

The new Italian and German relations with Algeria in the midst of the energy crisis

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Since the war in Ukraine started, the energy crisis has been the most crucial challenge for the EU. The member states work together and separately on solutions for an alternative to Russian gas. In this historical context, Algeria nowadays appears attractive to the EU policy, precisely the new German and Italian foreign/energy policy. The work will answer the question of what the role of North Africa and Algeria for Germany, Italy, and the entire EU could be. Namely, Algeria, as a Maghreb country, a Mediterranean country of moderate Islam with a secular government, seems vital for Africa's stability. Likewise, it is a member of the African Union, the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the United Nations, and the Arab Maghreb Union (a founding member). Territorially, Algeria is OPEC's largest member country, joined in 1969, and the greatest country in Africa (almost 45 million inhabitants), with a young growing population. Furthermore, Algeria's military is one of the biggest in Africa and has the most significant defence budget. Also, it has one of the largest economies on the continent, based mainly on energy exports (oil and gas); therefore, as such represents regional power in North Africa. The value of petroleum exports constitutes more than half of the total value of exports. Other natural resources include iron ore, phosphates, lead, and uranium. In Algeria, the GDP per capita is 3623\$¹. The country's income from gas exportation represents 60% of the state budget. At the

¹ Opec, *Algeria facts and figures*, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/146.htm.

beginning of 2023, 85% of total Algerian gas exportation goes to Europe, in the first place, to Italy².

Moreover, the World Bank Group ranks Algeria as the first country in Africa for its potential for wind power, defined as «world-class wind potential»³. The country shares borders with Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Libya, and Tunisia and to the north is the Mediterranean Sea. Also, Algeria has vast oil and natural gas reserves; *Sonatrach*, founded in 1963, employs more than 200.000 people; the national oil company, the major company in Africa, supplies ample natural gas to Europe⁴. The Hassi R'Mel gas plant, located in the desert, is one of the largest in Africa; around 13 percent of European natural gas imports come from Algeria. The gas is transported via pipelines to the Mediterranean coast and then to Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Next, a new Algerian law from 2020 encourages access for foreign investors considering gas exploration⁵. Besides, according to Eurostat, Italy and Germany are countries characterized by high energy import dependency, first more than 70 and second more than 60 percent⁶. Already in 2021, Algeria was critical energy partner for the EU; it was the third foremost supplier of natural gas, after Russia and Norway⁷. According to Eurostat, in 2021, Russian exports covered

² F. Borsari, *Algeria. Una forte spinta sul pedale del gas*, in «Mediterraneo allargato», Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), 2023, n. 1, pp. 8-9.

³ *New Analysis Shows Onshore Wind Potential Across Africa Enough to Power the Entire Continent Many Times Over*, International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group, 30.09.2020, <https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=24607>.

⁴ Sonatrach, Presentation, <https://sonatrach.com/presentation>.

⁵ *Where Will Germany Get Its Energy in the Future?*, in «Spiegel International», 03.08.2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/business/a-global-shopping-tour-where-will-germany-get-its-energy-in-the-future-a-c22f2fe7-7543-4413-a1f6-03a670fad347>.

⁶ *Energy import dependency, EU, 2020*, Eurostat, 10.03.2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Import_dependency_in_2020_10-03-2022.png.

⁷ *Main suppliers of natural gas and petroleum oils to the EU*, Eurostat, December 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments#Main_suppliers_of_natural_gas_and_petroleum_oils_to_the_EU.

40% of the EU's fossil gas, 30% of the EU's crude oil, and 30% of the EU's hard coal demand⁸. Then, due to the new geopolitical and international relations, in January 2023, Algeria surpassed Russia and became the second enormous gas exporter to the EU after Norway⁹.

Algeria as a regional power in North Africa

In 2021, after Libya and Nigeria, Algeria was in third place in Africa for proved crude oil reserves, with 12,2 billion barrels. Moreover, the Maghreb country has among Africa's biggest natural gas reserves (the second place behind Nigeria, with 159 trillion cubic feet). All these vast reserves make the Western Mediterranean country an attractive object of analysis for the EU decision-makers and possible long-term agreements. Therefore, diversifying away from Russian gas, the Mediterranean seems one of the most critical regions for the EU countries' energy security. In the first place, Italy can benefit from old good bilateral relations with Algeria. For instance, in 1983, *Transmed*, the world's first deep-water pipeline, connected Algeria and Italy¹⁰. It is important to bear in mind that at the end of 2021, Algeria has the ninth biggest proven crude oil reserves in the world¹¹. As Africa's largest gas producer also holds the world's tenth-largest gas reserves¹².

In addition, disputes and tensions between Algeria and Morocco on Western Sahara bring worries and potentially more extensive security and migration issues for the EU as a neighbour. In 2021, Alge-

⁸ *How Europe weighs the geopolitical risks of its energy supplies*, in «Euractiv.com», 28.02.2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/how-europe-weighs-the-geopolitical-risks-of-its-energy-supplies/>.

⁹ *L'Algeria supera la Russia e diventa il secondo esportatore di gas verso l'Europa*, in «Agenzia Nova», 05.01.2023, <https://www.agenzianova.com/news/energia-algeria-supera-la-russia-e-diventa-il-secondo-esportatore-di-gas-verso-leuropa/>.

¹⁰ *Can Algeria contribute to the EU's energy security?*, in «Deutsche Welle», 05.04.2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/can-algeria-contribute-to-the-eus-energy-security/a-61680466>.

¹¹ *OPEC share of World Crude Oil Reserves, 2021*, OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2022, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm.

¹² *Natural gas, Data 2021*, U.S. Energy Information Administration, <https://www.eia.gov/international/data/world/natural-gas/dry-natural-gas-reserves>.

ria announced the break of diplomatic relations with Morocco¹³. On the other side, Algerian foreign policy has good relations with France, Russia, Turkey, and Israel. All this make of Algeria an exciting object of analysis. The question is how Germany and Italy, Europe's first and third most significant economies, and their new Scholz and Meloni governments can manage the energy crisis. How can they react to the crisis, and how can that influence the EU energy policy and relations with Africa, particularly Algeria?

Furthermore, Algeria is included in the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which aims to bring the EU and its neighbours closer. Thus, Algeria makes part of this bilateral policy between the European Union and the other sixteen partner countries, the EU's closest neighbouring countries¹⁴. The new policy emerged in 2004, after enlargement to the east, intending to offer as well some benefits to the neighbouring countries without giving them the perspective of membership. Likewise, the goal was to make good relations between EU and non-EU states, building security areas. Therefore, the ENP is not just an economic agreement (financial assistance, trade liberalization, cross-border and intra-regional cooperation, access to the EU's internal market) but also a significant aspect of the EU's foreign policy¹⁵.

This February, the First Vice President of the European Commission and EU climate chief, Frans Timmermans, defined Africa as likely the EU's most important renewable energy partner in the future, as this continent has a high potential for renewable energy production, in particular solar power. He underlined especially the role of the Mediterranean and North African countries, stressing the EU-Af-

¹³ *Algeria cuts diplomatic ties with Morocco over 'hostile actions'*, in «Aljazeera», 24.08.2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/24/algeria-cuts-diplomatic-ties-with-morocco>.

¹⁴ *European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)*, European Commission, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn- asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en.

¹⁵ S. Bulmer et al., *Politics in the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020, p. 468.

rica energy partnership¹⁶. Namely, back in 2021, the EU announced the new Global Gateway strategy to counter China's New Silk Road plan, using its financial and diplomatic tools to ensure energy cooperation with Africa¹⁷. At the moment, China is a first exporter to Algeria. Arguably, the EU seeks better relations with Africa and would prefer the unity of North African countries in a Maghreb union; still, it could be challenging considering the Russian presence in the continent and various military agreements in a competitive geopolitical environment.

New intergovernmentalism and structural realism

Analysing the new German and Italian relations (narratives and offers) with Algeria amid the energy crisis, the work applies the theory of New Intergovernmentalism in European Integration and EU Governance and defensive neorealism-structural realism theory from an International Relations perspective. Consistent with the New Intergovernmentalism theory assumptions, I would argue that national governments play a dominant, growing, and decisive role in the new EU energy policy. This theory explains that member state-self-interest becomes more important, and intergovernmental decision-making seems more prominent. Besides, it emphasizes economic and geopolitical member-state interests. The theory underscores intergovernmentalism and informality as essential characteristics of the European Council. Namely, the heads of governments and states are crucial for this supranational body, as they provide the political framework for supranational legislation and give legitimacy to supranational action

¹⁶ *Timmermans: Africa likely to be EU's most important renewable energy partner*, in «Euractiv.com», 06.02.2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/timmermans-africa-likely-to-be-eus-most-important-renewable-energy-partner/>.

¹⁷ *A New Phase in Africa-EU Energy Collaboration: The Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative*, Africa-EU Energy Partnership, 27.07.2021, <https://africa-eu-energy-partnership.org/gei/>.

in a particular context¹⁸. The state-centric concept in the intergovernmentalism theory in the EU governance derives from Stanley Hoffman's realist school of thinking on national interests and high politics such as foreign policy. He considered national governments to be the ultimate arbiters of crucial decisions¹⁹.

Similarly, from an International Relations perspective, the work will approach Kenneth Waltz's defensive neorealism theory, where state actors' primary self-interest is maintaining power and national security in competition with other global state actors²⁰; in this case, with Russia and China. According to Waltz, an unstable multipolar world affects how states provide for their security. In multipolar systems, the states rely on their internal efforts and alliances with others. Also, the competition is more complicated than in unipolar or bipolar structures since it is hard to estimate the cohesiveness and strength of coalitions. Waltz argues that international politics is not transformed; therefore, theories highlighting extending democracy, and paving the way to peace, do not work. So, even after Cold War, realist theory remained explanatory power for self-interested states and their security concerns²¹. Thus, Waltz's theory could explain the period of war and turmoil, during the new East-West conflict, where the autonomy and rational states are the main actors in the system structure, which affects their interaction. Next, power distribution as a process in international relations would depend on the states' skills and capabilities. Hence, the analysis focus here will be on Italian and German foreign policy (energy policy considered as part of it) in Algeria. Lastly, it may be argued that the European energy policy, as well German and Italian diplomatic offensive in the case of Algeria, occurred not only as a reaction to the war in Ukraine and energy security but also to Russian

¹⁸ C. Bickerton, D. Hodson, U. Puetter, ed. by, *The New Intergovernmentalism: States and Supranational Actors in the Post Maastricht Period*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015.

¹⁹ G. Falkner, *Political theory and EU politics*, in G. Falkner, ed. by, *EU Social Policy in the 1990s. Towards a corporatist policy community*, Routledge, London/New York 1998, p. 12.

²⁰ K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw Hill, New York 1979, p. 126.

²¹ K. Waltz, *Structural Realism after the Cold War*, in «International Security», 2000, 25(1), pp. 5-6.

and Chinese security threats/pretensions in the Western Mediterranean, balancing their power.

Italy's diplomatic offensive in Algeria

This year, the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, visited Algeria in January. She had meetings with the President of Algeria, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, and Prime Minister Aïmen Benabderrahmane. Italy and Algeria signed five important agreements. First was the Memorandum of cooperation between *Confederazione generale dell'industria italiana-Confindustria* and the Algerian Economic Renewal Council. President Carlo Bonomi presented the *Confindustria*. The second memorandum, which concerns the understanding of the enhancement of the energy interconnection network between Italy and Algeria for a sustainable energy transition, was signed by the president of *Eni* (*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*), Claudio Descalzi, and director of Algerian *Sonatrach*. The third memorandum presents technological collaboration for the reduction of CO₂ emissions. The fourth brings cooperation between the Italian and Algerian space agencies. Finally, the fifth was the joint declaration between Meloni and Tebboune on the twentieth anniversary of the Treaty of friendship, good neighbourhood, and cooperation, signed in Algiers in 2003²².

Tebboune expressed his satisfaction with the Italian industrial investment in Algeria, for strengthening the economic and commercial exchange, and for the energy agreements between the two friendly countries in the last two years: «Italy will be the distributor of this gas for all of Europe [...] Italy has chosen the right path for the African economy». Furthermore, they discussed international scenarios: the situation in Sahel, Mali, Libya, Tunisia, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the end, the Algerian president expressed the wish for more cooperation with *Fiat* and the food industry; also, to try to expand the economic exchange as much as possible. On the other side,

²² *Il Presidente Meloni in Algeria*, Cerimonia di firma di accordi Italia-Algeria, Governo Italiano, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 23.01.2023, <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/il-presidente-meloni-algeria/21567>.

Meloni underscored that this was the first mission of the new Italian government in North Africa to reinforce the economic, energy, political, and cultural cooperation in the Mediterranean; according to the Prime Minister, it means how much Algeria is a reliable, fundamental and strategic partner. The Italian goal will be to reconnect the southern shore with the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Additionally, Meloni mentioned the Italian *Mattei plan for Africa*, «the model of equal cooperation», the model of development and cooperation, especially in the energy field. It would be the «non-predatory» approach of foreign states that allows African nations to grow on what they have: «Italy is a credible and non-predatory partner». At this point, the concept of soft power was introduced in the discourse. For instance, expressing happiness because of the Garden dedicated to Enrico Mattei in the Algerian capital, Meloni remembered him as an influential Italian who supported Algerian independence (FLN) and was a great Algerian friend. Namely, Mattei was an important Italian politician (*Democrazia Cristiana* political party) after the Second World War, in particular as the founder of *Eni* in 1953. Meloni added: «Algeria is our first gas supplier. The cooperation extends to the energy transition, renewable energies, agro-industry, telecommunications and infrastructure, construction of a new gas pipeline that should reach Sardinia, space exploration, space technology»²³.

Subsequently, the Prime Minister highlighted that Algeria is the first Italian trading partner in Africa and should be crucial for Europe in the current energy crisis. Recalling the energy agreements from 2022 it was underlined «the bridge» between the two countries and «the long extraordinary friendship». It seems to be a new Italian foreign policy orientation: «Right now we are focusing a lot on the Mediterranean, on North Africa to become a priority; Algeria is the most stable and long-lived partner from this point of view». Regarding the energy crisis and Algerian role, Meloni continued: «This energy crisis is the opportunity for us, Algeria can play an important role at the global level, and Italy can become the gateway of this energy for Europe». She argued that

²³ *Il Presidente Meloni in Algeria*, Algeri, dichiarazioni di stampa Meloni-Tebboune, Governo Italiano, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 23.01.2023, <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/il-presidente-meloni-algeria/21567>.

Europe has had little presence in Africa in recent years, but it is also in Europe's interest to address this issue: «It is a geopolitical question, Europe must be interested in the presence in the Mediterranean, in Africa, to stem the Russian and Chinese presence [...] Italy does not do this work only for itself but for the whole of Europe and must be supported by Europe, the European Council must address this issue»²⁴.

Also, Meloni greeted the crew of the Italian Navy ship “Carabiniere”, docked in the port of Algiers: «The vast majority of our national interests lie in the Mediterranean. For us, this is a crucial area and, representing the current Italian Government, I believe that the work you are doing is extremely strategic because, as you have seen, we are going back to making Italy a priority in the Mediterranean, considering its strategic interests»²⁵. In Algeria, the Italian Navy is present through the operation “Safe Mediterranean”, patrolling and fighting against illegal trafficking.

Hence, Italy's two-day state visit to Algeria brought stronger relations, proved by energy agreements, with Algerian *Sonatrach*, a state-owned company, one of the world's leading oil companies and Africa's largest joint-stock company. In particular, the focus was on hydrocarbon production facilities, sustainable energy transition, building a new gas pipeline, a new undersea power cable, and increasing production capacity for liquefied gas. It is also important to remember that Italy has pipeline connections with Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Angola, Congo, and Mozambique, but Algeria was chosen as a strategic partner. The *Eni* director, Descalzi, expects that Italy, with the new Algerian gas, can reduce Russia's gas supplies even to zero from 2024-25²⁶.

The following month Italy repeated the intentions to cooperate with Africa on energy supplies using the EU funds under *REPowerEU*²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Intervento di saluto all'equipaggio della nave della Marina Militare italiana “Carabiniere”, Governo Italiano, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 22.01.2023, <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/intervento-di-saluto-allequipaggio-della-nave-della-marina-militare-italiana-carabiniere>.

²⁶ *Italy boosts key energy ties with Algeria*, in «Euractiv.it», 24.01.2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-boosts-key-energy-ties-with-algeria/>.

²⁷ REPowerEU is the European Commission's plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030. It results from global energy

plan (€300 billion) to completely avoid Russian gas and build an energy hub for the entire EU. Some funds (about €25 billion) will also be available from the *NextGenerationEU* pandemic recovery plan launched in 2021. Namely, the goal is to build *South2 Corridor*, a link to bring hydrogen produced in northern Africa and arriving in northern Europe. The talks between Rome and Brussels regarding the EU funds for the energy hub should be completed by the end of April 2023²⁸. Meanwhile, the Council of the EU approved funds for the *REPowerEU* plan, allowing member states to use it in their national recovery and resilience plans. Additionally, the Council fosters inter-governmental cooperation, asking more than a third of spending to be assigned to cross-border projects²⁹.

Also in February, the Italian Environment and Energy Minister, Pichetto Fratin, speaking with President of the Sicily region on the occasion of opening the most giant European solar panel factory, owned by *Enel (Ente Nazionale per l'energia Elettrica)*, located in Catania, highlighted the goal to become the energy hub of Europe, as well the intention for southern Italy to set as a centre for Europe's energy supply, particularly as a source of wind and solar power, and as a gateway to receive African gas supplies³⁰. According to Gianni Silvestrini, scientific director of the Kyoto Club, Italy invests a lot in clean energy, so it can be expected a «boom in renewable energy» in 2023 in order to be more independent from Russian gas³¹. Moreover, Alessan-

market disruption caused by the war in Ukraine, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en.

²⁸ *Italien will EU-Mittel nutzen, um Energiedrehscheibe zu werden*, in «Euractiv.com» with «Reuters», 08.02.2023, <https://www.euractiv.de/section/europa-kompakt/news/meloni-italien-will-eu-mittel-nutzen-um-energiedrehscheibe-zu-werden/>.

²⁹ *EU recovery plan: Council adopts REPowerEU*, Council of the EU, Press release, 21.02.2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/21/eu-recovery-plan-council-adopts-repowereu/>.

³⁰ *In Sicilia l'Enel inaugura la prima 'gigafabbrica' solare in Europa*, in «Euractiv.com», 07.02.2023, <https://euractiv.it/section/energia/news/in-sicilia-lenel-inaugura-la-prima-gigafabbrica-solare-in-europa/>.

³¹ *Italien will mit Erneuerbaren zum Energie-Umschlagplatz werden*, in «Euractiv.it», 30.11.2022, <https://www.euractiv.de/section/europa-kompakt/news/italien-will-mit-erneuerbaren-zum-energie-umschlagplatz-werden/>.

dro Lanza, a professor of Energy Policy at LUISS University of Rome, argued that in 2024, Italy could have reduced its dependence on Russian gas from 40 percent to a 20 percent³². For instance, in 2020, Italy imported 43,3 percent of gas from Russia and 22,8 percent from Algeria; then in 2021, 40 percent from Russia and 30,8 from Algeria³³. Hence, Algeria was the second biggest Italian energy partner in relation to gas importation.

However, in the summer of 2022, only a few months after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, Algeria became the biggest Italian gas supplier. In addition, the Algerian *Sonatrach* confirmed the release of four billion m³ of gas to Italy. Visiting Algiers in July, the Italian Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, announced that this Mediterranean country would accelerate on gas supplies and confirmed a privileged partnership in the energy sector. Draghi continued: «Algeria is a very important partner for Italy. It is in the energy field, in industry and entrepreneurial activity, in the fight against crime, in the search for peace and stability in the Mediterranean [...] Italy and Algeria continue to work for peace in the Mediterranean starting from the Libyan crisis and the difficulties facing Tunisia». On the fourth intergovernmental summit, also chaired by Algerian President Tebboune, the new fifteen agreements were signed (among others, one for energy transition); six ministers presented Italy, and one of them was Luigi Di Maio, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Draghi underscored the ultimate intensification of Italian-Algerian relations when he remembered the visit of Italian President Mattarella to Algeria in November 2021 and Algerian President Tebboune to Rome in May 2021. The Italian Prime Minister again highlighted: «The energy transition is fundamental for our countries; it is fundamental for the future of EU». He added: «The friendship between Italy and Algeria is essential to face the challenges in front of us, the regional crises and energy transition. We want to

³² *Italy looks to demote Russia and make Algeria its top gas supplier*, in «Politico», 11.04.2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-turns-to-algeria-to-replace-russian-gas/>.

³³ *Importazioni di gas naturale per paese di origine. Governo Italiano, Ministero dell'ambiente e della sicurezza energetica*, <https://dgsaie.mise.gov.it/importazioni-gas-naturale>.

work together for the future of the Mediterranean»³⁴. As a result, the new agreements with Algeria allow Italy greater independence from Russia and diversification of gas. Indeed, the new relations between Italy and Algeria and between Europe and the African Mediterranean will be conditioned by the energy question.

So, back in April 2022, the former Italian Prime Minister announced that Algeria was set to overtake Russia as Italy's largest gas supplier through a new deal between the two countries. Russia was supplying around 40 percent of Italy's natural gas then. After meeting Algerian President Tebboune, Draghi pointed out: «Right after the invasion, I announced that Italy would move quickly to reduce dependence on Russian gas. This agreement shows a significant response to that strategic objective». With a deal signed between Italy's oil and gas company *Eni* and Algeria's *Sonatrach*, Algeria will send an additional nine billion cubic meters of gas to Italy by 2024. Before the deal was signed, *Eni* director Descalzi and former Italy's Foreign Minister Di Maio were on a diplomatic offensive in Algeria. Moreover, this agreement plans a new Italian investment in Algerian infrastructure to increase production since the Transmed pipeline does not run at total capacity³⁵. The Italian objective seems to enhance diplomatic presence to manage energy diversification in the short term.

Conversely, a gas agreement between Italy and Algeria provoked concerns in Spain that could affect smaller supplies of Algerian gas to the Iberian Peninsula. Hence, the worries led to further diplomatic talks between Italy and Spain³⁶. It is essential to bear in mind that in 2021, Algeria shut down a gas pipeline running across Morocco to Spain after Madrid backed a Moroccan intention to grant limited autonomy to Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony. Namely, this territory was annexed in 1975 by Morocco. However, Algeria supports Western Saha-

³⁴ *Dichiarazioni alla stampa Draghi-Tebboune ad Algeri*, Palazzo Chigi, 18.07.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEGOPpQRXMQ&t=11s>.

³⁵ *Italy looks to demote Russia and make Algeria its top gas supplier*, in «Politico», *op. cit.*

³⁶ *Italy and Spain Hold Talks to Head Off Tension Over Algerian Gas*, in «Bloomberg», 12.04.2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-12/italy-and-spain-hold-talks-to-head-off-tension-over-algeria-gas?leadSource=verify%20wall>.

ra's independence³⁷. Michela Mercuri, professor of Contemporary History of the Mediterranean Countries, argues that Europe and Italy have lost their influence in the Mediterranean after they could not understand the dynamics since the outbreak of the Arab spring in 2011 and the fall of Gaddafi. In her opinion, it resulted in a European geopolitical shipwreck. Moreover, she points out that isolated Italy should count in the Mediterranean if it wants to be able to count in Europe³⁸. Likewise, Gianni De Michelis, former Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, analysed the Mediterranean as a geostrategic region. After the Arab spring, he stressed that for the future of Arabic societies and global relations would be a pivotal role of Europe. According to De Michelis, in the past, Europe had not been such a «first level» player in the region, but it is time to take responsibility. Also, during the nineties, he proposed the integration of North African countries into the European Union³⁹.

Finally, the EU Commission approved the first «energy corridor» between North Africa and Italy last December. This project is about constructing a new submarine power line to transport clean energy from Tunisia to Italy. So, southern Italy (the province of Trapani in Sicily) was marked as an energy hub for Europe that should «strengthen the continent's energy security». In so doing, the Italian government promoted the Mediterranean energy hub to secure mainly solar energy for Europe. Prime Minister Meloni underscored: «It is in Italy's destiny to become a new energy hub for the entire European continent; it is in our mission to intensify cooperation with Africa to bring investment and development»⁴⁰. Indeed, the Italian advantage may be its geographical closeness to the western Mediterranean and Algeria and long-lived partnership; the two countries back in 1982 in

³⁷ *Italy looks to demote Russia and make Algeria its top gas supplier*, in «Politico», *op. cit.*

³⁸ M. Mercuri, P. Quercia, *Naufragio Mediterraneo*, Paesi Edizioni, Roma 2021.

³⁹ G. De Michelis, *Mediterraneo in ebollizione. Cause e prospettive della Primavera araba*, Boroli, Milano 2012.

⁴⁰ *EU-Kommission genehmigt ersten „Energiekorridor“ zwischen Italien und Afrika*, in «Euraktiv.it», 12.12.2022, <https://www.euraktiv.de/section/europa-kompakt/news/eu-kommission-genehmigt-ersten-energiekorridor-zwischen-italien-und-afrika/>.

Rome, signed an agreement on the supplies of Algerian gas to Italy⁴¹. Then, in 2007 by an agreement relating to a gas pipeline between Algeria and Italy through Sardinia, the Italian (Porto Botte) and Algerian (El Kala) coasts were connected by undersea pipeline⁴².

German energy interests in Algeria

After the war outbreak in Ukraine, Germany, like Italy, started to think urgently about gas diversification. The German group *Siemens Energy* was especially alarmed in July 2022 when Russian *Gazprom* significantly cut gas deliveries via *Nord Stream 1* under the Baltic Sea to about 20 percent of the pipeline’s capacity⁴³. Disgruntled Germany rebuked Russian actions and removed to consider deeper energy cooperation among others, also with Algeria, to mitigate and surmount the effects of the energy crises. Likewise, Chancellor Scholz previously described the new international context as *Zeitenwende* (“historical turning point”)⁴⁴. As a consequence, Germany suspended the certification of the *Nord Stream 2* pipeline, which was supposed to increase Russian gas supplies to Europe significantly⁴⁵. Hence, after cleavages with Russia, the revolutionary transformation of Germany’s energy

⁴¹ *Protocollo di accordo sulle forniture di gas algerino all’Italia*, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Archivio dei Trattati Internazionali Online, <https://itra.esteri.it/Search/Allegati/43143>.

⁴² *Accordo Intergovernativo tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Democratica e Popolare di Algeria relativo al gasdotto tra l’Algeria e l’Italia attraverso la Sardegna (GALSI)*, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Archivio dei Trattati Internazionali Online, <https://itra.esteri.it/Search/Allegati/49110>.

⁴³ *Terror in Europa: Gazprom drosselt Nord Stream 1-Lieferungen drastisch*, in «Euractiv.com» with «AFP» and «Reuters», 27.07.2022, <https://www.euractiv.de/section/eu-aussenpolitik/news/terror-in-europa-gazprom-drosselt-nord-stream-1-lieferungen-drastisch/>.

⁴⁴ Die Bundesregierung, *Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz*, Berlin, 27.02.2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/regierungserklaerung-von-bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-am-27-februar-2022-2008356>.

⁴⁵ O. Scholz, *The Global Zeitenwende. How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era*, Foreign Affairs, 05.12.2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/germany/olaf-scholz-global-zeitenwende-how-avoid-new-cold-war>.

policy should be analysed as the *Zeitenwende* process in the security strategy.

The German Federal Foreign Office defines political relations with Algeria as «good». It can be said that bilateral relations between Germany and Algeria are «very young». Nonetheless, bilateral relations started in 1962, the first official visit to Germany by one Algerian President (Abdelaziz Bouteflika) happened in 2001. On the other side, the first official travel by one German President (Horst Köhler) occurred in 2007. However, nowadays, the two countries' connections seem much more potent. For instance, the very first trip abroad by the current Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune was to Berlin in 2020, attending the Berlin Conference on Libya. Additionally, Germany is the fourth biggest importer in Algeria. The main imports are machinery, vehicle parts, and chemical products. Contrary, Germany is importing from North African country mainly oil and petrochemicals. Following the German-Algerian Joint Economic Commission that Chancellor Merkel and Bouteflika set up in 2011, the energy partnership was established in 2015, promoting the new bilateral business contacts. Subsequently, the third German-Algerian Energy Conference was held in December 2021 in Algiers and focused on the potential for developing green hydrogen in Algeria. Also, the new energy cooperation is followed by German cultural diplomacy⁴⁶. The principal indicator is the presence of the *Goethe-Institut* in Algiers, doubling the number of people learning German in a few years. Then, Elisabeth Wolbers, the German ambassador in Algiers, speaks about two important countries (Germany and Algeria) with traditionally close and friendly ties in economic, political, and cultural terms⁴⁷. Among other German institutions in Algeria active are the following: The German-Algerian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (around 400 members), *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung* and *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ *Deutschland und Algerien: bilaterale Beziehungen*, Auswärtiges Amt, 01.02.2023, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/laender/algerien-node/bilateral/222128>.

⁴⁷ *Deutsche Botschaft Algier*, <https://algier.diplo.de/>.

⁴⁸ *Deutsche Botschaft Algier*, Deutsche Institutionen in Algerien, <https://algier.diplo.de/dzde/willkommen/DeutscheInstitutionen>.

Historically, Germany had vital interests in the stability of Algeria, as it wanted no conflict zones in the Maghreb states in order to expand the markets for German goods. After the fall of the Berlin wall, united Germany with Chancellor Kohl soon recognized the instability issues in North Africa, notably the outbreak of the civil war in Algeria in 1991, causing a refugee crisis and obstacles to their investments in the region. Afterward, the German government held the presidency of the EU in 1994 and addressed the problems of the Mediterranean at the Essen European Council, launching an initiative on North Africa and the Middle East on security, cooperation, and investments⁴⁹. In that period, also the southern EU member states, like Italy, due to the refugees and threats to their companies' interests, were more concerned of the Mediterranean problems and Algerian civil war, than, for instance, for eventual EU enlargement to eastern Europe. Consequently, a year later, the Euro-Med Partnership (EUROMED) Agreement was signed, and later relaunched in 2008⁵⁰. Today, EUROMED presents a union of the EU Member States and Mediterranean countries based on cooperation agreements, aiming to promote economic integration and democratic reforms in North Africa and the Middle East⁵¹.

Back to recent energy history, the German-Algerian Energy Partnership was founded in 2015, signing a Joint Memorandum of Understanding. The German Ministry of Energy is the lead executing agency, and the project commissions the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). Also, other actors are included: The Algerian Electricity and Gas Regulatory Commission (CREG), state-owned energy supply companies Sonatrach and Sonelgaz, Algeria's Ministry of Energy (MEM), the German Federal Foreign Office (AA), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Federal Min-

⁴⁹ S. Bulmer et al., *Politics in the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020, p. 164.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 459.

⁵¹ *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED)*, European Commission, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/euro-mediterranean-partnership-euromed_en.

istry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Likewise, two permanent secretariats in Algiers and Berlin are open as meeting points for all interested stakeholders. This partnership represents the main instrument for institutional dialogue on energy between Algeria and Germany, with the principal objective of promoting an environmentally sustainable energy supply using renewable energy sources and efficient energy technologies. Moreover, it makes part of the global programme on Supporting Bilateral Energy Partnerships in Developing Countries and Emerging Economies. The annual German-Algerian Energy Day is a time when two countries discuss energy transition strategies⁵².

Regarding recent energy issues, Germany's Vice Chancellor and Minister of Economics and Climate action, Robert Habeck, has announced a visit to Algeria in the spring of 2023, seeking new non-Russian energy sources. Claus Leggewie, political scientist and professor at the University of Gießen, argues that should be an opportunity for value-based foreign policy since the members of the Algerian opposition are being imprisoned. The question is whether Habeck should make their release a condition for the talks. According to a professor, Germany should improve relations with Algeria but not neglect the democratisation, human rights, and press freedom of the Maghreb country and its authoritarian regime⁵³. Furthermore, regarding the search for new sources of natural gas, in August 2022, it was Chancellor Scholz, who supported the construction of the Iberian pipeline by 2025. Namely, he suggested getting gas to flow from Algeria to central and northern Europe via the Iberian Peninsula. It means the revitalization of a project begun in 2003 but never completed; in previous years has failed due to the high costs involved. The project should also include Algeria, Spain, Portugal, France, and European Commission⁵⁴.

⁵²*Deutsch-Algerische Energiepartnerschaft*, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, December 2022, <https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/57162.html>.

⁵³*Energiequellen in Algerien: Eine Gelegenheit für wertorientierte Außenpolitik*, in «Tagesspiegel», 08.01.2023, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/internationales/energiequellen-in-algerien-eine-gelegenheit-fur-wertorientierte-aussenpolitik-9146769.html>.

⁵⁴*Erdgas aus Algerien: Scholz befürwortet Fertigstellung der Iberischen Fernleitung*, in «Euronews», 11.08.2022, <https://de.euronews.com/2022/08/11/erdgas-aus-algerien-scholz-befurwortet-fertigstellung-der-iberischen-fernleitung>.

Two months before Scholz's statement, in June 2022, in an interview with *Spiegel*, Mohammed Arkab, Algeria's Energy Minister, said Europe and Germany must first invest in Algeria to develop new gas fields jointly. About half of the Algerian gas reserves have not yet been tapped. Answering that Algeria has already increased delivery by 40 percent to Italy, the minister stressed that gas could also be sent to Germany but with previous investments. He mentioned the Italian example of the *Eni* group and the ambitious joined programme of \$39 billion to expand production in the oil and gas sector by 2026. Hereafter, the minister expressed sympathy for Germany: «We want to invest the income from gas sales in the energy transition, which is our priority. Nevertheless, for the latest technologies, we need partners, preferably Germany. We built the first photovoltaic system with German participation in southern Algeria. Moreover, we would like to work with Germany on producing green hydrogen. We can become a partner in renewable energies. Algeria has 3000 hours of sunshine annually, and we have the space required for photovoltaics. With submarine power lines through the Mediterranean Sea, we could supply Europe with clean, renewable energy»⁵⁵. Then, in August 2022, German Foreign Minister Baerbock and her Algerian counterpart Lamamra agreed there was the political will on both sides to strengthen further bilateral relations⁵⁶.

According to Francis Ghilles, a former *Financial Times* North Africa correspondent, Germany could be another crucial player in Algeria: «Germany has a reputation for being reliable in Algeria, going back to tractor and motor plants it built back in the 1970s [...] it might be the right time for Germany and Algeria to restart a conversation on gas and renewable energy». So again, why is Algeria currently in focus? The US Energy Information Administration considers Algeria the third-largest recoverable shale gas resource after China and Argentina. Hence, Germany would be interested in renewable projects.

⁵⁵ *Interview mit Algeriens Energieminister*, in «Spiegel», 19.06.2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/algerien-interview-mit-energieminister-mohamed-arkab-ueber-moegliche-gas-lieferungen-a-8822f45c-39c7-4b78-9d57-6d09d87cc862>.

⁵⁶ *Algerien – Außenministerin Baerbock kondoliert bzgl. Waldbrandopfer*, in «Maghreb-Post», 24.08.2022, <https://www.maghreb-post.de/politik/algerien-aussenministerin-baerbock-kondoliert-bzgl-waldbrandopfer/>.

Nowadays, the German development agency – *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* investigates the Algerian green hydrogen potential, which is part of the German-Algerian Energy Partnership. In 2021, GIZ made a study on the potential of Power to X technologies in Algeria by 2050 that revealed the country could make much electricity from the solar energy needed to produce green hydrogen. The study shows that Algeria can improve and adjust its oil and gas expertise and gas pipelines for further hydrogen transport. Also, it is indicative that Algerian legislation has made some reforms to incentivize foreign ownership of Algeria-based companies⁵⁷.

Likewise, Matthias Schäfer, the representative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Algeria, stressed that the current European interest in Algeria has necessary energy policy background; he emphasized that in Algiers, compared to Germany, countries like Italy, France, and Spain, traditionally «have much better negotiating positions»⁵⁸. On the other side, Maria Josua, Algeria political scientist at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, thinks the Algerian government would be more stable after energy deals with European partners. Consequently, domestic political opponents and *Hirak's* protest movement for the rule of law and fight against corruption⁵⁹ would be weakened. According to Josua, trade with Algeria is politically risky since it helps to stabilize an authoritarian regime⁶⁰. Speaking about German political and energy cooperation with authoritarian regimes, it already happened with Russia twenty years ago. According to German professor of Contemporary History at the University of Heidelberg, Edgar Wolfrum, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer put more faith in Russia as Germany's strate-

⁵⁷ *Can Algeria contribute to the EU's energy security?*, in «Deutsche Welle», 05.04.2022, cit.

⁵⁸ *Energiekrise: Algerien ist in Europa wieder gefragt*, in «Deutsche Welle», 24.08.2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/energiekrise-algerien-ist-in-europa-wieder-gefragt/a-62898839>.

⁵⁹ Transparency International ranked Algeria, with high corruption perception index, on 117th place of 180 countries in 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/dza>.

⁶⁰ *Energiekrise: Algerien ist in Europa wieder gefragt*, in «Deutsche Welle», 24.08.2022, cit.

gic partner than the previous governments. In particular, a friendship developed between Schröder and Russian President Putin, who has seen the EU as the most important economic (energy) partner and Germany as the core of power in Europe⁶¹. Still, objectives have changed as a result of specific political circumstances.

Arguably, the new intergovernmentalism theory can be applied to the analysis of new German and Italian relations with Algeria during the energy crisis; internal and global factors influence their acting; national governments within self-help system are central actors, driven by energy security national interests in war context; their radical change in energy policy is a consequence of bargaining power and *quid pro quo* politics (gas for investments). As neorealism theory suggests, national leaders are driven by structural constraints. Scholz and Meloni seek cooperation with the EU, presenting their national energy policy/security interests as a common European strategy.

Conclusions

In the last two years, Algeria was dominantly in Italian and German diplomatic focus. Italy has excellent economic and trade relations with Algeria, which may be a solid base for the soft power strategy. Still, the Mediterranean fragmentation could perhaps be an issue in the regional energy sector. In the Italian case, cultural proximity with Algeria, long-standing ties, and mutual understanding are valuable diplomatic assets that can help maximize the Mediterranean's contribution to EU energy security. Draghi and Meloni have aimed at ending the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels, wishing to transform Italy into a Mediterranean energy hub. It may be an open question how will France and Spain perceive Italy's new approach to Algeria? It could be noticed that previous energy agreements between Italy and Algeria have already provoked a minor crisis in Italian-Spain relations. From this analysis, it appears that Italy intends to recover its role in the Mediterranean; nevertheless, substantial Turkish and Chi-

⁶¹ E. Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie. Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2006, p. 457.

nese investments in Algeria and Russian military presence can be obstacles. It suggests that the results of this endeavor will depend greatly on the force of the EU alliance and member states' focal interests.

It can be concluded that German politics toward Algeria relies principally on technology, investments, and research cooperation. Conversely, Italy utilises more cultural diplomacy and good historical amicable relations to achieve energy plans; as a core *Piano Mattei* includes substantial Italian energy investments in Algeria. As discussed, the confirmation of thoroughly intensified political relations is two Italian Prime Ministers' (Draghi and Meloni) visits to Algeria in just six months. Key findings emerge: Algeria comes into focus as Germany and Italy seek new gas suppliers to become more independent from Russia, whilst the Maghreb country seems to be an alluring and pertinent partner; it has enormous gas reserves and is already supplying gas to Europe; likewise, Algeria has increased supplies to Spain via the direct pipeline, and the gas that can be produced in the short term has already been promised to Italy, so analysing Algerian discourse, if Germany wanted to be supplied by Algeria, it would have to conclude long-term contracts. Accordingly, Chancellor Scholz initiates the construction of a new pivotal Iberian pipeline in *Zeitenwende*. Thus, Russia's war on Ukraine has reshaped energy markets; Germany and Italy redefined their politics towards North Africa; consequently, Algeria perhaps could be the winner of the European energy crisis.

Overall, the war in Ukraine strongly influences the European political dynamic, the overarching theme of the energy crisis, and foreign and energy policy towards the Mediterranean and North Africa. A comparison reveals that Algeria accepts the new German and Italian diplomatic and energy offensive, fostering investments in the Algerian energy sector. Further, it is noteworthy that Italy and Germany, so far, do not put pressure on the Algerian government to change its neutral position regarding the war in Ukraine. On the contrary, it was not on the agenda since now. Summing up, Italy has closer relations with Algeria than Germany. Probably, Italy has a superior starting position due to its geographical and historical closeness (cornerstone) with the Mediterranean country, while Germany strives to find new partners for the Algerian pipeline. Though, France seems to oppose this idea, fearing competition for French nuclear power plants in Europe.