IN%20SOMALIA%20I%20CARABINIERI%20FORMANO%20LA%20POLIZIA%20SOMALA,-Scritto%20da%20Redazione&text=Con%20l'avvicinamento%20degli%20Ufficiali,Somala%20(Somali%20Police%20Force)) (accessed 18 December 2022)

Rome's involvement in multilateral missions has allowed Italy to develop trust-based relationships at various levels of cooperation with other international actors and with African local and regional authorities. In October 2013, the Italian Armed Forces established a military base in Djibouti to consolidate its presence in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa region. Located in an area that is a strategic crossroads for shipping lanes, the Italian Military Support Base (BMIS)–known as the Amedeo Guillet base–provides logistical support to national assets passing through the territory of Djibouti and to those involved in operations in the Somali region.¹⁸ Currently, the maximum annual quota authorised by Italy for the national contingent deployed in the mission is 117 military personnel and 18 land vehicles.¹⁹

The Italian military training facility, the Guillet base, is a few kilometres from Djibouti City and is used to train local forces and some Somali units, as provided for in the military cooperation agreements between Italy and both Djibouti and Somalia. Italian cooperation with local and extra-regional partners is also good at the intelligence level. The episode of the kidnapping of the aid worker Silvia Romano was emblematic of this partnership. The Italian aid worker was kidnapped by al-Shabaab militias on Kenyan territory. Her release was made possible by the cooperation of three intelligence services: the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MIT), the Italian Foreign Intelligence and Security Agency (Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Esterna, AISE) and the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (Hay'ada Sirdoonka iyo Nabadsugida Qaranka, NISA). Italy's lack of a grassroots network was provided by Turkey which has gained an increasingly influential position in Somalia and a close relationship with NISA. Turkish intelligence capabilities on the ground facilitated the operation that led to Silvia Romano's release. Romano's release demonstrated the ability of Italian intelligence to cooperate and coordinate with the intelligence services of other external actors. However, the episode also revealed Italy's limited operational power on the ground, highlighting the need for greater intelligence cooperation with local networks.²⁰

¹⁸ Parlamento Italiano, *La base militare nazionale nella Repubblica di Gibuti (Missione della Commissione Difesa 10-11 febbraio 2020)*, Dossier no. 98 (Rome, February 2020), <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/DIO229.pdf> (accessed 18 December 2022)

¹⁹ Parlamento Italiano, *Authorisation and extension of international missions in 2022*, (Rome, August 2022), https://temi.camera.it/leg18/temi/autorizzazione-e-proroga-missioni-internazionali-ultimo-trimestre-2019_d_d_d.html (accessed 18 December 2022)

²⁰ Brendon J. Cannon and Federico Donelli, *Turkey's Involvement in the Release of Silvia Romano in Somalia. The role of secret services* (Milan: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale [ISPI], May 2020), <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/turkeys-involvement-release-silvia-romano-somalia-26310> (accessed 18 December 2022)

2.3

Economic Dimension

While security stabilisation is one of the pillars of the Italian agenda in Africa, economic and trade interests remain one of the main drivers of Italy's foreign policy actions. Increasing political engagement in Africa primarily supports economic interests to create new partnerships and strengthen old ones. The momentum to expand its presence in Africa came, not by chance, at the beginning of the new millennium's second decade.

For many years, the Italian agenda toward African states had been characterised by reduced economic and political interest. The Middle East was the main target of Italian efforts in the Mediterranean. As a result, Italy's Africa program was constrained. Between 2008 and 2011, two events helped reawaken Italian interest in Africa. The first was the 2008 global financial crisis which forced Italian companies to diversify their markets. These companies—which were mainly oriented toward Asia and the Middle East—began to observe the growth rates of some African countries with interest. Italy, like other European and non-European states, sought new economic opportunities and greater diversification of its markets. Geographic proximity also facilitated access to the African market which was seen by stakeholders in Rome as possessing exponential growth opportunities.

In 2011, with the instability caused by the Arab uprisings in North Africa, the growing economic interest coincided with political concerns. The institutional crises in Tunisia and Egypt and the civil war in Libya heightened Italian fears of increased migratory flows and the threat of faith-based terrorism. The two events thus created both an opportunity and a need for Rome to become more engaged and committed to Africa.

The economic dimension of Italy's relations with Africa has grown, starting with the consolidation of relations with regions and partners such as the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia. The Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and the Rome-based agency Insurance and Financial Services for Enterprises (SACE) have played important roles in this area. SACE is a joint stock company controlled by the MEF that specialises in insurance and financial sectors. Several targeted investments in the Horn of Africa have complemented Italian cooperation and development assistance. In 2017–2018, Italy allocated more than \$89 million for humanitarian and development aid to Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, and granted more than \$52 million in aid credits to the latter.²¹

²¹ Umberto De Giovannangeli, “Etiopia, la pace si fa Nobel. E investe sul futuro”, *Oltremare – Agenzia Italiana Cooperazione allo Sviluppo* (online), November 2019,

SACE has also increased the budget for Italian companies operating in the region. The Italian political and business establishment sees investment in the Horn of Africa as a key factor in stabilising the region and increasing the volume of trade.²² The major Italian companies, which have long been present in Africa, are the driving force behind the expansion of Italy's economic presence. In the infrastructure sector, the former Salini-Impregilo (now Webuild) is working on the development of two large dams, the Gibe III on the Omo River and the controversial Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile. Finally, the launch of the European Global Gateway program opens new opportunities for Italian companies engaged in large-scale construction and transportation.

The energy sector—a traditional driver of Italian foreign policy—is also an important part of the African agenda. Italian interest in Africa's natural resources grew after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the outbreak of the conflict, Italy imported 38 per cent of its gas from Russia, about 29 billion cubic metres per year. As a result, the government of then Prime Minister Mario Draghi launched a plan to diversify energy suppliers. Italy generally—and supermajor oil company Eni SpA (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) in particular—is looking to Africa. In Africa, Eni is a leader in both production and reserves of energy sources. With the Transmed pipeline, Algeria is Italy's second-largest gas importer. In January 2023, the two countries signed a new agreement in Algiers that will increase the quota to 9 billion cubic metres per year by 2024.²³

While Algeria and Libya (via GreenStream) remain the leading African suppliers, Eni is also focusing on sub-Saharan countries. Italy wants to revive the trans-Saharan gas pipeline project, known as Nigal precisely because it would run from Nigeria to Algeria. The project would cost about \$14 billion. If built, it could transport about 30 billion cubic metres a year.²⁴ The main concern is political instability and the presence of terrorist groups in the areas through which the pipeline will pass. The sub-Saharan region is therefore the most promising in the eyes of the Italian establishment.

So far, Eni's main hubs are in Congo, Angola, Nigeria and Mozambique. In March, Eni signed an energy joint venture agreement with the Angolan government to produce raw materials and promote investments in renewable energy.²⁵ Angola and Nigeria are

<https://www.aics.gov.it/oltremare/articoli/pace/etiopia-la-pace-si-fa-nobel-e-investe-sul-futuro/> (accessed 19 December 2022)

²² Giuseppe Dentice and Federico Donelli, (2020): 28–36

²³ “Algeria becomes Italy's biggest gas supplier in new €4bn deal to reduce Russian dependency”, *Euronews AFP* (online), 18 July 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/07/18/italys-draghi-visits-algeria-for-gas-talks-while-political-crisis-continues-at-home> (accessed 19 December 2022)

²⁴ Mauro Giansante, “Algeri vuole il supporto di Roma per il gasdotto Trans Sahariano (Nigal)”, *Energia Oltre* (online), 22 April 2022, <https://energiaoltre.it/algeri-vuole-il-supporto-di-roma-per-la-trans-sahariana-nigal/> (accessed 19 December 2022)

²⁵ Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (Eni), *Eni and bp finalise agreement to create new independent joint venture in Angola*, Press Release (Rome: Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi [Eni], 11 March 2022)

likely to be countries where Italy's strategic interests meet or collide with those of Turkey. The energy dimension is a priority for both Mediterranean nations' African agendas. The common interest in the natural resources of Angola and Nigeria could set the stage for increased competition and, possibly, cooperation.

Italy is well aware that it has a significant advantage over Turkey in terms of expertise and know-how in the energy sector. Italian companies do not see Turkey and Turkish companies as competitors. On the other hand, Turkey can use some of its leverage with many African countries to negotiate more smoothly. In addition, Turkey's many investments in the defence and security sector could strengthen the stability of some countries of Italian interest.

Looking at the Horn of Africa, many experts project the region to become Africa's oil region and a shining frontier in the oil and gas market. South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda hold 10.8 billion barrels of oil with more barrels expected as new blocks are explored.²⁶ Recent discoveries of oil and gas fields off the coast of Kenya and Somalia have put the region in the spotlight. The discoveries have attracted energy companies from around the world, raising the level of geopolitical competition in the area. Rome's initiatives in the coming months could aim to defuse the competition with Italian companies signing mutually beneficial contracts with the African countries interested in the exploitation of energy resources.

Some Italian companies have already explored opportunities in the region, particularly in the context of the transition to clean energy. Enel Green Power (Enel) has made significant investments in the construction of solar and wind power plants in the Ethiopian towns of Metehara, Humera and Mekele.²⁷ To date, Enel has 16 plants, both wind and solar, on the African continent. The Italian energy company holds major concessions in Kenya—currently with three offshore platforms in the Lamu Basin and a sustainability project.²⁸ There are also many Italian interests in northern Mozambique. As in Ethiopia, the ongoing insurgency in Mozambique's Cape Delgado province has temporarily halted the implementation of several Italian projects. The role of Eni and Enel in the energy sector is driving other major Italian companies that are committed to reconfiguring their investments, such as the renewable energy company ERG. The ERG group, one of the leading players in the oil market until 2008, has radically changed its business portfolio by making clean energy its core market.

<https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2022/03/eni-bp-finalise-agreement-create-new-independent-joint-venture-angola.html> (accessed 19 December 2022)

²⁶ Luke Patey, *A Belated Boom: Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, and prospects and risks for oil in East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2017), <https://a9w7k6q9.stackpathcdn.com/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/A-Belated-Boom-Uganda-Kenya-South-Sudan-and-prospects-and-risks-for-oil-in-East-Africa-WPM-71.pdf> (accessed 19 December 2022)

²⁷ "Etiopia: Enel investe nel solare", *Energia Oltre* (online), 23 October 2017, <https://energiaoltre.it/etiopia-enel-investe-nel-solare/> (accessed 19 December 2022)

²⁸ "Etiopia", *ENEL* (online), 2021, <https://www.enelgreenpower.com/it/paesi/africa/etiopia> (accessed 19 December 2022)

ERG's new clean energy vision is part of a trend among all major Italian energy companies toward the development of green energy. For this reason, Italy is a candidate to become one of the leading players in the renewable energy sector on the African continent.

Italian trade with Africa increased significantly in 2022, reaching \$75 billion. Comparatively, the Italian-African trade is higher than that of France (\$74 billion) and Germany (\$66.1 billion). The expansion of energy imports has driven this growth. The energy diversification after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine even doubled the imports from African countries to Italy - rising from \$26.5 billion (in 2021) to \$52 billion (in 2022). This amount is much higher than France's (\$43 billion) and Germany's (\$37 billion). In addition to the traditional North African suppliers (Algeria, Libya, and Egypt), imports also increased from sub-Saharan countries such as Angola, Gabon, Ghana, Mozambique, and Congo.

Apart from these considerations, overall Italian exports to Africa have also grown, reaching a record \$23.5 billion. However, the growth is minimal considering that in 2012 it was already at \$21 billion. Exports are dominated by capital goods, in particular mechanics, electrical equipment and pharmaceuticals. Africa plays a minor role in Italian exports, accounting for only 3.4 per cent. There is enormous untapped potential for growth especially in some sectors that have only recently opened up to Africa, such as the agri-food sector. Finally, Italian investment in Africa is a controversial data point. According to statistics, Italy has played a leading role. In 2015, it was the top investor overall with \$7.4 billion (10.4 per cent of total Direct Foreign Investment (FDI) in Africa that year). In 2016, Italy was the leading European investor. However, the figures are partly cooked by individual projects in capital-intensive sectors, notably oil and gas. The most recent data in 2021 show a decline in Italian FDI in Africa at around \$1.1 billion.²⁹

2.4

Humanitarian and Development Aid

The approach of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) aims to go beyond the traditional donor-beneficiary relationship typical of many extra-regional actors. Instead, Italy wants to build new relationships and partnerships based on sharing.³⁰ The spirit of sharing that conceptually drives Italian policy toward Africa has several similarities with the Turkish approach, at least in

²⁹ Massimo Zaurrini, *Commercio, investimenti e presenza economica italiana in Africa: come sta cambiando?* (Milan: Istituto di Studi di Politica Internazionale [ISPI], July 2023), <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/commercio-investimenti-e-presenza-economica-italiana-in-africa-come-sta-cambiando-135205> (accessed 04 September 2023)

³⁰ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI), 2020

theory. Turkey also markets itself to African countries by emphasising the horizontality of its relations and attitudes. In other words, with many differences, both countries want to avoid feeding the old dependency of African countries on Western states.

However, Italy faces several challenges compared to Turkey. The first and most important is the failure to operate as a system-country (*sistema paese*). The system-country concept refers to the promotion abroad of the country as a whole by a variety of actors, public and private, national and local; acting in a complementary manner as an organic body. On paper, a specific directorate of the MAECI called the *Direzione Generale per la promozione del Sistema Paese* supports internationalisation while trying to maintain the overall consistency of the country's promotion, support and enhancement activities abroad.

In practice, however, Italy's lack of coordination among the many initiatives undertaken by public and private actors on the continent drastically reduces the potential to capitalise on efforts at the national level. Moreover, Italy's ambitious and innovative agenda for Africa collides with the reality of a country whose foreign policy has traditionally been bound by a variety of internal and external constraints. External constraints and domestic instability are responsible for Italy's delay in capitalising on opportunities compared to other European countries and other extra-regional actors active in Africa. Contrasted against traditional powers such as France or Germany and emerging powers (China, India and Turkey), Italy is a declining middle power in the international arena.³¹

With the launch of a new agenda for Africa in 2015, Rome has placed a greater focus on aid. This new emphasis on development cooperation and humanitarian aid has led to the restructuring of the national institutional framework. The 125 law of 2014 ratified the birth of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS). The AICS is a public body with legal autonomy regarding regulations, administration, assets, organisation, accounting and budgetary oversight under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' supervision.³² AICS coordinates projects with other government agencies, the European Union and its institutions and relevant international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). AICS carries out development cooperation initiatives, protection of the most vulnerable (unaccompanied minors or victims of human trafficking) and training programs for local border and judicial authorities. AICS also provides equipment and tools for monitoring and preventing migratory flows. The Italian agency carries out prevention and information campaigns. It

³¹ Giulio Levorato and Federico Donelli, *Undoing the Liberal versus Illiberal Peacebuilding Dichotomy*, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 2024, doi: 10.1080/17502977.2023.2295321

³² Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, *Profile and Goals* (Rome: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione), <https://www.aics.gov.it/home-ita/agenzia/profilo/> (accessed 19 December 2022)

provides operational know-how to local authorities to jointly combat migration phenomena.

Along with AICS, another Italian institution has seen a significant increase in its functions and resources devoted to Africa in recent years: the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP). CDP is an Italian financial institution in the form of a joint stock company. About 83 per cent of CDP is controlled by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and about 16 per cent is controlled by several banking foundations. Since the launch of the new policy toward Africa, CDP has expanded its annual budget for investment in the continent through innovative loans, actions and financing to revitalise public perception of the country.

Further evidence of the importance Italy attaches to cooperation is the change in the name of the Ministry. In 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (or again the MAECI). Since 2017, Italy has established the National Fund for Africa (FA) to strengthen its efforts to promote capacity building in African countries. Established by the 2017 Finance Act, the Italian Fund enjoys a supplementary financial budget in addition to funds provided for ordinary development cooperation activities.

3.

Italian-Turkish Relations

Italy and Turkey share a long history of friendship and cordial relations. Italian-Turkish relations date back to 1923, when Italy was the second country to recognise the newly established Turkish Republic. In the decades following World War II, good diplomatic relations and NATO membership cemented the friendship between the two countries.³³

Over the past two decades, Turkey's emergence as an increasingly active player in the wider Mediterranean region has led to misunderstandings and minor friction with Italy. Looking into the future of bilateral relations between Rome and Ankara, it is possible to distinguish two main trends.

The first is the long-term trend which has generally coloured the relationship over the past one hundred years. This long-term trend has been characterised by a balanced partnership that is only marginally affected by political changes in either country. This trend is indicative of the excellent trade relations between Rome and Ankara. Italy is Turkey's second-largest European trading partner.³⁴ In 2022, the Italy-Turkey bilateral trade reached \$25.2 billion, behind only the Germany-Turkey trade of \$57 billion. As Italy is the fourth largest economy in Europe (behind Germany, France and the United Kingdom) the amount of trade between Ankara and Rome is impressive and indicative of the long-standing economic relationship-and subsequent realpolitik-based commercial links-between the two Mediterranean nations.

The second trend is characterised by a high degree of political inconsistency related primarily to the past two decades. The apparent irreconcilability of their mutual strategic interests at times has led Italy and Turkey into phases of competition. In this second trend the Rome-Ankara relationship has taken on an almost disjointed character in which the two countries seem to be moving away from a balanced

³³ Carlo Marsili, *I rapporti bilaterali Italia-Turchia* (Rome: Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, June 2019) https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/apr_2_marsili_italia-turchia.pdf (accessed 12 December 2022)

³⁴ "Italia-Turchia, 2022 da record con 25 mld dollari interscambio", *ANSA* (online), 16 December 2022, https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/news_dalle_ambasciate/2022/12/16/italia-turchia-2022-da-record-con-25-mld-dollari-interscambio_38767386-3ba1-40ff-a930-39925736ca4e.html (accessed 19 December 2022)

partnership and turning toward strategic rivalry.

Competition between Italy and Turkey has played out in two main interrelated areas: Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁵ Rome has gradually changed its position on the Libyan dossier since the beginning of 2019, following the conference on the future of Libya organised by the Conte government in Palermo during the fall of 2018. Further, Italy's lukewarm reaction to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's attack on Tripoli provided an opportunity for Turkey to move closer to the Government of National Accord (GNA). While formally supporting the GNA, Italy sought a complicated balancing act with the Tobruk government by strengthening ties with Haftar. As a result, Rome gradually aligned itself with the French and Greek positions in order not to be diplomatically side lined. Meanwhile in 2019, Turkey took advantage of a shift in Italy's political orientation to intervene in support of the GNA led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. Since then, Ankara has been a key player in Libya's future.

Despite these disagreements in 2022, there has been a growing dialogue between Italy and Turkey to find common solutions for Libya and the greater Eastern Mediterranean. During the last two years, there have been several bilateral meetings at both the ministerial and informal levels. New arenas have opened up where Rome and Ankara are both present and seeking to increase their presence, such as the Horn of Africa. Turkey's activity in the Horn and Italy's various attempts to reformulate its political agenda toward Africa have created a context in which the two countries are taking action on the continent.

3.1 The Economic Dimension

Similar to other European countries, Italian-Turkish relations have a multidimensional nature. Undoubtedly, the main asset of bilateral relations is the economic dimension. As mentioned earlier, Italy remains one of Turkey's most important trading partners and foreign investors. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Italian direct investment in Turkey reached \$578 million and exports exceeded \$11 billion. The uncertainties resulting from the global pandemic crisis had an impact during the 2020-2021 biennium as Italian exports to Turkey first slowed and then declined. Despite the inter- and post-pandemic challenges, trade between the two countries in 2021 was about \$20.9 billion with a positive trade balance for Turkey-\$10

³⁵ Federico Donelli, *Partner o rivali? L'altalenante rapporto tra la Turchia e l'Italia* (Rome: Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale del Parlamento, October 2022), <https://www.geopolitica.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/La-proiezione-esterna-della-Turchia-di-Erdogan.-Tra-ambizioni-internazionali-e-consolidamento-della-politica-regionale.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2022)

billion in exports and \$10.8 billion in imports.³⁶ Given the significant trade between the two countries, the current growth trend (+9.7 per cent) in trade is expected to increase in the coming years. According to the Trade Italian Agency (or ICE Agenzia), Turkey is among the top ten countries in the world where Italian exports are expected to expand the most. The two countries aim to gradually grow trade to \$30 billion in the coming years.³⁷

On the sidelines of his visit to Ankara in 2022, former Prime Minister Mario Draghi repeatedly stressed that the economy could be the driving force for strengthening bilateral relations. However, this requires that both countries implement joint policies to create and stimulate closer and more comprehensive economic and trade cooperation. In particular, Italy and Turkey should help to create a more flexible and accessible regulatory, bureaucratic and financial environment for businesses in both countries. This is a commitment that Italian leadership, led by Mario Draghi, has shown itself willing to make. So far, the government of the new prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, has made no clear move. However, Meloni's government could follow in the footsteps of its predecessor.

The industrial structure of the two countries is similar. Both are characterised by large companies, some of which are partially or formerly state-owned and by a cosmos of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)-some of which are still family-owned. The increase in the activities of Italian companies in Turkey and their relations with their Turkish counterparts are mainly the result of face-to-face business initiatives. Regardless of the support provided by consular offices, business associations and chambers of commerce, Turkish-Italian economic relations are almost always driven by interpersonal business relations.

More than 1,500 Italian companies operating on Anatolian soil have taken advantage of the receptiveness of Turkish companies. The latter have long been seeking new foreign investments and partnership opportunities for know-how transfer. Italian companies, on the other hand, see partnerships with Turkish firms as a means to access new markets and lower labour costs for production. Lower labour costs are particularly relevant because it has created a model of interaction. This pattern of Turkish-Italian business interaction is also emerging in foreign contexts, such as Africa, giving rise to bottom-up cooperative phenomena in which employees give feedback on the goals and daily tasks of companies. Italian companies operating directly or through joint ventures in Turkey are active in the defence, manufacturing, automotive, digitalisation, infrastructure development, banking and energy sectors.

³⁶ Governo Italiano, *Info Mercati Esteri, Osservatorio Economico Scambi Commerciali (TURCHIA)* (Rome: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale [MAECI]), https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/scambi_commerciali.php?id_paesi=95# (accessed 22 November 2022)

³⁷ Italian Trade Agency (ICE), *Le relazioni commerciali tra Italia e Turchia* (Rome, November 2022), <https://www.ice.it/it> (accessed 22 November 2022)

3.2

The Political Dimension

While economic and trade relations constitute the fundamental part of Italian-Turkish bilateral relations, the political dimension has tended to generate misunderstandings. Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Ankara in 2002, Italian-Turkish relations have gone from periods of closeness to estrangement and friction. In the past two decades, the Italian foreign ministry has at times cooled relations with Ankara all the while maintaining the cordiality needed to increase and continue trade. Two issues constitute the nerve of bilateral contention: Turkey's democratic backsliding and Ankara's adoption of a foreign policy that is less subordinated to the logic of the European-Atlantic alliance. These factors have manifested themselves in critical moments. One example was the dispatch of Turkish military vessels to disrupt Eni's partially-owned company Saipem's natural gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean in February 2018.³⁸ Another example was after the press conference of former Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi in April 2021, when Draghi labelled Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a dictator. Yet, even in times of political tension, diplomatic, economic, cultural and people-to-people relations between Italy and Turkey have continued without significant damage.

The erosion of democratic institutions has marked the domestic political environment in Turkey over the past decade.³⁹ In Italy, the mainstream media report extensively on Erdoğan's political actions and domestic developments in Turkey. Italian public opinion is critical of Turkey, as Turkey is almost exclusively identified with its president. Cross-cutting, Italian parties are inconsistent in dealing with Erdogan. They usually criticise him in public speeches for his authoritarian methods and strong appeal to religious (Islamic) principles. This trend is mainly driven by the Italian public's image of the Turkish president. Indeed, there is widespread nostalgia for a Turkey ruled by the secular and Kemalist establishment, although little is known about this reality.

For left-wing voters, Erdogan is an authoritarian leader who suppresses the rights of the opposition by cracking down on specific groups such as Kurds and LGBTQ. The right-wing electorate, on the other hand, is suspicious of the religious identity of Erdogan and his party. Specifically, they see him as a leader who wants to Islamise the country by creating a kind of Islamic republic or aimed at protecting terrorist groups. However, official statements are often at odds with political attitudes. Whatever the rhetoric of the Italian parties, they actually have a cordial and pragmatic approach to

³⁸ Michele Kambas, "Standoff in High Seas as Cyprus Says Turkey Blocks Gas Drill Ship", *Reuters* (online), 11 February 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1FV0X4/> (accessed 20 December 2022)

³⁹ Sinem Adar and Günter Seufert, *Turkey's Presidential System after Two and a Half Years* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], October 2021), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021RP02/> (accessed 19 December 2022)

Turkey, considering the Eastern Mediterranean nation an indispensable partner with many common interests.⁴⁰

Although all the Italian political parties have criticised the Turkish regime in their official statements, Italy, like other European countries, has adopted a double-track policy. On one hand, there are continuous statements and initiatives in support of freedoms and the protection of human rights in Turkey.⁴¹ One of the most recent examples was the request made to the European Commission by several Italian members of the European Parliament regarding student protests at Boğaziçi University, one of Turkey's leading universities.⁴² In particular, Italian civil society groups are working to raise the Italian public's awareness regarding challenging conditions which confront Turkey's academics, journalists and Kurdish community.

On the other hand, at the official level, a new approach to Turkey has grown over time. The Italian government, under first Draghi and later Meloni, has adopted a pragmatic and interest-oriented approach toward Turkey. Emblematic of this policy is the EU-Turkey migration deal. Initially signed in 2016, the agreement has been the subject of constant tension and criticism. The EU-Turkey deal has proven to be an effective tool in stemming the flow of refugees into Europe.⁴³ In recent years, Italian governments have not stopped cultivating interpersonal ties and promoting mutual relations through cultural diplomacy tools, such as the publications promoted by the Italian Cultural Institute in Istanbul.⁴⁴

Over the past decade, a new, more aggressive foreign policy approach from Ankara has coincided with Turkey's domestic lockdowns. From 2017 to 2022, Turkey adopted a muscular and interventionist foreign policy in which hard power has taken precedence over soft power. Currently, Turkey is militarily engaged on several fronts.⁴⁵ The most significant tensions with Italy arose in Libya. While its strategic

⁴⁰ Federico Donelli, Explaining the Role of Intervening Variables in Turkey's Foreign Policy Behaviour, *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 6, (2020): 223-257

⁴¹ Parlamento Italiano, *Commissione Straordinaria per la Tutela e la Promozione dei Diritti Umani* (Rome, 2012), <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/288928.pdf> (accessed 22 November 2022)

⁴² By spreading critical information about the Turkish government to the Turkish people, the Italian Cultural Institute in Istanbul supports the European Parliament's *Situazione dei diritti umani in Turchia*, Strasbourg: European Parliament published in February 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-000994_IT.html (22 November 2022)

⁴³ Luca Barana, *UE-Turchia 5 anni dopo: un bilancio controverso sul dossier migranti* (Rome: Affari Internazionali [AI], March 2021), <https://www.archivio-affarinternazionali.it/archivio/2021/03/ue-turchia-5-anni-dopo-migranti/> (accessed 22 November 2022); Daniele Albanese, *The Renewal of the EU-Turkey Migration Deal* (Milan: Istituto di Studi di Politica Internazionale [ISPI], May 2021), <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/renewal-eu-turkey-migration-deal-30509> (accessed 22 November 2022)

⁴⁴ "Le edizioni dell'Istituto di cultura italiana di Istanbul", *ANSA* (online), 06 April 2023, https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/news_dagli_istituti_di_cultura/2023/04/06/le-edizioni-dellistituto-di-cultura-italiana-di-istanbul_75286ac1-056c-48b8-8359-d8a15df96d2b.html (accessed 23 May 2023)

⁴⁵ Sinem Adar, Hürcan Aslı Aksoy, Salim Çevik, Daria Isachenko, Moritz Rau and Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, *Visualizing Turkey's Foreign Policy Activism* (Berlin: Centre for Applied Turkey Studies [CATS], 20

interests in the country differ from those of Italy, the two countries have recently found a point of convergence in Libya's stabilisation.⁴⁶ However, the Libyan framework is volatile and difficult to decipher.

August 2021), <https://www.cats-network.eu/topics/visualizing-turkeys-foreign-policy-activism> (accessed 22 March 2022)

⁴⁶ “Draghi: Italia e Turchia partner, amici, alleati. Erdogan: firmati 9 accordi con l’Italia”, *Il Sole 24ore* (online), 05 July 2022, <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/draghi-italia-e-turchia-partner-amici-alleati-Erdogan-firmati-9-accordi-l-italia-AEh9nNkB> (accessed 22 November 2022)

4.

Competition or Convergence in Africa

It is difficult to assess Italy's Africa policy only a few months into the new legislature. On several official occasions, however, the new Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has emphasised the centrality of Italy's African foreign policy. Behind the current PM's policy is the conviction that countering migration flows should include interventions to improve living conditions in the countries from which migrants come. Migration is a sensitive issue for Meloni's political party (Brothers of Italy) and her constituency. For this reason, Africa unexpectedly found a place in the inaugural speech of the new government. Prime Minister Meloni stressed the need for Italy to promote a Mattei Plan⁴⁷ for Africa.⁴⁸ According to Meloni, Italy should be at the forefront of European action toward Africa, promoting a virtuous model of cooperation and growth between the EU and African nations. According to the new Prime Minister, a commitment to Africa would allow Italy to regain its strategic role in the Mediterranean and on the international stage.⁴⁹

The Prime Minister's reference to Enrico Mattei, the businessman who played a key role in the growth of AGIP (now Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi, Eni), is no coincidence. AGIP established a more horizontal relationship, especially with (North) African countries whose resources were undervalued by the major oil companies. Enrico Mattei wanted to develop Africa's resources by allowing the continent to exploit its growth potential.

The Mattei Plan, drawn up by the current Italian government, has a long-term objective: to transfer part of Italian industry's production to Africa in order to reduce

⁴⁷ From 1953 to 1962, Enrico Mattei (1906–1962) was the head of Eni SpA (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi; “National Hydrocarbons Authority”), which had authority over Italy's petroleum resources. To secure Italy's foreign oil supplies, Mattei initiated innovative partnerships with the governments of Egypt and Iran.

⁴⁸ “Meloni: Promuovere un 'Piano Mattei' per l'Africa”, *Rainews 24* (online), 25 October 2022, <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2022/10/meloni-promuovere-un-piano-mattei-per-lafrica-5e46b0f7-6a2a-4795-b70a-fb4bc57add81.html> (accessed 28 November 2022)

⁴⁹ Valentina Iorio, “Il «piano Mattei per l'Africa»: cosa prevedeva la dottrina del fondatore dell'Eni”, *Corriere della Sera* (online), 04 December 2022, https://www.corriere.it/economia/aziende/22_dicembre_04/piano-mattei-l-africa-cosa-prevedeva-dottrina-fondatore-dell-eni-b4b39738-73ab-11ed-ab35-a2ab0487d524.shtml (accessed 19 December 2022)

the reasons for emigration. To this end, it is essential to ensure the stability of African states, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, regardless of the nature of the regime. Statewide collapse in African nations not only generates instability and increases migratory flows, but also deprives European actors of interlocutors with whom they can plan long-term development.

Meloni's idea and her government's new policy is to set up a non-predatory model of cooperation in which both partners must be able to grow and improve.⁵⁰ In order to gain the trust of the countries of origin and transit of migrants, it is necessary to establish genuine partnership relations. This requires increasing technological cooperation and promoting the transfer of production. The idea of the Mattei Plan is to reduce Africa's rentier economy as much as possible. In other words, Africa must be able to produce and process its raw materials.⁵¹ The Meloni government argues that the Italian-African partnership must converge in some key sectors, such as construction, tourism, agribusiness and energy.

Although it does not emerge explicitly from the interviews, some conversations with diplomatic interviewees reveal how the Italian cooperation model pursued by the new Meloni government resembles the concepts emphasised by Turkey. This non-predatory cooperation has many elements in common with the Turkish approach to Africa. In the Turkish case, horizontality is meant to distinguish itself from the approach of other traditional (Western countries) and non-traditional (China, India) extra-regional actors. Italy has been trying to reconfigure its relationship with Africa for a decade and for some Rome-based policymakers the horizontal actions of Ankara indicate new models for Italy to try in Africa.

The first steps of the new government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni have been focused on North Africa. At the forefront of Italian concerns are the two issues that are most relevant in the eyes of the public: energy and migration flows. In line with the Draghi administration, the new Meloni government considers Algeria a key country for the diversification of energy sources and the stability of neighbouring Tunisia.⁵²

The Meloni-led state has established a relationship with Algiers that goes beyond energy. Diplomatic reverberations from the Abraham Accords—the normalisation agreements between Israel and several Arab states—have complexified Algeria's relationship with Morocco. Rabat has come out in favour while Algiers is

⁵⁰ “Meloni: a ottobre presentiamo il Piano Mattei per l’Africa”, *Il Sole 24ore* (online), 14 April 2023, <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/meloni-ottobre-presentiamo-piano-mattei-l-africa-AE9jBYHD> (accessed 05 May 2022)

⁵¹ Mario Giro, *Gestire le migrazioni: il “Piano Mattei” e la sfida della governance* (Milan: Institute for International Political Studies [ISPI], July 2023), <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/gestire-le-migrazioni-il-piano-mattei-e-la-sfida-della-governance-135201> (accessed 02 September 2023)

⁵² Dario Cristiani and Karim Mezran, *Perché Italia e Algeria sono due alleati chiave nel Mediterraneo* (Rome: Affari Internazionali [AI], February 2023), <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/perche-italia-e-algeria-sono-due-alleati-chiave-nel-mediterraneo/> (accessed 04 April 2023)

intransigently opposed to the accords. Algiers' position threatens to isolate the country.⁵³ Such an eventuality could risk pushing Algeria and Tunisia closer to countries unfriendly to the West, such as Russia.

Prime Minister Meloni's recent visit to Algiers was intended to ensure that Algeria does not feel isolated. Italy wants to present itself as a reliable and important partner for Algeria in Europe and the West in general.⁵⁴ If Algeria is a crucial actor in ensuring stability in Tunisia, Turkey is seen as a necessary stakeholder in Libya. The Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani's trip to Ankara sought to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly on security and migrant issues.⁵⁵ On the future of Libya and migrants, the two countries could further improve their cooperation in the coming months. The Italian government supports Turkey's role as a mediator in Libya, the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Balkans.

Regarding energy issues, both countries share the ambition to become energy hubs: Italy as the hub of Southern Europe and Turkey as the hub of the Eastern Mediterranean. In general, the two plans are alternatives and compete with each other. However, both countries have expressed their willingness to address and cooperate on the issue. Moreover, they do not exclude the possibility of connecting the Italian and Turkish energy hubs. Indeed, Italy could become the destination for gas from the south (Algeria, Libya),⁵⁶ while Turkey could be a processor of gas coming from Russia and other locales to the east. Italy and Turkey could therefore become major gas distributors for the rest of Europe.⁵⁷

The new Italian political perspective seems to accept that Mediterranean issues can only be effectively addressed by involving Turkey. There is a general feeling in Rome that the mix of Euroscepticism and pragmatism could open a new phase in Italian-Turkish relations. However, within Meloni's ruling coalition a dormant Islamophobia against Turkey, a Muslim-majority country, could be an obstacle to the consolidation

⁵³ Anthony Dworkin, *Stallo in Nord Africa: Lo scontro sul Sahara occidentale alimenta nuove tensioni tra Marocco e Algeria* (Rome: European Council for Foreign Relations [ECFR], April 2022), <https://ecfr.eu/publication/north-african-standoff-how-the-western-sahara-conflict-is-fuelling-new-tensions-between-morocco-and-algeria/> (accessed 05 December 2022)

⁵⁴ Federico Borsari, *Algeria: una forte spinta sul pedale del gas* (Milan: Istituto Studi di Politica Internazionale [ISPI], Focus Mediterraneo, January 2023), <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/algeria-una-forte-spinta-sul-pedale-del-gas-110732> (accessed 02 February 2023)

⁵⁵ Francesco De Paolo, "Difesa, investimenti e migranti. Patto da 30 miliardi tra Meloni ed Erdogan", *Formiche* (online), 12 July 2023, <https://formiche.net/2023/07/difesa-investimenti-e-migranti-meloni-erdogan/> (accessed 08 September 2023)

⁵⁶ Marco Frojo, "Mediterraneo, quattro vie per l'Italia hub energy", *La Repubblica* (online), 05 April 2023, https://www.repubblica.it/dossier/economia/top-story/2023/04/05/news/mediterraneo_quattro_vie_per_litalia_hub_energy-395065708/ (accessed 08 September 2023)

⁵⁷ Chiara Muresu, "Turchia hub del gas s'ha da fare? La concorrenza (italiana) si fa avanti", *Energia Oltre* (online), 04 December 2022, <https://energiaoltre.it/turchia-hub-del-gas-sa-da-fare-la-concorrenza-italiana-si-fa-avanti/> (accessed 19 December 2022)

of relations.

Generally speaking, in the eyes of Italian diplomacy, Turkey is perceived as a Mediterranean country with an important role in the Middle East and the Balkans. Except for Libya and, to a lesser extent, Somalia, Turkey's presence in Africa is seen as limited. Interviewees note that the emergence of new extra-regional actors is changing the African context. As a result, Italy, like other European countries, has been hard-pressed to relate to several new developments in Africa. Ankara's new role on the continent is one of these developments. More than one interviewee reports how the presence of Turkish personnel on the ground has increased—both diplomatically and economically. Most interviewees recount episodes of close interaction with their Turkish counterparts. Examples from the interviewees are the opening of a health clinic, the inauguration of a section of highway or a meeting with local authorities in Somalia.

However, there are no reports of close cooperation on specific issues. Furthermore, all interviewees believe that Turkey's role in Africa should not be overestimated. Ankara's influence in areas of Italian interest is seen as relatively insignificant. There are emerging signs of potential conflict between Ankara and Rome in capacity-building programs for the African security apparatus. Italy has an important position in this sector, recognised by African countries and international partners. The Carabinieri's efforts to train local African police forces are similar to the work done by other countries such as France and the United States. Yet, Turkey is the new kid on the block in this sector of defence training. Ankara has begun to present itself to African countries as a partner in the training of special forces. The Turkish Counterterrorism Training and Exercise Centre Command in Isparta is increasingly positioning itself as an alternative to the Carabinieri.

Informal talks with some representatives of Italian ministries and security apparatuses show that Turkey's security relations with Italy are solid. The two countries cooperate on many issues in various multilateral and bilateral frameworks. The interviews reveal that Turkey's growing influence in some regional contexts can bring benefits to all partners, including Italy. Some interviewees reiterate these considerations in light of ongoing global dynamics. The growing Russian presence in the Mediterranean and some African contexts is a strategic challenge for Italy. Consequently, the strengthening of NATO's southern and southeastern flanks through increased Turkish activism is viewed favourably by interviewees from the Italian security establishment.

Boosting Turkey's presence in the strategic triangle of Italian interests in Africa could bring benefits not only from the perspective of countering Russian actions, according to the interviewees. In particular, the more extensive Turkish presence at the level of intelligence sharing will help to counter radical groups and the criminal organisations responsible for human trafficking. Counter-terrorism is one of the areas in which

interviewees consider Turkish-Italian relations to be most established. In particular, interviewees repeatedly emphasise the effective exchange of intelligence on radical Islamist groups operating in the wider Mediterranean region.

However, some interviewees point out that the security partnership is increasingly tied to political decisions. As a result, the partnership has been characterised by an erratic relationship in recent years. It was clear to respondents that Turkey is increasing its defence and security presence in some African regions, such as the Horn of Africa. While Turkey's growing influence is a plus for its European and NATO partners, there was some scepticism among respondents. More than one expressed concern about how Turkey will use its newfound influence. In other words, there is some suspicion that Ankara might use its African footprint in opposition to, or as a bargaining chip with, Italian and European strategic interests. The interviewees do not specify how such bargaining will happen but they point out that anti-colonial rhetoric could potentially become a tool for anti-Western mobilisation.

The low level of trust in the current Turkish government leads some interviewees to imagine that Turkey, like Russia, could act in Africa to destabilise European interests. Although Turkish efforts in Somalia are acknowledged, there is generally no perception among respondents that Turkey's role in Africa can be that of a stabilising actor. Growing defence trade agreements with African countries are also viewed with some trepidation. Italian security officials are concerned that Turkey is contributing to the proliferation of weapons throughout the continent. If left unchecked, this growth of weapons in Africa could lead to new interstate conflicts.

Turkey is a NATO partner and has good intelligence and security relations with Italy. However, there is some sense of unease about Turkish actions on various issues related to international security and specific crisis areas. The general Italian perception of Turkey is that of a partner with whom to continue dialogue and cooperation, but one that is becoming less reliable and predictable.

The Italian defence industry is closely linked to its state security apparatus. The sector is of strategic importance for Italian economic interests. The current Italian government, like the previous one, considers aerospace, defence and security sectors as key assets for the revitalisation of the Italian economy. The modernisation process of the Italian military has led to a gradual increase in investments in the sector. Italy has adopted a quality-focused approach, prioritising technologically advanced and high-capacity projects. The aim is to consolidate its position in the global market.

The growth of the Turkish defence sector and its expansion into the African market do not worry major Italian defence companies. Italian defence respondents are aware of the developments made by Turkish companies, especially in technologies such as drones. However, industry leaders do not see Turkey as a threat for two main reasons. The first relates to the relationship of Italian companies with Africa. Most

interviewees point out that sub-Saharan Africa is not currently a strategic market. Beyond NATO partners, the main markets for Italian defence products are Egypt, Pakistan, and the Gulf monarchies such as Qatar and Kuwait. The Italian defence industry has historically followed a sales strategy of selling many products to a few buyers. According to some interviewees, sub-Saharan African countries are seen as marginal customers. The defence industry policy makers display a general short-sightedness toward the African market, which partly reflects the short-sightedness of Italian politics.

The second reason industry leaders are not concerned about Turkey's defence sector is that Turkish defence companies are competing with French and Chinese counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa⁵⁸—a region in which Italian companies are absent. Despite not being concerned about Turkish moves into the sub-Saharan defence market, interviewees emphasise that Turkish companies are business competitors in some areas (such as Morocco), especially in armed vehicles and ammunition.

Some defence industry analysts stress that economic needs on the ground should better shape Rome's foreign policy and political agenda. Respondents explain that Italian foreign policy at times does not match the needs of an ever-developing defence market in Africa. In contrast, interviewees emphasise how the political agenda of the Erdoğan-led state is synonymous with Turkish defence companies' market positioning. This implies that Ankara has a different approach to African countries and the African market.

Turkish companies also manage to sell to countries that cannot always pay for orders. They do so because these companies are backed by Turkish state foreign policy and long-term goals. According to some respondents from the Italian sector, the sale of military technology does not lead to direct political influence but rather creates the right conditions for the gradual strengthening of economic and political relations. According to these interviewees, this approach is lacking among Italian companies.

There are also domestic political reasons that constrain the activities of Italian companies. Italy's approach to African countries emphasises the projection of stability through a holistic approach. Italian initiatives include goals such as local capacity building, regional integration, institutional transparency and civil society development. According to some interviewees, this approach clashes with the possibility of arms sales. Italian goals, indeed, are at odds with the risks associated with the proliferation of arms in Africa. As much as the supply of weapons can contribute to domestic stability, it can often generate side effects, such as increased tensions with neighbouring countries, abuse of power by rulers or incentives for the military to interfere in the country's political life.

⁵⁸ Federico Donelli, *UAVs and beyond: Security and defence sector at the core of Turkey's strategy in Africa* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], Megatrends Africa Policy Brief, 02 March 2022), doi: 10.18449/2022MTA-PB02

4.1

Critique of the Italian Defence Industry Responses

From interviewees there is an excess of confidence and over-optimism in the ability of Italian and European diplomacy in Africa. At the same time, there is a general underestimation of Turkish activism on the continent. Italian diplomats' knowledge of Turkish strategy toward Africa is minimal. Most of the interviewees know the Turkish defence industry actions in Africa only from newspaper reports.

Meanwhile, ideology influences the Italian politicians' perceptions. Particularly among politicians on the centre-left—which currently serves as the opposition—any discussion of Turkey is monopolised by issues such as the Erdoğan government's democratic backsliding, the abuse of opposition figures such as journalists and academics and the Kurdish issue. In general, the conversations revealed a lack of understanding regarding Turkey's foreign policy, especially connected to the Anatolian nation's presence in Africa.

Respondents close to the government show an initially harsh and negative attitude toward Turkey and then recognise the need to find a pragmatic *modus vivendi*. Even in their case, the perception of Turkey in Africa is difficult to grasp because the focus of the conversation is often on Erdoğan's undemocratic policies, neo-Ottomanist considerations and the spread of conservative/Islamist identity within the country.

Many Italians' perception of Turkey in Africa centres on Libya, where Ankara's strategic interests are seen as less legitimate than Rome's. In the Libyan context, Turkey is seen as a destabilising actor and not entirely reliable. In interviews with respondents from the security sector, Turkey is often called an inconsistent but necessary actor. The view is that Ankara acts in Africa as elsewhere, often unscrupulously pursuing common and divergent interests with Italy and Europe. Lower political costs and greater autonomy allow Turkey to act in situations where European countries are stuck. Most interviewees repeatedly emphasised how Turkey uses Africa to gain international status. As a result, its diplomatic strategy, which one interviewee described as diplomatic "colonialism," is aimed at making Turkey appear as a powerful and widespread actor across the continent. The reality, however, seems different. Turkey is nowhere near as powerful as it projects itself to be. While the interviewees do not rule out the possibility of cooperation with Turkey, they are sceptical, mainly because they are unsure of Turkey's willingness to move away from its autonomous approach to policy initiatives in Africa.

4.2

Large Corporate Actors

When analysing the perception of the Italian business sector, it is necessary to distinguish between large corporations and SMEs. The interests and the needs of the two categories on the ground are different. As a result, their perceptions of the growing Turkish presence vary. Turkey is generally seen in Africa as a player with limited economic influence, but one that is present and well-structured. In particular, interviewees appreciate how Turkey moves throughout Africa with a chain of linked and coordinated political and commercial actions.

In the case of large companies, Italian groups are mainly active in the energy sector. Turkey is seen as a potential competitor in the Mediterranean. For this reason, the interviewees stress the need to find a coexistent solution to avoid stepping on each other's toes. Furthermore, the interviewees do not rule out the possibility that Italy's energy diversification process creates opportunities for closer cooperation with Ankara, including the establishment of joint ventures. The attention of the Italian energy companies is mainly focused on the Turkish political positions in two interrelated scenarios of high strategic relevance: Libya and the planned EastMed natural gas pipeline.

According to the interviewees, the approach of private companies and the Italian government toward Turkey should be pragmatic. Under the AKP leadership, Turkey is perceived as a country whose policies are volatile and difficult to read. However, Turkey is an important, full-fledged player in the wider Mediterranean region. At the same time, it is a country with historically prosperous and well-established economic and trade relations with Italy and other European states. From a legal perspective, contracts with Turkish companies and public entities are also made more accessible by shared normative frameworks. Considering all these factors, most of the respondents from the Italian energy sector suggest the need to find the most stable and undisturbed coexistence possible. For this reason, it is necessary to promote the complete resolution of any dispute, starting with the search for common positions in Libya and the EastMed.

With regard to Africa, however, the interviewees emphasise that there is little concern about growing Turkish activities. Turkey is perceived by interviewees as one actor among others whose relevance in the energy sector is marginal. According to Italian business policy makers, the room for cooperation with Turkish companies could be in the development of infrastructure related to the energy sector, such as dams, power plants and pipelines. In addition, respondents from the energy sector point to several areas where Turkey and the EU could cooperate in a win-win situation. In particular, they highlight the development of the North-South gas corridor. According to the

interviewees, Turkey is an ideal candidate to act as an intermediary between African and European countries. However, this requires a non-ideological approach on both the Turkish and European sides.

According to some respondents, the main concerns about Turkish involvement in Africa relate to the energy transition processes of African countries. Several private companies have long been committed to supporting African countries' decarbonisation projects through investments in renewable energy. Italian companies are mainly investing in the development of a high-quality biofuel supply chain according to new circular economy models. Italian companies aim to provide the raw material for biorefineries in Italy and the conversion of refineries in Africa. In recent years, agri-hubs have been set up to produce vegetable oil from the pressing of certain crops such as castor bean, croton and cottonseed—an undervalued by-product of the textile industry. The sustainability of the process is an aspect that is repeatedly emphasised by interviewees. None of the raw materials used compete with food use. This is an example of a larger plan involving companies and institutions. One concern that emerged from the interviews is that Turkey, like other extra-regional players (China), may decide to exploit the vacuum left by Western companies to develop the hydrocarbon sector in Africa. This would undermine the continent's energy transition plan from the ground up.

A different kind of argument has to be made when it comes to the defence sector. Respondents relate that many Italian leaders are conflicted in their approach to statecraft which results in the loss of potential markets and opportunities.

In recent times, interviewees explain that African elites find it challenging to buy from traditional suppliers like France, Russia, and China because of domestic political reasons and geopolitical conditions. As a result, the Italian government could take the opportunity to capitalise on this moment to win new markets for its defence companies. Yet, Rome does not do this and misses an opportunity for growth due to, what respondents call, the Italian collective guilt complex.

This collective guilt complex cuts across political affiliations, although it is more pronounced among centre-left parties. Italy has never carried out a mass psychological coping process regarding its colonial past. The Italian experience in Libya and the Horn of Africa has been uniquely relegated to a negative page of history by both the public and the political elite. However, a widespread and overarching sense of guilt has emerged. This feeling prevented Italy from playing a more active role in the region.

As such the Italian defence industry faces serious domestic political challenges in making potential sales to African countries. No Italian political leader is inclined to be an active and open supporter of the defence industry as a tool in relations with African states. At the same time, there is a kind of snobbery towards the African market. This

is exemplified by Prime Minister Meloni's government and its cultivation of relationships in the defence sector with traditional customers such as Qatar, Egypt and Bahrain.

4.3

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

The Italian presence in Africa's economic sectors is highly diversified and does not exclusively involve large groups. Many SMEs have been trying for several years to carve out new market niches, sometimes with a pioneering attitude.

Italian SMEs are generally impressed by the growth of the Turkish presence in Africa over the last decade. The interviewees see Turkey as a close-knit country capable of cooperation across economic, political and social elements. Regardless of the nature of the domestic regime, the political continuity provided by more than two decades of AKP rule is seen as a guarantee by both Italian and African entrepreneurs.

Interviewees point out that Turkey is a reliable interlocutor for African partners. As a result, Turkish companies also enjoy more significant advantages on the ground than Italian companies. According to Italian entrepreneurs, Turkey has been able to adapt and refine its approach to Africa in recent years. The result is a "run-in country" system that is proving to be efficient.

According to many Italian entrepreneurs, Turkish SMEs operating in Africa can count on a coherent structure. Some interviewees express partial envy at how Turkish diplomacy seems to guide, if not pave, the way for Turkish entrepreneurs in different regional contexts. Compared to the large corporations, the SMEs interviewed show a mixture of resentment and admiration for Turkey's work in Africa. These feelings are partly influenced by the problems that Italian companies complain about to the state. Unlike their French and German counterparts/competitors, Italian SMEs operate in the African context without a strong institutional, diplomatic and financial framework to support their activities. As a result, the entrepreneurs interviewed stress that they often have to improvise and rely on their own initiatives. Although Italian governments have been trying to strengthen the Italian institutional framework in Africa for some years, many resource and structural constraints remain.

Italian companies in Africa complain mainly about two aspects of government support: firstly, the weakness of Italian agencies in Africa and secondly the lack of banks to lend for Italian business activities in Africa. Many interviewees repeatedly say that Italy could learn much from Turkey. The long-term vision adopted by Ankara should become a model for Rome's opening of new African regions and markets for the expansion of existing relations. In particular, the SMEs interviewed praise the visa

system that Turkey has created for many African countries, especially in conjunction with the opening of Turkish Airlines routes. Italy and –more generally– the Schengen countries have a visa deficit with African countries. Bureaucratic difficulties combined with the high costs of doing business with Europeans are causing African countries and companies to look elsewhere. One point emphasised by interviewees is that European governments do not understand how important time is for doing business in Africa. The more structural obstacles government leaders in Africa face when making business relationships with a foreign entity, the more African countries choose other less constricting business partners. From this perspective, the Turkish model in Africa is a paragon of time-saving for African stakeholders who are impressed by the existence of Turkish Airline's widespread flight network and Ankara's friendly visa policies.

In such an environment, respondents see Turkey as a potential partner for cooperation in Africa. Unlike other European companies –which are more supported by their countries' governments– interviewees from Italian SMEs state that Turkish companies are not perceived as competitors. For this reason, in the eyes of many Italian SMEs, Turkish companies are potential partners, especially in some African regions little explored by Italy. This possible connection between Italian SMEs and Turkish businesses will have to be monitored in the coming years. It is not certain that Turkish and Italian entrepreneurs will increasingly form partnerships to compete with larger, stronger and better equipped economic rivals. Yet, Italian SMEs can use their know-how to support Turkish companies in various sectors such as agriculture, tourism, technology, infrastructure and energy. At the same time, Turkish SMEs can act as gatekeepers for Italian companies in many African markets. Therefore, all opportunities for mutual benefit must be evaluated and explored. For this reason, SMEs leaders underscore that government policymakers must create the conditions for greater cooperation between Rome and Ankara.

According to the respondents, there is a European-wide problem that needs to be addressed. The EU does not act compactly in Africa, which creates two problems. The first is competition. European countries, and consequently their companies, compete with each other in African markets. This competition inevitably leaves room for other non-European players such as Turkey and China to enter the African market. The second issue concerns a general need for more knowledge about Africa and its complexity. According to the interviewees –both in Italy and more generally at the European level– institutions and the public need to be more aware of how diverse and complex Africa is.

4.4

Critique of Business Actors' Responses

The overall picture that arises from the interviews is that large Italian companies are less interested in Turkish involvement in Africa than small and medium-sized enterprises. Interviewees from the energy sector, in particular, point out that the impact of Turkey's presence in the African market is relative and almost nil as far as their interests are concerned. At the same time, there is a greater awareness of Turkish policy in Africa than in the political and diplomatic sectors, especially among the SMEs group. Direct contacts with Turkish companies on the ground and, in some cases, the establishment of partnerships in markets and contexts that are still unfamiliar lead most of the SMEs entrepreneurs interviewed to see the Turkish presence as an opportunity.

Compared to the respondents from the political-diplomatic segments, a broader and more detailed picture of Turkey's international role emerges from the business sector. However, especially in the energy sector, it is difficult to understand the perception of Turkey in Africa beyond the Libyan issue. The defence sector deserves a separate comment, mainly because of its close connection with Italian politics. Interviewees from the Italian defence sector clearly understand the Turkish phenomenon in Africa. Yet, they do not perceive the involvement of Turkish companies with concern, because they feel that the Turkish defence sector's actions are connected with the African market, which is not strategic for them.

4.5

Humanitarian & Development Aid

The perceptions found in the business sector between large corporations and SMEs are also found in the field of development aid. In this case, there are differences between public agencies and private NGOs. However, in the aid and cooperation sector, the considerations and general perceptions are much more blurred than in the business community.

Although the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) is under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), it functions to distinguish the technical from the political forms of cooperation. In other words, while the MAECI offices manage cooperation according to the political agenda, AICS is operationalising these directions into development aid initiatives and projects. In addition, AICS follows the preparation, implementation, and completion of cooperation projects from a technical point of view, acting as a link with the NGOs

working in the field.

There is a widespread feeling among Italian public sector respondents that the actors involved in African aid are changing rapidly. In such a fluid situation, Turkey is but one state among many. As such, interviewees do not perceive Turkey as an increasingly prominent and influential state. On the contrary, most respondents stress that Turkey's weight in aid is being exaggerated by Turkish leaders to drive a political narrative both in Turkey and in African nations.

A group of interviewees relate that it is necessary to understand Turkish aid practices. They indicate that European agencies need to learn how to relate and engage with other extra-regional actors on the ground. In Africa, as in other regional contexts, the Turkish Development Agency (TIKA) and Turkish NGOs form a parallel world. Despite the growing number of AICS projects and activities, its aid workers rarely meet their Turkish counterparts. In this respect, Italian aid workers perceive that the Turkish actions in African aid and development are similar to Beijing's moves on the continent in that Turkish (and Chinese) aid work is often separate from other nations' aid agencies.

The general perception of the interviewees is that Turkish aid workers are not interested in establishing cooperative relations with their European counterparts. In addition, interviewees point to a lack of communication with Turkish colleagues regarding projects implemented on the ground. In other words, Italian aid workers are not aware of Turkish aid projects, even though they are working in adjacent geographical areas. Furthermore, the interviewees underscore that Turkey is not represented in specific projects of international organisations. Turkish aid workers are rarely present, even at UN meetings or other gatherings organised by local governments, where non-European actors are usually present.

According to the interviewees, there are interrelated political and cultural factors behind the lack of dialogue between Turkish and Italian agencies. Turkish public and private organisations focus on bilateral actions. Turkey sees development assistance as a foreign policy tool to maintain and strengthen bilateral relations. Therefore, Turkish agencies act unilaterally rather than multilaterally. Turkey's aid policy differs significantly from that of European countries. Turkey understands foreign aid as a tool that can generate direct and indirect benefits. In contrast, the expected benefits of Italian aid, as well as those of other European countries, are indirect. The perception of the interviewees is that political rather than humanitarian assessments are behind Turkey's decision to intervene through aid.

Some interviewees stress that the limited interaction between Turkish and Italian aid workers also is due to psychological factors such as mutual mistrust. On the Turkish side, there is a general mistrust of European agencies. On the part of Italian aid

workers, there is mistrust toward "new" actors such as Turkey.

There are elements in the interviews which can be traced to collective unconscious drives which direct European and Turkish actions. These drives have to do with the hidden characteristics of European cooperation with Africans. Italian aid worker respondents relate that African people often perceive European aid activity as coming from a place of collective European guilt. This feeling conditions European aid workers themselves. Meanwhile, respondents state that Turkish agencies can establish a more balanced relationship with African beneficiaries without such emotional baggage.

In the area of humanitarian and development aid, respondents consider increased cooperation between Italian and Turkish agencies unlikely. According to them, the rationale of aid cooperation and the promotion of different values make it difficult to establish structured cooperation between Italian/European and Turkish agencies. Despite their scepticism, Italian aid workers stress the need for more dialogue with their Turkish counterparts. At the same time, respondents wonder whether the Turks and their agencies would be willing to coordinate more with European agencies.

Aid workers from Italian NGOs share many of the same ideas on Turkey made by those from Italian government public agencies. However, the respondents from Italian NGOs have views which come from lived experiences on the ground in African nations. According to the NGOs' interviewees, Turkey's involvement in Africa is exaggerated. Some of the NGO aid workers emphasise that the narrative which Ankara projects to external audiences regarding its engagement in Africa is overblown compared with the reality on the ground. According to some, Turkey's ability is to maximise its image in African nations. This trait can be seen in any context where TIKA workers or those of other Turkish agencies or NGOs operate. The Turkish way of promoting aid work has an impact in the eyes of the locals. Italian NGOs interviewees relate that many African communities perceive that Turkey - unlike other countries such as Italy - promotes concrete projects and development aid in their countries.

Although interviewees assume that any assistance that helps and benefits African countries and people is more than welcome, many Italian aid workers are annoyed by the absence of Turkish officials and practitioners at international coordination meetings or NGO field coordination groups. The Turkish lack of coordination with other actors, especially European ones, threatens to concentrate Turkish aid efforts on one project while neglecting other precarious situations.

Italian aid respondents state that the impact of initiatives by Turkish agencies on the ground is limited. At the same time, respondents stress that the projects Turkish aid workers implement never interfere with Italian and European activities. In other words, they do not see the Turkish presence as detrimental. However, interviewees expressed concern about the Turkish mix of business, politics and development.

Moreover, some of them fear that the presence of political interests could fuel local patronage networks.

More than one Italian aid worker discusses how European NGOs benefit from the achievements of Turkey or China. In many African regions, Turkish infrastructure is essential for connectivity and logistics. Most of the interviewees are impressed by the connections of Turkish Airlines, which facilitate travel. A group of respondents discussed how new actors such as Turkey offer a parallel aid effort to European activities. As a result, they believe it is valid, if not crucial, to have more dialogue with the Turkish aid sector - something that rarely happens.

According to the interviewees, the motives behind the choice of Turkish agencies and NGOs working in Africa are often different from those of European agencies and NGOs. However, in a competitive environment, some suggest that Italy and other European countries should learn to better market themselves and their actions in Africa.

Finally, there is widespread scepticism due to the domestic events in Turkey that have moved the Anatolian country away from European norms and values. As a result, many interviewees believe that the principle of liberal democracy which drives Italian and European cooperation does not presently exist in Turkey. As such, it is hard for interviewees to imagine closer aid cooperation between Ankara and Rome.

5.

Suspicion and Curiosity: Italy Divided on Turkey

After a long period of relative disengagement, Italian foreign policy has been marked by a renewed interest in Africa over the past decade. At the heart of Italy's interest in Africa are three intertwined issues: energy, migration and development.

As Italy's interest in Africa grows, so too does the need to engage with other extra-regional actors, including Turkey. However, the issue of extra-regional actor engagement remains poorly addressed. At the ministerial level in Rome, there is a partial and superficial understanding of Turkey's policy toward Africa. In Italy, perceptions of Turkey are influenced by the narratives from political circles and their media allies.

For the centre-right, Ankara's hyperactivity is viewed with suspicion because of the Muslim identity emphasised by the Erdoğan-led government. Among rightwingers in Italy, there is widespread Islamophobia, mixed with nationalist concerns and desires for influence over the Mediterranean.

In Italy's centre-left circles, the main concern is the undemocratic nature of the Turkish regime and Ankara's human rights violations. The Kurdish issue is central to the interests of civil society organisations, leftist parties and the left-wing media in Italy. These considerations are important because they prevent an open and non-ideological political debate on Turkey's role in international politics, especially regarding Ankara's involvement in Africa.

As a result of these left and right political divisions in understanding Turkey and Ankara's moves in Africa, there is little knowledge and much confusion at the policy level. Yet, the discourse is different for those Italian respondents who regularly work on the ground in Africa—both practitioners of for-profit organisations and organisations engaged in humanitarian and development activities. These actors show a heightened awareness of the Turkish phenomenon in Africa which they approach with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity. The curiosity lies in how Turkish actors manage to operate in an environment as complex as Africa.

Both business and development interviewees recognise one aspect of the Turkish approach that should be imitated: the ability to know how to promote their initiatives to win over hearts and minds across Africa. Nonetheless, suspicion of Ankara's motives and desires on the continent remains rampant fuelled by Turkey's tendency to engage little in multilateral initiatives at the local level.

Abbreviations

AICS	<i>Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo)</i>
AISE	<i>Italian Foreign Intelligence and Security Agency (Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Esterna)</i>
AKP	<i>Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)</i>
BMIS	<i>Italian Military Support Base</i>
CDP	<i>Cassa Depositi e Prestiti</i>
CoESPU	<i>Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units</i>
Enel	<i>Enel Green Power SpA</i>
Eni	<i>National Hydrocarbons Authority (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi SpA)</i>
FA	<i>Fund for Africa</i>
FDI	<i>Direct Foreign Investment</i>
GNA	<i>Government of National Accord</i>
IOM	<i>International Organisation for Migration</i>
LGBTQ	<i>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer</i>
MAECI	<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale)</i>
MEF	<i>Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze)</i>
MIT	<i>Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı)</i>
NISA	<i>Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (Hay'ada Sirdoonka iyo Nabadsugida Qaranka)</i>
SACE	<i>Insurance and Financial Services for Enterprises</i>
SMEs	<i>Small and medium-sized enterprises</i>
TIKA	<i>Turkish Development Agency</i>
UNHCR	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>

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