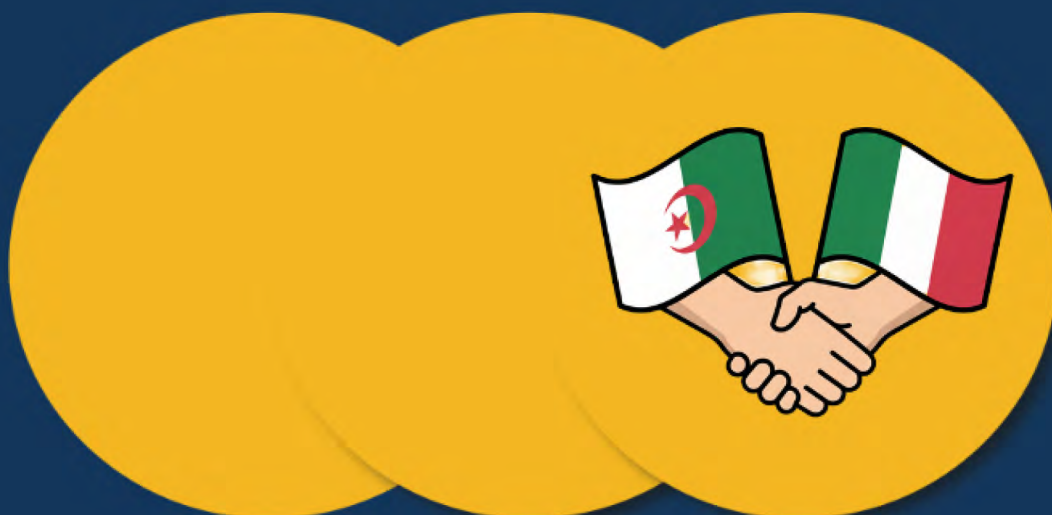


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**The Algerian-Italian Relations:
A Strategic Partnership in a Turbulent
Geopolitical Context**

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NAD

Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie:
Diritto, Istituzioni, Società

Saggi

THE ALGERIAN-ITALIAN RELATIONS:
A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
IN A TURBULENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXTLE RELAZIONI ALGERINO-ITALIANE: UN PARTENARIATO STRATEGICO
IN UN CONTESTO GEOPOLITICO TURBOLENTO*Lotfi Sour** ORCID: LS 0000-0001-8783-9340

ABSTRACT

[It.] Over the past twenty-five years, Algerian-Italian relations have evolved into one of the most structured and resilient bilateral partnerships linking North Africa and the European Union. The 2003 Treaty of Friendship institutionalized political dialogue and economic cooperation, with energy interdependence – anchored in the TransMed pipeline – forming the core of mutual interests. Beyond hydrocarbons, historical ties and sustained high-level exchanges have helped manage political divergences and preserve diplomatic continuity. Yet the partnership remains asymmetrical and sectorial: Italy's policies are framed by EU and NATO commitments, while Algeria upholds principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Consequently, collaboration is more consistent in the economic than in the security domains. Algerian-Italian relations thus reveal the asymmetries of North Africa-EU interaction, where pragmatic cooperation coexists with enduring hierarchies and the interplay of authoritarian resilience and democratic pragmatism.

Keywords: Algeria – Italy – Energy – Security Interests – Bilateral Relations.

[Eng.] Negli ultimi venticinque anni, le relazioni tra l'Algeria e l'Italia si sono evolute in uno dei partenariati bilaterali più strutturati e resilienti che collegano il Nord Africa e l'Unione Europea. Il Trattato di Amicizia del 2003 ha istituzionalizzato il dialogo politico e la cooperazione economica, ponendo al centro l'interdipendenza energetica, fondata sul gasdotto TransMed. Oltre al settore degli idrocarburi, i legami storici e il costante dialogo ad alto livello hanno contribuito a gestire le divergenze politiche e a preservare la continuità diplomatica. Tuttavia, il partenariato rimane asimmetrico e settoriale: la politica estera italiana è incardinata negli impegni dell'UE e della NATO, mentre l'Algeria mantiene una forte adesione ai principi di sovranità e di non ingerenza. Ne consegue che la cooperazione risulta più stabile sul piano economico che in quello della sicurezza. Le relazioni algerino-italiane rivelano così le asimmetrie delle interazioni Nord Africa-UE, dove la cooperazione pragmatica coesiste con gerarchie persistenti e con l'intreccio tra resilienza autoritaria e pragmatismo democratico.

Parole chiave: Algeria – Italia – Energia – Interessi di sicurezza – Relazioni bilaterali.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria and Italy, bound by deep historical ties, share a rich cultural and archaeological heritage that bears testament to the enduring relations between these two Mediterranean nations¹. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, numerous peace and trade agreements were forged between the Regency of Algiers and the Italian states, reflecting the dynamic interactions and mutual interests that characterized their historical engagement². During the Algerian War of Liberation, the National Liberation Front (FLN) received support from numerous Italian politicians and intellectuals who were committed to the principles of justice, peace, and freedom³. Key Italian figures such as Enrico Mattei⁴, Pietro Nenni, Giorgio La Pira, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, and Mario Lana played instrumental roles in fostering solidarity with the Algerian cause. Their efforts helped to shape a distinctive cultural and political legacy that underscored Italy's complex engagement with the liberation movement. While these individuals championed anti-colonialism and human rights, Italy's official stance remained cautiously neutral, shaped by its NATO commitments and the need to balance relations with France, the dominant colonial power in Algeria⁵. This duality reflected the tensions inherent in Italy's post-war foreign policy and its evolving role in Mediterranean geopolitics⁶.

Diplomatic relations between Algeria and Italy were formally established following Algeria's independence. Since then, the two countries have demonstrated a consistent commitment to strengthening their partnership across various strategic sectors. Notably, during Algeria's "Black Decade" of terrorism, Italy maintained cooperative ties with Algeria, including sustaining the operations of Alitalia's air connection to Algiers. The bilateral relationship was further solidified with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourhood, and Cooperation in Algiers on January 27, 2003⁷. The positive tenor of this relationship is facilitated by the absence of colonial discord and reinforced by shared Mediter-

¹ S. Raven, *Rome in Africa*, Routledge, 1993, 3.

² L. Merouche, *Recherches sur l'Algérie à l'époque ottomane. La course, mythes et réalités*, Bouchène, 2002, 215-288.

³ B. Bagnato, *L'Italie et la guerre d'Algérie 1954-1962*, Editions Dahlab, 2017, 201-221; S. Mourlane, *La guerre d'Algérie dans les relations Franco-Italiennes (1958-1962)*, in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, No. 217, 2005, 77-90.

⁴ B. Bagnato, *Petrolio e politica. Mattei in Marocco*, Polistampa, 2004, 136-143.

⁵ B. Bagnato, *Tra Parigi e Algeri. L'Italia e l'elastico filo della sopportazione francese (1954-1962)*, in A. Giaccone, M. Maffioletti (Dir.), *France et Italie (1955-1967) Politique, société et économie*, Peter Lang, 2010, 113-132.

⁶ S. Silvestri and R. Aliboni, *Italy's Mediterranean role*, in *International Journal*, No. 4, 1972, 499-510; J. W. Holmes, *Italy: In the Mediterranean, but of it?*, in *Mediterranean Politics*, No. 2, 1996, 176-192.

⁷ The Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourhood and Cooperation was a real and significant turning point in their country-to-country relations, as confirmed by the long series of agreements signed in the following years covering all sectors of bilateral interest, with energy, trade, security, migration, culture the most important; by the hundreds of visits at government levels paid by both sides and the great array of Italian companies working in Algeria.

anean imperatives, notably in energy security where Algeria has become Italy's principal gas supplier⁸, and by institutional collaboration within frameworks like the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the 5+5 Dialogue⁹. At the same time, the relationship remains nuanced: while converging in areas of strategic interest, the two countries occasionally diverge on regional issues such as Libya and Western Sahara, where Italy's positions – mediated by EU and NATO considerations – do not always align with Algeria's policy of regional sovereignty and self-determination¹⁰.

Situated at the intersection of African, Arab, and European geopolitical spheres, Algeria constitutes a fulcrum of strategic gravitas in the African and Mediterranean security complex. Its demographic weight, vast territorial expanse, and commanding geographic position confer upon it a capacity to influence regional dynamics that extends well beyond its immediate borders, situating the country as both a security provider and a diplomatic broker within overlapping African, Arab, and Euro-Mediterranean arenas. These structural attributes render it an attractive and, in certain sectors, indispensable partner for Italy across political, economic, and security domains. In an era marked by shifting regional equilibria and the recalibration of Euro-Mediterranean relations, both countries possess incentives to sustain and expand cooperation in areas ranging from energy security and infrastructure development to counter-terrorism and maritime governance.

Points of convergence are particularly evident in their shared reading of certain regional crises. In the Libyan conflict, Algiers and Rome have both emphasized the importance of a unified, sovereign Libyan state, free from foreign interference, while recognizing the destabilizing consequences of protracted fragmentation on regional stability, migration flows, and energy security¹¹. Nevertheless, their approaches are not entirely identical: Algeria privileges political dialogue inclusive of all Libyan actors, resisting initiatives perceived as externally imposed¹², whereas Italy – though also supportive of United Nation (UN) mediation – has at times engaged more directly with factions aligned to its own security and migration priorities, reflecting its EU and NATO frameworks¹³.

Conversely, the dynamics of their respective relations with France further reveal both proximity and divergence. While both seek to maintain strategic autonomy *vis-à-vis* Paris, Algeria-France relations have been periodically strained, particularly in recent years, over historical memory disputes, migration issues, and differences in regional policy¹⁴. In contrast, Italy's ties with France, though subject to occasional friction, have generally remained more functional and cooperative¹⁵, anchored in shared EU membership and economic interdependence¹⁶. This asymmetry creates different diplomatic margins for manoeuvre in Maghreb affairs.

⁸ B. Tahchi, *Algerian gas to strengthen energy security of the European Union: Policy, capacity and strategy*, in *Energy Reports*, 2024, 3600-3613.

⁹ G. Fini, *Italy's Role in Mediterranean Security and the Fight Against Terrorism*, in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, No. 1, 2006, 1-15.

¹⁰ C. Roggero, *Algeria and Italy: A New Era, Scattered with Challenges*, ISPI, 2024, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/algeria-and-italy-a-new-era-scattered-with-challenges-183086>.

¹¹ T. Megerisi, *Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia. Neighboring States - Diverging Approaches*, in K. Mezran, A. Varvelli (Eds.), *Foreign Actors in Libya's Crisis*, Ledizioni, 2017, 34-38.

¹² L. Sour, *Algeria's role in Libya: Towards a renewed regional diplomacy*, in *Romanian Review of Political Sciences & International Relations*, No. 2, 2022, 145-156.

¹³ A. Melcangi, A. Varvelli, *A new state-building process for Libya? Italy and the international community (2011–2021)*, in L. Monzali, P. Soave (Eds.), *Italy and Libya: from colonialism to a special relationship (1911–2021)*, Routledge, 2023, 263-277.

¹⁴ D. Le Saout, *Les relations France-Algérie et le soulèvement du Hirak*, in *Pouvoirs*, No.1, 2021, 108-110.

¹⁵ E. Brighi, M. Musso, *Italy in the Middle East and the Mediterranean: Evolving Relations with Egypt and Libya*, in *Italian Politics*, No. 1, 2017, 85.

¹⁶ J. P. Darnis, *Les relations entre la France et l'Italie et le renouvellement du jeu européen*, L'Harmattan, 2021, 161-168.

Such differences, however, have not fundamentally disrupted bilateral ties. Rather, they illustrate the distinct strategic priorities, normative commitments, and geopolitical constraints that each state navigates. Algeria's diplomacy continues to be shaped by its revolutionary heritage, non-aligned posture, and strong normative framing of sovereignty and self-determination¹⁷, whereas Italy's Mediterranean engagement is embedded within its EU obligations, NATO commitments, and diverse economic linkages. The result is a relationship characterized by pragmatic alignment and deep cooperation where interests converge, and carefully managed divergence where national imperatives differ.

This article reconstructs the trajectory of Algerian-Italian relations from the early 1960s – when Italy formally recognised Algerian sovereignty and established permanent diplomatic channels – and argues that the relationship's distinctiveness lies less in the quantitative metrics of trade or the chronology of recognition than in a durable strategic coherence that has guided political engagement. For over six decades, Algiers and Rome have institutionalised regular, structured dialogue and mutually reinforcing mechanisms of consultation, preserving channels of communication and cooperation across shifting regional and global conjunctures. Even during Algeria's violent security crisis of the 1990s – when instability might have provided sufficient grounds for other powers to distance themselves – Italy treated the turbulence as a temporary disruption rather than a fundamental rupture. What prevailed was the hard calculus of interest: the recognition that maintaining a stable and reliable partnership with Algiers served Rome's strategic needs in the Mediterranean, and that resilience in the face of adversity was preferable to withdrawal. This capacity to weather shocks, rather than retreat in moments of uncertainty, underscores the realist logic that has underpinned the relationship's endurance.

The article examines the political and economic foundations of this enduring partnership, demonstrating that its resilience derives not only from mutual respect but also from the strategic dividends each side extracts from sustained engagement. Trust, while often invoked rhetorically, has been underpinned by material interdependence – above all energy ties – that bind Italy's security of supply to Algeria's stability and revenue streams. This dense web of interests has acted as a stabiliser, ensuring that cooperation persists even when the regional environment has grown inhospitable. The analysis highlights how these factors have consolidated a bilateral alignment that goes beyond sentiment, reflecting instead a convergence of hard interests. It further situates the relationship within the broader contest for influence in the Western Mediterranean, a space where external actors and shifting coalitions continuously reshape the strategic landscape. Finally, the article assesses how Algeria's recalibrated foreign policy under President Abdelmadjid Tebboune intersects with Italian priorities, suggesting that Rome's attentiveness to Algiers is not a matter of goodwill but of strategic necessity in a volatile regional order.

1.1 Research Questions and Methodology

To better understand the key aspects of Algerian-Italian cooperation and assess the prospects for a formal alliance, the following research questions will be examined:

How do Algeria's and Italy's geopolitical priorities align?

Analysing the similarities and differences in the geopolitical priorities of both nations is essential for

¹⁷ L. Sour, *Algeria's Golden Opportunity*, in *The Republic*, 2025, <https://rpublic.com/algeria/algeria-golden-opportunity/>.

assessing the potential for a formal alliance. Understanding these priorities will shed light on the possibilities for future strategic partnership.

What are the costs associated with further cooperation, and what should Algeria and Italy be prepared to pay?

This question seeks to identify the political and security costs involved in further deepening cooperation. By examining the potential costs, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels, we can gain a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities for future interaction between Algiers and Rome.

To address these questions, this article adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach grounded in the traditions of foreign policy analysis and regional security studies. It seeks to understand how Algeria and Italy articulate, negotiate, and operationalize their strategic interests within the evolving Euro-Mediterranean environment. Rather than testing formal hypotheses or relying on quantitative indicators, the research aims to interpret the meanings, practices, and strategic narratives through which both states construct their foreign policy orientations. This interpretive orientation assumes that foreign policy is not merely a response to material constraints but also a process embedded in historical experiences, institutional legacies, and evolving perceptions of regional order.

The integrated theoretical and methodological design directly supports the study's overarching aim: to elucidate how Algeria and Italy construct and operationalize strategic interests within a shifting Euro-Mediterranean order. By combining interpretative and realist perspectives, the framework captures both the discursive articulation of policy and its material anchoring in regional power structures.

The dyadic case approach, grounded in systematic documentary and discourse analysis, offers a balanced perspective on cooperation, competition, and interdependence. Reflexivity and transparency reinforce the credibility of findings, while the emphasis on contextual interpretation situates the research within contemporary debates on foreign policy behavior, regional security interdependence, and the geopolitics of the Mediterranean. In this way, theory and method jointly sustain a coherent analytical narrative capable of bridging empirical evidence and conceptual insight.

The article relies on an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources, including official statements, bilateral agreements, press releases, government communiqués, and policy documents, complemented by peer-reviewed articles and specialized reports from research institutes and international organizations. These materials are examined through discourse and documentary analysis to capture the explicit and implicit dimensions of policy framing. Triangulation of multiple sources ensures both analytical rigor and contextual accuracy, while tracing continuity and change in the bilateral relationship over time.

The Algerian–Italian dyad is selected as a revealing and instructive case of mid-level power interaction in the Mediterranean. It exemplifies how two states – neither global powers nor peripheral actors – navigate shifting regional dynamics to enhance their strategic autonomy. The relationship also provides a fertile ground for analyzing the intersection between energy interdependence, security cooperation, and geopolitical alignment, particularly in light of the changing European energy landscape after 2011 and the deepening instability in North Africa and the Sahel. By focusing on this bilateral relationship, the article sheds light on broader patterns of regional reconfiguration, where middle powers use sectoral cooperation, especially in energy and counterterrorism to reinforce their diplomatic leverage.

2. POLITICAL AND SECURITY RELATIONS: ITALY'S ROLE AS THE TRUSTED PARTNER

2.1 *Algerian-Italian Relations in Regional Setting*

The Maghreb occupies a central position in Italy's geopolitical vision, serving as a strategic bridge between Europe, Africa, and the Mediterranean. Italy's peninsular geography renders it structurally more exposed than other European states to political instability, economic turbulence, migration surges, and security threats emerging from North Africa. Studies by Coralluzzo¹⁸ and Carbone¹⁹ underscore that Italy's vulnerability to Maghrebi developments has refocused its foreign policy to prioritize the region, elevating it from peripheral concern to strategic cornerstone²⁰. Italy has specifically prioritized stabilizing the Mediterranean region as part of its national interest, emphasizing both multilateral and bilateral initiatives aimed at reinforcing political dialogue and economic cooperation with the coastal countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

The objective has been to establish a safety net around Italian maritime borders in response to the risks associated with an uncontrolled increase in migration – an issue to which Italy is particularly vulnerable compared to other European countries – alongside the instability of North African energy resources and the threat of terrorism infiltrating Italian territory. In addition to addressing the critical concerns regarding the Maghreb region that directly impact Italy's national interests – such as security, migration, development, and energy – the article also examines the key aspects of bilateral relations between Italy and Algeria²¹.

The evolution of Algerian-Italian relations reflects a gradual process of consolidation grounded in a combination of historical, political, and economic factors. The initial phase, marked by Italy's early and consistent support for Algeria's independence, established a foundation of political goodwill that would endure in subsequent decades. Over time, the relationship acquired additional strategic depth, driven primarily by Algeria's role as a reliable supplier within Italy's energy security architecture and as its leading commercial partner in the MENA region.

In the early 2000s, this dynamic entered a new stage with the signing, in Algiers, of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation. Far from being a merely symbolic gesture, the Treaty institutionalized mechanisms for sustained high-level political dialogue and laid the groundwork for sectoral agreements in areas ranging from infrastructure and defense cooperation to cultural exchange. The year 2003 thus constituted a pivotal juncture in bilateral relations, marking the mutual decision to frame the partnership as “strategic” in scope. This shift was not limited to diplomatic rhetoric; it entailed a deliberate effort to synchronize political consultations, deepen economic interdependence, and expand security coordination, thereby embedding the relationship within the broader Euro-Mediterra-

¹⁸ V. Coralluzzo, *Italy and the Mediterranean: Relations with the Maghreb countries*, in *Modern Italy*, No. 2, 2008, 115-133.

¹⁹ M. Carbone, V. Coralluzzo, *The Politics of Italy's Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean*, in *Mediterranean Politics*, No. 3, 2009, 429-435.

²⁰ M. Carbone, V. Coralluzzo, *Italy in the Mediterranean: between Atlanticism and Europeanism*, in M. Carbone (Ed.), *Italy in the post-cold war order: adaptation, bipartisanship, visibility*, Lexington Books, 2011, 197-214.

²¹ G. Lošić, *The New Italian and German Relations with Algeria in the Midst of the Energy Crisis*, in *Rivista di Studi Politici*, 2022, 66-67.

nean framework²². Since 2003, the collaborations between Algeria and Italy – an EU founding member and a major global player – have not only held bilateral significance but also extended to discussions on regional issues, Algeria-EU relations, and broader multilateral matters.

Analytically, bilateral relations between Algeria and Italy have strengthened significantly over the past two years, marked by an increasing number of official visits. This progress has been facilitated by a key institutional development in 2022: the establishment of the Algerian-Italian Strategic Dialogue²³. This mechanism has proven to be an essential tool for consultation, aiming to foster deeper connections between public and private institutions, thereby improving overall bilateral relations. Chaired by the two countries' Foreign Ministers, the Strategic Dialogue is designed to adopt a comprehensive approach to all facets of Algerian-Italian relations. In recent years, this framework has been instrumental in the signing of numerous agreements that support both diplomatic and economic objectives. A notable example of this is the Italian Prime Minister (PM) Giorgia Meloni's visit to Algeria in January 2022, which resulted in the signing of several cooperation agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), further consolidating the strategic partnership²⁴.

The intensification of Algerian-Italian relations in 2021–2022 was marked by high-level reciprocal visits, including President Sergio Mattarella's state visit to Algiers in November 2021 and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's official visit to Rome in May 2022. These visits were characterised in official statements as reflecting broad convergence on bilateral priorities and a shared ambition for strategic cooperation. According to diplomatic reporting, this period has been described as a “golden age” in bilateral relations²⁵, further underlined by PM Giorgia Meloni's visit to Algiers in January 2023—her first trip outside Europe since taking office—and the earlier visits of her predecessor Mario Draghi in April and July 2022²⁶.

Most recently, in July 2025, President Tebboune returned to Italy for the Fifth Algerian-Italian Inter-governmental Summit in Rome, co-chaired with PM Meloni. This summit produced over forty cooperation agreements across sectors including energy, security, infrastructure, and cultural exchange²⁷, while reaffirming joint commitments to counter-terrorism and Mediterranean stability²⁸.

Italy's Mediterranean policy has long occupied a contested space in historiography, oscillating between interpretations that view it as an extension of great power aspirations and those that emphasize its pragmatic adaptation to regional dynamics²⁹. Given its geographical proximity to three of the five Maghreb states, Italy has historically assumed the role of a pivotal, if at times ambivalent, regional actor. Yet proximity alone does not explain the durability and complexity of Italian-Maghrebi relations. Rath-

²² M. Parodi, *Estensione delle zone di mare e problematiche concernenti la loro istituzione: il caso del Mar Mediterraneo*, Tesi di Laurea, 2023, <https://unire.unige.it/bitstream/handle/123456789/6418/tesi25596488.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&group=an>.

²³ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et de la Communauté Nationale à l'Étranger, 2ème session du Dialogue stratégique algéro-italien sur les relations bilatérales et les questions politiques et de sécurité globale.

²⁴ G. Lošić, *The New Italian and German Relations with Algeria in the Midst of the Energy Crisis*, cit., 67.

²⁵ A. Kaval, *Giorgia Meloni launches her Mediterranean policy in Algiers*, in *Le monde*, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/01/24/giorgia-meloni-launches-her-mediterranean-policy-in-algiers_6012947_4.html

²⁶ G. Lošić, *The New Italian and German Relations with Algeria in the Midst of the Energy Crisis*, cit., 70.

²⁷ Agenzia Nova, *Italy and Algeria Have Signed over 40 Agreements. Meloni: 'Important Pieces Added to the Mattei Plan*, in *Agenzia Nova*, 2025, <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/Italy-and-Algeria-have-signed-over-40-agreements--adding-important-pieces-to-the-Mattei-plan/>

²⁸ A. Amante, *Italy and Algeria Agree to Tackle Terrorism and Migration at Summit*, in *Reuters*, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/italy-algeria-boost-cooperation-with-new-security-business-deals-2025-07-23/>.

²⁹ M. Carbone, *Introduction: Italy's foreign policy and the Mediterranean*, in *Modern Italy*, No. 2, 2008, 111-113.

er, what emerges is a strategic entanglement shaped by geopolitical realignments in the Mediterranean and by shifting patterns of regional interdependence³⁰.

For Algeria in particular, bilateral ties with Italy have evolved within a broader Mediterranean framework that transcends dyadic relations³¹. The reconfiguration of Mediterranean geopolitics – from energy security and migration governance to the securitization of maritime routes – has redefined the strategic context in which Algiers and Rome interact. Issues once considered in isolation, such as the geostrategic significance of the Mediterranean Sea and the imperative of regional economic development, increasingly converge as shared challenges that necessitate coordinated approaches³². Thus, the Algerian-Italian relationship cannot be adequately understood through a purely bilateral lens³³.

It must be situated within the multilayered architecture of Mediterranean politics, where the interplay between national interests, regional institutions, and transnational pressures shapes the scope and direction of cooperation. This perspective highlights not only Italy's function as a Mediterranean "middle power"³⁴, but also Algeria's role as a strategic counterpart in sustaining stability and economic connectivity across the southern Mediterranean rim.

Although Italy and Algeria draw on different foreign policy traditions – Italy through its integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions³⁵ and Algeria through its postcolonial, sovereignty-centered orientation³⁶ – their bilateral relations have increasingly converged around pragmatic common interests. Beyond energy, both states share an interest in preserving stability in the wider Mediterranean. They have coordinated in areas such as counter-terrorism, maritime security, and the management of migratory flows across the central Mediterranean corridor³⁷. Moreover, economic cooperation – through infrastructure projects, industrial partnerships, and trade diversification – has reinforced the perception of Italy and Algeria as indispensable counterparts in fostering a more balanced North–South Mediterranean integration.

Thus, the significance of the Italian-Algerian relationship lies less in the supposed convergence of foreign policy doctrines and more in their ability to translate divergent historical trajectories into pragmatic alignments on shared strategic concerns: energy, security, and regional development³⁸.

As previously noted, Algeria's leaders are fully aware of their country's strategic importance to Italy as both a secure ally and a resource base. In turn, Italy has publicly acknowledged Algeria's role in contributing to stability in the South Mediterranean. The geopolitical rationale for strong Algerian-Italian ties provides Algeria with an opportunity to enhance its regional engagement on various issues, particularly energy, commerce, and sustainability³⁹.

Today, Algeria's importance in the EU's overall foreign policy strategy is growing, driven by several

³⁰ R. Del Sarto, N. Tocci, *Italy's politics without policy: Balancing Atlanticism and Europeanism in the Middle East*, in *Modern Italy*, No. 2, 2008, 135-153.

³¹ V. Coralluzzo, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, cit.

³² R. Del Sarto, N. Tocci, *Italy's politics without policy*, cit.

³³ M. Carbone, V. Coralluzzo, *The Politics of Italy's Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean*, cit.

³⁴ G. Dentice, F. Donelli, *Reasserting (middle) power by looking southwards: Italy's policy towards Africa*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, No. 3, 331-351.

³⁵ E. Brighi, *Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Relations: The Case of Italy*, Routledge, 2013, 138-140.

³⁶ R. A. Mortimer, *Algerian Foreign Policy: from Revolution to National Interest*, in *The Journal of North African Studies*, No. 3, 2015, 466-482.

³⁷ M. Ceccorulli, *The Mediterranean as a buffer: Confining irregular migrants in North Africa*, in M. Ceccorulli, N. Labanca (Eds.), *The EU, Migration and the Politics of Administrative Detention*, Routledge, 2014, 187-189.

³⁸ R. Del Sarto, N. Tocci, *Italy's politics without policy*, cit., 135-153.

³⁹ K. Mezran, A. Pavia, *Giorgia Meloni's Foreign Policy and the Mattei Plan for Africa: Balancing Development and Migration Concerns*, in *LAI Commentaries*, 2023, 1-2.

factors⁴⁰. Foremost among these is Algeria's emergence as a major power in the global energy market⁴¹. Additionally, its diplomatic and security ties have raised concerns within the EU about the potential formation of a geopolitical balancing coalition, with members spanning multiple borders, including those with Russia and China.

By strengthening its ties with Algeria, Italy not only serves its own interests but also potentially those of the EU and the United States. This is evident in Algeria's recent disputes with Spain, which recently ended five decades of neutrality on the Western Sahara issue, and with France, where relations continue to be influenced by their colonial past. Additionally, Morocco's growing relevance in the eyes of the United States, particularly after joining the Abraham Accords, further underscores the risk of sending a message to Algeria that it is becoming increasingly isolated⁴².

Algeria's strategic importance in the Mediterranean, as well as its role in energy security, counterterrorism, and migration management, makes it a crucial partner for European and American interests⁴³. Italy, with its geographic proximity and longstanding ties to Algeria, is positioned to act as an intermediary and potential facilitator for broader EU and US cooperation with Algiers. However, the shifting alliances in North Africa – evidenced by Morocco's improved relations with both the US and Israel – pose a delicate challenge for Algeria⁴⁴. This diplomatic reconfiguration risks deepening Algeria's sense of marginalization, particularly as it has traditionally relied on its strong regional alliances and its stance on issues like Western Sahara and the Libyan conflict. For the EU and the US, maintaining strong relations with Algeria is crucial in addressing regional instability, particularly the threat of extremism emanating from the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, Algeria's energy exports remain vital for European energy security, especially in light of recent disruptions in global energy supply chains⁴⁵. Therefore, Italy's engagement with Algeria could serve as a strategic balancing act, offering a counterweight to the growing influence of Morocco while reinforcing broader geopolitical interests in the region. However, the EU and US must also be mindful of Algeria's sensitivities regarding its sovereignty and regional influence. The risk of pushing Algeria further into isolation is not merely diplomatic but could have tangible economic consequences, especially if it seeks to pivot towards alternative partners in Asia or Russia, which have shown interest in expanding their footprint in North Africa. In this complex geopolitical landscape⁴⁶, Italy's role as a mediator and ally of Algeria could provide a stabilizing force, but it also requires careful navigation of Algeria's regional rivalries and its historical grievances with former colonial powers.

2.2 Regional Security Environment in the Italo-Algerian Relations

In fact, Italy and Algeria have forged a pragmatic partnership encompassing diplomacy, security, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange, yet the fluid contours of the regional geopolitical landscape

⁴⁰ D. Cristiani, K. Mezran, *Perché Italia e Algeria sono due alleati chiave nel Mediterraneo*, in *Istituto Affari Internazionali*. 2023, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/perche-italia-e-algeria-sono-due-alleati-chiave-nel-mediterraneo/>.

⁴¹ M. Benasla, *Algeria's potential to supply Europe with dispatchable solar electricity via HVDC links: Assessment and proposal of scenarios*, in *Energy Reports*, 2023, 39-54.

⁴² D. Cristiani, K. Mezran, *Perché Italia e Algeria sono due alleati chiave nel Mediterraneo*, cit.

⁴³ H. Darbouche, *Decoding Algeria's ENP Policy: Differentiation by Other Means?* in *Mediterranean Politics*, No. 3, 2008, 371-389.

⁴⁴ D. Maghraoui, *The Multiple Layers of Morocco's Normalization with Israel*, in G. Yang, J. Zhang, X. Xiong, L. Liu (Eds.), *Risks, Resilience and Interdependency*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, 267-268.

⁴⁵ O. Voytyuk, *Scenarios for diversification of EU natural gas supplies from Algeria*, in *African Studies Quarterly*, No.1, 2023, 22-40.

⁴⁶ A. Dworkin, *The Maghreb maze: Harmonising divergent European policies in North Africa*, in *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-maghreb-maze-harmonising-divergent-european-policies-in-north-africa/>.

continue to test the resilience of their strategic alignment in the southern Mediterranean. A critical source of this uncertainty arises from divergent perspectives on key issues. Notable among these are disagreements over the exclusive economic zone and maritime boundary delimitation between Algeria and Italy⁴⁷, as well as differing stances on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite these differences, the enduring pragmatic foundation of Algerian-Italian relations highlights their mutual entanglement in major regional security concerns. This is particularly evident in contexts where their geopolitical strategies intersect, including Libya, the Sahel, and the broader western Mediterranean. Algeria and Italy's collaborative efforts to counter violent extremism, ensure energy security, foster economic partnerships, and address increasing migratory flows from North Africa underscore their shared regional interests. These overlapping priorities not only reinforce the strategic relevance of their bilateral engagement but also demonstrate the necessity of coordinated action in navigating the complexities of Mediterranean geopolitics⁴⁸.

Italy perceives Algeria as a pivotal player in the Maghreb and Sahel regions, a country whose regional influence aligns with Rome's broader geopolitical priorities. Algeria's strategic significance is particularly evident in Italy's calculations concerning Libya and Tunisia. In Libya, both nations are united in their objectives: preserving the country's territorial integrity, supporting the UN-recognized government, and preventing the western regions of Libya from descending into disorder. Since the fall of the Qaddafi regime—a development that generated significant geopolitical concerns for both Algiers and Rome—Italy and Algeria have actively cooperated to stabilize the Libyan situation. As foreign military involvement in Libya gradually diminishes, renewed and intensified collaboration between the two countries will become essential to safeguarding their shared security interests and curbing further instability⁴⁹.

For Algeria, Libya presents a considerable security challenge. The ongoing conflict, marked by its violent dynamics, exacerbates a range of threats along Algeria's eastern border⁵⁰. These include heightened risks of terrorism and the infiltration of armed groups. Algeria's neutrality in Libya's internal conflicts and its potential role as a mediator further underscore its importance. European states, notably Italy and Germany, view Algeria as an indispensable partner in efforts to restore peace and stability in Libya⁵¹.

For Italy, Algeria's role extends beyond the Libyan theatre. Rome relies on Algiers to mitigate broader regional crises that threaten European security, including terrorism, irregular migration, and refugee flows⁵². Algeria's stabilizing influence, coupled with its geographical proximity and strategic posture, positions it as a cornerstone in Italy's efforts to manage the complexities of North African and Mediterranean geopolitics⁵³.

Similarly, Italy supports the ongoing peace process but focuses on aligning its efforts with other major powers and regional players, including EU, UN, and the United States⁵⁴. While, Algerian efforts have been

⁴⁷ F. Caffio, *Acque agitate nel Mediterraneo occidentale: la proclamazione algerina della zona economica esclusiva*, in *Rivista del diritto della navigazione*, No. 1, 2019, 209-218; R. Pascale, W. Seddik, *Les chevauchements entre revendications maritimes Algérie/Italie et Algérie*, in *ZOMAD Les zones grises du droit de la mer*, 2020, <https://zomad.eu/fr/med05-algeria-spain-italy/>.

⁴⁸ F. Borsari, *Algeria: verso il 2024 tra sfide e traguardi*, in *ISPI*, 2023, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/algeria-verso-il-2024-tra-sfide-e-traguardi-135061>.

⁴⁹ T. Megerisi, *Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia*, cit.

⁵⁰ L. Sour, *Algeria's role in Libya*, cit., 151-152.

⁵¹ F. H. Lawson, M. Legrenzi, *Algeria's Assertive Re-emergence*, in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, No. 5, 2022, 127-142.

⁵² G. Lošić, *The New Italian and German Relations with Algeria in the Midst of the Energy Crisis*, cit., 62-63.

⁵³ F. D. L. Lumeno, *Italy's Evolving Mediterranean Strategy: Migrations, Economic Diplomacy, and Regional Challenges from the Arab Springs to the Mattei Plan*, in *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy*, 2024, 42-51.

⁵⁴ M. Ceccorulli, F. Cotichia, *I'll Take Two. Migration, Terrorism, and the Italian*, in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, No. 2, 2020, 174-196.

confined to supporting, mediating, and facilitating rather than taking on a strong leadership role in achieving, sustaining, and enforcing peace. Algeria favours a peace process and political resolution to the conflict.

Italy's increasing focus on Algeria, leveraging its strategic location as a geopolitical hub, could contribute to strengthening the Algiers-EU relationship while aligning with broader transatlantic interests. Algeria has historically been wary of foreign interference. For instance, when Morocco joined the so-called Abraham Accords in 2020, the resulting geopolitical shifts heightened pressure on Algeria's elites and fueled domestic anxieties⁵⁵. Italian policy on Western Sahara reflects its delicate balancing act between fostering strong relations with both Morocco and Algeria. Rome has sought to optimize economic and trade benefits with these nations while navigating their competing interests. Historically, Italy's stance has ranged from constructive neutrality to limited support for Algeria⁵⁶. Historically, Italy's position has ranged from constructive neutrality to active support—to some extent—for Algeria. As part of this policy, Italy has also cultivated friendly relations with a variety of actors affiliated with the Western Sahara. Many Italian local administrations have approved twinning agreements and cooperation projects with the territory and its municipalities. Also, the Italian Parliament granted diplomatic representation to the Polisario Front in 2007 and has since called for the need to guarantee human rights in the territory⁵⁷.

Recent developments suggest that Italy's balancing act between Algeria and Morocco has become increasingly challenging, particularly in light of the United States' evolving stance on the Western Sahara⁵⁸ and Algeria's new role as Rome's primary supplier of natural gas. Italy's efforts to reconcile its strategic interests in the Mediterranean with its traditional support for the UN-led diplomatic track on the Western Sahara have resulted in a somewhat ambiguous position on the issue in recent years.

In July 2022, during a meeting with Italian PM Mario Draghi, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune emphasized that Algeria and Italy share a commitment to supporting UN initiatives aimed at resolving the Western Sahara conflict. Italy's ability to maintain close ties with both Algeria and Morocco reflects its foreign policy flexibility, the sophistication of its diplomatic efforts, and the inherent limitations of Italian-Algerian cooperation. Nevertheless, Italy's strategic objectives position it as a situational ally of Algeria⁵⁹. However, Italy remains cautious about taking sides in the Western Sahara dispute. Balancing parallel relationships with Algeria and Morocco – two bitter regional rivals – continues to test Italy's resourcefulness and diplomatic agility.

3. ALGERIAN-ITALIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS: AN EVOLVING PARTNERSHIP

The literature on Algeria's economic history highlights Mattei's legacy as a cornerstone of Algerian-Italian economic relations, particularly in the energy sector⁶⁰. Italy has established a longstanding

⁵⁵ E. Magnani, *L'enigma algerino*, in *Difesa online*, 2023, <https://www.difesaonline.it/geopolitica/analisi/lenigma-algerino-seconda-parte>.

⁵⁶ P. Malesani, *Italian Foreign Policy and the Western Sahara: Balancing Relations with Morocco and Algeria*, in *LAI Commentaries*, 2022, 1-2.

⁵⁷ Senato della Repubblica, *Resoconto sommario / Resoconto stenografico*, 266^a Seduta pubblica (pomeridiana), XV Legislatura, Roma: Senato della Repubblica, dicembre 2007, <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/295170.pdf?utm.com>.

⁵⁸ K. Eichensehr, *United States Recognizes Morocco's Sovereignty Over Western Sahara*, in *American Journal of International Law*, No. 2, 2021, 309-319.

⁵⁹ P. Malesani, *Italian Foreign Policy and the Western Sahara*, cit.

⁶⁰ A. Layachi, *Italy and Algeria: A resilient connection*, in L. Monzali, P. Soave (Eds.), *Italy and the Middle East: Geopolitics, Dia-*

partnership with Algeria, being among the first European nations to officially recognize Algeria's independence in 1962. Since then, Italy has remained one of Algeria's key trading partners, significantly contributing through investments in infrastructure and energy sectors. Italian economic diplomacy has also played a pivotal role in fostering cooperation with Algeria. This partnership aligns with an emerging, albeit gradual, Italian perspective of a shared Mediterranean future, a vision that began to materialize only in later years⁶¹, finding both tangible and symbolic representation in Italy's cultural diplomacy and Mediterranean policy initiatives.

The construction of the Trans-Mediterranean pipeline (1978–1983), often referred to in Italian political discourse as the “Mattei pipeline”, embodied both the material and symbolic dimensions of Italian-Algerian relations. Technically, it provided a direct infrastructural link between Algeria and Italy through Tunisia, securing long-term energy flows that reinforced Italy's dependence on Algerian natural gas⁶². Symbolically, the invocation of Enrico Mattei – who during Algeria's war of independence had cultivated direct relations with the FLN in defiance of French policy – functioned as a reminder of Italy's claim to a distinctive role in the Maghreb⁶³. As scholars of energy geopolitics note, infrastructure projects such as the TransMed pipeline operate not merely as conduits of resources but as institutionalized frameworks of interdependence, anchoring bilateral relations within a broader Mediterranean energy system⁶⁴.

Seen in this light, the TransMed pipeline cannot be reduced to a banal historical reference; rather, it encapsulates the convergence of geopolitical pragmatism and historical symbolism. It cemented Algeria's emergence as a reliable energy partner for Italy, while also allowing Rome to assert a Mediterranean vocation distinct from both its Atlantic commitments and Franco-centric European orientations⁶⁵. Thus, the “Mattei pipeline” stands as an enduring marker of how energy infrastructure intertwines with foreign policy identity and regional strategy.

The origins of Algerian-Italian energy cooperation are historically charged and politically contested, shaped as much by symbolism and postcolonial diplomacy as by material interests. The figure of Enrico Mattei, founder of Ente Nazionale dei Idrocarburi (ENI), occupies a central place in this narrative. At a time when France sought to retain control over Saharan hydrocarbons⁶⁶, Mattei established direct contacts with the *Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne* (GPRA), offering political recognition and technical advice on energy sovereignty—an approach that earned him enduring esteem in Algiers but also positioned Italy in delicate opposition to French interests⁶⁷. This foundational moment framed the trajectory of ENI's presence in Algeria, subsequently consolidated through a partnership with Sonatrach that has now lasted more than six decades. The construction of the TransMed pipeline between 1978 and 1983 – then the first underwater gas pipeline linking North Africa to Europe – further symbolized Italy's technological capability and long-term commitment to the Maghreb⁶⁸. In this

logue and Power during the Cold War, I.B. Tauris; 2021, 192; Ambasciata d'Italia Algeri, *Enrico Mattei et l'Algérie: Un ami inoubliable (1962–2022)*, Éditions Barzakh, 2022.

⁶¹ A. Sanguini, *Italy and Algeria, a stable partnership in a troubled region*, in ISPI, 2016.

⁶² V. Coralluzzo, *Italy and the Mediterranean*, cit., 127–128.

⁶³ M. Musso, *Oil companies as agents of post-colonial relations: France, Algeria, and Italy in the Sahara*, in S. Amirell, T. Berglund, M. Eriksson Baaz (Eds.), *The business of development in post-colonial Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 127–155.

⁶⁴ A. Prontera, *The new politics of energy security in the European Union and beyond: States, markets, institutions*, Routledge, 2017, 95.

⁶⁵ R. Del Sarto, N. Tocci, *Italy's politics without policy*, cit.

⁶⁶ A. Aissaoui, *Algeria: The Political Economy of Oil and Gas*, Oxford University Press, 2001, 49.

⁶⁷ P. Frenkel, *Mattei: oil and power politics*, Faber & Faber, 1966, 120.

⁶⁸ J.P. Entelis, *Sonatrach: The Political Economy of an Algerian State Institution*, in *Middle East Journal*, No. 1, 1999, 16.

sense, ENI's contemporary role cannot be disentangled from the historical legacies of Mattei's diplomacy, which embedded energy cooperation within broader narratives of decolonisation, autonomy, and Mediterranean interdependence⁶⁹.

More importantly, Algeria's energy profile is not reducible to reserve statistics; it represents a structural factor in the political economy of the Mediterranean. As the EU's third-largest supplier of natural gas, Algeria functions as both a guarantor of supply diversification and a strategic buffer in moments of crisis, as demonstrated by the post-Ukraine recalibration of Europe's energy map. This positioning grants Algiers leverage that extends beyond economics, embedding it in the geopolitics of energy interdependence where supply security, long-term contracts, and infrastructure corridors intersect with broader questions of sovereignty and regional stability⁷⁰. Thus, Algeria is not simply a "resource holder," but a pivotal actor whose energy diplomacy shapes Euro-Mediterranean relations and reinforces its own international agency.

In the first months of 2022, Algeria provided about 12.6% of European gas needs. It has been the third largest supplier of natural gas to Europe for many years⁷¹. Algeria is dependent on its pipeline gas exports to Spain and Italy: 34.89% of Algeria's pipeline gas exports go to Spain and 21% to Italy. Total pipeline exports reach 26 billion cubic metres (bcm), almost double Algeria's Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) exports. The EU imports about half of Algerian LNG supplies⁷². The war that began in Ukraine in February 2022 is accelerating a reshaping of the political and economic landscape of the central and western Mediterranean, above all regarding the energy sector and, specifically, gas supply⁷³. In this context, Italy is reasserting its influence, especially in the central Mediterranean as it replaces its Russian-sourced gas with greater amounts of Algeria. Italy and Algeria came to an agreement on May 11th 2022 whereby the volume of gas shipped via the TransMed pipeline would be increased from 21 bcm to 30 bcm by the end of 2023. This pipeline, which carries Algerian gas to Italy via Tunisia, thus acquires greater strategic importance⁷⁴. In the context of the looming gas crisis since 2022, Italy, which is very dependent on Russian gas imports, started negotiating its first contract to buy more gas from Algeria, ensuring that by the end of 2023 its North African neighbour will increase its throughput of gas via the TransMed pipeline from 21 bcm per annum to 30 bcm. Earlier this year Italy's state oil and gas company ENI secured a broad range \$1.5 bn contract with its Algerian counterpart Sonatrach to explore and develop new sources of gas, hydrogen, ammonia and electricity from renewable sources⁷⁵.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Italy has sought to reduce its dependence on Russian fossil fuel supplies by turning to Algeria. On April 11, 2022, Italian PM Mario Draghi visited Algeria, where ENI signed an agreement with Sonatrach. This agreement allows the increased utilization of the

⁶⁹ M. Musso, *The Transmediterranean gas pipeline: a political history*, in A. Beltran (Ed.), *Les routes du pétrole / Oil Routes*, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2016, 132-155.

⁷⁰ O. Voytyuk, *Scenarios for diversification of EU natural gas supplies from Algeria*, cit., 24.

⁷¹ Eurostat, *Imports of energy products down in Q1 2023*, in *Eurostat*, 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230704-1>.

⁷² BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy*, S&P Global Platts, 2022.

⁷³ IEA, *World Energy Outlook 2022*. Paris: International Energy Agency, 2022.

⁷⁴ Z. L. Ghebouli, *Power couple: How Europe and Algeria can move beyond energy cooperation*. European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023.

⁷⁵ S&P Global, *Algerian pipeline gas flows to Southern Europe remain robust in 2023*, in *S&P Global*, 2023, <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/052223-algerian-pipeline-gas-flows-to-southern-europe-remain-robust-in-2023>.

TransMed gas pipeline (gazoduc) to boost gas flows⁷⁶. Sonatrach is expected to progressively supply higher volumes of gas starting in 2022, with deliveries set to increase by up to 9 bcm annually.

Currently, Algeria accounts for 26.6% of Italy's total gas imports⁷⁷. This share is expected to rise following the major gas agreement signed between the two countries in April 2022, a strategic move by Italy to lessen its reliance on Russian gas exports⁷⁸. Algeria increased its gas exports to Italy, aiming to meet the target of delivering an additional 9 bcm annually by the end of 2024, as per the agreement reached in April 2022⁷⁹. In 2023, Algeria supplied 3 bcm of gas to Italy, following the delivery of an extra 3 bcm in 2022 (out of the initially planned 4 bcm), leaving another 3 bcm to be exported in 2024. However, ongoing export commitments to other countries and rising domestic gas consumption could potentially delay achieving this target until 2025⁸⁰. In the last few years, Italy's relationship with Algeria has grown even stronger. Italian government officials, including Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, PM Mario Draghi, and senior executives from the Italian oil company ENI, have made multiple visits to Algeria⁸¹. During a state visit to Algeria in November 2021, Italian President Sergio Mattarella noted, «Algerian-Italian relations are solid, longstanding, and strategic, and we are working to further strengthen and consolidate them»⁸². Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune reciprocated with a visit to Italy in May 2022. Additionally, the two countries convened a bilateral summit in Algiers in July of the same year, which culminated in the signing of several new trade and investment agreements, signaling a commitment to deepening cooperation⁸³.

While the bilateral partnership is often presented in terms of economic diversification – encompassing sectors such as automotive, agriculture, and telecommunications – much of the relationship remains overwhelmingly shaped by energy cooperation. Analysts have noted that Italian policy has at times privileged access to Algerian gas over critical engagement with the country's domestic governance and political constraints, suggesting that Rome's strategic calculus rests less on sectoral diversification than on securing reliable energy flows and complementary interests, including the defense sector⁸⁴. This broader pattern aligns with theoretical models of regional strategic interdependence, where energy and security cooperation become interlinked within Mediterranean institutional architectures. In this light, Italy's defense collaboration with Algeria – manifested in industrial partnerships, joint technological frameworks, and institutional defense dialogues – should be read not just as a discrete bilateral initiative, but as embedded within a regional security structure shaped by energy-related interdependence⁸⁵.

⁷⁶ J. Cockayne, *Eni Surges Ahead as Algeria's Top Foreign Producer*, in *Middle East Economic Survey*, 2023, <https://www.mees.com/2023/4/21/oil-gas/eni-surges-ahead-as-algerias-top-foreign-producer/04b02b20-e03d-11ed-b8d2-d1398e435b82>.

⁷⁷ EIA, *Algeria*, in *Energy Information Administration*, 2023, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/DZA>.

⁷⁸ Reuters, *Italy clinches gas deal with Algeria to temper Russian reliance*, in *Reuters*, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/italy-signs-deal-with-algeria-increase-gas-imports-2022-04-11/>.

⁷⁹ Eni, *Eni and Sonatrach agree to increase gas supplies from Algeria through Transmed*, Press Release, 2022, <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2022/04/eni-and-sonatrach-agree-to-increase-gas-supplies-from-algeria-through-transmed.html>.

⁸⁰ International Energy Agency, *Global Gas Security Review 2024: Including the Gas Market Report Q4-2024*, IEA, 2024, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/fa115714-f9f8-4727-8520-5e8b5ca265ad/GlobalGasSecurityReview2024.pdf>.

⁸¹ A. Pavia, *Crisis in the Maghreb*, in *North Africa's transatlantic relations amid change and continuity*, Atlantic Council, 2022, 29-38.

⁸² A. Boukhlef, *Le gaz et le commerce cimentent le lien entre Rome et Alger*, in *Middle East Eye*, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actu-et-enquetes/algerie-italie-draghi-tebboune-gaz-ukraine-espagne-crise>.

⁸³ APS, *Algeria, Italy sign 15 MoUs, bilateral cooperation agreements*, in *Algeria Press Services APS*, 2022, <https://www.aps.dz/en/economy/44356-algeria-italy-sign-15-mous-bilateral-cooperation-agreements>.

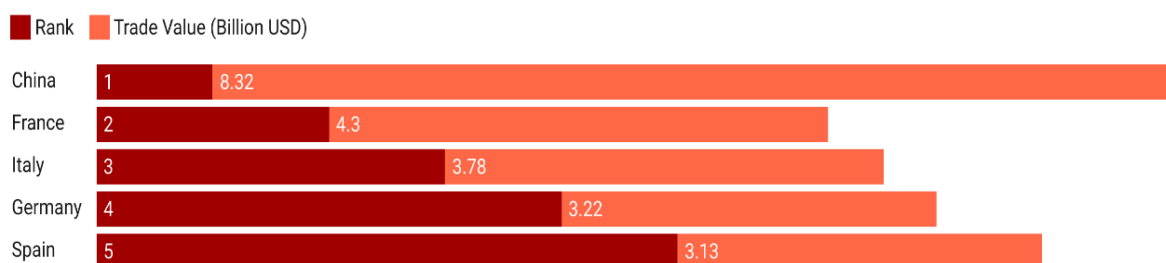
⁸⁴ U. Profazio, *Pipeline politics: Algeria, Italy and the great game in North Africa*, in *Observatoire du Maghreb*, Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, 2025.

⁸⁵ D. Ghanem, *Algeria-Italy partnership: A new axis reshaping the Mediterranean?*, in *Middle East Council on Global Affairs*, 2025;

Currently, nearly 200 Italian companies are operating in Algeria across diverse fields, including energy, construction, transportation, irrigation, and telecommunications⁸⁶. This partnership offers Algeria an opportunity to assimilate Italy's expertise in managing an industrial model centered on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and small and medium industries (SMIs). This is especially significant given that Algeria's industrial landscape consists of 85% SMEs, predominantly family-owned businesses⁸⁷.

In the renewable energy sector, Italy maintains significant ties with Algeria. This year, the two nations' oil companies signed a pivotal agreement to explore alternative energy sources. Algeria, a key and reliable gas exporter to Europe, seeks to sustain its prominent role in the European energy market. By adopting clean energy solutions such as solar electricity and green hydrogen, Algeria aims to remain a strategic energy partner even in a post-fossil-fuel era⁸⁸. This energy transition not only allows Algeria to uphold its geopolitical influence and regional presence but also enhances its position as a leading international energy exporter to Europe. On January 23, the Italian energy company ENI and Algeria's state-owned Sonatrach signed a landmark agreement in Algiers in the presence of Italian PM Giorgia Meloni⁸⁹. The agreement focuses on the production and export of green and blue hydrogen to Europe. As part of this initiative, a new gas pipeline will be constructed between the two countries. With a projected capacity of 8 to 10 bcm per year, the pipeline will transport gas, ammonia, and hydrogen. Known as the Galsi project, the pipeline will span 837 kilometres, including 565 kilometres offshore through the Mediterranean Sea and 272 kilometres onshore. The total estimated cost of the project is \$2.5 billion⁹⁰.

Figure: 1. Algeria's Major Import partner between 2017-2021



Source: Bank of Algeria, 2023.

On June 18, 2023, Algerian Minister of Commerce Taieb Zitouni announced in a press conference that trade between Algeria and Italy had surpassed \$20 billion. He highlighted that Algeria has become Italy's principal trading partner in North Africa and the Arab world⁹¹. Globally, Italy ranks as Algeria's

Strategic Report, *Italy as a Reluctant Pivot in the New Geopolitical Energy-Defense Nexus: The Silent Transformation of a Mediterranean Middle Power*, 2025.

⁸⁶ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *Italy–Algeria Business Forum*, Italy–Algeria Business Forum, 2025.

⁸⁷ Ministry of Industry and Mines, *Statistical Information Bulletin of SMEs*, No. 42, 2023.

⁸⁸ M. Benasla, *Algeria's potential to supply Europe with dispatchable solar electricity via HVDC links*, cit.

⁸⁹ F. Landini, A. Armellini, *Italy's Eni, Algeria's Sonatrach sign deals on gas supply, decarbonization*, in *Reuters*, 2023.

⁹⁰ M. Acherchour, *Pourquoi l'Europe devrait se ruier sur l'hydrogène bleu algérien ?*, in *Revolution Energetic*, 2023, <https://www.revolution-energetique.com/pourquoi-leurope-devrait-se-ruer-sur-lhydrogene-bleu-algerien/>.

⁹¹ Agenzia Nova, *Algeria-Italy: relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean are intensifying*, in *Nova News*, 2023, <https://>

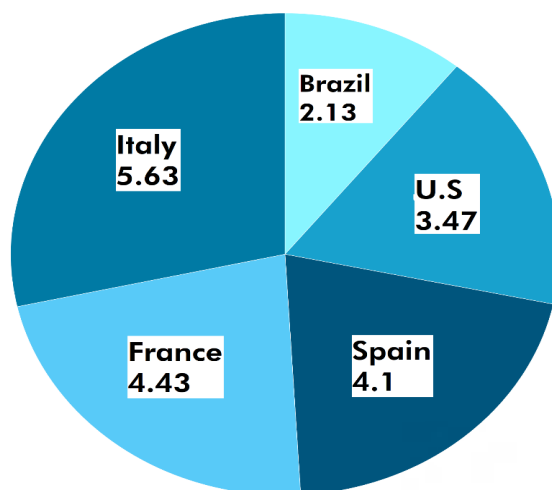
third-largest commercial partner, holding the dual distinction of being its top customer and third-largest supplier (refer to Tables 1 and 2). In 2022, bilateral trade between the two countries amounted to \$20.5 billion, marking an impressive increase of 158% compared to 2021. Italian exports to Algeria reached \$2.3 billion, reflecting a 31.2% growth, while imports from Algeria surged to \$18.2 billion. Italy's presence in Algeria is particularly pronounced in key sectors such as energy, automotive – where Stellantis has initiated local production of Fiat vehicles – infrastructure, and construction. Additionally, emerging sectors such as agro-industry, energy transition, biomedical technologies, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and digital infrastructure present promising opportunities for further collaboration⁹².

Trade between Algeria and Italy reached a record level of 20 billion euros in 2022, more than double the 9 billion euros recorded in the previous year (see Table 3). Italy has emerged as Algeria's primary trading partner across Africa and the Middle East. The trade balance strongly favours Algeria, primarily due to its substantial gas exports to Italy⁹³. However, excluding hydrocarbons, the balance shifts significantly, with Italy enjoying a surplus of approximately 70%.

In 2022, Italian exports amounted to 2.311 billion euros, reflecting a 30% year-on-year increase. This upward trend persisted into the first quarter of 2023, with Italian exports totalling 628.62 million euros, a 22.9% rise compared to the same period the previous year. Imports from Algeria, on the other hand, reached a total value of 18.277 billion euros in 2022, representing a remarkable 194.6% increase. This surge was driven primarily by the sharp rise in imports from the “products of mines and quarries” sector, which includes natural gas and accounted for 16.645 billion euros. Excluding hydrocarbons, Algerian imports to Italy amounted to 1.632 billion euros, resulting in a trade balance – net of hydrocarbons – that favoured Italian products⁹⁴.

Figure: 2 Algeria's Major Export partner between 2017 -2021

■ Brazil ■ United States ■ Spain ■ France ■ Italy



Source: Bank of Algeria, 2023.

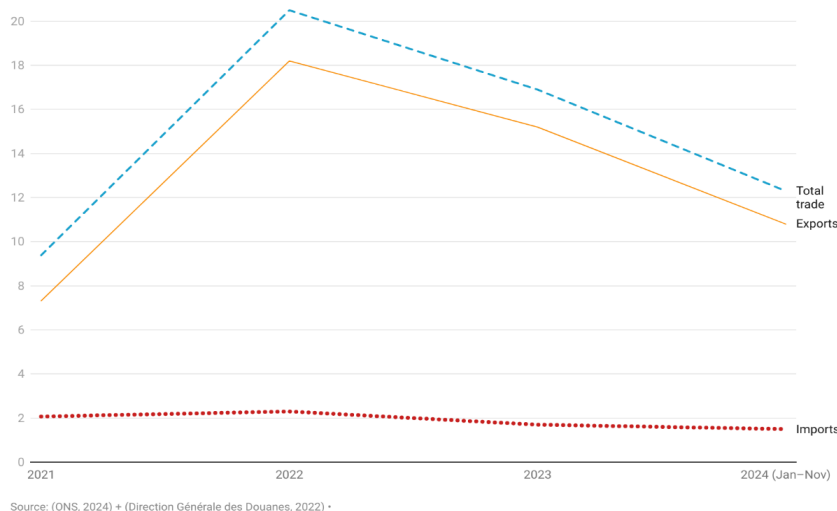
www.agenzianova.com/en/news/algeria-italy-relations-between-the-two-shores-of-the-mediterranean-intensify/.

⁹² W. Farouk, *Energy and agriculture: Italy and Algeria are gradually expanding cooperation*, in *Ecomondo*, 2025, <https://www.ecomondo.com/en/news-detail/energy-and-agriculture-italy-and-algeria-are-gradually-expanding-cooperation%20?news-Id=3121715>.

⁹³ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *Diplomazia Economica Italiana*. Rome: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2022.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

Figure 3 Algeria trade with Italy 2021-2022



4. COUNTERING FRENCH INFLUENCE: BALANCE OR OPPOSITION?

The significance of the rapprochement between Algeria and Italy can be better understood when placed in the context of the emerging hostility between Algeria and France, particularly in the post-*Hirak* era⁹⁵. The Franco-Italian competition for influence in North Africa was not a marginal rivalry but a structural feature of Mediterranean geopolitics. In Tunisia, for instance, the large Italian community and Rome's ambitions often clashed with French colonial administration, producing a “colonial rivalry within colonialism”⁹⁶. Similarly, in Algeria, Italian claims to a shared Latin heritage intersected with French anxieties about cultural hegemony⁹⁷. This rivalry, while asymmetrical given France's stronger colonial presence, shaped both countries' strategies in the region well into the 20th century⁹⁸. From 1900 to 1902, Rome signed a series of treaties with Paris, in which it recognized French control over Morocco in exchange for France's pledge not to seize Libyan territories⁹⁹. Italy maintained control over Libya from 1911 until World War II, when “Italian Libya” was divided into three zones under joint Franco-British occupation, lasting until 1951, when Libya gained independence during the wave of decolonization in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s¹⁰⁰.

France's ties with its African colonies continue to serve French material interests (economic, political, and security), but these relations no longer bolster France's symbolic power or social capital as a foundation for its status on the international stage¹⁰¹. Given France's current approach to African policy as a tool for

⁹⁵ The Algerian *hirak* (Arabic for movement) began on February 22nd 2019 as millions of Algerians began peacefully protesting in the streets, demanding that President Abdelaziz Bouteflika step down, opposing his candidacy for a fifth Presidential term.

⁹⁶ C. A. Le Neveu, *France and Italy in North Africa*, in *Foreign Affairs*, 1928; J. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900*, University of California Press, 2011, 267.

⁹⁷ P. M. E. Lorcin, *Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past*, in *French Historical Studies*, No. 2, Duke University Press, 2002, 295-329.

⁹⁸ M. Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938*, University of California Press, 2013, 28-70.

⁹⁹ J. Wright, *A history of Libya*, Columbia University Press, 2009, 108-114.

¹⁰⁰ D. J. Vandewalle, *A history of modern Libya*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 43-50.

¹⁰¹ S. Recchia, *A Legitimate Sphere of Influence: Understanding France's Turn to Multilateralism in Africa*, in *Journal of Strategic*

modern power politics and its pursuit of a prominent role in international affairs, maintaining influence in Africa and restoring its image as a great power has become a major concern. Meanwhile, French influence in Africa is eroding not only due to competition from other foreign powers but also due to the reluctance of some local actors, especially as the African Union's initiatives challenge French interventionism¹⁰².

In early 2024, Rome hosted the Italian-African Summit, during which Italian PM Giorgia Meloni's government outlined its vision for fostering development across the African continent. The plan focused on five key areas of investment: energy, water, agriculture, health, and education. Central to the summit was the unveiling of Italy's new strategy for Africa, referred to as the "Mattei Plan", after Enrico Mattei¹⁰³. The timing of Italy's renewed engagement in Africa coincides with a significant shift in geopolitical dynamics. On one hand, Rome seeks to expand its influence across the continent¹⁰⁴; on the other, it capitalizes on the setbacks France has experienced in recent years, marked by a notable decline in its traditional influence in Africa. This vacuum, created by France's gradual withdrawal, presents Italy with an opportunity to assert itself as a key partner for African nations¹⁰⁵.

Rome's strategy appears to include a deliberate effort to contrast its approach with that of Paris. By adopting rhetoric that emphasizes partnership and mutual respect, Italy seeks to differentiate itself from the paternalistic tone often associated with France's engagements in Africa, an approach that has contributed to growing anti-French sentiment on the continent. This strategic pivot not only positions Italy as a more collaborative partner but also enhances its appeal to African leaders seeking alternatives to traditional power dynamics¹⁰⁶.

Unlike Italy, which had a relatively minor colonial legacy in Africa, France has historically been a key player in the region, but its influence has diminished over time. Africans have come to view Italy as a more trustworthy partner, particularly in light of the declining credibility of French tutelage, as France is no longer the dominant actor on the African stage¹⁰⁷. At the same time, France, the European country with which Algeria shares the deepest—and most complex—relationship due to the legacy of French colonial rule, is experiencing diminishing influence in Algeria, a reality that has become undeniable.

More importantly, relations between Algiers and Paris reached their lowest point after the Hirak protests, following the election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune as the new president of Algeria on December 12, 2019¹⁰⁸. Initially, France made only general public statements regarding the demonstrations in its former colony, putting no pressure on the Algerian regime to enact reforms. However, after French public television broadcast documentaries about the Hirak movement in May 2020, the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs recalled the French ambassador to Algeria for consultations. The crisis was effectively resolved a week later through a conversation between the two presidents, during which they agreed to

Studies, No. 4, 2020, 508-533.

¹⁰² B. Engels, *Coups and Neo-Colonialism*, in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 176, 2023, 147–153.

¹⁰³ D. Fattibene, S. Manservigi, *The Mattei Plan for Africa: A Turning Point for Italy's Development Cooperation Policy?*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ G. Carbone, *Italy's return to Africa: Between external and domestic drivers*, in *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, No. 3, 2023, 293–311.

¹⁰⁵ G. Carbone, L. Ragazzi, *Rebooting Italy's Africa Policy: Making the Mattei Plan Work*, ISPI, 2024, 13-15.

¹⁰⁶ L. Guglielminotti, G. Trombelli, *The evolution of Italian presence in Africa: towards an innovative policy approach?*, Fondation méditerranéenne d'études stratégiques, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ A. Brogi, "Competing Missions": France, Italy, and the Rise of American Hegemony in the Mediterranean, in *Diplomatic History*, No. 4, 2006, 741-770.

¹⁰⁸ D. Le Saout, *Les relations France-Algérie et le soulèvement du Hirak*, cit., 105-107.

collaborate on restoring security and stability in the region¹⁰⁹.

On the other hand, when Abdelmadjid Tebboune became president, he called for «mutual respect» in Franco-Algerian relations, emphasizing that Algeria «will not accept any interference or tutelage» from abroad¹¹⁰. Tebboune made this statement in response to French President Emmanuel Macron's call for a «transition of reasonable duration» at the onset of the Hirak protest movement, which Tebboune considered an “interference” in Algeria's domestic affairs¹¹¹. In October 2021, Algeria recalled its ambassador to Paris, Mohamed Antar Daoud, in response to Macron's comments that Algeria, after gaining independence in 1962, had been built on a “memory rent” maintained by “the political-military system”¹¹². The Algerian authorities viewed Macron's statement as an insult to the Algerian people, especially his suggestion that there was «no Algerian nation before French colonization»¹¹³. Given the significance of Franco-Algerian relations, a return to normalcy eventually occurred following Macron's re-election in April 2022.

In addition, Macron's three-day visit to Algeria, from August 25 to 27, 2022, helped resolve some of the contentious issues¹¹⁴. However, the question of memory could resurface and potentially cause another crisis in the future. Such recurring tensions with France, while not the foundation of Algerian-Italian relations, further strengthen Algeria's longstanding preference for Italy as a reliable and historically trusted partner.

Traditionally, Algeria has largely avoided building a conventional network of allies, for reasons ranging from long-standing ideological inclinations to pragmatic strategic calculations. However, in recent years, Algeria under Tebboune has begun to assert the practice of a “new type of international relations,” moving away from the traditional status quo policy that prevailed under Bouteflika in favor of a “win-win cooperation” approach. This rhetoric is intended to support the narrative that Algeria's rise is the result of a strategic decision to build relationships centered on economic ties, as part of its quest to consolidate territorial gains¹¹⁵.

As mentioned earlier, the significant deepening of Algerian-Italian ties across diplomatic, security, economic, and people-to-people issues in recent years often points to a major shift resulting from two key crises with France and Spain. Although Italy has always maintained strong relations with Algeria, Algerian-Italian relations have benefited further from the recent Algero-Spanish dispute¹¹⁶. As Algeria seeks a new equilibrium in its engagement with the region's two largest allied states, Italy and Turkey, a more robust Algerian-Italian partnership promises better coordination between both states.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁰ Le Monde, *Relations franco-algériennes : le président Tebboune appelle au « respect mutuel »*, in *Le Monde*, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/01/24/relations-franco-algeriennes-le-president-tebboune-appelle-au-respect-mutuel_6027064_3212.html.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹² R. Mortimer, *The Stora Report*, in *Modern & Contemporary France*, No. 1, 2023, 7-16.

¹¹³ S. Orus-Boudjema, *Algérie-France : y avait-il une nation algérienne avant la colonisation française ?*, in *Jeune Afrique*, 2021, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1247481/politique/algerie-france-y-avait-il-une-nation-algerienne-avant-la-colonisation-francaise/>.

¹¹⁴ APS, *President Macron's visit to Algeria is “very successful”*, in *Algeria Press Service*, 2022. <https://www.aps.dz/en/algeria/44724-president-macron-s-visit-to-algeria-is-very-successful>.

¹¹⁵ A. Chikhaoui, *The Non-Alignment Posture of Algeria's Foreign Policy*, in *Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies*, 2022, <https://nesa-center.org/the-non-alignment-posture-of-algerias-foreign-policy/>.

¹¹⁶ Spain's sudden change of position – in violation of international legality – resulted in Algeria recalling its ambassador to Madrid, Saïd Moussi, suspending the Treaty of Friendship, and blocking commercial transactions, except for the export of natural gas.

Furthermore, strong disagreements between France and Italy over Libya, as well as the reluctant support of most EU countries for French operations in the Sahel since 2013¹¹⁷, have diminished the diplomatic influence that France and its EU partners once enjoyed in the broader northwest African region¹¹⁸. Geopolitically, Italy's relationship with France struggles to balance competing interests, as the two countries pursue incompatible foreign policy visions¹¹⁹.

In turn, France is likely to recognize Algeria's general shift toward Italy and seek ways to restructure Algerian-French relations in order to offer an alternative cooperation model at an acceptable cost. The geopolitical rationales for robust Algerian-French ties, rooted in the Colonial Period and the post-Colonial era, have gradually faded, and bilateral relations between Algiers and Paris are likely to remain functional but more modest than the historical norm. In fact, to some extent, Algeria views its engagement with Italy as a hedge against French dominance and a counterbalance to France's deepening interventionist trend in the region. This also reflects a traditional affinity between Rome and Algiers, unburdened by the colonial legacy that shapes France's relations with Algeria, and it aligns with shifting regional trends¹²⁰.

Moreover, the emerging period of Franco-Italian strategic competition, which could last for decades, is likely to influence both Algerian and Italian assessments and engagements aimed at gaining geopolitical leverage against France. For Algerian policymakers, ties with Italy have also offered a steadying anchor through the more irregular ups and downs of the Franco-Algerian relations. The steady decline in the Franco-Algerian relations over the past few years has been matched by a corresponding growth of Italian political, diplomatic, and economic influence¹²¹.

Hence, the underlying assumption of this thesis is that Algeria and Italy have developed a closer relationship in the wake of tensions with France. Their rapprochement can be viewed from the perspective of Algeria as a *de facto* defensive strategy to counterbalance France. Another reason many analysts attach great importance to this shift is Algeria's growing concern about being surrounded by hostile nations aligned with France, namely Spain and Morocco. Algeria's adversary in the west, Morocco, has long been a close ally of France, Algeria's regional rival. Consequently, the Algerian-Italian strategic nexus is likely to continue and further strengthen, especially with the growing rift between Algeria and France, as well as between Italy and France¹²².

Still, Algeria is cautious about adopting a more assertive policy of balancing against France. Some analysts have even warned that Algeria does not want to provoke France unnecessarily. France is closely monitoring the increasing closeness of Algerian-Italian relations, particularly regarding economic cooperation. Paris seems to be increasingly concerned about the formation of Algerian-Italian strategic cooperation, which signals a pattern of alliance-building activities that France cannot afford to ignore¹²³.

¹¹⁷ G. Carbone, *Italy's return to Africa*, cit., 302.

¹¹⁸ F. Ghiles, *Algeria's cautious return to the world stage*, in CIDOB, No. 284, 2023.

¹¹⁹ O. Afsar, A. El-Hayani, *The impact of French foreign policy towards Africa on the external migration policy of the European Union*, in *Acta Politica Polonica*, No. 68, 2023.

¹²⁰ A. Dworkin, *The Maghreb maze*, cit.

¹²¹ D. Ghanem, *Algeria-Italy partnership*, cit.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ E. Martin, *France torn between Morocco and Algeria*, in *Geopolitical Intelligence Services*, 2023, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/france-morocco-algeria/>.

5. BETWEEN PROMISE AND UNCERTAINTY: DIVERGING PATHS, SHARED INTERESTS

Needless to say, Algeria and Italy do not always see eye to eye, and their national interests are not always aligned. Despite strong historical ties and deep economic cooperation, Algeria and Italy exhibit notable divergences in their foreign policy orientations. These differences are shaped by their respective geopolitical alignments, security imperatives, and economic priorities. While Italy, as a core EU and NATO member, is firmly integrated into Western strategic frameworks, Algeria maintains a doctrine of strategic autonomy, engaging with multiple global powers to preserve its sovereignty and regional influence¹²⁴. However, these divergences do not preclude interdependence, particularly in the domains of energy and regional diplomacy.

Algeria and Italy's foreign policy orientations are shaped by their respective positions in the global order. Italy, as an EU and NATO member, aligns itself with Western policies, particularly in relation to security and economic governance¹²⁵. Its commitment to the transatlantic alliance is reflected in its support for EU sanctions on Russia and its cautious approach to Chinese economic influence, as seen in its 2023 decision to withdraw from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)¹²⁶. Italy's foreign policy is thus embedded within EU regulatory structures and NATO security doctrines, limiting its flexibility in global affairs¹²⁷.

In contrast, Algeria prioritizes a multipolar foreign policy, balancing relations between Western and non-Western powers to safeguard its sovereignty. A key feature of this approach is its enduring partnership with Russia, exemplified by its status as one of Russia's largest arms importers¹²⁸. At the same time, Algeria has embraced China's BRI, positioning itself as a strategic partner in Beijing's economic expansion into Africa. Unlike Italy, which has recalibrated its engagement with China due to Western policy constraints, Algeria continues to view Chinese investment as a cornerstone of its infrastructure and energy development¹²⁹.

Perhaps the biggest test of the relationship between Algeria and Italy in recent decades is the war in Ukraine. Paradoxically, the conflict has been both a major driver of their partnership, particularly in energy and economic cooperation, and a potential source of divergence. Algeria often views Italy's strong alignment with Western security policies with caution. The war in Ukraine has once again highlighted Italy's deep integration into NATO and the EU's collective approach, which at times contrasts with Algeria's preference for strategic autonomy and non-alignment. Algeria has maintained a neutral and non-aligned stance on the Ukraine war, abstaining from key UN votes against Russia and upholding its traditional policy of non-interference and strategic autonomy, while continuing its diplomatic and defense ties with Moscow¹³⁰. In contrast, Italy, as a NATO and EU member, has strongly condemned Rus-

¹²⁴ L. Thieux, *The dilemmas of Algerian foreign policy since 2011: between normative entrapment and pragmatic responses to the new regional security challenges*, in *Journal of North African Studies*, No. 3, 2019, 426-443.

¹²⁵ N. Fasola, S. Lucarelli, *The 'pragmatic' foreign policy of the Meloni government: between 'Euro-nationalism', Atlanticism and Mediterranean activism*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, No. 2, 2024, 198-213.

¹²⁶ S. Malhotra, *Italy's BRIexit: Not All Roads Lead to Beijing*, in *Occasional Paper*, No. 441, 2024.

¹²⁷ G. Gabusi, A. Caffarena, *Changing and yet the same? Italy's foreign policy ideas and National Role Conceptions in a populist age*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, No. 3, 2024, 314-335.

¹²⁸ L. Thieux, *The dilemmas of Algerian foreign policy since 2011*, cit.

¹²⁹ H. Rabehi, *The Future of Algeria-China Relations in a Changing World*, in A. Abdel Ghafar, A. Jacobs (Eds.), *China and North Africa: Between Economics, Politics, and Security*, Springer Nature, 2024, 289-300.

¹³⁰ V. Koga, *Algeria defends neutral stance in Russia-Ukraine conflict*, in *Nation Africa*, 2022, <https://nation.africa/africa/news/>

sia's actions, supported sanctions against Moscow, and provided military and financial aid to Ukraine¹³¹.

This divergence is also evident in their respective perceptions of Western influence. Italy, operating within the EU's collective decision-making structures, often aligns its foreign policy with Brussels' strategic priorities. Algeria, by contrast, emphasizes autonomy and resists external pressures, as illustrated by its refusal to follow Western calls to distance itself from Russia and China. These differences occasionally surface in their interactions within multilateral fora—such as the United Nations or regional Mediterranean and African frameworks—where their voting patterns and strategic priorities do not always align.

Energy remains a central pillar of Algeria-Italy relations, highlighting both their interdependence and strategic divergence. For Italy, Algeria plays a crucial role in its energy security strategy, serving as one of its largest gas suppliers. In response to Europe's efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy following the Ukraine war, the two countries have intensified their energy cooperation, further strengthening their economic ties. However, while Italy seeks to ensure energy security in the short term, it simultaneously adheres to EU decarbonization policies aimed at reducing fossil fuel dependency. This dual approach—expanding hydrocarbon imports while accelerating the transition to renewables—highlights the inherent tension in Italy's long-term energy strategy. Algeria, by contrast, remains heavily reliant on hydrocarbon exports, which account for approximately 90% of its total export revenues¹³². Unlike Italy, which is diversifying its energy mix¹³³, Algeria maintains a strong commitment to resource nationalism, restricting foreign investment in its energy sector to preserve state control¹³⁴. While both countries recognize the importance of sustaining their energy partnership, their long-term trajectories diverge: Italy is progressively shifting towards renewable energy, whereas Algeria prioritizes the protection of its hydrocarbon reserves as a pillar of economic stability.

Moreover, Italy's alignment with EU energy governance creates additional challenges in its relationship with Algeria. EU regulatory frameworks emphasize energy market liberalization and investment-friendly policies, whereas Algeria's restrictive investment laws limit foreign participation in its energy sector. This asymmetry complicates Italy's long-term energy engagement with Algeria, as Rome seeks greater flexibility in its investments while Algiers remains protective of its sovereign control over natural resources¹³⁵.

Algeria and Italy's diplomatic approaches in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region further illustrate their policy divergences, despite areas of mutual interest. Italy, as an EU member, aligns its regional diplomacy with Brussels' strategic objectives. It supports the EU's position on key issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Gulf security, and negotiations with Iran. Italy's involvement in Libya, for example, is guided by EU-backed stabilization efforts and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, reinforcing its role as a Western-aligned actor in North African geopolitics¹³⁶. Algeria, by contrast, pur-

algeria-defends-neutral-stance-in-russia-ukraine-conflict-3849274.

¹³¹ E. Brighi, S. Giusti, *Italian diplomacy and the Ukrainian crisis: the challenges (and cost) of continuity*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, No. 2, 190-204.

¹³² C. Camporeale, R. Del Ciello, M. Jorizzo, *Beyond the Hydrocarbon Economy: The Case of Algeria*, in J. Yangan, J. Byrne (Eds.), *Sustainable Energy Investment: Technical, Market and Policy Innovations to Address Risk*, Intech Open, 2021, 165-180.

¹³³ International Energy Agency, *Italy 2023: Energy Policy Review*, in IEA, 2023. https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/71b328b3-3e5b-4c04-8a22-3ead575b3a9a/Italy_2023_EnergyPolicyReview.pdf.

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Investment Climate Statements: Algeria*, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/algeria>.

¹³⁵ R. Bouckaert, *The Case of Algeria: EU Short-Term Energy Policy Inconsistencies and Their Possible Long-Term Consequences*, Ghent University, 2023.

¹³⁶ S. Graziano, *Italy's role in NATO. Part 1*, in *Institute of New Europe*, 2021, <https://ine.org.pl/en/italys-role-in-nato-part-1>.

sues an independent regional policy centered on non-interventionism and alignment with causes that often contradict Western positions¹³⁷. Its staunch support for Palestinian statehood frequently places it at odds with Italy and other EU states, which adopt a more balanced stance. Additionally, Algeria's neutral approach to Gulf politics and its independent relations with Iran further underscore its distinct regional positioning. Unlike Italy, which aligns with Western security frameworks, Algeria prioritizes African and Arab-led diplomatic initiatives, favoring the Arab league and African Union mechanisms over EU-driven engagements.

Despite these differences, Algeria and Italy share a common interest in regional stability, particularly in Libya. Their approaches, however, diverge: Italy operates within EU-led frameworks, whereas Algeria emphasizes a non-interventionist regional diplomacy. While Algiers has consistently sought closer coordination with Rome, this has not translated into a genuine Italian-Algerian axis in Libya. Instead, what emerges is a parallel recognition of the strategic necessity of preventing further destabilization, rather than structured cooperation in fostering dialogue. This mutual concern provides a platform for pragmatic cooperation despite their broader foreign policy divergences. The 60 years of cooperation between Algeria and Italy have played a crucial role in their foreign policy agenda and neighbourhood diplomacy. Even with enduring interests and short-lived disagreements, Algeria has always regarded Italy as a reliable partner and seeks to maintain steady economic and trade cooperation.

There is little evidence to suggest any significant disruption in Algeria-Italy ties. The long-term trajectory of their relationship is likely to remain stable across all vectors. However, the unpredictability of the current security environment and evolving alliance-building strategies may alter their strategic calculations. As a result, the future of Algeria-Italy relations will depend on their ability to navigate these divergences while sustaining areas of pragmatic cooperation. As global geopolitical dynamics continue to evolve, their relationship will be shaped not only by their strategic differences but also by the extent to which they can reconcile these differences within a framework of mutual economic and security interests.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has analysed the trajectory of Algerian-Italian relations against the backdrop of shifting geopolitical configurations in the western Mediterranean. The evidence suggests that while recurrent Franco-Algerian tensions have indirectly reinforced Algiers' preference for Rome, the durability of the partnership cannot be explained solely by conjunctural crises. Rather, it reflects a deeper historical layering of diplomatic engagement, economic interdependence, and political trust that has evolved since Algeria's independence. The establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership in 2003 institutionalized these dynamics, yet its scope and depth remain uneven across different domains.

A closer examination reveals the ambivalent nature of this relationship. On the one hand, energy interdependence and diplomatic dialogue provide continuity and resilience; on the other, significant asymmetries persist. Italy's embeddedness within EU structures constrains its autonomy, while Algeria's insistence on foreign policy sovereignty generates frictions, particularly in multilateral fora where their

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¹³⁷ A. Chikhaoui, *The Non-Alignment Posture of Algeria's Foreign Policy*, cit.

voting records and strategic preferences often diverge. The Libyan case further illustrates this ambivalence: both states share an interest in preventing destabilization, yet their approaches have remained parallel rather than coordinated, undermining the notion of a genuine bilateral axis.

These findings underscore the need to interpret Algerian-Italian relations less as a linear trajectory of deepening cooperation and more as a fluctuating alignment shaped by external shocks, regional rivalries, and domestic imperatives. The partnership exemplifies the tensions inherent in North African–European relations: resilience coexists with fragility, convergence with divergence, and historical solidarity with structural asymmetry. Ultimately, the Algeria–Italy case sheds light on the dilemmas faced by medium powers in a fragmented Mediterranean order, where pragmatic alignments are possible but rarely insulated from the broader dynamics of EU policy, great-power competition, and Algeria’s cautious reform agenda.