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**Energy Security and Gas Pipeline Diplomacy: Italy's
Mediterranean Foreign Policy Post Russia-Ukraine War between
Security Threats and Geostrategic Competition.**

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ITSS Verona Magazine, Vol. 2, n. 1

Spring/Summer 2023

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To cite this article: Ilas Touazi, *Energy Security and Gas Pipeline Diplomacy: Italy's Mediterranean Foreign Policy Post Russia-Ukraine War between Security Threats and Geostrategic Competition*, ITSS Verona Magazine, Vol. 2, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2023.

Keywords: Energy Security; Gas Pipeline Diplomacy; Italy's Mediterranean Foreign Policy; Post Russia-Ukraine War; Security Threats; Geostrategic Competition

ITSS Verona website: <https://www.itssverona.it/itss-magazine>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/itss-verona/>

Instagram: https://instagram.com/itss_verona?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

Published online: July 4th, 2023

Abstract: While Russia, as an exporting country, has used energy as a pressure tool to obtain political concessions, the current context of the invasion of Ukraine constitutes a new phase of post-modern hybrid warfare with the militarization of gas resources as a means of geopolitical influence. In contrast, for the importing countries in general and Italy in particular, the rapid halt of Russian gas supplies has triggered an energy crisis, thus embarking on a process of searching for alternatives to Russia as the main energy supplier. Given the role of energy in the economy and as a determining factor of global security, this research examines the impact of the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis and its influence on Italian foreign policy. This paper attempts, through causal and systemic analysis, to refine the understanding of Italian energy security strategies in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine by identifying the Italian foreign policy agenda with pipeline diplomacy as an element of soft power that will fulfil the ambitions of becoming a gas hub for Europe. This has led to a rethinking of Italian foreign policy towards the southern Mediterranean and the new priority of reorienting its regional energy cooperation policies. Simultaneously, the “Mattei Plan” for Africa and the Mediterranean is the focal point of the southern gas corridor and a strategic area for the security of energy supplies. Hence the need for an integrated partnership approach and for particular attention to not only the geostrategic rivalries between the major powers but also the proliferation of transnational security threats, which constitute major challenges for Italy's repositioning in the global energy arena.

In her first meeting with the main European institutions as President of the Italian Council, Giorgia Meloni stated that “Italy's voice in Europe will be strong; we are ready to tackle the big problems, starting with the energy crisis, working together on a solution to support families and businesses”.¹ Indeed, Italy has been particularly notable in its handling of the energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, finding an alternative to become less dependent on Russian gas supplies. In fact, energy policy is linked to high politics under the umbrella of economic strategy based on energy “weapons” within the framework of foreign policy as an effort to take advantage of international economic structural dependencies in order to strengthen power and influence for geo-political purposes, which focuses on the discursive constitution of the “energy superpower”, militarised by Russian hybrid warfare that affects the security and independence of its European energy partners.²

This is why Rome has actively sought to expand its pipeline diplomacy to ensure energy security at the top of its foreign policy. It has done so by reorienting Mediterranean policy in an extremely volatile international and regional context that is essentially characterised by the proliferation of security myriads and rivalries for natural resource supplies. The present contribution explores Italy's ambition to become an energy hub, the role of Italy as a regional actor capable of exerting its influence on the southern Mediterranean and repositioning itself for the future of energy policies.

The underlying claim that this paper will test consists of the following interconnected variables: The fragile international environment created by the post-conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which serves as an aggravating factor, adequately explains the current energy security crisis in Italy. The security of energy supplies continues to be a priority for Italian

¹ Elena Lionnet, “Giorgia Meloni s'est-elle vraiment convertie à l'Europe ?”, TV5 Monde (03 Novembre 2022), accessed April 3, 2023
<https://information.tv5monde.com/info/giorgia-meloni-s-est-elle-vraiment-convertie-l-europe-477205>.

² Boris Barkanov, NATURAL GAS, in ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY, Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.), (New York: Routledge, 2018), p.139, accessed June 8, 2023
https://pure.spbu.ru/ws/portalfiles/portal/28346451/ROUTLEDGE_HANDBOOK_OF_RUSSIAN_FOREIGN_POLICY.pdf

foreign policy, and pipeline diplomacy has been focused on the southern gas corridor in the Mediterranean and in Africa.

The analysis will be symmetrically divided into three chapters, the first of which will be devoted to the Italian energy security crisis in the context of the current war in Ukraine. The second chapter focuses on Italian gas pipeline diplomacy, which has been a constant in its foreign policy agenda, namely in the framework of the “Enrico Mattei” Plan for the Mediterranean and Africa with ambitions to become a new gas hub for Europe. Finally, reference was made to the obstacles to Italy's central role in European energy security, especially with the rise of geopolitical rivalries and security threats in the southern Mediterranean.

The analysis is built around a systemic approach method, describing the complexity of the post-war energy crisis in Ukraine and its threatening impacts on the security of energy supplies in Italy (inputs), explaining the interactions of Italian foreign policy in its Mediterranean and African neighbourhoods within the framework of its pipeline diplomacy and the Southern Gas Corridor (outputs), and the energy cooperation policies at the bilateral and multilateral level (feedback). As well as the “causal process methodology” through the interaction of the causal mechanisms, the correlation with the current precarious energy situation, especially in Europe, and the effect of this on the reorientation of Italian foreign policy to diversify energy suppliers, which was accentuated by the current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Italian energy security: a globalised crisis in the current context of the Russia-Ukraine War

The current context of the war between Russia and Ukraine has radically changed the global energy landscape, with the militarization of energy security as an instrument of postmodern hybrid warfare. However, this situation has caused an unprecedented energy

crisis at the European level and in Italy in particular, which is why it has therefore shifted its geopolitical influence to the southern Mediterranean as an alternative and a solution to this globalised energy insecurity.

The militarization of energy security in the aftermath of Russia –Ukraine war: a global issue between hybrid warfare and geopolitical influence

Because of the fundamental role of energy in all human activities, it refers to the necessity of "singular importance" for the functioning of modern industrial society.³ Thus, this aspect of energy derives as a major issue of sovereignty and independence for states,⁴ the economy, and the environment, and by extension becomes a sector of security extended to the overlap between national, regional, international, and human security. Indeed, “energy security” encompasses the dual functions of ensuring the supply of energy in sufficient quantities to meet the vital needs of a state and ensuring their unimpeded delivery, even in times of crisis or international conflict.⁵ However, since World War II, “energy security” has repeatedly emerged as an issue of great importance, and it has been further strengthened with the creation of the current energy security system, which was originally established as a response to the 1973 Arab oil embargo in order to ensure coordination among industrialized countries in the event of supply disruptions, to encourage collaboration on energy policies, and to deter any future use of an “oil weapon” by exporters.⁶

Similarly, energy security has acquired an important military dimension to guarantee stability in oil- and gas-producing regions. In doing so, the United States, in late 1979 and early 1980, during the first Gulf War in 1990 and also in the second Gulf War (the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003), unleashed “the Carter Doctrine” with the use of military forces to

³ Michael T. Klare, *Energy Security*, in *security studies an introduction*, edited by Paul D. Williams (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2008), 483.

⁴ Kamel Ait Cherif, “La sécurité énergétique : un enjeu majeur de souveraineté”, *Algérie-Eco* (6 juin 2017), accessed March 26, 2023 <https://www.algerie-eco.com/2017/06/06/la-securite-energetique-un-enjeu-majeur-de-souverainete/>

⁵ Michael T. Klare, *Energy Security*, 483-485.

⁶ Daniel Yergin, “Ensuring Energy Security”, *Foreign Affairs* 85, no.2 (March/April 2006):1-4, accessed March 25, 2023 http://faculty.nps.edu/relooney/0_New_820.pdf

confront threats to energy security.⁷ In fact, energy insecurity during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan prompted the U.S. military to create the Department of Defence Energy Security Task Force in 2006.⁸ Moreover, the G8 Summit Meeting held in St. Petersburg on July 16, 2006, discussed a plan of action for “global energy security”.⁹ In this perspective, NATO's role in energy security has been defined and consolidated since the Bucharest Summit in 2008. Accordingly, the NATO Centre of Excellence for Energy Security has been supporting NATO in its work on energy security since 2012.¹⁰

Simultaneously, Russia has repeatedly instrumentalized energy as a means of geopolitical influence with “the militarization of energy policy” towards former Soviet republics that rely on oil and natural gas for much of their supply, including Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and the Baltic states. Apparently, these actions were motivated by disputes over energy pricing, but Moscow undertook such actions to punish an unfriendly government or to obtain political concessions.¹¹ As a result, the threat to the security of energy supplies increased with the voluntary interruptions of its gas deliveries to Ukraine in 2005 and its oil deliveries to Belarus in 2006.¹² Moreover, Russia's predominant political role has been manifested mainly by using the instrument of energy dependence with its neighbours, in particular Ukraine, as a means of a constant quest for power and energy prices as a variable.¹³ For instance, it provoked two “gas wars” that disrupted supplies to Europe in the winters of 2006, after the “Orange Revolution”. In turn, in 2009, Gazprom made Kiev sign extremely

⁷ Kamila Proniska, “Energy and security: regional and global dimensions”, in SIPRI Yearbook 2007, edited by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Stockholm: International Peace Research Institute, 2007), 228-229, accessed March 25, 2023 <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/YB07%20215%2006.pdf>

⁸ Col CHAUVANCY, “Sécurité énergétique militaire”, dans séminaire « Participation des forces armées à la sécurité énergétique » Travail collectif du groupe n°16 d'enseignement optionnel (Mars 2009) :7, accessed March 25, 2023 <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/secureenergetiquemilitaire@cicde09.pdf>

⁹ Lionel Beehner, “The G8 Summit Agenda”, Council on Foreign Relations (July 13, 2006), accessed March 26, 2023 <https://www.cfr.org/background/g8-summit-agenda>

¹⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Energy security”, NATO files (05 July, 2022) accessed March 25, 2023 https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/topics_49208.htm?selectedLocale=en

¹¹ Michael T. Klare, Energy Security, 487-488.

¹² Jan Horst Keppler, “La sécurité des approvisionnements énergétiques en Europe : principes et mesures”, Note de l'Ifri (Avril 2007) :1, accessed March 21, 2023

https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/securetekeppler1_1.pdf

¹³ Boris Barkanov, NATURAL GAS, 139.

unfavourable ten-year contracts covering the purchase and transit of gas, as well as the so-called “fleet for gas” agreement in 2010, following which Russia strengthened its military presence in Crimea.¹⁴ This triggered a wave of panic in the EU and prompted Brussels to find other sources of energy, such as liquefied gas from Qatar, the United States, and Nigeria.¹⁵ In effect, Russia is using its energy resources as an instrument of foreign policy by increasing Europe's energy vulnerability, especially as the “green revolution” in the renewable energy sector is seen as a threat to Russia's strategic interests as part of its economic security strategy.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Russia is one of the most common actors to employ “hybrid warfare” practices; it used them particularly effectively in 2014 during the illegal annexation of Crimea. Indeed, with the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, the Kremlin continues to employ a variety of hybrid measures to harm infrastructure, policies and energy supplies.¹⁷ However, Russia was by far the largest exporter of oil and natural gas to global markets on the eve of its invasion of Ukraine. The European Union was purchasing approximately 50% of Russia's oil exports and more than 60% of its gas exports prior to the war, but with the invasion, Russian pipeline flows to Europe dropped by 80% from pre-invasion levels, causing

¹⁴ Szymon, Kardaś and Tadeusz, Iwański, “From vassalisation to emancipation. Ukrainian-Russian gas co-operation has been revised”, OSW COMMENTARY, Centre for Eastern Studies, no. 263 (7 March 2018):2, accessed June 8, 2023 https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_263.pdf

¹⁵ MANSUR, MIROVALEV, “ Will another 'gas war' with Russia ruin Ukraine?”, TRT WORLD (2021), accessed June 8, 2023 <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/will-another-gas-war-with-russia-ruin-ukraine-50713>

¹⁶ Assemblée Parlementaire de l'OTAN, PARADES AUX MENACES HYBRIDES ÉMANANT DE LA RUSSIE : UNE MISE À JOUR, COMMISSION SUR LA DIMENSION CIVILE DE LA SÉCURITÉ (CDS), Rapport spécial 166 CDS 18 F 166 CDS 18 F fin (28 septembre 2018), 11, accessed Jun 8, 2023 https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2018-12/166%20CDS%2018%20F%20fin%20%20PARADES%20AUX%20MENACES%20HYBRIDES%20EMANANT%20DE%20LA%20RUSSIE%20-%20RAPPORT%20JOPLING_0.pdf

¹⁷ Arnold C. Dupuy, Dan Nussbaum, Vytautas Butrimas, Alkman Granitsas, “La sécurité énergétique à l'ère de la guerre hybride”, NATO REVIEW (13 janvier 2021), accessed March 21, 2023 <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/fr/articles/2021/01/13/la-securite-energetique-a-lere-de-la-guerre-hybride/index.html>

a massive shock to global energy markets and a fatal blow to Russia's relationship with its largest customer, the European Union.¹⁸

Italian energy security in the context of Russia -Ukraine war: a function with different variables

It is important to understand that the energy security crisis that Italy is experiencing with the war in Ukraine concerns natural gas, given the dependence of European countries on Russian natural gas that has developed as part of their energy transition. Thus, Italy has become extremely dependent on Russian natural gas to produce its electricity. But, with the invasion of Ukraine, Italy no longer wanted its thirst for energy to finance Russia's war against Ukraine. While Russian energy is vital, especially as this liquefied natural gas (LNG) is mainly syphoned off by European countries, this led to an increase in prices for all regions; thus, the crisis of Russian gas supply to Europe spread with a globalised natural gas crisis.¹⁹ In this respect, Italy's economy shares a significant degree of vulnerability with the Ukrainian crisis, with a large share of energy-intensive manufacturing and a high dependence on Russian energy imports, so disruptions in some supply chains of key Russian raw materials and intermediates increased the risk of a prolonged recession. However, such a strong dependence on fossil fuels and, in particular, Russian gas is found in the growth model and long-term evolution of the Italian economy with cheap Russian gas, in addition to the historical links with the Russian energy sector; for example, the relationship between the Italian state-owned oil company Eni and Gazprom has strengthened since the 1990s, and Russia is an important export market for Italian products.²⁰

¹⁸ Fatih Birol, "Where things stand in the global energy crisis one year on", International Energy Agency (23 February 2023), accessed March 25, 2023
<https://www.iea.org/commentaries/where-things-stand-in-the-global-energy-crisis-one-year-on>

¹⁹ Marjorie Henriquez, "À LA RECHERCHE DE LA SÉCURITÉ ÉNERGÉTIQUE", Finances & Développement (Décembre 2022), accessed March 25, 2023
<https://www.imf.org/fr/Publications/fandd/issues/2022/12/cafe-econ-in-search-of-energy-security>

²⁰ Giuseppe Celi et al, "The Asymmetric Impact of War: Resilience, Vulnerability and Implications for EU Policy", Intereconomics 57, no. 3 (May /June 2022):141-147, accessed March 25, 2023
<https://rsf.uni-greifswald.de/storages/uni-greifswald/fakultaet/rsf/lehrstuehle/ls-koernert/intereconomics-2022-03.pdf#page=5>

Nevertheless, Italy has been one of the most successful countries in finding alternative sources of supply to the energy crisis; the “National Energy Strategy 2017” defines the actions to be carried out by 2030, in line with the long-term scenario set out in the EU Energy Roadmap 2050, with the main objective of developing a national energy system based on competitiveness, sustainability, and security.²¹ Indeed, natural gas imports into Italy pass through six pipeline interconnection points and three LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminals. The vast majority of imports (over 90% in January 2022) are via pipeline,²² mainly through two pipelines: the Trans Austria Gas (TAG) and the Trans-Mediterranean (Trans-Med) pipelines. In 2023, they will have a capacity of 44 and 34 billion standard cubic metres, respectively, carrying gas from Russia and Algeria, which are Italy's main suppliers of natural gas.²³ Meanwhile, the Ministry of Ecological Transition is responsible for the emergency policy and preventive action plan for natural gas in Italy. It manages an emergency plan in case of gas supply disruption or interruption, as well as the measures that can be taken to deal with it.²⁴

The EU quickly put in place a “burden-sharing” strategy to deal with the harsh effects of the conflict.²⁵ At the regional level, Italy has sought to develop “solidarity agreements” with the EU's neighbouring countries, with the solidarity mechanism designed to deal with extreme situations in which supply is threatened. In this sense, an agreement with Slovenia was signed in 2022.²⁶ In doing so, Italy's decision to stop relying on Russian gas supplies has therefore led to shortages, causing a dramatic rise in energy prices. In December 2021, 40%

²¹ Carlo Calenda and Gian Luca Galletti, “ITALY’S NATIONAL ENERGY STRATEGY 2017”, Ministry of Economic Development and Ministry of the environment and protection of the territory and the sea (10 November 2017), 3, accessed March 27, 2023 https://www.mise.gov.it/images/stories/documenti/BROCHURE_ENG_SEN.PDF

²² The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (“OECD”), and the International Energy Agency (IEA), “Italy Natural Gas Security Policy”, Natural Gas Security Policy (18 October 2022), accessed March 20, 2023 <https://www.iea.org/articles/italy-natural-gas-security-policy>

²³ Statista Research Department, Capacity of import pipelines for natural gas and LNG in Italy 2023, Statista (Mar 9, 2023), accessed March 22, 2023 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1074183/pipeline-capacity-fo-natural-gas-imports-italy/>

²⁴ See note 22.

²⁵ Costanza Galetto, “The Ukrainian Conflict and the Energy Crisis: Sustaining the Energy Transition”, IAI Commentaries 22, no.62 (December 2022),1.

²⁶ See note 22.

of Italy's total gas imports came from Russia.²⁷ However, by 2022, Russian gas has accounted for about 10% of Italy's imports, and this amount has been replaced by LNG from North Africa. While, Italy initially planned to become independent of Russian gas by spring 2025, with the increase of its regasification capacity.²⁸

The heterogeneity of an Italian perception of the Mediterranean: between security challenges and energy opportunities

Geographically, Italy is unambiguously a Mediterranean country. But Italian Mediterranean policy has reflected the reality of an Italian state that has been weak, especially in its international activities, while the Italian economy has been increasingly strong at the global level, especially in the Mediterranean basin.²⁹ Indeed, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Mediterranean Academy was one of the central bodies in the Mediterranean orientation of Italian foreign policy and the affirmation of a common trans-Mediterranean culture, particularly around the political concept of Eurafrika.³⁰ The Mediterranean serves as a support for Italy's autonomous foreign policy aspirations, endowed with a geographical justification of a policy with the historical reference of the invocation of the Roman heritage.³¹ Italy assumes towards the countries south of the Mediterranean the myth of the “mission” of ancient Rome, in parallel with an alternative thought of the South, not negative but rather mediating towards complementary differences and built on the basis

²⁷ Costanza Galetto, *The Ukrainian Conflict and the Energy Crisis*, 3.

²⁸ Alberto Brambilla and Chiara Albanese, “Italy Secures Enough Supplies for Winter Without Russia Gas”, *Bloomberg* (27 September 2022), accessed March 27, 2023 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-27/italy-secures-enough-supplies-for-winter-without-gas-from-russia?leadSource=verify%20wall>

²⁹ John W. Holmes, “Italy: In the Mediterranean, but of it?”, *Mediterranean Politics* 1, no. 2 (1996): 176-177, accessed March 20, 2023 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13629399608414578>

³⁰ Stéphane Mourlane, « La Méditerranée des élites italiennes aux lendemains de la Seconde Guerre mondiale », *Rives méditerranéennes*, no. 32-33 (2009), 141-152, accessed March 27, 2023 <https://journals.openedition.org/rives/2957>

³¹ Jean-Pierre Darnis, Catherine Brice, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, « Le mythe de la Méditerranée dans le discours politique italien contemporain », *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 110, no. 2 (1998) : 807, accessed March 27, 2023 https://www.persee.fr/doc/AsPDF/mefr_1123-9891_1998_num_110_2_4590.pdf

of a mixture of North-South synergies.³² Consequently, a conception of the Mediterranean as a sea of European predominance on which history is thus woven by exchanges, rivalries, and conflicts between civilizations is held, where the southern shore is represented as the “Counter-Mediterranean” of the north-western shore.³³

The three classical axes of Italian foreign policy are Europe and the Atlantic Alliance, which represent the groups of belonging and inclusion, while the Mediterranean constitutes the universe of projection, the geographical grouping often defined in an extensive manner, towards which Italy uses instruments of power such as military force or commercial policy.³⁴ Italy's geographical absolutism, divided between a north turned towards European integration and a south looking towards the Mediterranean, is thus a constant dichotomy in the definition of its vital interests.³⁵ In doing so, Italy has focused its Mediterranean foreign policy on three groups of countries: “key players”, which play a central role in their respective sub-regional environments, namely Morocco and Algeria in the Maghreb, and Egypt, Israel, and Jordan in the Mashreq; the “old friends”, including Tunisia and Egypt, and the “problem” countries consisting of Libya and Syria.³⁶

Moreover, this geographical position stimulates an Italian perception of the Mediterranean as a vast geopolitical area where power projections are exercised, essentially through two dimensions: economic-commercial and security. Indeed, the southern shore of the Mediterranean represents first of all a crucial stake for the geopolitics of energy and the supply of gas and oil for Italy.³⁷ In this perspective, Rome has established a capacity for

³² Toni Maraini et Danielle Laglace, « L'ITALIE EST-ELLE ENCORE UN PAYS MÉDITERRANÉEN ? », *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Juillet-Août 2011) :73-76.

³³ Claude Liauzu, « La Méditerranée selon Fernand Braudel », *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 31 (Automne 1999):186.

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Darnis, « L'Italie en Méditerranée : projection et défense vis-à-vis de la rive Sud », *Revue Défense Nationale* 7, no. 822 (Été 2019):136.

³⁵ Alexis Coquin, « La politique étrangère italienne : européenne, atlantiste et méditerranéenne », *Classe Internationale* (6 Avril 2021), accessed March 27, 2023 <https://classe-internationale.com/2021/04/06/la-politique-etrangere-italienne-europeenne-atlantiste-et-mediterranee/>

³⁶ Laura Guazzone, “ ITALY’S POLICY TOWARDS THE MEDITERRANEAN MIDDLE EAST AREA AN OVERVIEW”, *ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI* (June 24, 1991):4, accessed March 29, 2023 <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai9131.pdf>

³⁷ Jean-Pierre Darnis, « L'Italie en Méditerranée, 137.

balanced dialogue with the southern shore of the Mediterranean and more particularly with the Arab world, taking into account the economic and security logic. This versatile positioning is in line with Italy's strategic interests, with constant adaptation to the international situation. Indeed, Italy is both highly dependent on hydrocarbons for its energy security and relatively close to the war zones that are tearing the Middle East apart.³⁸ However, the emergence of security risks from the South has significantly influenced the formulation of Italy's Mediterranean policy,³⁹ and this partly explains the Italian initiative in 1990, within the framework of the 5+5 Dialogue, as an informal sub-regional forum of the Western Mediterranean countries.⁴⁰ Thus, the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of Italy's Mediterranean policies are focused on a “global security approach,” especially with the emergence of transnational security challenges such as mass migration, terrorism, and organised crime, which reflects its conception of the Mediterranean and Middle East region as synonymous with the Southern rim and represents an external, often-threatening context. Then define it as a priority area for action in its foreign policy.⁴¹

³⁸ See note 35.

³⁹ Laura Guazzone, “ITALY’S POLICY TOWARDS THE MEDITERRANEAN MIDDLE EAST AREA AN OVERVIEW”, 4.

⁴⁰ Institut Européen de la Méditerranée, « Le dialogue 5+5 Genèse, historique et fonctionnement, » Medthink 5 plus 5 (26 juin 2017) , accessed March 27, 2023 <https://medthink5plus5.org/le-dialogue-55/genese-historique-et-fonctionnement/>

⁴¹ Laura Guazzone, “ITALY’S POLICY TOWARDS THE MEDITERRANEAN MIDDLE EAST AREA AN OVERVIEW”, 2.

Italian Gas pipeline diplomacy: a constant on the foreign policy agenda in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War

The context of the war between Russia and Ukraine has prompted Italy to strengthen its gas pipeline diplomacy as the main concern of its foreign policy agenda, with the ambition to become a new gas hub for Europe. Indeed, this was initiated by the launch of the "Enrico Mattei" plan for Africa and the Mediterranean, in addition to the new strategic partnership with the southern Mediterranean countries, mainly Algeria and Libya, as the main energy supplier.

Pipeline diplomacy, the soft power of foreign policy: Italy's ambitions as a new gas hub for Europe

Pipeline policy and diplomacy are integral and fundamental pillars of energy policy. Indeed, pipelines were first used domestically and over short distances before gradually becoming a means of international energy trade, which has also encouraged and precipitated their central role in both domestic politics and energy and gas diplomacy.⁴² However, energy politics and diplomacy are well-developed fields and play an increasingly important role in contemporary history. Today, with the invasion of Ukraine, gas pipelines are being used as a political tool and a weapon of strategic influence, so the sale of gas has become a “soft power” in foreign policy.⁴³ This is why the EU, especially Italy, is looking for alternative solutions to end their dependence on Russian gas.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, for Italy, as for other industrialised states that depend on energy imports, energy security has an obvious foreign policy dimension, insofar as one of the main objectives of their diplomacy abroad is to establish and maintain friendly ties with the main suppliers of oil, gas, and other fuels, thus

⁴² Filippou Proedrou, “Revisiting pipeline politics and diplomacy: From energy security to domestic politics explanations,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 00, no. 00 (2017): 1, accessed March 31, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1303616>

⁴³ Jennifer Kavanagh, “The Ukraine War Shows How the Nature of Power Is Changing”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (June 16, 2022), accessed April 2, 2023 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/06/16/ukraine-war-shows-how-nature-of-power-is-changing-pub-87339>

⁴⁴ Susanne Schattenberg, “Pipeline Construction as “Soft Power” in Foreign Policy. Why the Soviet Union Started to Sell Gas to West Germany, 1966–1970,” *Journal of Modern European History* 20, no.4 (2022): 555 -556, accessed March 31, 2023 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/16118944221130222>

facilitating energy supply. In many cases, maintaining these links has become a major responsibility of senior state officials⁴⁵; for example, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni visited North Africa, particularly Algeria and Libya, to discuss strengthening energy cooperation between these countries with the aim of increasing investment opportunities for Italian energy companies.

Indeed, since the period of Italy's national industrialization, especially after the Second World War, most Italian diplomatic actions have focused on establishing a network of stable and peaceful relations with the main fossil fuel exporting countries. In fact, this has led to an important foreign policy perspective that considers energy security one of its main objectives.⁴⁶ Thus, the Italian oil and gas company “Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi” (ENI) is one of the most notable embodiments of energy policy, and its importance is such that it often structures Italy's foreign policy towards the countries where it operates.⁴⁷ Currently, Italy's energy security diplomacy is focused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a commitment based on diversifying its gas suppliers, such as Qatar and Mozambique. However, it will continue to import gas in the form of LNG from Egypt and Israel.⁴⁸

The supply of energy from the southern shore also corresponds to the historical vision of ENI, which conceived of Italy as a Mediterranean energy hub in order to ensure the continuity of sources but also to place it in a favourable position for distribution on the European markets.⁴⁹ Indeed, the objective of making Italy an energy hub dates back to the 1990s,⁵⁰ but following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this project has been revived, and

⁴⁵ Michael T. Klare, *Energy Security*, 487.

⁴⁶ Guido Marseglia, Elisa Rivieccio, Carlo Maria Medaglia, “The dynamic role of Italian energy strategies in the worldwide scenario”, *Kybernetes* 48, no. 3(2019): 638-639, accessed March 25, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-04-2018-0199>

⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Darnis, *L'Italie en Méditerranée*, 137.

⁴⁸ Francis GHILÈS, “As North African energy links are redrawn, Italy becomes Europe’s southern gas hub”, *Barcelona Center for International Affairs* (July 2022), accessed March 30, 2023 https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/notes_internacionals/276/as_north_african_energy_links_are_redrawn_italy_becomes_europe_s_southern_gas_hub

⁴⁹ Jean-Pierre Darnis, *L'Italie en Méditerranée*, 137.

⁵⁰ Arturo Varvelli, “Gassy ambitions: The obstacles to Italy’s planned gas hub for Europe”, *The European Council on Foreign Relations* (14 February 2023), accessed March 11, 2023 <https://ecfr.eu/article/gassy-ambitions-the-obstacles-to-italys-planned-gas-hub-for-europe/>

Italy is on the way to becoming the new Mediterranean gas hub. Three pipelines, from Azerbaijan, Libya, and Algeria, bring gas to its southern shores. Thus, Italy's gas exports have increased to 4.2 billion m³ in 2022, compared to 1.6 billion m³ a year earlier, mainly through the Tag pipeline. Moreover, exports at Tarvisio could reach 6 billion m³ in 2023. This is why Giorgia Meloni said that “fruitful cooperation with African countries will support Italy's role as a Mediterranean energy hub for the whole of Europe”.⁵¹

“Enrico Mattei” Plan for Africa and the Mediterranean: the new Italian repositioning in the chessboard of regional influence

Since her inaugural speech in the House of Representatives on October 25, 2022, Prime Minister “Giorgia Meloni” has referred to the “Mattei Plan for Africa and the Mediterranean”, describing it as “a virtuous model of cooperation and growth between the European Union and African countries” and stating: “We want to regain our strategic role in the Mediterranean after years of privileged withdrawal”.⁵² Indeed, energy supply from the southern shore also corresponds to the historical vision of ENI, that of its founder “Enrico Mattei”, who conceived of Italy as a “Mediterranean energy hub” so as to ensure the continuity of sources but also to place Italy in a favourable position for distribution on the European markets.⁵³ Thus, this reflects the agenda of Italy's official foreign policy, since the time of “Enrico Mattei”, which has been essentially oriented towards the protection of the interests developed by its entrepreneurs, whether private or para-governmental.⁵⁴

In fact, this initiative within the framework of the “Mattei plan” symbolises Italian efforts to establish new relations with the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East, with anti-colonial and Third Worldist visions based on a double entrepreneurial and

⁵¹ Alexandra Vladimirova and Antonio Peciccia, “The EU's REPowerEU plan will pave the way for Italy to deepen its gas ties with Africa”, Argus Media (15 February 2023), accessed March 30, 2023 <https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2420149-repowereu-plan-to-make-italy-an-energy-hub-meloni>

⁵² Roy Brown, “What is the Mattei Plan that Giorgia Meloni talks about so much?”, The Nation View (January 31, 2023), accessed March 31, 2023 <https://thenationview.com/economy/154425.html>

⁵³ Jean-Pierre Darnis, *L'Italie en Méditerranée*, 137.

⁵⁴ John W. Holmes, “Italy: In the Mediterranean, but of it?”, 176-177.

economic model with energy at the Centre of priorities but also obeying political needs.⁵⁵ In this way, the idea of a national energy policy pursued by Enrico Mattei, president of ENI, between the 1950s and 1960s, was transformed into a real “foreign policy parallel to official policy”, which boils down to “collaboration instead of exploitation”, a policy far removed from any neo-colonialist temptation, which also worked effectively in the interests of African countries on the model of “Africa for Africa”.⁵⁶ In this context, Mattei's strategy aimed to establish Italy's energy independence at the national level, followed by the creation of a transactional system intended to produce effects on the oil market and on Italian foreign policy as a country fighting for its economic development and political independence in favour of the oil-producing countries.⁵⁷

However, the aim of the “Mattei plan” is to transform Italy into a real energy distribution “hub” between North Africa and the European Union, while at the same time pushing forward a “cooperation model” between Europe and the countries of the African continent. This is why, since January 2023, Giorgia Meloni has devoted herself to official missions in Algeria, followed by a trip to Libya, to better seal this new pact with North Africa aimed at creating “an area of stability and shared prosperity” around the Mediterranean.⁵⁸ Thus, the return of the Mattei plan, focused specifically on North Africa and the Middle East and to be catalysed by the interruption of natural gas imports from Russia to Europe, is similar to that which existed during the Cold War, when Mattei himself wanted to build a

⁵⁵ Patrick Lafond, «Le tiers-mondisme italien de Mattei», *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 122, no.1 (2010) :161-195, accessed March 31, 2023 <http://journals.openedition.org/mefrim/565>

⁵⁶ Alfredo Lonoce, « La formula Enrico Mattei: “Africa per l’Africa”», *Studio Lonoce* (11 Marzo 2021), accessed March 31, 2023 <https://www.studiolonoce.it/articoli/la-formula-enrico-mattei-africa-per-lafrica/>

⁵⁷ Sara Onofri, “Enrico Mattei and Aldo Moro: Shaping the Mediterranean Détente in the Cold War”, *School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli, Department of Political Science*, (2018/2019),22-39. accessed March 31, 2023 http://tesi.luiss.it/25420/1/635762_ONOFRI_SARA.pdf

⁵⁸ Pierre de Gasquet, « Souveraineté énergétique de l'Italie : Meloni à nouveau dans les pas de Draghi », *Les Echos* (22 mars 2023), accessed March 31, 2023 <https://www.lesechos.fr/idees-debats/editos-analyses/souverainete-energetique-de-litalie-meloni-a-nouveau-dans-les-pas-de-draghi-1917941>

bridge between the Eurasian and Atlantic empires.⁵⁹ Indeed, this project reflects an Italian consensus and continuity in energy security policies under the former government of Mario Draghi, who reoriented gas supply with investments in African countries such as the Republic of Congo, Angola, Nigeria, and Mozambique.⁶⁰ In doing so, Giorgia Meloni insisted that “Italy is and can be much more than a natural hinge and energy bridge between the Mediterranean and Europe”.⁶¹

The keystone of the Italian energy crisis: between the southern gas corridor and the Algiers-Tripoli axis

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2022 has particularly reshaped the EU energy security strategies with an awareness of the dangers of the new policy of “natural gas weaponization” for national, regional, and international security.⁶² That's why Italy has already engaged as a key actor and an integral part of the “Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum” (EMGF), established in 2019 as an international organisation that aims to strengthen energy and gas cooperation between countries in the region. In this sense, on October 6, 2022, the “Italian Regulatory Authority for Energy, Networks, and the Environment” hosted in Rome the third meeting of the Forum's “Regulatory Authority Advisory Committee” to discuss security of supply, market integration, regional agreements, and cross-border coordination.⁶³

⁵⁹ Carlos Perona Calvete, “Italy’s Mattei Plan”, The European Conservative (March 4, 2023), accessed March 31, 2023 <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/commentary/italys-mattei-plan/>

⁶⁰ Silvia Sciorilli Borrelli, “Italy renews its ‘Mattei plan’ to develop energy ties to Africa”, Financial Times (January 11 2023), accessed March 31, 2023 <https://www.ft.com/content/05d17d35-b0c3-47d2-b6b7-6f7d65d758fc>

⁶¹ Federica Pascale, “Meloni says Italy can lead in EU-Africa cooperation”, EURACTIV (December 5, 2022), accessed March 31, 2023 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/meloni-says-italy-can-lead-in-eu-africa-cooperation/>

⁶² Laurent A. Lambert et al, “The EU’s natural gas Cold War and diversification challenges”, Energy Strategy Reviews 43, (September 2022):1-2, accessed March 25, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2022.100934>

⁶³ Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, “2nd RAAC physical meeting - October 6th, 2022”, Regulatory Authority Advisory Committee (RAAC) events, accessed April 1, 2023 <https://emgf.org/events/raac-events/>

However, the “Southern Gas Corridor” (SGC) is one of the largest projects aiming to significantly reduce dependence on a single supplier with a new approach based on prioritising gas import diversification as the central element of economic sovereignty and energy security.⁶⁴ The SGC is a 3500-kilometre-long mega pipeline connecting the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCPx) from Azerbaijan to Georgia, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) through Turkey, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which crosses Greece, Albania, the Adriatic Sea, and ends in southern Italy, and will transport 16 cbm of natural gas per year.⁶⁵ In doing so, Italy's pipeline policy and energy diplomacy are put to work with the new strategy, as illustrated by the government's involvement in the development of the Southern Gas Corridor and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline. In this context, the model of the "catalyst state," which ensured optimal functioning with enhanced capacity and an increased interventionist role in energy policy, especially in such a crisis situation, proves to be the most appropriate in the new institutional structure related to the security of gas supply. Thus, Italy is particularly involved in the main gas corridors due to its geographical location and, above all, to improve its energy security.⁶⁶

Italian energy diplomacy has been oriented towards the countries of North Africa, particularly Algeria, with a historical partnership. In this sense, since the 1970s, ENI has been involved in cross-border natural gas transport projects with Sonatrach, the Algerian public oil and Gas Company, within the framework of the Trans-Med gas pipeline, which was renamed the Enrico Mattei gas pipeline in 2000.⁶⁷ Indeed, the new dynamic in Algerian-Italian relations intervenes in the context of the post-conflict energy crisis in Ukraine, but it is also in

⁶⁴ Andrea Prontera, “Italian energy security, the Southern Gas Corridor and the new pipeline politics in Western Europe: from the partner state to the catalytic state”, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, (August 14, 2015):1-2.

⁶⁵ Peter Tase, “Southern Gas Corridor: A Grand Project In The Making – OpEd”, *Eurasia Review* (March 6, 2018), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.eurasiareview.com/06032018-southern-gas-corridor-a-grand-project-in-the-making-oped/>

⁶⁶ Andrea Prontera, “Italian energy security, the Southern Gas Corridor and the new pipeline politics in Western Europe, 1-2.

⁶⁷ Mark H. Hayes, “Algerian Gas to Europe: The Transmed Pipeline and Early Spanish Gas Import Projects”, Working Paper 27, The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (May 2004):1.

continuity with the Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness between the two countries signed on January 27, 2003.⁶⁸ Thus, Giorgia Meloni's visit to Algeria on January 22, 2023, follows in the footsteps of his predecessor, Mario Draghi, who closed 4 billion euro energy deal and accelerated the delivery of Algerian gas to Italy from 3.5 billion cubic metres in 2022 to around 6 billion cubic metres from 2023 to 2024.⁶⁹ Moreover, the launch of the new Galsi gas pipeline project linking Algeria to Sardinia will enable the export of electricity, ammonia and hydrogen in addition to gas. This is why the Italian Prime Minister insisted that “Algeria is a very important partner in the Mattei plan for Africa, with a view to transforming several current crises into new opportunities and potential”.⁷⁰

Moreover, Libya is the second North African country that Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni visited on January 28, 2023. In this perspective, the two countries share many common interests, with strategic investments beginning in 2019; Italy imported 8% of its natural gas from Libya, through the Greenstream pipeline, linking western Libya to Sicily, in addition to collaborating in the electricity and energy sectors. Simultaneously, Italy is a key partner for Libya, sharing historical ties that date back to 1911, during the colonial occupation, as well as the 2008 Benghazi Treaty.⁷¹ Indeed, an \$8 billion energy contract was signed,⁷² and the Italian Prime Minister repeated the words she had spoken in Algeria, saying that while Italy wanted

⁶⁸ Hassen Houicha, « L'Algérie et l'Italie signent 5 mémorandums de partenariat et de coopération », Agence Anadolu (23 January 2023) accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/politique/lalg%C3%A9rie-et-litalie-signent-5-m%C3%A9morandums-de-partenariat-et-de-coop%C3%A9ration-/2795350>

⁶⁹ Álvaro Escalonilla, “Meloni resumes Draghi's agenda in Algeria: "We will be a gas hub for Europe", Atalayar (January 24 2023), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://atalayar.com/en/content/meloni-resumes-draghis-agenda-algeria-we-will-be-gas-hub-europe>

⁷⁰ Ferial Nourine, « Giorgia Meloni a achevé sa visite en Algérie / Alger-Rome : Un partenariat en béton ! », Reporters (24 January 2023), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.reporters.dz/giorgia-meloni-a-acheve-sa-visite-en-algerie-alger-rome-un-partenariat-en-beton/>

⁷¹ Karim Mezran and Alissa Pavia, “Italy found its way back into Libya”, Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council (April 16, 2021), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/italy-found-its-way-back-into-libya/>

⁷² Alessandro Speciale and Hatem Moharebi, “Italy's Meloni Visits Libya as Eni Signs \$8 Billion Energy Deal”, Bloomberg (January 2, 2023), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-28/italy-s-meloni-visits-libya-to-strengthen-energy-migration-ties#xj4y7vzkg>

to increase its presence in the region, it was not seeking to play a “predatory” role but wanted to help African countries “develop and become richer”.⁷³

The obstacles to Italy’s pivotal role in European energy security in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war

Italian gas pipeline diplomacy and its aspirations to become the new hub of European energy security are confronted with several challenges, including the EU's new energy transition strategies. In addition, the spread of geostrategic rivalries in the western Mediterranean, led by the Latin Arc countries, and Turkey's growing role in the eastern Mediterranean, in an already southern Mediterranean region, are mainly characterised by a myriad of security threats.

The post-Russia-Ukraine war dilemma: energy security versus energy transition

Since the invasion of Ukraine, the management of an imminent transition to cleaner energy sources to avoid the worst effects of climate change has been relegated to the bottom of the priority list in Italy with “a triple dilemma”, which is manifested principally through the spiral of burning issues, namely, energy security, energy transition, and soaring energy prices.⁷⁴ In doing so, Rome should step up climate-friendly investments and accelerate overall progress towards the new EU target of a net reduction in emissions of -55% by 2030. Moreover, it has a significant impact on Italy's commitment to decarbonizing its economy, with policy measures such as phasing out coal by 2025, using renewable energy in the electricity and transport sectors.⁷⁵ However, this has an effect also on the Italian National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) which is based on two pillars: renewable energies and

⁷³ Euro news, “Giorgia Meloni visits Tripoli as Libya signs \$8bn gas exploration deal with Eni”, (January 28, 2023), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.euronews.com/2023/01/28/giorgia-meloni-visits-tripoli-as-libya-signs-8bn-gas-exploration-deal-wit-h-eni>

⁷⁴ Shelby Webb, Carlos Anchondo, David Iaconangelo, “3 questions answered on the Ukraine war’s impact on energy”, E&E News (February 22, 2023), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.eenews.net/articles/3-questions-answered-on-the-ukraine-wars-impact-on-energy/>

⁷⁵ Marc-Antoine Eyl-Mazzega, “Italy’s Green Recovery Strategy and the European Climate Agenda”, Ifri Green Deal Virtual Lunch Series(11 February 2021), accessed April 1, 2023
<https://www.ifri.org/en/debates/italys-green-recovery-strategy-and-european-climate-agenda>

energy efficiency,⁷⁶ especially when it comes to the main objectives of the energy transition policy and achieving climate neutrality.⁷⁷ As a result, the inconsistency with the energy security policy in the framework of the European Green Deal which obliges Italy to radically rebuild its economy around a system focused on sustainability and thus become an environmentally responsible actor.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Italy's ambition to become a gas hub is hampered by the fact that Europe's gas needs in 2030 could be 30-50% lower than in 2019, which means that investments in exploration and exploitation infrastructure may not be profitable. Additionally, existing pipelines would only be able to transport small amounts of hydrogen, while Italy's strategy depends on EU decisions on the energy mix.⁷⁹

Italy's gas hub aspirations and the game of geostrategic competition: between the countries of the Latin arc and the role of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean

On January 19, 2023, France and Spain signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Barcelona, which aims to elevate and seal the bilateral relations between the two countries in a permanent strategic partnership framework. The signing in Barcelona is a strong signal of the importance of the EU's Mediterranean neighbourhood for the countries of the Latin arc, so the EU must pay greater attention to its southern flank, which is a source of great energy opportunities in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis but also requires greater and better management of security risks and threats.⁸⁰ In this context, and already on October 20, France, Spain, Portugal, and Germany replaced the MidCat gas pipeline project with a new “green energy corridor” project to address the energy crisis and strengthen green energy

⁷⁶ Massimo LOMBARDINI, “Italy’s Energy and Climate Policies in the Post COVID-19 Recovery”, Briefing Memo, Ifri Center for Energy & Climate (February 2021):1-5, accessed April 1, 2023 https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/memo_lombardini_italy_necp_in_an_european_context_fev_2021.pdf

⁷⁷ Marco Siddi, “Europe’s Energy Dilemma: War and the Green Transition”, *Current History* 122, no. 842 (March 2023): 83, accessed April 1, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2023.122.842.83>

⁷⁸ Teresa Coratella, “The European Green Deal: A political opportunity for Italy”, *The European Council on Foreign Relations* (17 February 2020), accessed April 1, 2023 https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_european_green_deal_a_political_opportunity_for_italy/

⁷⁹ Arturo Varvelli, “Gassy ambitions: The obstacles to Italy’s planned gas hub for Europe”,

⁸⁰ Ana Palacio et al, « Un nouvel axe franco-espagnol ? », *Le grand continent* (19 janvier 2023), accessed April 2, 2023 <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/01/19/un-nouvel-axe-franco-espagnol/>

infrastructure. The project paves the way for the transport of hydrogen from renewable energy sources.⁸¹ Thus, the parallel is immediately drawn between two frontal visions facing the situation of the European energy crisis: on the one hand, the Italian project of the “southern gas corridor” in the Mediterranean, and on the other, the “green energy corridor”, led by Emmanuel Macron and Pedro Sánchez.

But in reality, the post-Russian invasion of Ukraine has faced Europe with a new construction of the games of axes with the Franco-Spanish couple that will be an alternative to the Franco-Italian alliance sealed by the Treaty of the Quirinal.⁸² Additionally, this coincides with Georgia Meloni's North African diplomatic trip to Algeria and Libya in January 2023, where energy security was at the top of the bilateral cooperation agenda. Meanwhile, contrary to the Italian-Algerian relations, which have become strategic and exceptional, it still excites strong diplomatic tension with France linked to its colonial past, which still constitutes an obstacle. While Algeria supplies Spain with more than 40% of its natural gas through the trans-Mediterranean “Medgaz” pipeline, which has a capacity of 10 billion cubic metres per year, it was immune to the global gas crisis after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, since October 30, 2021, the Maghreb-Europe (GME) gas pipeline through Morocco has been shut down by Algeria.⁸³ That’s why Madrid and Paris see the new Italian dynamism in North Africa and particularly in Algeria as a threat to their economic interests and especially energy security. Indeed, the context of intra-European rivalry over new gas supplies has intensified between Italy and Europe with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, desperately trying to find new sources of gas. But this competition has already manifested

⁸¹ Davide Basso et Paul Messad, « La France troque le gazoduc MidCat contre un nouveau projet déjà controversé », EURACTIV France (21 octobre, 2022), accessed April 1, 2023 <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/energie/news/la-france-troque-le-gazoduc-midcat-contre-un-nouveau-projet-deja-controversee/>

⁸² Ana Palacio et al, « Un nouvel axe franco-espagnol ? »,

⁸³ Khaled Mahmoud, “Algeria’s Ambition in Europe: Between France’s Legacy and Spain’s Hesitation”, Fanack (April 1, 2022), accessed April 1, 2023 <https://fanack.com/politics-en/algerias-ambition-in-europe-between-frances-legacy-and-spains-hesitation~229923/>

itself, particularly since the French intervention in Libya, which did not take into account Italy's economic interests. By losing its supplies from Libya, Rome has therefore turned to Algiers to increase its share of gas imports. Contrary to Franco-Algerian relations, which are still in difficulty, from this perspective, the Italian strategy focused on the criticism of France to get closer to Algiers. It is also the same logic that prevails with Spain, which is on the fence with Algeria over the Western Sahara issue. Thus, there is a diffuse geostrategic competition between Rome, Paris, and Madrid to better position themselves as future gateways to Russian gas replacement supplies.⁸⁴

Indeed, Italy's involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2020 is to promote energy projects but is also seen as “geopolitical opportunism” and a regional desire to isolate Turkey from its sphere of influence and curb Erdogan’s heavy-handed foreign policy.⁸⁵ While Turkey in 2019 reached a maritime agreement with the former Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNA). However, the agreement on energy exploration is likely to ignite an already highly inflammatory environment in the Mediterranean.⁸⁶ Moreover, Turkey's geopolitical strategy aims at making its territory a real “regional energy hub”, which requires it to control certain production sites (Libya and the central Mediterranean) and deprive other powers, notably Italy, of alternative transit routes.⁸⁷ In particular, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Pipeline (EastMed), which transits to Italy through the Poseidon pipelines.⁸⁸ In this perspective, Turkish ambitions are revived by the context of

⁸⁴ Ahmed Faouzi, “Algérie du gaz dans la diplomatie”, Medias24 (22 Avril 2021), accessed May 6, 2023 <https://medias24.com/chronique/algerie-du-gaz-dans-la-diplomatie/>

⁸⁵ Arnaud Peyronnet, « VERS UNE POLITIQUE TURQUE DE DÉLIMITATION MARITIME ENCORE PLUS AGRESSIVE EN MÉDITERRANÉE ? », Fondation Méditerranéenne d’Etudes Stratégique (13 Août, 2020), accessed April 2, 2023 <https://fmes-france.org/vers-une-politique-turque-de-delimitation-maritime-encore-plus-agressive-en-mediterranee-par-arnaud-peyronnet/>

⁸⁶ Sean Mathews, « Escalade des tensions en Méditerranée orientale après un accord maritime préliminaire entre la Turquie et la Libye », Middle East Eye (6 Octobre, 2022), accessed April 1, 2023 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actu-et-enquetes/turquie-libye-escalade-tensions-mediterranee-orientale-accord-maritime-energie-gaz>

⁸⁷ Arnaud Peyronnet, « VERS UNE POLITIQUE TURQUE DE DÉLIMITATION MARITIME ENCORE PLUS AGRESSIVE EN MÉDITERRANÉE ? »,

⁸⁸ Marina Rafenberg, « Le gazoduc Eastmed, une option compliquée pour diminuer la dépendance européenne au gaz russe », Le Monde (12 mars 2022), accessed April 2, 2023

war in Ukraine, so Vladimir Putin, in the margins of the summit of the Conference for Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Kazakhstan on October 13, 2022, during his meeting with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, proposed to Ankara that it become a “gas hub”, through which Russian exports could transit. There is already the TurkStream pipeline, which allows Russia to export some thirty billion cubic metres of gas per year to Turkey and then to the Balkans.⁸⁹

The southern Mediterranean myriad of security threats and the new project of Trans-Saharan gas pipeline between Algeria and Nigeria

North Africa is not a strategic area for the EU's energy supply security. But without a renewal of European political and economic investment on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, insecurity, political crises, and the lack of clear governance will limit Italian initiatives in the region. The EU's relocation process to the south should be accompanied by broader investment initiatives that would support the region's long-term stabilisation.⁹⁰ While Italian companies are among the main foreign partners in the development of Libya's oil and gas sectors. ENI plays a key role in the management of export pipelines to Italy. But the state's failure and the strong divisions in the country following the post-Arab Spring civil war with foreign (Turkey, Russia) political and military interference remain major obstacles for the Italian energy security policy.⁹¹

Moreover, Italy seeks to expand its pipeline diplomacy, which is mainly motivated by attempts to become less dependent on gas supplies from Moscow following Russia's invasion

https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2022/03/12/le-gazoduc-eastmed-une-option-compliquee-pour-diminuer-la-dependance-europeenne-au-gaz-russe_6117178_3234.html

⁸⁹ Timour Ozturk, « La Turquie ambitionne de devenir un hub gazier aux portes de l'Europe », les Echos (19 octobre, 2022), accessed April 2, 2023

<https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/europe/la-turquie-ambitionne-de-devenir-un-hub-gazier-aux-portes-de-leurope-1870710>

⁹⁰ Arturo Varvelli, “Gassy ambitions: The obstacles to Italy’s planned gas hub for Europe”,

⁹¹ Observatoire de la sécurité des flux et des matières énergétiques (OSFME), « Les enjeux énergétiques en Afrique du Nord : Algérie, Libye, Égypte », RAPPORT 8 (Juin 2021), 11-19, accessed April 2, 2023

<https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/OSFME-R8-Les-enjeux-%C3%A9nerg%C3%A9tiques-en-Afrique-du-Nord-Synth%C3%A8se-Rapport.pdf>

of Ukraine, Rome has forged a new axis of energy security cooperation with Algeria.⁹² But this policy has its limits, as Algeria currently has limited production capacity, which seriously compromises these expansion plans, particularly in terms of exploration, infrastructure development, and investment.⁹³ The new Algerian renewable energy development plan will theoretically allow for savings of around 60 GM3 of gas (accumulated until 2035), but in reality this represents less than 4 GM3 per year on average. These gas savings would not be significant and would be very insufficient to actually meet both an increase in domestic consumption and its requirements to secure more natural gas volumes for export.⁹⁴ As Algeria's commitment to the OPEC+ oil production ceiling agreement increases, Algeria may need to reinject more of its gas production to support oil production. Algeria's contribution to replacing Russia has thus far been largely limited to reducing overall exports and redirecting supplies from Spain to Italy.⁹⁵

The war in Ukraine has revived the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) project. Thus, on July 28, 2022, in Algiers, Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding, formalising the 4,000-kilometre project that will bring Nigerian gas to Europe.⁹⁶ The TGSP, or Nigal (Nigeria/Algeria) project, was officially launched in 2001. It could transport up to 30 billion cubic metres (1,000 billion cubic feet) of gas per year from Nigeria in West Africa through Niger to Algeria.⁹⁷ The pipeline would then be connected to Europe via the Medgaz pipeline from Algeria to Spain or the Enrico Mattei

⁹² Sofian Philip Naceur, "Italy and Algeria cooperate on energy Algiers is banking on Europe's gas rush", Qantara (March 08, 2023), accessed March 25, 2023

<https://en.qantara.de/content/italy-and-algeria-cooperate-on-energy-algiers-is-banking-on-europes-gas-rush>

⁹³ Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Europe turns to Algeria for natural gas", GIS Reports online (October 20, 2022), accessed April 2, 2023 <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/algeria-europe/>

⁹⁴ Observatoire de la sécurité des flux et des matières énergétiques (OSFME), « Les enjeux énergétiques en Afrique du Nord », 47.

⁹⁵ Robin Mills, « Why can't Algeria solve Europe's gas woes? », Euractiv (18 August, 2022), accessed April 1, 2023 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/opinion/why-cant-algeria-solve-europes-gas-woes/>

⁹⁶ Ali Boukhlef, "Algeria: The Trans-Saharan pipeline, a Nigerian alternative to Russian gas?", Middle East Eye (10 September 2022), accessed April 2, 2023 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/algeria-trans-saharan-pipeline-nigeria-alternative-russian-gas>

⁹⁷ Benjamin Augé, "Le Trans Saharan Gas Pipeline Mirage ou réelle opportunité ?" Note de l'Ifri (Mars 2010), 4-5, accessed April 1, 2023 https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/auge_le_trans_saharan_gas_pipeline.pdf

Trans-Mediterranean pipeline from Algeria to Italy via Sicily.⁹⁸ Italy will thus have a geostrategic opportunity to exert its “soft power” influence and establish its gas pipeline diplomacy, but the insecurity in the Sahel with organised crime and transnational terrorism would be another major obstacle to geopolitical competition, particularly from Russia in the region. Moreover, Italy is aware of its dangers, as the Minister of Defense, Guido Crosetto, stated on March 13, 2023, that “there is a clear strategy of hybrid warfare that the Wagner group is implementing, using its considerable weight in certain African countries”.⁹⁹

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is evident that Russia's war with Ukraine has brought the issue of energy security to the forefront of Italian domestic politics. The crisis has also started to reshape its foreign policy agenda with the emergence of a diplomatic pipeline activism built around a national consensus and with a certain degree of continuity, initially led by former Prime Minister Mario Draghi and followed by Giorgia Meloni, aiming to find alternatives to Russia as a main energy supplier. Thus, Italy has moved towards strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation in its relations, especially with the oil and gas producing countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with the southern Mediterranean as a central piece in the regional energy security game, which in the current international context has become a major instrument of geopolitical influence with a double process of securitization and militarization.

However, this energy crisis has turned into a geostrategic opportunity for Italy to transform itself as a leading player, going beyond its regional limits to influence the international system by positioning itself as a key player in the future of energy security,

⁹⁸ Martina Schwikowski, “African countries seek to revive Sahara gas pipeline”, Deutsche Welle (December 08,2022), accessed April 2, 2023
<https://www.dw.com/en/african-countries-seek-to-revive-trans-saharan-gas-pipeline-dream/a-62778681>

⁹⁹ Agence Ecofin, “L’Italie accuse le groupe russe Wagner d’être à l’origine de la hausse des flux de migrants africains en Méditerranée”, (14 mars 2023), accessed April 2, 2023
<https://www.agenceecofin.com/actualites/1403-106460-l-italie-accuse-le-groupe-russe-wagner-d-etre-a-l-origine-de-la-hausse-des-flux-de-migrants-africains-en-mediterranee>

which explains its active involvement in the “Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum” (EMGF). Furthermore, Italy's strategy has been geared towards realising its ambition to become a new gas hub for Europe. This was supported by the “Enrico Mattei” plan for Africa and the Mediterranean, which symbolises Italian perceptions of a just, balanced, anti-neocolonial order and above all is in favour of the Third World. Indeed, Italy has emphasised strategic partnerships with North African countries for energy taming, especially with Algeria, by launching the new “GALSI gas pipeline” project that will combine natural gas and green hydrogen. But Italy's post-Ukraine gas pipeline diplomacy faces major challenges, mainly related to the dilemmas of energy security versus the green energy transition imposed by the European Union, geopolitical rivalry, and, above all, the emergence of transnational security threats in the countries of the energy supply, thus constituting a vicious circle for the stability of the international energy system.

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