

Introduction and background

The plan is presented as an instrument to revitalize relations between Italy and Africa, counteract “mass immigration” in their place of origin and position Italy as the center of natural energy supply for all of Europe, explicitly following the legacy of Enrico Mattei and the role of ENI. This plan was first presented in Giorgia Meloni's inaugural speech in 2022².

The Mattei Plan, far from being just a simple sectoral policy, is established normatively as an Italy-Africa strategic plan. This was adopted through decree-law 161/2023 and developed in the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM). The latter document defines its initial operational lines and governance. The Government of Italy describes it as an open platform, based on six priority areas: water and energy, health, agriculture and food security, training and education, and physical and digital infrastructure. This initiative seeks to reposition Italy as a leading player in the Mediterranean and the Euro-African axis, capitalising on the opportunity that has been created due to the fact that it needs to diversify its energy supply after the invasion of Ukraine and that it faces competition from other models such as China's Belt and Road Initiative or the European Global Gateway³.

The initial analysis of the Mattei Plan focuses, in great measure, on its energy facet and on Italy's ambition to transform itself into a Mediterranean gas centre, emphasising the fragile balance that Rome must maintain between its two main regional suppliers: Libya and Algeria. While this approach emphasizes the relevance of ENI's historical trajectory as a geopolitical agent and the value of diversifying routes and sources, it is prone to relegate other fundamental aspects of the plan to the background. The most current Italian analyses highlight the tensions between the rhetoric of partnership and the reality of a perspective very focused on Italy's national interests, in addition to the criticisms coming from Africa and Europe regarding the possibility of replicating neocolonial logics under a new initiative⁴.

² Giovanni Carbone, Gianpaolo Bruno, Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, and M. Montanini, *La Politica Dell'Italia in Africa*. 2023.

³ D. P., “Il Piano Mattei in breve,” Jan. 2026, Available: <https://www.amahorongozzi.org/il-piano-mattei-in-breve/>

⁴ L. Guerzoni, “ENI as a Geopolitical Actor: Italy's Energy Diplomacy in the Mediterranean,” Jan. 2026, Available: <https://www.oneroinstitute.org/content/eni-as-a-geopolitical-actor-italys-energy-diplomacy-in-the-mediterranean>

The Mattei Plan has implications that go beyond the energy field. On the one hand, it has an impact on the design of the security space in the Mediterranean region and in the Sahel, where Italy shares, with countries such as Spain, concerns related to terrorism, political instability, the fragility of maritime routes and the safeguarding of essential energy infrastructure. On the other hand, Italy's ambition to establish itself as the main route for African gas to enter Europe could come into potential conflict, but also in potential synergy, with Spain's intentions to strengthen its own role as an energy node. Likewise, the migratory facet of the Mattei Plan may cause a relocation of routes, alterations in interception models and increased pressure on the western Mediterranean façade. All this would have a direct impact on Spain⁵.

From colonialism to energy projection

In the colonial period, Italy had a presence in Africa, with occupations in Libya, Somalia, and Eritrea, as well as a short occupation in Ethiopia. This occurred within a plan for overseas expansion that was late compared to the other European powers. Although the Italian colonial empire was not very extensive or long-lasting, it has left a legacy in political, social and symbolic terms that still affects the vision of Italy in the northern part of the continent and in the Horn of Africa. Through development cooperation, cultural presence, and a diplomacy focused on strengthening its margin of autonomy within the Western bloc, Rome continued its relations with its former lands after World War II and decolonization.

From the 1950s, the energy field became the main means of projecting Italy in Africa, especially through Enrico Mattei and the establishment of ENI as a state-owned company that aimed to guarantee the supply of hydrocarbons. Mattei promoted a policy of pacts with newly emancipated producing nations, which was based on more advantageous contractual terms than those offered by the "Seven Sisters."⁶ He achieved this by combining political backing for anti-colonial movements with offers of more equitable benefit-sharing. Its tactics in Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia were simultaneously intended to weaken French dominance in the Maghreb and establish Italy as an alternative energy

⁵ F. Ghilès, "A tale of two gas suppliers to Europe: Algeria and Libya," Jan. 2026.

⁶ The Seven Sisters is the name that Enrico Mattei used to refer to the seven large oil companies that dominated the sector from 1940 to 1973.

partner, thus laying the foundations for ENI's presence in North Africa.

Over the following decades, ENI established itself as a true geopolitical player in Italy's foreign policy in the Mediterranean and Africa, functioning not only as an energy company, but also as a tool for economic diplomacy. The interdependence between the stability of the southern nations and Italian energy security was strengthened by the development of projects in Egypt, Nigeria and Libya, as well as by the construction of large infrastructures, such as the trans-Mediterranean gas pipelines linking Algeria with Italy. At the same time, Italy's policy in Africa was defined by an approach that combined alignment with multilateral frameworks and the search for its own spaces, especially in the Horn of Africa and the central Mediterranean.

After the Arab Springs and the invasion of Ukraine

The overthrow of Gaddafi's government and the Arab uprisings of 2011 marked a shift in Italian policy in North Africa and the Mediterranean. The fragmentation of power between rival governments and militias, the weakening of Libya and the growth of new threats in the Sahel led Rome to readjust its priorities related to security, energy and migration control⁷. Since then, Italy has combined its efforts at political mediation and assistance to stabilization procedures with an increasingly intense concern about the use of the Libyan coast as the main route for the departure of migrants and refugees to Europe. This generated bilateral agreements on migration management⁸.

At the same time, Algeria was strengthening its role as an energy supplier, especially after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022⁹. Rome's position as one of the main intermediaries of North African energy to Europe was strengthened by the expansion of Algerian gas exports to Italy via the TransMed pipeline, as well as joint projects between ENI and Sonatrach. Italy's energy policy in the Mediterranean has morphed into a careful balancing practice between Algeria, a relatively stable and predictable partner, and Libya, an unstable but high-potential context¹⁰.

⁷ F. Simonelli, and L. Goretti, "Enlarged Mediterranean: from the Arab Spring to the Mattei Plan," 2024.

⁸ M. Tanchum, "Libya, energy, and the Mediterranean's new 'Great Game,'" 2020.

⁹ U. Shokri, "How Algeria is emerging as Europe's energy partner of choice," 2022.

¹⁰ A. S. Analysis, "Algeria's Economic Reorientation: Italy Rising, France Receding, and Implications for EU-North Africa Relations," 2025.

At the same time, the issue of migration became a crucial issue on the Italian agenda. Migratory pressure on Italy increased due to the conjunction of crises in the Sahel, disputes in the Horn of Africa and routes through the central Mediterranean, which encouraged policies to outsource border supervision and agreements with countries of origin and transit. These pacts generated harsh criticism from human rights organizations and sectors of European and African civil society. They denounced the systematic abuse of migrants and refugees and questioned the coherence between the discourse of the partnership and concrete practices¹¹.

A new approach

Italy has sought to establish a more structured perspective towards Africa over the past ten years, after having traditionally focused on the central Mediterranean and former areas of colonial influence. The Italy-Africa Initiative, which began in 2013, as well as the summits and ministerial conferences between Italy and Africa, made possible a more extensive policy towards the African continent by Italy, which includes sub-Saharan territories where Italy previously had less presence. Italian diplomacy establishes strategic continuity between the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa through the "Enlarged Mediterranean" concept, on which this process is based¹².

The Mattei Plan is located within this scenario, which was revealed by Giorgia Meloni in her 2022 investiture speech and made official during the Italy-Africa summit that took place in Rome in January 2024. The Italian government describes the plan as a new approach to relations with Africa, based on an equal partnership and aimed at addressing the fundamental drivers of migration through investments in health, education, energy, water, agriculture and infrastructure. However, analyses from both Italy and Africa point to the tension between this narrative and a practice focused on national security priorities, as well as the danger of replicating asymmetrical logics with modernized rhetoric¹³.

The Mattei Plan seeks to give coherence to a series of trends already existing in Italian politics, such as the search for a "bridge" role between Africa and Europe, the use of ENI

¹¹ M. C. Maciej Pawłowski, and B. Mirowski, "Libya – North Africa's main migration hub," Oct. 2024.

¹² Maddalena Procopio, Arturo Varvelli, Leo Goretti, Filippo Simonelli, Roberto Menotti, Giovanni Carbone, Lucia Ragazzi, & Daniele Frigeri,. (2024). *The Mattei Plan: Relaunching Italy's Africa Policy*.

¹³ "The Language Conservancy," 2023. Available: <https://languageconservancy.org/>

as a geo-economic tool, the rivalry with France and other actors in the Sahel and Maghreb, as well as the need to react to migratory pressure in the central Mediterranean. Understanding this background is essential for Spain and for the European Union in general, in order to analyse the extent to which the Mattei Plan represents a genuine innovation in Italian African politics or simply a strategic repackaging of pre-existing dynamics, but now with more political visibility and resources¹⁴.



Figure 1. Enlarged Mediterranean¹⁵

What is the Mattei Plan?

Italy's most important strategic documents in recent years agree on one concept: that the Enlarged Mediterranean, which includes the Sahel, the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa, is the priority area for national security. The Triennial Programming and Planning Document on Foreign Policy and Cooperation 2024-2026 emphasizes that Italy, in a world scenario characterized by climate crises, conflicts and demographic pressure, seeks to strengthen the socio-economic resilience of vulnerable communities and considers the Mattei Plan as the first tangible manifestation of a collaborative and egalitarian strategy with that continent. From this point of view, Africa is not only a focus of dangers (such as

¹⁴ D. C.-V. Filippo Simonelli, "Business or Multilateralism? Italy and Spain's Competing Models of Engagement with Africa," 2025.

¹⁵ Mapcreator, "Enlarged Mediterranean." 2026.

organised crime, migration or terrorism), but also a key space for projecting influence and internationalising economically¹⁶.

In terms of defense, Italy's perspective of the Enlarged Mediterranean directly connects internal security with stability south of its borders. Studies such as those of the St. Pius V Institute highlight the way in which Rome perceives intertwined threats in the area. These include the weakness of the state, the growth of jihadist groups, energy controversies and the instrumental use of migratory movements. This reading translates into a more active participation of the Italian Armed Forces in NATO and EU operations in the Sahel and the central Mediterranean, in addition to the strengthening of their air and naval capabilities, which are aimed at protecting essential energy infrastructures and controlling maritime spaces¹⁷. The Mattei Plan is included in this doctrinal context as an instrument of extended security. Through development, investment and partnerships, it seeks to address structural elements of instability that are otherwise only managed by military or police instruments¹⁸.

The current Italian perspective towards Africa has elements of continuity with previous periods, but also significant alterations in the way this policy is structured. There is continuity on three levels; the fundamental role played by the energy company ENI as a geopolitical agent in Italy, particularly in North Africa; the relevance of the Algeria-Libya axis in relation to energy security, including gas pipelines and other projects that influence Italy's foreign policy; and the practice of using bilateral agreements to delegate migration control, especially with Libya, which had been tested prior to the Mattei Plan.

Political statement and declared objectives

According to government messages and official documents, the Mattei Plan is pointed out as the main element of a new Italian African policy, which aims to change from a link

¹⁶ M. degli A. E. e della C. Internazionale, "Three year Programming Policy Planning Document." Available: https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Three-year-Programming_Policy-Planning-Document_PPPD_2024-2026.pdf

¹⁷ A. U. Francesco Anghelone, "Integrated European Security: The Mattei Plan in the Enlarged Mediterranean," 2024. Available: https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Istituto_SanPioV_Piano_Mattei.pdf

¹⁸ F. Guala, "Mattei Plan: Bridging Italy and Africa," Mar. 2024.

characterized by traditional assistance and emergency management to a long-term strategic partnership. The government presented the Plan as a means to turn Italy into an energy and economic nexus between Europe and Africa, with the capacity to provide investment, training and technology transfer in exchange for more guarantees in energy, stability and migration management. Several evaluations highlight that the government sees the Mattei Plan as a tool to strengthen Italian primacy in the enlarged Mediterranean¹⁹.

The government has publicly endorsed this general trend, albeit with certain clarifications. The President of the Republic stressed that the Plan must be based on non-paternalistic relations, on honouring African sovereignty and on being consistent with European principles and the 2030 Agenda. He stressed that education, youth and institutional strengthening are the foundations of shared security. From this point of view, the Presidency of the Republic is not only proposing the Mattei Plan as a national project, but also as a contribution by Italy to a broader response in Europe²⁰.

The Italian government synthesizes the aspiration of the Mattei Plan in three main ideas, from the point of view of political discourse. First, the concept of "cooperation among equals": Italy maintains that it wishes to leave behind both colonial relations and those based only on aid, suggesting a partnership characterized by mutual respect, shared benefit and joint responsibility in the management of common challenges. This line means that plans should be drawn up *with* African partners, not *for* them, and that the priority is to enable African nations to optimize the use of their own human and natural resources²¹.

Secondly, the Executive maintains that the Mattei Plan is a "non-predatory" method of the European presence in Africa, which clearly distinguishes it both from the colonial experiences of the past and from contemporary models considered extractive²². Third, the government is closely linked to three important sectoral goals: migration, energy, and development. With regard to migration, the government emphasizes the importance of intervening on the root causes that lead individuals to migrate and guarantees the right not to migrate, while strengthening the battle against trafficking networks and promoting

¹⁹ L. Quartapelle, "Beyond the Mattei plan: Italy's search for an Africa policy," Jan. 2024.

²⁰ E. Commission, "The Mattei Plan for Africa and Global Gateway," June 2025.

²¹ L. S. Martini, "Italy's Mattei Plan for Africa: no development without climate," Feb. 2024.

²² A. S. Jaldi, , and A. Cercaci, "The Mattei Plan: Recasting Cooperation Through Strategy and Branding," Aug. 2025.

regular migration routes and job training programs²³.

Broadly speaking, Italy's political declaration introduces the Mattei Plan as a blueprint that seeks to turn crises into opportunities, employ investments in education, infrastructure, energy and agriculture to stabilize key neighbouring areas, reduce illegal migration, restrict the actions of violent groups and entrench Italy as a major player in Europe-Africa relations. However, much of the literary critic points out that the challenge will be to show in practice that this cooperation between equals and this non-predatory approach are not just slogans, but that the benefits for African societies are real and not relegated to the background in the face of Italian interests of security and power.

Design and implementation

Decree-Law 161/2023 establishes the legal scaffolding of the Mattei Plan, and its conversion into Law 2/2024 defines it as a programmatic and strategic platform to foster closer collaboration between Italy and the nations of Africa. The law establishes a management cabinet, which is chaired by the Government or, by delegation, by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is the responsibility of this Booth to determine priorities in geographical and sectoral terms, validate projects, harmonize policies between different departments and submit an annual report to Parliament on the status of implementation of the plan²⁴.

This design increases the inter-ministerial character of the Mattei Plan, while placing it under the direct supervision of the core of the executive power, which makes this plan one of the most important tools for coordinating Italian foreign action in Africa. This governance structure indicates that Italian policy in relation to Africa has been transformed from a sum of isolated actions to an integrated framework focused on the long term. This could increase Rome's ability to influence the priorities of Europe's southern flank²⁵. Education and training, agriculture and food security, water, energy, health and infrastructure are six fundamental pillars of intervention established in the

²³ G. Musabimana, "Who Deserves to Emigrate? Mapping the Loopholes at the Africa-Italy Summit of 2024," Apr. 2024.

²⁴ Law no. 2 of 2024, containing urgent provisions for the "Mattei Plan" for development in states on the African continent, has been published in the Official Gazette. 2024.

²⁵ Report on the state of implementation of the Mattei Plan - updated to 30 June 2025 - Doc. CCXXXIII, no. 2. 2025.

programmatic documents of the Mattei Plan. The Plan aims to promote gas and renewable energy and hydrogen projects, as well as new electricity interconnections that strengthen energy production capacity²⁶.

The Mattei Plan, in the area of digital and physical infrastructure, focuses on the modernization of ports, digital platforms, telecommunications networks and transport corridors to promote trade and regional integration in Africa; this is consistent with the European Global Gateway agenda²⁷. All these sectors are affected by the migratory dimension. The official documents emphasize that the generation of employment, the improvement of basic services and the strengthening of institutional capacities have to contribute to reducing forced departures and irregular migration, while promoting regular mobility programs and cooperation agreements in border management and the fight against trafficking networks²⁸.

Pilot projects and priority countries

The Mattei Plan, in its initial stage, consists of a set of pilot projects in a restricted number of African nations, selected to maximize policy effect and show results in key areas. The first nucleus is made up of nine countries. In North Africa are Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, while in the sub-Saharan part are Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia. Later, additional countries such as Tanzania, Ghana, Mauritania, Senegal and Angola have been included in the list by the Italian government. In this way, the Plan now covers around fourteen countries²⁹.

These projects demonstrate how the Mattei Plan seeks to transform the proclaimed objectives into specific actions: countries that have an energy importance, an economic weight at the regional level or relevance in migratory routes are chosen, and interventions are organized that integrate investment, knowledge transfer and institutional support. The choice of these countries is important for Spain: it signals Italy's intention to strengthen

²⁶ A. Nova, "Mattei Plan: 21 projects in progress in nine countries for a total of 420 million euros, here is the list," 2024.

²⁷ M. Bettoli, "Piano Mattei: the pilot projects," 2025.

²⁸ L. Hart, "Migration in the Mattei Plan".

²⁹ 360 Mozambique, "Africa: Mattei Plan Expands to Four New Countries," 2026.

its presence in the Maghreb and expand into East and West Africa³⁰.

Italy has sought, from the outset, to introduce the Mattei Plan within Europe's Global Gateway strategy, presenting it as a national contribution to the sustainable infrastructure agenda and to connectivity between Africa and Europe. The Italian documents emphasize that the Plan does not seek to be a solitary effort, but a programmatic and operational platform willing to collaborate with European entities, development banks and African allies during the definition and execution stage of the projects³¹.

At the same time, the Mattei Plan is being developed in a context of geopolitical competition in Africa. Academic studies and think tanks indicate that Italy is using the Plan to position itself against other major players on the continent, especially Russia, whose influence is expanding in Sahel and North African nations, and China, through the Belt and Road Initiative. Within the European Union, the Mattei Plan meets other national perspectives, such as the Spain-Africa strategy, which is more multilateral and ³²developmental. How it coordinates with Global Gateway and the tactics of other partners, as well as the extent to which it is considered a genuine partnership initiative or a means of national power, will be essential in assessing its strategic impact.

Progress and criticism

The Italian authorities note that at the end of 2025, ongoing projects related to the Mattei Plan were valued at around €1.3 billion to €1.4 billion when budget, loans and co-financing resources at European and international level are counted. Varied analyses estimate that the initial allocation for the total Plan in the medium term will be approximately €5.5 billion, merging Italian funds with instruments from multilateral banks and the European Union, covering six main areas³³.

The Plan has helped to organise, in the sectoral field, under the same label initiatives that were previously dispersed in the areas of economic diplomacy, cooperation and energy policy. The development community has appreciated the centralization of governance

³⁰ E. Bompan, "Piano Mattei: the three-card trick at the expense of climate, Africa and Italy," Aug. 2024.

³¹ S. Palmieri, "The reference scenario for the Global Gateway and the Mattei Plan," 2025.

³² D. for the Government program, "Mattei Plan for Africa," Oct. 2024.

³³ G. Orlandi, "Italy reviews progress on Mattei Plan at Africa summit in Ethiopia," 2026.

and coordination between ministries as a genuine effort to overcome Italy's fragmentation in Africa and develop a more consistent partnership structure³⁴.

Despite this progress, many sources highlight that the implementation of the Mattei Plan faces structural difficulties. The reports of the research centres underline the lack of a clear medium- and long-term roadmap, including specific timetables, milestones and performance indicators. In addition, gaps have been identified with regard to transparency: clarity of the criteria used to select projects, the determination of funding sources, and the availability of accessible procedures to track the development and impact of interventions has been questioned³⁵.

In the context of development cooperation, professionals and organisations warn of potential conflicts between the goals of sustainability and equity that the Plan itself proclaims and the use of blended finance tools. There are fears that prioritizing large-scale energy infrastructure projects could displace resources. These criticisms point out that the governance of the Plan needs to be strengthened with stronger methods of accountability, involving civil society and aligning with the national development strategies of the African partner countries³⁶.

The reception that the Mattei Plan has had among African actors is ambivalent. Some administrations see the Plan as an opportunity to attract investment, gain visibility and diversify alliances with other external actors. Ahead of the 2024 Italy-Africa summit, more than 80 African organisations signed an open letter denouncing the origins of the Plan and warning of the danger of increasing dependence on fossil fuels and entrenching a model that focuses on exporting energy to Europe, which harms access to electricity for Africans themselves. These entities denounced the low involvement of Africa in the elaboration of the Plan, and described it as potentially "colonial".³⁷

Other research from the global South emphasizes that the persistence of Europe, and also Italy, in linking energy with migration control could perpetuate logics of securitization that do not give enough attention to the interests expressed by African nations. From this

³⁴ D. Fattibene and S. Manservigi, "The Mattei Plan for Africa: A Turning Point for Italy's Development Cooperation Policy?," 2024.

³⁵ F. Simonelli, "The Mattei Plan after the Addis Ababa Italy-Africa Summit," 2026.

³⁶ I. Cooperazione, "Piano Mattei, il sondaggio svela le crepe di un successo geopolitico," Feb. 2026, Available: <https://www.info-cooperazione.it/2026/2/piano-mattei-il-sondaggio-svela-le-crepe-di-un-successo-geopolitico>

³⁷ F. Kaboub, "Why Africa must reject the Mattei Plan," Feb. 2024.

point of view, the Mattei Plan could be seen as a mechanism that promotes European stability and prosperity rather than as a response to Africa's requests³⁸.

Within the European Union, the Mattei Plan is simultaneously creating concern and expectations. On the one hand, there is agreement that the EU needs strong measures to confront other powers in Africa and that Italian vigour can be beneficial. On the other hand, analysts warn that, if the Plan is seen primarily as a means for Italy's national interests in energy and migration, it may hinder the creation of a genuinely joint European policy towards Africa³⁹.

From Spain, the assessment is necessarily nuanced. The Mattei Plan is perceived as an element that strengthens the presence of a competitor and direct partner on the southern side. At the same time, the integrated approach of the Plan provides opportunities for coordination if interests coincide, provided that the priorities of the Spanish strategy towards Africa and the Atlantic are maintained⁴⁰. In short, the Mattei Plan has certainly made progress in terms of the number of projects and the centralization of Italian policy toward Africa, but its credibility and long-term impact will depend on the extent to which it succeeds in addressing transparency issues and better integrating African priorities.

Comparison with other initiatives

The Mattei Plan has become a structural priority of the State⁴¹. The Italian model has marked differences with respect to Spain. The Spain-Africa Strategy 2025-2028 establishes the relationship with Africa in terms of democratic governance, climate, gender equality, youth and inclusive development. It focuses in particular on the use of European Union instruments and development cooperation, as well as on multilateralism.

Italy articulates the Mattei Plan as an association that clearly seeks specific national interests, although it presents it with a discourse of "mutual benefit" and "dialogue

³⁸ D. Fattibene, "The Mattei Plan for Africa: From Aid to Partnership? Recommendations for the 2026 Italy-Africa Summit," 2025.

³⁹ A. Varvelli, "Italy's Mattei Plan: Mirage or Reality?," July 2024, Available: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mta-spotlight-34-italys-mattei-plan-mirage-or-reality>

⁴⁰ A. V. Kelly Petillo, "The turtle and the pilot fish: How the EU and Italy can help each other in the Mediterranean," Oct. 2025.

⁴¹ D.L. 161/2023 - Urgent provisions for the "Mattei Plan" for development in States of the African continent. 2024. Available: <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/provvedimento/disposizioni-urgenti-per-il-piano-mattei-per-lo-sviluppo-in-stati-del-continente-africano.html>

between equals". The Spanish model shows security interests more indirectly and through cooperative action, while the Italian model tends to relate each area to benefits for Italy's international standing and security in a more direct way⁴².

The Mattei Plan is seen, from the Spanish point of view, as a challenge and an opportunity at the same time. On the one hand, it strengthens the presence of a partner and direct competitor in Africa and the Mediterranean. On the other hand, it establishes areas of collaboration in fields where the interests of Italy and Spain intersect. In this context, it is essential that Spain uses its own Spain-Africa Strategy and its alignment with Global Gateway to establish a model of relationship with Africa that is complementary, more multilateral and focused on governance and development. This model must add value to European action and prevent merely symbolic competition between national actions.

Conclusions

Firstly, the Mattei Plan confirms that Italy has transformed Africa and the Mediterranean into the main axis of its national security and its external action. The integration of the plan into Italy's most important strategic documents, the creation of an inter-ministerial booth and the approval of Law 2/2024 demonstrate the desire to strengthen an African state policy that integrates economic interests, security and development under the same framework.

Second, by specifically addressing concerns about migration and energy security, the Mattei Plan represents a bold effort to reshape Italy's narrative regarding Africa through concepts such as "cooperation among equals" and a "non-predatory model." The selection of priority sectors and a limited number of countries, along with the Plan's phased approach in conjunction with the European Global Gateway strategy, suggests an agenda that combines geoeconomic projection with development. However, the tension between the rhetoric of partnership and the focus on Italy's interests will continue to be a determining factor for the Plan's credibility.

Third, the progress made so far is significant but still incomplete. It can be said that the Mattei Plan has begun to be implemented through specific measures on the ground. At

⁴² U. E. and C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Spain Africa 2025-2028 Working Together through a Strategic Relationship," Nov. 2024.

the same time, doubts remain regarding transparency in the selection and monitoring of projects, medium-term economic viability, and the ability to effectively integrate the priorities of African partners beyond Italy's own goals related to migration and energy security. From this perspective, the Plan's future will depend on the strengthening of its accountability, participation, and evaluation procedures.

The armed conflict in Iran is exacerbating Europe's energy vulnerability, driving up oil and gas prices, and straining key shipping routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, posing an immediate threat to Italy, a nation that relies heavily on imports. At the same time, this crisis reinforces the rationale behind the Mattei Plan: to diversify sources and supply routes, shifting the focus even further toward the Mediterranean and North Africa. In these regions, energy projects with Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia take on a strategic role for Italy and the European Union⁴³.

However, extending the "arc of crisis" from the Gulf to the Sahel further complicates the security environment Italy has described, as it diverts resources and attention and increases the risks along maritime and trade routes. In this context, the Mattei Plan can be considered a useful tool (though not sufficient on its own) for the European response to instability, as it helps to shorten and diversify supply chains with Africa. Nonetheless, it must be coordinated with other EU initiatives and with the strategies of nations such as Spain to prevent disorganized competition and optimize its stabilizing effect on the southern flank.

Finally, the Mattei Plan should not be viewed merely as an Italian sectoral policy, but also as a sign of a broader process of reconfiguring Europe's southern flank, in which various member states are seeking to define their own model of engagement in Africa. For Spain and the Ministry of Defense, it will be essential to closely monitor the Plan's development, identify areas for cooperation and potential conflicts, and adopt proactive positions within NATO and the European Union.

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⁴³ L. Basquel, "How the Iran war could trigger a European energy crisis," Mar. 2026.