

Italy and the action of Energy Diplomacy in the Mediterranean

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Author: Gabriele La Spina, Editor in Chief and geopolitical analyst in European Affairs, for an Italian think tank, which is IARI – Institute for International Relations Analysis.

Introduction

The increase in energy demand, the continuous volatility of raw material prices, an increasingly fierce international competition for access to energy resources, have led to the overwhelming return of the energy issue to the center of a renewed international public debate. Italy, a country historically dependent on energy imports, has long been at the forefront in the name of defense and national security. Just a few years later, not many to tell the truth, the concept of "*national defense*" emerged, as a softer and more commonly accepted version, compared to the patriotism or protectionism so dear to *President Trump's America First*. For many European countries, large national energy companies have become a valuable tool to counter the bargaining power of energy-exporting countries. According to estimates by the International Energy Agency (IEA),¹ world energy consumption is set to increase by about 40% by 2030. " (Frappi & Varvelli, 2010).

The retrieval of the necessary resources aimed at producing energy, are now the key to better understand the international dynamics put in place by the European countries and by all the non-European countries bordering the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean region has become one of the focal points for energy flows around the globe. In this perspective, diplomatic and commercial relations between the southern side, represented by North African and Middle Eastern countries, and the northern side of the Mediterranean, composed of the EU countries, including Italy, are becoming

¹ The International Energy Agency (IEA) is an international intergovernmental organization founded in 1974 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) following the oil shock of the previous year. The purpose of the agency is to facilitate the coordination of member countries' energy policies to ensure the stability of energy supplies (mainly oil) in order to support economic growth. The agency has extended its mandate towards the direction of sustainable development, also dealing with environmental protection and climate change. It has therefore taken on a role in promoting and developing alternative sources of energy, rationalising energy policies and coordinating multinational research into new energy sources.

increasingly important. Historically, oil and gas have dominated the energy picture of the region, whose hydrocarbons have accounted for 50% of the entire basin's exports. (Sartori & Bianchi, 2019). The energy interests of all the countries of the Mediterranean region are theoretically converging, this would make the entire energy sector an ideal tool, to rethink collaboration, using a *win-win* approach between the south and north shores of the area. **A cooperative approach would be able to produce a considerable economic stability**, so much sought, by the European Union after the nineties, without, though, any significant result. The existing cooperation and institutional framework are not entirely effective. At European level, a number of initiatives and mechanisms have been put in place, but very often these have been proved to be short-sighted. The EU's Mediterranean policy has been characterised by a lack of long-term strategy. Therefore, it is this absence of vision that leads to a consequent dispersion of the actors and tools on the ground, leaving ample room for maneuver to the individual EU states.

The individual economies of non-EU states are advancing at a faster pace than those of Europe. It has been estimated that the North African area will grow at a rate of 4.4% every year, until 2024, among them Egypt stands out, which is growing at an annual rate of 6%. In addition, according to the United Nations estimates,² Egypt will increase its population from the current 100 million inhabitants to about 160 million by 2050. A population increase is also expected for Algeria and Morocco.

Following the commitments made by States, with the Paris Agreement, for the global reduction of greenhouse gases and the fight against climate change, many areas of the Mediterranean need large investments, in particular in renewable energy sources. The World Bank has estimated such investments for Egypt, Jordan and Morocco at about \$100 billion, which are necessary to develop the new renewable energy technologies. In this regard, Italy is one of the protagonists of the Mediterranean region. **The large Italian energy companies such as Eni, Enel, Edison, Snam and Terna represent one of the main drivers of the energy transition** throughout the basin, both in the gas and renewable energy sectors.

We can define the Italian presence in Algeria and Libya as an historic one since Eni was led by Enrico Mattei. **Today the energy giant has become a leading player in the gas and renewables sector.**

² UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), World Population Prospects 2019. Volume I: Comprehensive Tables, New York, United Nations, 2019, p. 24-25, https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Volume-I_Comprehensive-Tables.pdf.

Eni's international relaunch was mainly due to the decree on the opening up of the domestic gas market,³ which by limiting the possibility of growth in Italy, pushed the company to undertake an increasing international growth strategy. The company of the *six-legged dog*, is still present today throughout the Mediterranean, both in the western and eastern part. This last quadrant, for many observers turns out to be a hot side, due to the continuous friction between Turkey, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the EU with some of its member states. In this geopolitical scenario, Italy and Eni can boast a consolidated presence, thanks to the *Blue Stream* submarine pipeline, which is a *joint venture* between the Russian company Gazprom and Eni. This pipeline connects Russia to Turkey, providing Ankara with a stable and secure energy supply. Greece is also an important partner for Eni, which has been operating in the country since the fifties, and is currently present in the supply, sale of gas and electricity, due to the purchase of 100% of the Greek company EPA Thess Sa (Marchionna, 2020).

In the Mediterranean, Egypt, led by President Al-Sisi, is looking to become a *strategic energy hub* for the entire region. Eni is engaged in this country through the so-called *Production Sharing Agreement (PSA)*.⁴ The company holds numerous concessions in the exploration sites of natural gas, which fall under Egyptian control. *The energy diplomacy* put in place is remarkable, to make the eastern part of the Mediterranean a real gas-hub. For example, between 2004 and 2009 Eni doubled its gas production at the Damietta plant, located on the Egyptian coast near the city of Port Said. In 2015 Eni discovered the *Zohr well*, then in 2018 the cooperation with the company French Total Energies⁵ always led Eni to the discovery of a new field, called *Calypso*, located off the Cypriot coast, then again in 2019 *Glaucus and Noor* were found, which are located respectively between the waters of Cyprus and Egypt. The gas reserves discovered are 43% in Egyptian waters, 41% in the Israeli

³ Legislative Decree 23 May 2000, n.164, published in Official Journal – General Series 20 June 2000.

⁴ Are a common type of contract signed between a government and a resource extraction company (or group of companies) regarding how much resource (usually oil) extracted from the country each Must receive. NotI Production Sharing Agreement, the government of the country assigns the execution of exploration and production activities to an oil company. The oil company assumes the mining and financial risk of the initiative and explores, develops and eventually produces the field as required. Production-sharing agreements can be beneficial to the governments of countries that lack the skills and capital to develop their resources and wish to attract foreign companies to do so. They can be very profitable deals for the oil companies involved, but they often involve considerable risks.

⁵ Multinational Integrated Oil and Gas French founded in 1924 and one of the seven companies oil supermajor. Its activities cover the entire oil and gas chain, from the exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas to energy production, transportation, refining, marketing of petroleum products and international trade in crude oil and products. The Total Energies is also a large-scale chemical manufacturer.

area of competence and 17% belonging to the Cyprus area. These percentages have enabled these three Eastern Mediterranean countries to cover their domestic energy needs, but at the same time they have also become net exporters of gas to Europe.

These gas discoveries have a great strategic importance not only for the states in the area, but for the stability of the entire Mediterranean quadrant. Although the gas discoveries are considerable, when compared with those of large global gas producers such as Russia, they are very modest, as the resources contained are estimated to constitute only 1% of the world's total reserves. However, this has been enough in the past years to rekindle the competition between coastal states, starting a real race for energy exploration, especially by Turkey. In this geo-economic and geopolitical framework, Italy could be a candidate to play a logistical role, for the transport of what is now called the "*Blue Gold*". This could be implemented thanks to the infrastructures that Eni and Edison own on the terminals of the *Idku and Damietta* plants (Dentice, 2021).

On the other hand, as far as Algeria and Libya are concerned, they are the main suppliers of gas and oil for Italy. The gas arrives in the network through the *Transmed* pipeline, which crosses Tunisia and arrives in Italian and European homes thanks to the Sicilian channel. Still with regard to the supply of gas, it should also be mentioned *Green Stream* with which comes the Libyan gas. In addition, on this geographical side, the Italian Terna plays a leading role, as it is involved in the construction of two submarine electricity interconnections, between Tunisia and Sicily. Once the work is completed, it will be possible to connect the North African markets with the European ones, forming in fact a Mediterranean electricity grid. Also mentioned are the efforts made by Enel green power in Morocco, in which the Italian company has set itself the goal of designing, developing, financing, building and managing, as many as five wind farms for a total of 850 MW, with an investment of about 1 billion euros.

Finally, it should be noted that Eni has inaugurated the first *Energy Compact*, it is a public commitment recognized by the United Nations, with which it wants to accelerate the 2030 sustainable development goals and the objectives of the Paris Agreement of increasing the green energy. The Italian company has committed to achieving ambitious goals, namely carbon neutrality by 2050, increasing its renewable energy generation capacity beyond 15GW. The Energy Compact consists of a voluntary commitment, undertaken by a company, in this case by Eni, in order to implement the ecological transition, including universal access to increasingly clean energy at affordable prices.

Ruolo dell'Italia nell'area Mediterranea

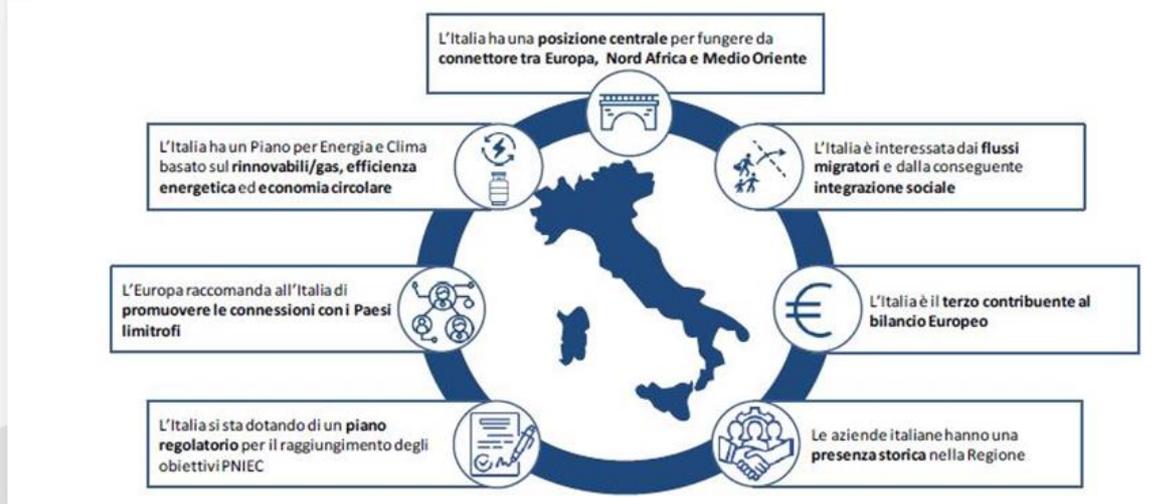


Figure 1

Source: Confindustria Italia & Analisi PwC Strategy, 2020

Italy's energy policy in the enlarged Mediterranean

Only through a careful analysis of Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean area, in particular with the study of relations between the states of the southern shore, we can understand Italy's Mediterranean policy. Doing so, we also need to take into appropriate consideration variables that often contrast with each other, and that, on one hand, have conditioned the development of Italian politics and diplomacy, but at the same time they have favoured the economic and social sector.

It should be emphasized that with regard to the Mediterranean, in the past, the revival of Italy's international position has been linked to France, as well as to the difficult path towards a united Europe. Precisely from the seventies, Italy needed to start a new diplomatic season, which, however, clashed with the need not to compromise the political and economic relations of those countries historically linked to Italy. This was precisely the case of relations between Rome and Paris, put to the test by the thorny Algerian question (Lecis, 2012).

According to the political vision of those years, guided by the Christian democracy, Italy had to assume a balancing role and dialogue between the two sides of the Mediterranean. However, this clashed with the European project of an increasing integration between European countries. Therefore, unconditional adherence to the Algerian cause would inevitably have meant the rupture of relations with France, a strategic and indispensable partner for the success of the common European project. In such a complex political and diplomatic context, the Algerian question assumed a decisive role for Italian politics.

Although, during the Algerian crisis, bilateral relations between Italy and France did not suffer any setback, it was evident the marginality within which the government of Rome was relegated. In fact, thanks to a perfect balancing act, Italy's political direction moved along a line, very often defined as: "*pro-Arab ambiguity*" for which the French Government had not failed to criticize the Italian government, in particular regarding the activities of North African arms smuggling on Italian territory.

In seeking legitimacy, as a spokesman for a new Western policy towards the Arab world, Italy has moved cautiously in the Maghreb area, but with very specific objectives, for example maintaining good relations with Egypt, developing political and economic relations with Libya and with particular attention to the Algerian liberation movement. Remaining faithful to the Atlantic alliance and the European Community of those years, the Italian government intended to relaunch the country in the new scenarios of decolonization, fitting perfectly into the space of relations between Europe and Africa. The policy of Italy adopted in the Mediterranean aims to keep together, within the limits of *real politik*, the southern Mediterranean shore to the European community of that time.

It is precisely in this international context that Enrico Mattei's energetic vision in Mediterranean Africa and the Near Middle East fits perfectly. Mattei, who was the President of what was then called Agip today Eni, began a real work of flanking the work of the Italian government, in the Mediterranean quadrant. It was a real *parallel diplomacy*, the one put in place by Enrico Mattei,⁶ who believed that Italy should actively collaborate in the new phase of economic development of the African continent, by virtue of the fact that, among all the European states, Rome started from more

⁶ È he was an Italian entrepreneur, partisan, politician and public leader. In 1945 he was appointed liquidator commissioner of Agip. Disregarding the mandate, he instead made it a multinational oil company, the protagonist of the post-war economic miracle. Mattei also made Eni a centre of political influence.. Under his presidency, Eni negotiated significant oil concessions in the Middle East and an important trade agreement with the Soviet Union.. These initiatives helped break the oligopoly of the Seven Sisters, who then dominated the world's oil industry.

favorable conditions, as it was less compromised than France and the United Kingdom on the colonial past.

The project for the development of Africa elaborated by Enrico Mattei, drew its advantage in the fact that initially, the large multinationals were not interested and did not believe in the economic development of the continent. They did not consider Africa as a privileged place for their investments. Mattei managed to turn all this into his strong point, thanks to the creation of a real African refining system, based on mixed companies between Eni and local ones. It was this development project for Africa, whose strength was the technical-economic collaboration, the true and only alternative to colonial exploitation and the sale of weapons. The development project conceived and wanted by Enrico Mattei, fitted very well with the independence process of the African continent, underway in those years. For these reasons, the privileged or equal relationship between the President of Eni and the local governments of the various African states in which the Italian company operated was often positively underlined (Belloni, 2014)

"Parallel diplomacy" is what today we would call as corporate policy, carried out by Eni, in Africa and the Middle East. It had the great privilege of having begun to write a new chapter of relations between Europe and the former colonial world. The real strength of the entire strategy and development plan implemented by Eni lay in the educational work, that, through the school of San Donato and the Venetian plants of Irom, enabled young workers and managers of African countries to be trained, so that they could learn the techniques and secrets of the most important energy company in the country, in order to replicate them in their countries with local energy companies. It should be remembered that on February 29, 1960, the city of Agadir in Morocco was hit by a violent earthquake, in this unpleasant event it was Eni to intervene, providing help to the population, for the Moroccans from that moment, the Italian company had become the symbol of anti-colonialism and friendship between Italy and Morocco. In fact, Moroccans remained wary of the long and humiliating protectorate French for a long time. In the countries of North Africa, Enrico Mattei was seen as the one who dialogued with the local workers and made them treat them like the European ones. Anti-colonialism became an end, but at the same time an instrument of the corporate strategy of President Mattei and his Eni.

The oil crisis of 1973 caused a real shock in the energy supply of the Western world. Italy was undoubtedly one of the consumer countries most affected by the effects of the *shock*, being completely dependent on foreign supplies for its energy supply, covered at the beginning of the

Seventies, for only 15% of national production. The energy issue became one of the crucial nodes of national politics. In 1974 an oil plan was approved by the Italian executive, with the dual objective of, on the one hand changing the structure of the national oil industry and on the other one, favoring the inclusion of the country in the new international oil system, which was emerging in those difficult years. Another objective of the plan was to increase the safety margins of the national supply of crude oil at the most stable and convenient price conditions possible, through the strengthening of Eni's role and functions. The Italian company made every effort to be able to play the role attributed to it by the Italian government, in guaranteeing autonomy and national oil supply (Bucarelli & Labbate, 2014).

ENI intensified its research activities abroad, to establish direct and preferential relations with the governments of the producing countries, in particular with those of the MENA area (Mediterranean and Middle East), aimed at concluding framework agreements for cooperation and assistance, thanks to which, the signing of contracts for the purchase of oil in the medium and long term, and the supply of goods and services, were useful for the development of local economies.

The short but punctual paragraphs written so far have served to illustrate the historical position of Italy in the Mediterranean area. **Talking about the current time, the country still plays a leading role thanks to its geographical position, cutting-edge technologies and the *know-how* it possesses in the energy field.**

As for the energy aspects more generally, the Mediterranean accounts for about 7% of the global energy supply, 6% of total CO₂ emissions, as well as 8% of global investments in energy. In addition, the Mediterranean region also holds 4% of the world's oil reserves, 5% of the total natural gas reserves and 3% of the total coal reserves. The main producing countries in the region for gas and oil are Algeria, Libya, Egypt, while for coal Turkey. It should also be noted that the region has a wide availability of renewable resources, boasting some of the world's leading sites for solar and wind energy. However, the existence of some technical, institutional but also market barriers mean that the potential in its entirety is not exploited yet (Confindustria energia, 2020).

From a strictly geographical point of view, we can divide the entire Mediterranean into three corridors: Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean. The area that extends from Algeria, Spain, Portugal to France is the one that is identified with the western Mediterranean. Italy is part of the central Mediterranean, and is able to connect the countries of the Balkan area to North Africa, which is why it is a strategic transit country. On the contrary, the Eastern Mediterranean sector is very

fragmented. The entire Italian energy supply chain, composed of operators, contractors and sub contractors, is historically present in the States of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, or those belonging to North Africa. The Italian contribution is important in terms of technological skills, ability to carry out projects and financial organization. In the years to come, it is expected that this Italian presence will be increasingly flanked by a series of interventions aimed at strengthening the capacity of the producing States in the management of their supply chain.

As for the production of hydrocarbons, the most important Italian presence in the region is Eni, especially in relation to the gas fields recently discovered in the eastern Mediterranean, located in Egyptian territorial waters, i.e. the Great Nooros area and Zohr. Both deposits are located in shallow water about 12km from the coast, within the concession: *Nile Delta*. The investment carried out by Eni is about 7.6 billion euros, the Italian company owns 50% and thanks to its work would allow Egypt to aspire to energy self-sufficiency and become a gas exporter for the entire Mediterranean region.

As far as renewable energy is concerned, important projects have been carried out in recent years, such as the construction of five wind farms with a total capacity of 850 MW in Morocco by Enel Green Power, and the production of castor for biofuels and photovoltaic parks built in Tunisia by Eni. These are experimental projects, thanks to the cultivation of 140 hectares of castor plant fields, whose goal is to progressively eliminate palm oil for non-food use, castor oil will be used in the bio refineries of Venice and Gela. In Tunisia, the construction of two photovoltaic parks started, one in *Tataouine* for the production and sale of electricity for internal use in Tunisia, while the second one located in *Adam*, to supply electricity to the industrial part of the country.

Remaining on the northern African side, Libya represents for Italy a strategic area, not only for national energy interests, but also for economic and commercial ones. Historically, relations between Rome and Tripoli have never been particularly idyllic; however, a turning point came in 2008 with the signing of the Italian-Libyan friendship treaty⁷ between the Italian government and Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.⁸ The Italian presence in Libya was particularly strong until February 2011, when

⁷ August 30, 2008, Gaddafi and Berlusconi have signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in the city of Benghazi. The treaty was ratified by Italy on 6 February 2009 and from Libya on March 2, during a visit by Berlusconi to Tripoli. This treaty entails significant financial burdens on Italy and provides a framework for partnership between the two countries.. The treaty consists of three parts: principles, closure of the past and disputes, partnership.

⁸ The ideological challenge of the military coup that on 1 September 1969 led to the fall of the monarchy (accused of being corrupt and excessively pro-Western) of King Idris I of Libya and his successor Hasan. Gaddafi was, for the next forty-two years, the highest authority of Libya. At first he established a military dictatorship; later, after an initial

in the wake of the so-called "Arab Spring," we witnessed popular uprisings in many cities and that soon resulted in what we know today as: Libyan civil war. The internal conflict in Libya gave France, led by President Nicolas Sarkozy, the opportunity to intervene with NATO forces belonging to the United States and the United Kingdom, flanking the rebel forces and managed to overthrow the Gaddafi regime. This represented the point of no return of the Italian presence in the country. As if all this were not already enough, the entry of Turkey, Russia and other regional actors, made Italy lose political and economic influence. (Colombo, 2021).

In recent years, Italy in Libya has tried to pursue a *real politik* based on an economic approach, to try to recover what was lost with the civil war. In this context, an agreement was signed⁹ between Eni and British Petroleum in 2018. The Italian energy company¹⁰ has obtained 42.5% of the Libyan hydrocarbon deposits, held by the British company. This is a very important partnership, which serves to start mining activities in Libyan fields, which were blocked for years. The pact between the two energy giants, the Italian and the British ones, represents a major strategic turning point, given that politically it would represent a full British support to Italy on the 'Libya issue'. This move is to be considered in stark contrast to the policy adopted by France throughout Libyan territory. It is no secret that large companies operating in the energy sector are an integral part of a state's diplomacy. This union of intent is profitable for both companies, for the simple fact that British Petroleum will have the opportunity to reactivate its fields, thus returning to production in Libya, while Eni will see its leadership in the hydrocarbon sector increase throughout the territory. It is also a British recognition of Italian expertise and reliability in the North African region.

approach to socialism An Arab of Gamal Abd el-Nasser, he proclaimed the "republic of the masses", based on a new ideology, which he himself theorized in the "Green Book" and known as the "Third Universal Way", which at the same time rejected capitalism and class struggle in favor of a socialism of national inspiration. Nevertheless, he continued throughout the duration of his regime to maintain an opportunist policy and to correct and change his ideological position according to the changing international balances.

⁹ This is a signed letter of intent in October 2018, by the CEO of ENI, Claudio Descalzi and British Petroleum's chief executive, Bob Dudley.

¹⁰ It is a UK company operating in the energy sector and especially in the oil and natural gas sectors, in which it is one of the four largest players in the world together with Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil and Total. The head office is in London.

Investimenti italiani nel Mediterraneo

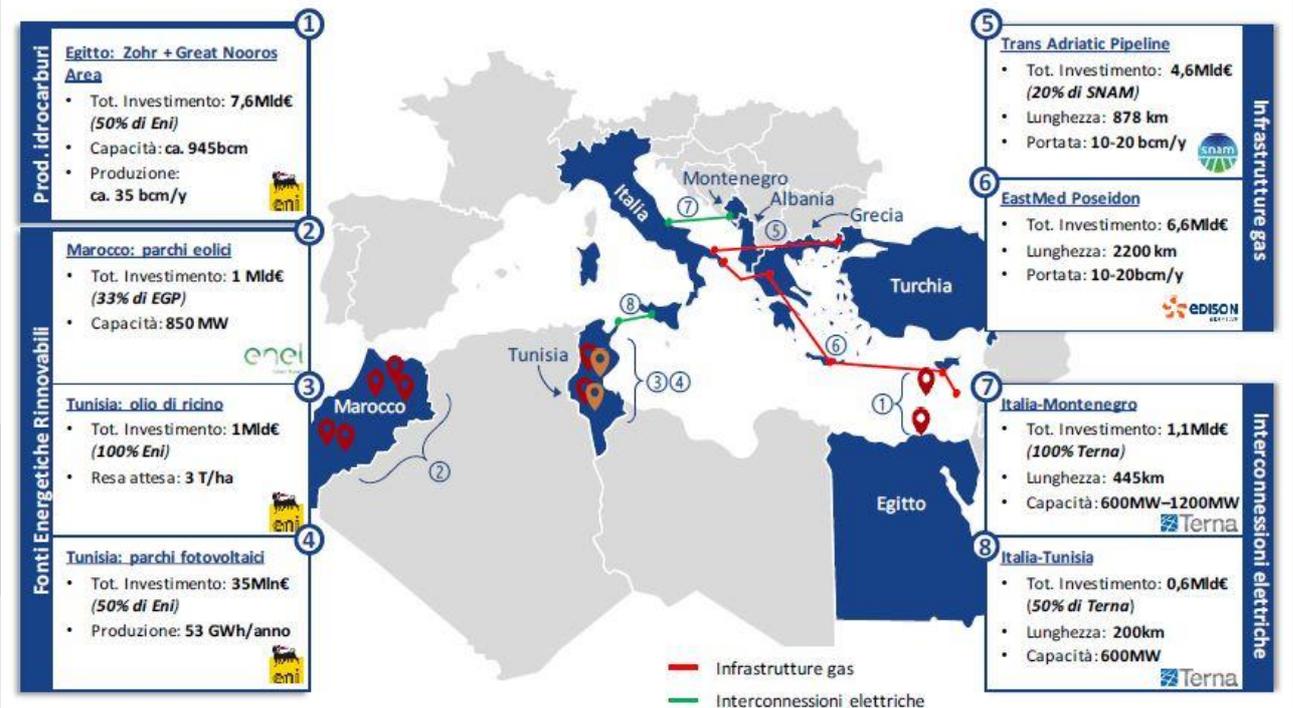


Figure 2

Source: Confindustria Italia, PwC Strategy&, 2020

We continue our journey in the Mediterranean, just as Ulysses did in his ‘Odissea’, which lead us to two important gas transport projects, these are gas pipelines capable of transporting natural gas from the Middle East to Italy and then being sorted throughout Europe. We are talking about the *Trans Adriatic Pipeline* (TAP) carried out by the Italian SNAM, and *the EastMed-Poseidon* of which Edison is part is also under construction. On the other hand, on the electricity side, two very important works commissioned by TERNÀ should be also mentioned. The first project, inaugurated in November 2019, concerns the marine interconnection, about 445km long, that crosses the Adriatic Sea and allows to connect Montenegro to Italy. The second concerns the construction of an underwater

interconnection that would allow Tunisia to be connected to Italy, opening the concrete possibility of uniting North Africa to Europe - from an electrical point of view - through Italy, by 2027. Both projects mentioned would bring benefits in terms of sustainability and integration of electricity markets, as well as reducing procurement costs on the most advantageous markets.

Thanks to what has been said so far, Italy would have all the credentials to meet the recommendations made by the European Commission, which has long maintained that Rome can act as a development center for neighboring countries, able to amalgamate the two shores of the Mediterranean, the northern one constituted by the EU states and the southern one constituted by the North African countries. The Italian development model based on renewable sources, gas and energy efficiency is potentially a replicable model, by many non-EU countries bordering the Mediterranean.

Wanting to widen the zoom of the analysis on the action of *energy diplomacy* conducted by Italy, we can move to an area adjacent to that of the Mediterranean. This is the Arabian Peninsula, that part of land that the Romans called "Arabia Felix". It is appropriate to consider the relations between Italy and the Gulf monarchies, better known by the name of *petromonarchies*, for the fact that they are among the largest oil producers in the world. In this geographical quadrant, the San Donato-based company has been able to snatch contracts and partnerships of fundamental importance, not only for Italy but also for the EU. The agreement between Eni and Adnoc¹¹, the energy giant of the United Arab Emirates, is an important piece of the energy jigsaw that concerns the enlarged Mediterranean. In this case, it is a *Share Purchase Agreement* that will allow Eni to acquire up to 20% of Adnoc Refining, the agreement contains a deal of 3.3 billion euros, effectively marking the Italian presence in the Arabian Peninsula. The industrial plan of the Italian company is to try to take control of energy exploitation in the Persian Gulf. Rome has every interest in wanting to carve out a position as a strategic European partner with the Gulf monarchies, which often need technologies and companies that are able to sell their enormous amount of gas and hydrocarbons at their disposal.

Such an important agreement for Italy was possible due to the fact that in the region of the Arabian Peninsula, Italian diplomacy has managed to nurture important relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, also from a geopolitical point of view. The Italian convergence on US and British positions, which in this geographical area are particularly strong, has allowed our country to play an

¹¹ La Abu Dhabi National Oil Company o ADNOC is a state-owned oil company of the United Arab Emirates. According to the magazine *Oil & Gas Journal* as of January 2015 ADNOC had the 7th largest oil reserve in the world with 97.8 billion barrels, most of which was located in Abu Dhabi., this is the largest company in the state emiratino.

increasingly important role, forging further ties with the State of Bahrein and Oman. Italian energy policy is in antithesis to the one carried out by France and Total energies, which in this game appears to have been scaled down to the advantage of Eni and Italy.

Finally, let us look even further east, more precisely in Central Asia, whose countries in recent years have increased investment, negotiations and strategic partnerships with numerous foreign governments. It is appropriate to consider what is the role of Italy in this part of the globe, not so far from the Mediterranean region with which it is interconnected. These are the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Within this macro-region, Italy is in a privileged position when compared to other Western countries, strong in the diplomatic and economic relations maintained by Rome with the Central Asian republics (Observatory of International Politics, 2021).

The main sectors of collaboration between Italy and the countries of this region are in the field of renewable energy, in particular wind and hydroelectric. This is thanks to the presence of Eni and WeBuild ex Salini Impregilo, which in the period from 2018 to 2021 have seen their investments in the region increase. From a strictly geographical point of view, the Italian presence is concentrated in the renewable energy market mainly in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. In March 2020, in Kazakhstan, Eni started production of the Badamsha 1 wind farm, whose capacity is 48 MW. This project will be joined by a second wind farm of 48 MW, which will significantly increase the amount of wind energy produced by the country. As for the side on Tajikistan, the Italian presence is that related to the construction giant WeBuild, which was awarded the construction of the Rogun dam, on the Vakhsh river. Once the project is completed, energy production will be guaranteed by 6 turbines of 600 MW each, which will be able to generate a power of 3600 MW of energy. The combined arrangement of the dam and the 6 turbines, will be able to provide hydroelectric energy to about 8 million citizens of Tajikistan. Therefore, Rome turns out to be one of the most reliable and present European partners in the Central Asian region.



Figure 3

Source: Ansa

Conclusions

In the conclusions of this paper in which we have taken into consideration the energy diplomacy of Italy in the enlarged Mediterranean, we can outline a final general consideration. In this paper, **Italy's action clearly emerges. It is an all-out presence with regard to the national big companies of energy and hydrocarbons, not only in the past, but also and above all in recent times.** The potential expressed and the efforts made by the Italian companies are remarkable. However, we must also take into account the weaknesses of Italy, some are structural and typical of what we call *the country system*, others instead are contingent, among those that arise from time to time, according to the circumstances.

Among the indicators of structural weakness, we can include the Italian public debt, according to the most recent estimates of the Ministry of Economy and Finance,¹² for the year 2021 the debt stood at 153.5%. In fact, according to further estimates made by the OECD,¹³ Italy appears to have the third largest debt in the world, after Japan (220%) and Greece, compared to an average of 110% of industrialized countries and with Estonia (13%) and Chile (30%) at minimum levels. To be taken into account is the fact that in Italy, from 1945 to today, there have been 66 governments. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, 29, in Germany 22, this clearly poses a problem of political instability. This is one of the most burdensome and deleterious political-institutional characteristics: the instability of Italian governments. If we turn our attention to other Western European countries, we can certainly observe higher levels of stability. For example, Germany is the country of the *Große Koalition* and the two-party governing coalitions. The UK, on the other hand, is known for its alternation of government, with the frequent alternation between Conservatives and Labour. To conclude, we can add that Rome from the storic point of view, apart from the parenthesis of the Roman era, which, however, is lost in the mists of time, has never been an Empire like the British or French. This is, on one hand, to be considered a good thing, because it has allowed the country and the energy companies to accredit themselves in the best way throughout the enlarged Mediterranean, but on the other hand, this is denote a lack of aptitude on the part of the institutions to be able to clearly defend national interests, especially in decisive geographical areas. For example, having been an empire in the past, it should imply to have maintained a powerful diplomatic and consular network, military and intelligence services capable of making a difference in some geopolitical theaters. This is precisely what happens for France, which especially on the African continent can boast a massive presence, precisely in those countries that are identified as belonging to the *françafrique*, which have kept a strong historical, political and cultural French identity. Indeed, often these African states continue to maintain a link with Paris, which is so strong that French and African politics influence each other. However, France does not have a concept of the enlarged Mediterranean as in the case of Italy. The French attention towards the Mediterranean region derives both from the colonial past and from a series of geopolitical elements aimed at making Paris, the centre of Mediterranean Europe. This is not a power policy, but rather a relevant position of France in much

¹² Update Note to the economic and financial document, DEF of 1 October 2021.

¹³ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/l-italia-e-terzo-paese-mondo-piu-indebitato-62700-dollari-testa-AC9Ckuy>

of Africa and the Arab world that is part of the French strategy of a variable geometry game. Finally, it should be remembered that in recent years, Paris has distinguished itself for its activism on the African continent, becoming a de facto *security provider*, particularly in Mali¹⁴ with the challenge to terrorism. (Melly & Darracq, 2013.).

We can conclude by affirming that despite the atavistic weaknesses of Italy, especially if compared with those of other European countries, often and willingly, the *big Italian* energy and hydrocarbon companies, manage to be competitive and appreciated on the energy market, thanks to what is recognized by foreign states with which they manage to sign partnerships and contracts, and these are: expertise, know-how, high technological level and reliability.

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