

## Italy's Evolving Mediterranean Strategy: Migrations, Economic Diplomacy, and Regional Challenges from the Arab Springs to the Mattei Plan

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### Abstract

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This study examines Italy's strategic recalibration in the Mediterranean region following the Arab Spring uprisings, focusing on the interplay between migration management, economic diplomacy, and regional security. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining policy analysis and empirical data, we argue that Italy has pursued a multifaceted strategy to address the challenges posed by increased migration flows and regional instability. This approach encompasses a shift towards 'diplomacy of growth,' enhanced economic engagement with African nations, and efforts to position Italy as a key player in EU-Africa relations. The study reveals how Italy's geographical position at the center of the Mediterranean has shaped its foreign policy objectives, leading to initiatives such as the Italy-Africa Conference and the proposed 'Mattei Plan.' By integrating migration policy with economic development and energy security concerns, Italy aims to transform challenges into opportunities for regional leadership. This research contributes to the broader understanding of how middle powers navigate complex geopolitical landscapes in times of regional upheaval, offering insights into the effectiveness of comprehensive approaches to migration management and regional stability.

**Keywords:** Italy – Mediterranean – Migrations – Economic Diplomacy – Arab Springs – Energy Security – Africa – EU Relations

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### 1. Introduction

Italy, due to its geographical location, is uniquely vulnerable to risks arising from the 'arc of instability,' which encompasses a broad region from the Balkan area to the Strait of Gibraltar, along with the deepest areas of the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, and sub-Saharan Africa (De Lucia Lumeno, 2024). This study examines how Italy has navigated these challenges in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, addressing the following research question: How has Italy's Mediterranean strategy evolved to address the interconnected challenges of migration, economic development, and regional security in the post-Arab Spring era?

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of Italy's multifaceted approach to regional challenges, offering insights into how middle powers can effectively respond to complex geopolitical shifts. By examining Italy's 'diplomacy of growth' strategy and its efforts to position itself as a key interlocutor between the EU and Africa, this research contributes to our understanding of the potential for integrated approaches to address migration, economic development, and security concerns simultaneously.

Methodologically, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining policy analysis of key Italian and EU documents with empirical data on migration flows, economic indicators, and diplomatic initiatives. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both the strategic intentions and practical outcomes of Italy's Mediterranean policy.

The Arab Spring uprisings that began in Tunisia in 2010 and spread across North Africa and the Middle East had profound implications for Italy's economic and security interests in the region. As a country with deep historical ties and significant economic investments in North Africa, Italy found itself at the forefront of dealing with the consequences of regional instability (Colombo, 2015). The immediate economic impact was substantial, reflecting the deep interconnections between Italy and the North African economies. According to a December 2012 report by the Institute for International Policy Studies (ISPI) for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italian exports to North Africa fell by approximately 20% in 2011, contrasting sharply with a 15% increase in

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Italian exports to non-EU countries (ISPI, 2012). This stark divergence underscores the significant economic disruption caused by the political upheavals in the region.

The impact of the Arab Spring on Italy's economic interests varied significantly across countries and sectors, reflecting the diverse nature of Italy's engagement with the region. Exports to Libya, a country with which Italy had particularly strong economic ties, plummeted by 77%, reflecting the severe disruption caused by the civil war that followed the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi (ISPI, 2012). In contrast, exports to Egypt and Tunisia saw more modest declines of 12% and 11% respectively, while Algeria and Morocco, less affected by political upheaval, actually saw increases in Italian exports (ISPI, 2012). This variegated impact highlights the complex and nuanced nature of Italy's economic relationships across the North African region.

On the import side, Italy, as the primary market for North African goods (receiving 13.6% of their exports), experienced a 28% decline in 2011 (ISPI, 2012). The tourism sector, particularly important for countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, saw a drop of around 30% (ISPI, 2012). These figures underscore the mutual economic dependence between Italy and North African countries, and the vulnerability of these economic relationships to political instability. The disruption to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was also significant. Italy, as the second-largest European investor in the region after France, had substantial investments, particularly in Egypt (58% of Italian FDI in the region) and Algeria (30%) (ISPI, 2012). The political instability threatened these investments and created uncertainty about future economic engagements.

From a security perspective, the collapse of authoritarian regimes, particularly in Libya, led to a dramatic increase in migration flows across the Mediterranean (Ambrosetti, 2020). This surge in migration posed immediate humanitarian challenges and strained Italy's reception capabilities. It also highlighted the interconnectedness of security, migration, and economic development in the region (Ambrosetti, Strangio, & Wihtol de Wenden, 2020). The breakdown of state control in Libya was particularly problematic for Italy. Libya had been a key partner in controlling migration flows, and its descent into civil war not only removed this buffer but also created new security challenges in terms of terrorism and arms proliferation (Colombo, 2015).

The Arab Spring and its aftermath also had significant implications for Italy's energy interests in the region. Prior to the uprisings, Libya was a key energy partner for Italy, with the Italian energy company ENI heavily invested in Libyan oil and gas production. The civil war in Libya disrupted these operations and created uncertainty about future energy supplies. Similarly, Italy's significant investments in Algeria's energy sector were potentially at risk due to regional instability. The disruption of energy supplies from Libya highlighted Italy's vulnerability to regional instability and underscored the need for a more diversified energy strategy (Cappellini, 2016).

In summary, the economic weight of the so-called NA5 (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Libya) is not negligible for Italy, accounting for more than 11% of trade with non-EU countries as a whole. From a strategic point of view, the area plays a crucial role in the panorama of energy supply sources (gas from Algeria and oil from Libya), which makes it more exposed to geopolitical instability in the region (ISPI, 2012). The Arab Spring thus confronted Italy with a complex set of challenges, encompassing economic disruption, increased migration flows, and energy security concerns. These challenges necessitated a comprehensive and multifaceted response, shaping Italy's evolving Mediterranean strategy in the years that followed.

## 2. A varied approach

The existing literature on Mediterranean migration and Italy's role in managing regional challenges offers a rich backdrop for understanding the complexities of the post-Arab Spring era. Scholars have long recognized the Mediterranean as a critical region for migration studies, with Ambrosetti (2020) highlighting the demographic challenges in the Mediterranean and emphasizing the need to understand migration patterns in a broader socio-economic context. The work of Carbone (2023) provides insights into Italy's historical engagement with Africa, offering a foundation for understanding current migration dynamics.

The impact of the Arab Spring on migration patterns has been a focal point of recent scholarship. The political upheavals in North Africa led to a breakdown of authoritarian control, resulting in increased migration flows towards Europe. This perspective is supported by data showing a 20% reduction in Italian exports to North Africa in 2011, contrasting with a 15% increase in exports to non-EU countries (ISPI, 2012).

European policy responses to the migration crisis have been extensively analyzed in the literature. The Global Approach to Migration (2005) and the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum (2008) represent attempts to balance control of illegal immigration with the benefits of legal migration (European Council, 2006; European Council, 2008). However, as noted by multiple scholars, these policies faced significant implementation challenges (Lutterbeck, 2006; Mainwaring, 2019).

Italy's dual approach to migration management, focusing on both humanitarian rescue and border control, has been the subject of numerous studies. The Mare Nostrum operation and its successor, Operation Triton, exemplify this approach (Senatodella Repubblica, 2014). However, as Giro (2023) argues, these efforts also highlight the limitations of national initiatives within a fragmented European framework.

Recent literature has increasingly focused on Italy's shift towards a "diplomacy of growth" strategy. This approach, initiated in 2012, seeks to establish renewed diplomatic and political communication pathways with African countries, particularly in the NA5 region (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Libya) (Carbone, 2016). The strategy is further elaborated in the "Piano Mattei" proposal, which aims to manage migration through economic development and cooperation (Giro, 2023).

Current scholarship increasingly calls for a more comprehensive approach to migration management. This includes addressing not only immediate border security concerns but also engaging with the underlying long-term drivers of migration, such as political instability, economic inequality, and conflict in migrants' countries of origin (Ambrosetti, Strangio, & Wihtol de Wenden, 2020). The establishment of the Rome-based Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development of Africa (Ministerodell'Ambiente e dellaSicurezzaEnergetica, n.d.) represents a concrete step towards this more holistic approach.

### 3. Italy's Evolving Approach to Migration Management

The surge in migration following the Arab Spring forced Italy to rapidly evolve its approach to migration management. This evolution was characterized by a combination of national initiatives, engagement with EU-level policies, and bilateral agreements with North African states (European Commission, 2011a; European Commission, 2011b; European Commission, 2013). Italy's response to the migration challenge reflects the complex interplay between national interests, European obligations, and humanitarian concerns.

One of Italy's most significant national initiatives was Operation Mare Nostrum, launched in October 2013 following the tragic death of 366 migrants off the coast of Lampedusa (Senatodella Repubblica, 2014). This naval and air operation, while primarily focused on search and rescue, also aimed to combat human trafficking. Mare Nostrum was notable for its humanitarian focus and its operational reach, extending 30 miles off the Italian and Maltese coasts. The operation reflected Italy's initial approach to the migration crisis, prioritizing humanitarian concerns and search and rescue operations. However, the financial burden of Mare Nostrum (estimated at €9 million per month) and concerns that it might be encouraging more migrants to attempt the dangerous sea crossing led Italy to seek greater EU involvement (Senatodella Repubblica, 2014).

The transition from Mare Nostrum to Operation Triton, a Frontex-led initiative launched on November 1, 2014, marked a shift in Italy's approach to migration management (Official Journal of the European Council, 2013b). Triton had a more limited operational area and a primary focus on border control rather than search and rescue. This transition reflected the tension between humanitarian concerns and border security considerations, as well as Italy's efforts to share the burden of migration management with other EU member states.

Italy's approach to migration management was also shaped by its engagement with broader EU initiatives. For example, Italy was a key supporter of the European Agenda on Migration, adopted on May 13, 2015, which aimed to address the root causes of irregular migration, improve border management, and develop a common asylum policy (European Commission, 2015). Italy also played a significant role in shaping the EU's external migration policy. The "Migration Compact" proposed by Italy in 2016 advocated for a more comprehensive approach to cooperation with African countries, including investment projects and Euro-African bonds to facilitate self-financing at reduced rates (Governo Italiano, 2016). This proposal reflected Italy's growing recognition of the need to address the root causes of migration through economic development and cooperation.

Bilaterally, Italy sought to renew and strengthen agreements with key North African states. The most controversial of these was the memorandum of understanding signed with Libya in February 2017, which aimed to combat illegal immigration, human trafficking, and contraband by providing support to the Libyan coast guard (Ronzitti, 2009; Ciccù, 2021). While effective in reducing migrant arrivals, this agreement has been heavily criticized by human rights organizations for potentially exposing migrants to abuse in Libya. The agreement highlights the complex ethical and practical challenges involved in outsourcing migration management to countries with questionable human rights records.

Italy's evolving approach to migration management also involved engagement with broader EU initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of migration. At the 2015 Valletta Summit on migration, Italy played a significant role in shaping the EU's approach to cooperation with African countries. Italy became a founding member of the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) and the second-largest funding country after Germany

(Consilium, 2015b). This involvement demonstrated Italy's commitment to addressing migration issues through a comprehensive approach that included development cooperation.

However, Italy's efforts to manage migration have faced significant challenges. The implementation of European migration management strategies has been impeded by deficiencies in their operationalization and a lack of coherence among EU member states (European Commission, 2020). The absence of an equitable and unified system for the distribution of responsibility for migrants has resulted in security-driven responses, rather than addressing the underlying causes of migration. Italy's position as a frontline state has often left it bearing a disproportionate burden in terms of migrant reception and processing.

In recent years, there has been a stalemate among European countries with regard to the issue of migration (European Commission, 2020). This was the result of a number of contributing factors, including the global crisis caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, which has resulted in the implementation of heightened security measures, border controls, and rejections, both within and outside the EU. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia has resulted in the displacement of over five million individuals, who have sought refuge elsewhere, adding to the complexity of Europe's migration challenges.

Italy's approach to migration management thus reflects the complex interplay between national interests, European obligations, and humanitarian concerns. While Italy has sought to balance these competing priorities, its efforts have often been constrained by the limitations of EU-wide policies and the reluctance of other member states to share the burden of migration management. The ongoing challenges in this area underscore the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated European approach to migration, one that addresses both immediate security concerns and the long-term drivers of migration.

#### **4. The "Diplomacy of Growth" Strategy**

In response to the challenges posed by regional instability and increased migration, Italy developed a strategy that came to be known as the "diplomacy of growth." This approach sought to reframe Italy's relationships with African nations, particularly those in North Africa, through a lens of economic partnership and development cooperation (Carbone, 2016; MAECI, 2017; Governo Italiano, 2016). The "diplomacy of growth" strategy was based on several key principles: viewing Africa as a market of opportunity rather than solely a source of migration and security challenges; leveraging Italy's historical ties and geographical proximity to establish stronger economic partnerships; using economic cooperation as a tool to address the root causes of migration and promote stability; and positioning Italy as a bridge between Europe and Africa in terms of trade, investment, and development cooperation.

This strategy was exemplified by several key initiatives. The Italy-Africa Initiative, launched in December 2013 by then-Foreign Minister Emma Bonino, aimed to draw attention to the growing potential of emerging African markets, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Carbone, 2016). It marked a shift away from viewing the region solely through the lens of terrorism and migration, instead recognizing it as an area of sustained economic growth. Between 2014 and 2016, there were significant diplomatic engagements with African nations, including visits by then-Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and President Sergio Mattarella to various East, Central, and West African countries (Carbone, 2016). These visits underscored the growing importance of Africa in Italy's foreign policy, particularly in relation to energy and migration issues.

Legislative reforms also played a crucial role in implementing the "diplomacy of growth" strategy. The passage of Law 125/2014 restructured Italy's development cooperation system, integrating development cooperation as a fundamental aspect of Italian foreign policy (Official Journal General Series, 2014). This law led to the establishment of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and positioned Cassa di Risparmio di Roma (CR) as the Financial Institution for Development Cooperation. The Africa Act, proposed by the Italian Democratic Party in July 2016, aimed to boost Italian investments in Africa through a combination of tax incentives, subsidized credit, and training support (GruppoPd Camera deiDeputati, 2016). The Act sought to establish Italy as a prime investment destination in Africa, focusing on sectors such as transport, infrastructure, agriculture, and sustainable energy.

These initiatives reflected a growing recognition within Italian policy circles of the need to engage with Africa in a more comprehensive and mutually beneficial manner. By promoting economic growth and development in African nations, Italy aimed not only to create new markets for Italian businesses but also to address the root causes of migration and contribute to regional stability. The "diplomacy of growth" strategy thus represented a significant shift in Italy's approach to the Mediterranean and Africa, moving beyond traditional security-focused policies towards a more holistic engagement with the region.

## 5. Italy as a Bridge between the EU and Africa

Building on its "diplomacy of growth" strategy, Italy has sought to position itself as a crucial intermediary between the European Union and Africa. This role leverages Italy's geographical position, historical ties, and growing economic engagement with the continent. Italy's efforts in this regard are evident in several key initiatives and diplomatic engagements. At the 2015 Valletta Summit on migration, Italy played a significant role in shaping the EU's approach to cooperation with African countries. Italy became a founding member of the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) and the second-largest funding country after Germany. This involvement demonstrated Italy's commitment to addressing migration issues through a comprehensive approach that included development cooperation.

The EU's Migration Compact, as proposed by Italy, included not only programmes pertaining to security and immigration but also a comprehensive approach to cooperation, encompassing investment projects and Euro-African bonds that would facilitate self-financing at reduced rates. This integrated strategy aimed to address the multifaceted challenges of migration through a multi-pronged approach that incorporated prevention, contrast and aid, in addition to fostering a more integrated and mutually beneficial relationship between the EU and Africa.

The Italy-Africa Ministerial Conference, which has become a regular event, brings together delegations from most African countries, as well as representatives from international and regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations. The conference provides a platform for discussing collaboration in various fields, including economics, politics, socio-environmental issues, security, and culture, showcasing Italy's commitment to multifaceted engagement with Africa. In the area of sustainable development, Italy established the Rome-based Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development of Africa in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This center focuses on climate, sustainable agriculture, water accessibility, and clean energy generation, demonstrating Italy's commitment to addressing key development challenges in Africa and positioning Italy as a leader in sustainable development initiatives.

These efforts reflect Italy's strategic aim to be more than just a frontline state dealing with the consequences of migration. By positioning itself as a key interlocutor between the EU and Africa, Italy seeks to shape policies, influence resource allocation, and create opportunities for Italian businesses and interests across the Mediterranean and beyond. This approach is exemplified in the strategic report "The Partnership with Africa" prepared by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) in December 2020, which outlined Italy's medium and long-term foreign policy priorities towards the African continent.

## 6. Energy Interests and Regional Stability

Italy's energy interests in North Africa, particularly in Libya and Algeria, have been a significant factor shaping its Mediterranean strategy. The Arab Spring and its aftermath posed both challenges and opportunities in this sector. Prior to the Arab Spring, Libya was a key energy partner for Italy, with the Italian energy company ENI heavily invested in Libyan oil and gas production. The civil war in Libya disrupted these operations and created uncertainty about future energy supplies. Similarly, Italy's significant investments in Algeria's energy sector were potentially at risk due to regional instability.

The disruption of energy supplies from Libya highlighted Italy's vulnerability to regional instability and underscored the need for a more diversified energy strategy. This realization has influenced Italy's approach to the region in several ways. Italy has been at the forefront of international efforts to bring stability to Libya, recognizing that a stable Libya is crucial for its energy interests and for managing migration flows. As Libya's instability persisted, Italy has sought to deepen its energy cooperation with Algeria. In 2019, Italy and Algeria signed a series of agreements to strengthen their strategic partnership, particularly in the energy sector.

Italy has also sought to diversify its energy sources, looking to countries like Egypt (with its significant gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean) and exploring renewable energy projects across North Africa. Furthermore, Italy has increasingly sought to position itself as a potential energy hub for Europe, leveraging its geographical position and existing infrastructure to become a key transit point for gas from North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean to European markets. The interplay between energy interests and regional stability has been a key factor in Italy's support for initiatives aimed at promoting economic development and political stability in North Africa. The "diplomacy of growth" strategy, for instance, is partly motivated by the recognition that economic development and energy cooperation can contribute to regional stability, which in turn secures Italy's energy interests.

## 7. The Mattei Plan and Future Prospects

As Italy continues to refine its Mediterranean strategy, new initiatives are emerging that seek to build on past efforts and address ongoing challenges. One of the most significant of these is the proposed "Mattei Plan," named after Enrico Mattei, the founder of ENI who played a crucial role in Italy's post-war economic recovery and its engagement with oil-producing countries. The Mattei Plan, announced by the Meloni government, represents an ambitious attempt to redefine Italy's relationship with Africa.

While details of the plan are still emerging, its key elements appear to include: the relocation of some production, manufacturing, and processing industries, particularly in the agro-food sector, to Africa; positioning Italy as a European energy hub, leveraging its geographical position to become a key transit point for energy resources from Africa to Europe; significant development cooperation elements, focusing on sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and renewable energy; and addressing migration issues indirectly by promoting economic development in countries of origin.

The Mattei Plan represents a continuation and expansion of Italy's "diplomacy of growth" strategy, seeking to address multiple challenges simultaneously. By promoting economic development in Africa, Italy aims to create opportunities that could reduce migration pressures. At the same time, by positioning itself as an energy hub, Italy seeks to enhance its energy security and reduce dependence on Russian gas, a concern that has become particularly acute in the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

**The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Italy-Africa Relations:** The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 presented new challenges to Italy's engagement with Africa, necessitating adjustments to its strategic approach. The pandemic's economic repercussions were particularly severe for African nations, leading to increased healthcare expenditures, market contractions, decreased foreign direct investment, reduced remittances, and a decline in tourism. These factors collectively contributed to rising debt levels among most African countries, potentially jeopardizing the progress made in economic cooperation between Italy and Africa.

In response to these challenges, Italy played a key role in promoting the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) for the most impoverished nations. This initiative demonstrated Italy's commitment to supporting its African partners during a time of global crisis and highlighted its role as a responsible international actor. The pandemic also underscored the importance of health cooperation between Italy and African nations, leading to increased collaboration in areas such as vaccine distribution, medical equipment provision, and knowledge sharing in public health management.

Despite the setbacks caused by the pandemic, Italy's strategic interest in Africa remained strong. The crisis, in fact, reinforced the importance of diversifying economic partnerships and supply chains, a goal that aligns well with Italy's long-term strategy of deepening engagement with Africa. The pandemic also highlighted the interconnectedness of global challenges, from health crises to economic instability and migration, further validating Italy's comprehensive approach to its Mediterranean and African strategy.

**Challenges and Critiques of Italy's Mediterranean Strategy:** While Italy's evolving Mediterranean strategy has shown promise in addressing complex regional challenges, it has also faced significant obstacles and criticisms. One of the primary challenges has been the persistent instability in key countries like Libya, which has hampered efforts to establish consistent economic and security partnerships. The ongoing migration crisis has also strained Italy's resources and tested its diplomatic relationships within the EU, as debates over burden-sharing and responsibility allocation have often left Italy feeling unsupported by its European partners.

Critics have argued that Italy's approach to migration management, particularly its agreements with countries like Libya, prioritizes short-term reductions in migrant arrivals over long-term solutions and human rights concerns. The memorandum of understanding signed with Libya in 2017, while effective in reducing migrant arrivals, has been heavily criticized by human rights organizations for potentially exposing migrants to abuse in Libya. This highlights the ethical dilemmas and practical challenges involved in outsourcing migration management to countries with questionable human rights records.

Furthermore, Italy's efforts to position itself as a key interlocutor between the EU and Africa have sometimes been viewed with skepticism by other EU member states, who may see Italy's initiatives as attempts to advance its national interests rather than collective European objectives. The fragmented nature of EU foreign policy and the diverse interests of member states have at times limited the effectiveness of Italy's proposals for comprehensive EU-Africa engagement.

The "diplomacy of growth" strategy and initiatives like the Mattei Plan, while ambitious, also face challenges in terms of implementation and long-term sustainability. Critics argue that these approaches may oversimplify the complex socio-economic and political realities of African countries and that Italy's capacity to drive significant economic transformation across the continent may be limited.

Conclusion: Italy's Mediterranean strategy in the post-Arab Spring era represents a significant shift towards a more comprehensive and integrated approach to regional challenges. The "diplomacy of growth" strategy, exemplified by initiatives such as the Italy-Africa Conference and the proposed Mattei Plan, reflects Italy's efforts to address migration, economic development, and security concerns simultaneously. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of these issues and seeks to leverage Italy's geographical position, historical ties, and economic interests to create mutually beneficial partnerships across the Mediterranean and Africa.

Our analysis reveals that while Italy has made strides in positioning itself as a key interlocutor between the EU and Africa, the effectiveness of its approach is constrained by broader EU policy frameworks and regional instabilities. The dual focus on humanitarian rescue and border control, as seen in operations like Mare Nostrum and Triton, highlights the ongoing tension between national initiatives and EU-wide policies. Italy's efforts to integrate migration management with economic diplomacy and development cooperation represent a potentially more sustainable approach to addressing the root causes of migration, but the full impact of these initiatives remains to be seen.

The study's findings have significant implications for understanding how middle powers can navigate complex regional dynamics. Italy's experience suggests that integrated approaches linking migration management with economic development and energy security can offer more sustainable solutions to regional challenges. However, the success of such strategies depends on their ability to garner broader EU support and address the root causes of migration in countries of origin.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of Italy's engagement with Africa, particularly in areas such as health cooperation and economic resilience. The crisis has reinforced the need for diversified partnerships and supply chains, aligning well with Italy's long-term strategy of deepening engagement with Africa. However, the pandemic has also exacerbated existing challenges, particularly in terms of economic stability and migration pressures, underscoring the need for continued adaptation and refinement of Italy's Mediterranean strategy.

Looking forward, the success of Italy's Mediterranean strategy will depend on its ability to navigate several key challenges. These include maintaining a balance between national interests and EU-wide objectives, addressing human rights concerns in migration management, ensuring the long-term sustainability of economic partnerships with African nations, and adapting to evolving regional dynamics, including the ongoing impacts of climate change and geopolitical shifts.

In conclusion, Italy's evolving Mediterranean strategy offers valuable insights into the potential for comprehensive approaches to address complex regional challenges. As the Mediterranean continues to be a critical region for global security and economic interests, understanding how nations like Italy navigate its complexities offers valuable lessons for policymakers and scholars alike. Future research could benefit from a comparative analysis of Mediterranean strategies adopted by other EU member states, as well as a more in-depth examination of the perspectives of African partner countries. Such studies would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering sustainable partnerships across the Mediterranean and African regions.

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