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**Policy of Italy in regard to Arab
states of Mediterranean sea**

This article examines the relationship between Italy and the Arab states. As a result of its central geographic position, acting as a natural bridge between Europe and Africa, Italy is undoubtedly more exposed and vulnerable than other countries to any critical developments in the political and economic situation of this area, so it is understandable that it occupies an increasingly important position in Italian foreign policy. The aim has been to create a safety net around Italian maritime borders against the risks posed by an uncontrolled increase in migration (to which Italy is more exposed than other countries), the instability of North African energy resources and Islamist terrorists infiltrating Italian territory. Apart from examining the concerns regarding the Maghreb region that have become crucially important for Italian national interests (security, immigration, development, energy), the article analyses the salient elements of bilateral relations between Italy and the Maghreb countries, particularly Libya.

Key words: Mediterranean region, Algeria, migration, Italian foreign policy, energy dependence.

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**Жерорта теңізіндегі
Араб елдеріне қатысты Италия
мемлекетінің саясаты**

Мақалада Италия мен Араб елдерінің арасындағы қарым-қатынас мәселесі қарастырылған. Географиялық орналасуы жағынан орталық аймақта орналасқан Еуропа мен Африканы жалғастырушы көпір болып табылатын бұл Араб аймағы Италияның сыртқы саясатында маңызды орын алады. Италия, әрине, басқа елдер сияқты экономикалық және саясаттық салада шиеленісті жағдайларға бейім және осал. Саясаттың мақсаты – Италия теңіз шекараларының төңірегіндегі миграцияның ауқымды ағымынан мүмкін болатын қауіп-қатерден (басқа мемлекеттерге қарағанда Италия бұл қауіп-қатерге бейім), және Италия аймағын қамтыған Исламдық терроризм мен солтүстік-африкалық энергетикалық ресурстардың тұрақсыздығынан қорғану мақсатында қауіпсіздік жүйесін құру. Италияның ұлттық қызығушылықтарының маңызды бөлігі болған (қауіпсіздік, иммиграция, даму, және энергия) Араб елдерінің мәселелерін зерттеумен қатар, бұл мақала Италия мен Магриб елдері, әсіресе Ливия арасындағы екі жақтық елеулі элементтерін де талдайды.

Түйін сөздер: Жерорта теңіздік аймақ, Алжир, Миграция, Италия сыртқы саясаты, энергетикалық бағыныштылық.

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**Политика Италии в отношении
арабских государств
Средиземноморья**

В статье рассматриваются отношения Италии с арабскими странами. Арабский регион занимает важное место во внешней политике Италии, действуя в качестве естественного моста между Европой и Африкой. В результате своего центрального географического положения Италия, несомненно, подвержена и уязвима на критические события в политической и экономической сфере нежеле другие страны. Цель состоит в том, чтобы создать систему безопасности от угроз вокруг итальянских морских границ, представляемых безудержным увеличением миграции (которому Италия более подвержена, чем другие страны), нестабильностью североафриканских энергетических ресурсов и исламистских террористов, пропитывающих итальянскую территорию. Помимо исследования проблем арабского региона, ставшего важной частью национальных интересов Италии (безопасность, иммиграция, развитие, энергия), статья также анализирует существенные элементы двусторонних отношений между Италией и Магрибскими странами, особенно Ливии.

Ключевые слова: Средиземноморский регион, Алжир, миграция, внешняя политика Италии, энергетическая зависимость.

**POLICY OF ITALY
IN REGARD TO
ARAB STATES OF
MEDITERRANEAN SEA****Introduction**

Italy's ambivalent geographical position is described as 'a sort of centaur, with its head well stuck into Europe and hooves reaching down into the Mediterranean'. There are, in fact, two possible interpretations of the geopolitical identity of Italy. The first is 'maritime', 'naval' Mediterranean: Italy 'is certainly more an island than a peninsula, which theoretically controls half the Mediterranean basin from East to West, thus fulfilling a potential role as regional leader in its geographic area'. The other is 'land bound', 'continental', European: Italy occupies a 'completely residual and peripheral' geopolitical role, and is perceived only 'as a peninsula, which is in turn attached to another peninsula (central Europe and Germany), which in turn is an appendix to Asia' [1]. Historically 'the continental role has always prevailed, for reasons of economy and power (the North decides)', but there is no question that 'its hypothetical coherence is often put under pressure by the unavoidable insular, Mediterranean component'. The Mediterranean role is in line with the 'Italian missionary tradition': a tradition which is initially deeply rooted in Catholic and secular culture of the nineteenth century, later in fascism, which presents a revanchist and imperialist interpretation of it.

The Maghreb and Italy's national interests

During the last 25 years, the Mediterranean basin and confining areas (Sahel, Persian Gulf, Horn of Africa) have been a privileged area of Italian foreign policy, where Italy has adopted more dynamic and assertive action, to the point where, during the second half of the 1980s, the term 'new style' was coined to describe the numerous political, economic and military Italian initiatives undertaken in this area, and Italian foreign policy generally was characterized by an 'emerging profile', and 'waning immobility'. At the same time, the region which has, in recent years, become crucial to Italian national interests is the Maghreb, which takes its name from the Arabic 'al-Maghrib' ('the place where the sun sets'). In ancient times, this term covered the Islamic territories west of Egypt; today it refers to the northwestern African countries: Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (with the addition of Mauritania, which, however, will not

be taken into account because its relations with Italy are of little relevance).

The southern European countries are interested in the economic and political evolution of the Maghreb, as well as the entire Mediterranean area. It was no coincidence that at the end of the Cold War these countries began to worry that failing to reach a solution to problems in this region would affect the security of the Old Continent through an increase in migratory pressure, a threat to vital economic interests, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and an increase in terrorism. With the aim of preventing such consequences, the Southern European countries promoted the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative through NATO, and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in the Barcelona Declaration through the EU. Because of its central geographic position, as a natural 'bridge' between Europe and Africa, a fulcrum for relations between the two shores and a vertical divide between the two halves of the Mediterranean, Italy has undoubtedly been 'the country running the greatest risk should there be a substantial increase in Mediterranean turbulence' [2]. It has also been the most exposed and vulnerable to any critical developments in the political and economic situation in the Maghreb. So it is understandable that one of Italy's specific, high priority interests has been to contribute to the stability of this area through multilateral and bilateral initiatives aimed at encouraging integrative processes underway and at reinforcing political dialogues and economic cooperation with individual Maghrebi countries in order to create a protective safety net around Italy's maritime borders. This is designed to guard against the risks to which Italy is more exposed than other countries stemming from the uncontrolled increase in migration, the instability of North African energy sources and even (albeit unlikely) military threats (such as when in April 1986, as a reprisal against the American bombing of Tripoli and Bengasi, the island of Lampedusa was the target of an unsuccessful missile attack from Libya) and the risk of infiltration of Italian territory by Islamic terrorists.

Dealing with the war in Algeria

Concern for threats against security and Italian interests from an area like the Maghreb – which is increasingly exposed to the contagion of Islamic integralism and terrorism, vulnerable to low intensity conflict and at high risk of escalation – was already noticeable in the 1980s, when, following his incendiary speeches and presumed involvement in inter-

national terrorism, Ghaddafi took the lead as Western public enemy number one. It re-emerged with force in the 1990s when the unprecedented ferocity of the terrorists of the *Groupes Islamiques Armés* (GIA) and the government security services (or the deviant sector of the services) precipitated Algeria into horrific violence that caused more than a 100,000 deaths.

The Algerian drama was followed anxiously in Italy, especially after the murder of seven Italian sailors in 1994. The Italian government pronounced itself successively in favor of a European initiative. This was to avert the risk of any repetition in Algeria of the mistakes made in the Balkans, when Europe, afraid of precipitating a crisis, washed its hands of the area (even if this action was hastily followed by pressing inconclusive diplomatic chitchat). The only serious attempt at a peaceful solution to the Algerian crisis came from an NGO – the Community of St Egidio, which in January 1995, after some difficulty, succeeded in making the leaders of the seven most representative Algerian parties sign the so-called 'Platform of Rome' at the Roman headquarters of the Community. The Algerian authorities, remaining faithful to the policy of not compromising with the Islamists who were believed to have started the civil war, scornfully rejected the Platform, describing the meeting in Rome as a 'non e've'nement' and accusing Italy, and all those favorable to the Roman document (including the President of the EU and the European Parliament), of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. The Italian government, fearful of irritating the authorities of a country that Italy depended on (and still depends on) for a large part of its natural gas supply, decided to keep a low profile regarding the Algerian crisis. It supported, but not emphatically, the initiative of the Community of Saint Egidio. Despite this, Italo-Algerian relations deteriorated significantly, especially during 1997, to the point where the Italian ambassador was summoned by the Algerian Foreign Minister and subjected to repeated, virulent attacks on the Community and presumed Italian meddling. A delayed reevaluation of the Platform of Rome finally took place after the election of the first non-military president of Algeria, Bouteflika. Bouteflika recognized for the first time that the proposals contained in the document signed in Rome could, with some modifications, constitute a useful basis for negotiation. The Italian government learnt a lesson from the Algerian crisis that was efficiently summed up by D'Alema, then leader of the PDS (Democratic Party of the Left).

Matteo Renzi's Mediterranean Policy

Matteo Renzi is an Italian politician who has been the serving Prime Minister of Italy since 22 February 2014 and Secretary of the Democratic Party since 15 December 2013. During his premiership, Renzi faced a lot of difficult situations, such as the continuing of the European debt crisis, the civil war in Libya, the Ukrainian Crisis and the insurgency of the Islamic State in the Middle East. Renzi formed a close relationship with the US President Barack Obama, supporting the 2014 military intervention against ISIL with hundreds of Italian troops and four Panavia Tornado aircraft. [3] A key ally of Renzi in the Mediterranean is Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi; the two leaders held many bilateral meetings where they discussed the problem of immigration to Italy and the increasing tensions in the Middle East and North Africa. As a result of the Libyan and Syrian Civil Wars, a major problem faced by Renzi upon becoming Prime Minister in 2014 was the high levels of Mediterranean illegal immigration to Italy. The unfolding Mediterranean migrant crisis represents a significant puzzle. On one hand, the crisis represents a serious humanitarian emergency, which if unchecked, could have a lasting and damaging effect upon Europe's humanitarian reputation and the security and stability of the region. On the other hand, however, this crisis could tender a rare opportunity for Renzi to stake his claim to the upper echelon of European leadership. 2014 saw an increase in the number of migrants rescued at sea being brought to southern Italian ports, with the increase in the number of refugees and migrants prompting criticism of Renzi by the anti-immigration Lega Nord, the populist Five Star Movement and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party. [4] On 8 August 2014, the Cabinet approved a law-decree providing for the international protection of migrants. Operation Mare Nostrum (Our Sea) was Italy's response to the emerging migrant crisis. Launched in October 2013, the operation intended to tackle illegal migration to Europe by patrolling large swaths of the Central Mediterranean with Italian naval and air assets. The operation, which ran for nearly a year, cost the Italian government €115 million according to reports. The cost forced Renzi, and Italy, to look to Europe in order to re-balance their policy in the Mediterranean. On 19 April 2015, a huge shipwreck took place in the Mediterranean Sea, causing the death of more than 700 migrants from North Africa. Renzi, returning to Rome from

a political event in Mantua for the regional elections, held an emergency meeting with ministers and spoke by telephone to French President François Hollande and Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat. The call led to an emergency meeting of European interior ministers to address the problem of migrant deaths. In a speech addressing immigration, the Italian Prime Minister condemned human trafficking as a «new slave trade». From January to April 2015, about 1600 migrants died on the route from Libya to Lampedusa, making it the deadliest migrant route in the world. [5]

Managing migratory flows

Although it is important not to underestimate the destabilizing effects of Islamic subversion for the entire Maghreb area, it is clear that Italy and Europe not only pay attention to the fight against terrorism, which faces the problems that Euro Mediterranean cooperation is still largely insufficient, and there is a lack of terrorism, but they also aim at achieving objectives that are equally important to national security. These include dealing with clandestine migration, a more harmonious and efficient management of migration, in the sense of a more careful and organized regulation of migration from the Southern towards the Northern countries of the Mediterranean and the adoption of a more welcoming policy that values common interests and complementary elements between the peoples and cultures of the two shores – something which should be able to reinforce the bridging role of migrants between their homelands and destinations. This bridge could bring together minarets and church bells, as was said of the Moroccan immigrants to Italy [6], avoiding the risk of 'self-ghettoization' and the consequent radicalization of the immigrant community.

Libya has become the favored transit point for illegal immigrants heading for Italy and generally a focal point in the geography of unauthorized migration in the Mediterranean. This is because its lack of blue collar workers has meant that 'for years it pursued a line of Pan Arabism and later Pan Africanism, and opened its doors to its neighbors' [7]: first to its Arab neighbors, headed by the Egyptians, and more recently to migrants from the African Sub Sahara, which in the entire Maghreb are approximately two million and in Libya alone number between a million and a million and a half.

In fact, the main objective of Italian policy regarding relations with emigration and transit coun-

tries 'has been to ensure better cooperation in migratory flow regulation, and more specifically, control of exit movements and readmission of forcibly expelled persons'. To this end, Italy has followed both bilateral and multilateral programs. Regarding the former, during the last ten years it has drawn up readmission and police cooperation agreements with a wide range of countries in the Mediterranean basin (Albania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt). With respect to the latter, Italy has forcefully promoted the 'communitarisation' of immigration and asylum policies, the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue providing an opportunity to promote an organic framework for negotiations with countries of migratory flow origin, aimed at adopting a common approach to readmission. Italy has also contributed to control reinforcement and Mediterranean joint patrolling operations carried out by FRONTEX (the European agency for management of operational co-operation of external borders, active since 2005) and, more recently, its operational branch RABIT (Rapid Border Intervention Team). These checks and operations are producing the first results, if, as seems to be the case, the arrival of illegal immigrants has decreased by 67% in the Canaries and 27% in Italy, even though it seems doubtful that this deployment of resources is really capable of significantly reducing migratory pressure as a whole, rather than affecting a single route making it impracticable. The EU is also starting to recognize the need for this communitarisation. The Vice-President of the European Commission, Franco 126 V. Coralluzzo Frattini, in charge of the justice, freedom and security portfolio, has been developing a worthwhile awareness program for some time.

In any case, there is no doubt that 'security management of the migratory phenomenon', principally focused on 'law enforcement measures and externalizing migration control beyond community borders' [8], and on the idea that 'international migration constitutes a risk to economic stability and the security of host countries, to be avoided at all costs', is clearly insufficient because it does not take account of the fact that the objective of containment and progressive reduction of trans-Mediterranean migratory flow cannot be reached without open, long-sighted choices, both at EU and single Member State levels, regarding development cooperation and economic and commercial relations with countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. What is needed, in other words, is to widen perspectives and shift attention to economic and social (as well as

political and cultural) causes of emigration, suggesting means of eliminating or mitigating them through the adoption of increasingly effective methods of cooperation, perhaps with varying structures and at different speeds, with the countries of origin (and transit) of the most conspicuous migratory flows. In this regard, the 'Mediterranean Union', which the French President Sarkozy is working towards, is promising, although it runs the risk of running dry in the deserts of rhetoric and good intentions.

A regional middle power?

Regarding Italy, there are at least two main obstacles to overcome before its possible relaunch as a 'medium power' in the Mediterranean zone. The first obstacle lies in the structure of the Italian economy, in so far as 'always being someone's tributary... cannot help but emphasize Italy's vulnerability'. If this means 'that the country finds it impossible to remedy the stoppage of its vital flow of resources and raw materials, and it is unable or is incapable of overcoming its economic, social and political burdens', then this vulnerability is characteristic of Italy, which 'is surrounded and permeated by it to such a point that public opinion only seems to remember it at an unconscious, collective level (the hoarding phenomenon during the Gulf War, although there was no direct danger) rather than carrying out a rational analysis of the underlying risks and dangers'.

A significant example of these risks is the energy dependence of the Italian economy, demonstrated by the so-called 'gas emergency' during the winter of 2005–2006, when 'for the first time the Italian system was exposed not only to an insufficient maximum, but also to a potentially insufficient volume'. Today, Italy relies on foreign providers for more than 86% of its energy consumption, compared to an EU average of approximately 56%; in addition, this is characterized by 'an imbalanced mix of sources of over three quarters towards natural gas and petroleum' and by 'a concentration of buying in two or three highly unreliable countries'. In particular, the picture of Italian energy supply confirms, if it needed confirming, the absolute centrality of the Maghreb region to Italian economic interests. Of foreign supplies of natural gas, 35.4% is provided through Tunisia and the Transmed gas pipeline, which finishes in Mazara del Vallo, with further expansion planned. A small proportion (3.4%) of Algerian liquefied gas comes into the ENI terminal at

Panigaglia. In addition, Italy shares the Galsi project with Algeria. This is a 940 kilometre-long gas pipeline, which from 2010 should be able to transport eight billion metric cubes of gas to the Sardinian coast. Of the foreign petrol supply, 28.7% (as well as a still modest natural gas supply, 4.5%, via the Greenstream gas pipeline) comes from Libya, with which ENI recently signed a major strategic agreement for US\$28 billion, strengthening and extending the current 25-year contract for the production of petrol and gas. This places the Italian company clearly first among foreign companies operating in Libya.

In addition to its energy vulnerability, the other limit to Italy's ambition to be a medium regional power is that the resources usually destined for development cooperation policy are scarce. In fact, there is an unavoidable, glaring contradiction in the way Berlusconi has on several occasions fervently advocated substantial increases to African international aid and reasserted a joint commitment to development aid of 0.33% of GDP by 2006, 0.51% by 2010 and 0.7% by 2015, while (towards the end of his second term in power) casually announcing that it would be impossible even to maintain the already low rates of previous years as Italy's accounts were in the 'red'. In May 2006 the public development aid percentage of GDP was recorded at around a miserly 0.2%, and much more will be needed to regain an even keel than the increase planned in the 2007 budget, from 392 to 600 million euros of resources (equal to less than a quarter of the total) allocated by the Foreign Minister to development aid.

These results confirm that 'migratory pressure is definitely one of the basic concerns pushing the Italian government to intervene more strongly to support the development of the countries of the Southern Mediterranean', since the main beneficiaries of Italian aid among the Maghreb countries are also the countries of origin of the highest number of legal and illegal immigrants: Morocco and Tunisia. In any case, it must be remembered that the question of the link between development and migration is complicated. Past experience (e.g., in Spain), in fact, shows that 'the inception of a development project encourages emigration rather than slowing it down'; in practice, 'by helping less-developed countries in the long-term we contribute to a decrease in migratory flow, while in the short term the flow does not necessarily lessen' [9]. Hence, there is the need to work on development as well as security issues in

order to achieve balanced management of the migratory phenomenon.

Conclusion

The Maghreb region, and more generally the Mediterranean area have particularly in the last decade, occupied an increasingly central role in Italian foreign policy. The Mediterranean, provided that it is viewed as a resource and place of opportunity rather than a burden, now provides Italy with the conceptual and operational dimensions 'to recover a sense of purpose and a definite rather than unrealistic role within the international community of states'. Naturally, this is not a matter of pursuing a dream of cultural, political, social and economic hegemony, for which Italy is not equipped; but rather following the golden rule that applies to all actors on the world stage: 'stabilization of adjacent areas must be the first and most important step in any sound international policy' [10]. This brings us back, in Italy's case, to the *mare nostrum*. Priority must be given to relations with the coastal countries on the shore of the southern Mediterranean. To use an updated version of the humorous metaphor in the 1980s, when Italian Mediterranean policy was described as 'the American wife and the Arab mistress' in a mernage where 'the wife acted jealously, then exploited the same extra-marital relationship for her own interests', it could be said that too often, in recent years, 'the mistress has been abandoned, and the wife has stayed, in the meantime becoming more demanding, less tolerant of other lovers, more bitter and despotic'. Now, as never before, and in the interests of the American wife herself, it is important that Italy retakes its Arab lover and regains the capability that the country has always had of 'mediating and opening secure corridors for correspondence between worlds and cultures which would otherwise never be able to communicate'. For it is in 'access to the Arab and Middle Eastern world' that Italy's greatest 'added value' lies in what it can bring to its friendship with the United States, apart from being able to influence EU policy. One final point, however, should be emphasized: Italy 'must remain a European country geographically dislocated in the Mediterranean and not a Mediterranean country in Europe' – that is, 'rather than having an independent Mediterranean policy Italy should provide its Atlantic and European policy with a Mediterranean dimension'.

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