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Italy and Turkey in the Mediterranean: challenges and opportunities for cooperation

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Sinossi

Italia e Turchia sono attori di primo piano nel contesto mediterraneo. Le relazioni tra i due paesi sono amichevoli e abbracciano estensivamente tutti i campi della loro proiezione estera. La posizione geografica di queste due medie potenze e la comune appartenenza a una serie di organizzazioni internazionali rendono ancor più multiforme e articolata, nonché ampia, la cooperazione italo-turca. Questo lavoro si prefigge l'obiettivo di analizzare le relazioni italo-turche contemporanee sulla base del ruolo che i due paesi rivestono nel Mediterraneo. Per fare ciò, il primo capitolo propone una panoramica delle relazioni tra Roma e Ankara, con un particolare focus sugli ultimi vent'anni, necessari per comprendere a fondo le più recenti evoluzioni del partenariato strategico italo-turco e le attuali sfide che gli attori coinvolti nelle dinamiche mediterranee devono affrontare.

I rapporti tra Italia e Turchia si sviluppano sia all'interno di alleanze multilaterali, sia in forma bilaterale. Per quanto riguarda le prime, Italia e Turchia sono entrambe membri del Consiglio d'Europa, della NATO, dell'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico (OCSE), dell'Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa (OSCE) e dell'Unione per il Mediterraneo (UpM). L'adesione condivisa a questa serie di organizzazioni internazionali fa di Italia e Turchia due paesi legati da radici ben ancorate in Occidente in generale e in Europa in particolare. Inoltre, Ankara è un partner politico ed economico di primo piano per l'Unione Europea (UE). Nel 1999 la Turchia ha fatto domanda di adesione all'UE e nel decennio successivo Ankara e Bruxelles hanno aperto il processo negoziale di accesso. La spinta europeista turca ha però subito una battuta d'arresto a causa dei veti apposti durante i negoziati da parte di alcuni paesi membri dell'UE poco vicini ad Ankara, primo fra tutti Cipro. Il processo di adesione è entrato definitivamente in una fase di stallo dopo l'involuzione autoritaria che ha interessato la Turchia negli ultimi cinque anni. Nonostante l'accesso della Turchia all'UE non sembra essere più un'opzione percorribile, il dialogo tra Bruxelles e Ankara è una priorità nell'agenda politica dei decisori sia turchi che europei. Oltre alle floride relazioni commerciali, l'UE e la Turchia sono infatti legate anche da un accordo che è parte della

strategia di Bruxelles di esternalizzare i controlli di frontiera e la gestione del fenomeno migratorio di massa, che ha colpito l'UE con particolar vigore a partire dal 2015.

A livello bilaterale, le relazioni tra Italia e Turchia sono consolidate e radicate. Lasciatisi alle spalle i primi vent'anni del Novecento che li ha visti contrapposti nella guerra italo-turca per il controllo della moderna Libia e durante il primo conflitto mondiale, i due paesi hanno approfondito i loro legami, ulteriormente tutelati dal netto posizionamento di entrambi nel campo occidentale durante la Guerra Fredda. Un importante incidente diplomatico ha però turbato le relazioni bilaterali all'alba del terzo millennio: il caso Ocalan. La gestione della crisi, conclusasi favorevolmente alle richieste avanzate dalla Turchia, ha dimostrato quanto ormai i legami italo-turchi erano rilevanti per Roma da non permettere una potenziale loro compromissione. I primi anni duemila sono stati caratterizzati da un aumento delle relazioni economiche tra i due paesi, che vantano oggi un significativo interscambio economico, e un considerevole attivismo da parte italiana nel promuovere la causa dell'adesione turca all'UE; mentre in Turchia il partito di Erdoğan, il Partito della Giustizia e dello Sviluppo (AKP), poneva le basi per la sua ancor'oggi incontrastata dominazione del panorama politico turco. In risposta a una serie di condizionamenti interni ed esterni, da poco più di un decennio la Turchia ha progressivamente riorientato il focus della propria politica estera da Bruxelles al vicinato medio-orientale e nord-africano. Le relazioni italo-turche hanno così acquistato una dimensione mediterranea più accentuata e aperto una serie di nuovi fronti di confronto in seguito alla destabilizzazione della regione causata dalle rivolte arabe del 2011 e alla scoperta di considerevoli giacimenti di gas naturale nel bacino mediterraneo orientale a partire dal 2009.

Alla luce di questi epocali mutamenti avvenuti nel contesto del Mediterraneo centrale e orientale, il secondo e il terzo capitolo di questo lavoro forniscono una presentazione quanto più dettagliata possibile del ruolo giocato nell'ultimo decennio da Italia e Turchia specificamente nel contesto libico e nel Mediterraneo orientale. Le dinamiche del conflitto libico e quelle del bacino del Levante sono ormai strettamente interconnesse e rivestono grande importanza

nella definizione delle politiche estere italiana e turca, nonché nell'interazione tra i due paesi.

Con la caduta del lungo regime di Gheddafi, la Libia è stata sconvolta da una serie ancora ininterrotta di conflitti intestini tra fazioni e milizie che costellano il panorama socio-politico libico. Italia e Turchia, entrambe vicine alla Jamahiriya libica, si sono ivi inserite sin dal 2011, dopo un iniziale tentennamento nei confronti della posizione filo-ribelle adottata dalla NATO. Portatrici di forti interessi nel paese nordafricano, da quel momento Roma e Ankara si sono profuse negli sforzi di stabilizzare la Libia. Formalmente sempre dalla stessa parte, Italia e Turchia hanno però adottato approcci differenti. La prima ha optato per un ruolo da mediatore ponendosi a tutela dei processi di pace facilitati dall'ONU e in netta opposizione al dispiegamento di una presenza militare sul campo; al contrario, la seconda ha progressivamente acquistato centralità nel conflitto dimostrando la disponibilità a stanziare mezzi e finanziamenti per supportare militarmente il governo libico riconosciuto dalla comunità internazionale. La vittoria del fronte sostenuto dalla Turchia ha contestualmente oscurato il ruolo di Roma e accresciuto l'influenza di Ankara nei confronti della Libia. Il tandem turco-libico è servito alla Turchia per legare le sorti del conflitto in Libia alle dispute marittime che l'hanno vista protagonista nel Mediterraneo orientale. Tramite un contestato memorandum d'intesa con Tripoli, nel 2019 la Turchia ha delimitato la propria Zona Economiche Esclusiva (ZEE) nel Mediterraneo, intaccando la contiguità marittima delle ZEE greca e cipriota. La mossa di Ankara ha un rilevante valore strategico perché rompe l'isolamento in cui era stata relegata dai corregionali nelle attività di ispezione, estrazione, lavorazione, trasporto e smercio del gas mediterraneo. Infatti, le maggiori riserve gasifere scoperte nel Mediterraneo orientale sono locate nelle ZEE di Israele, Cipro ed Egitto, tutti attori che nell'ultimo decennio hanno sviluppato una crescente conflittualità con Ankara. Le ragioni alla base dell'ostilità poggiano su storici contrasti – questo è il caso di Cipro, cui si aggiunge l'alleata Grecia – o più recenti inimicizie – come per Israele ed Egitto. Assieme ad altri vicini levantini e a due attori euro-mediterranei di primo piano come Francia e Italia, i sopracitati paesi hanno dato vita al Forum del Gas del Mediterraneo Orientale (EMGF), un'organizzazione internazionale che mira a facilitare la creazione di un mercato

per il gas mediterraneo così come la cooperazione e il dialogo tra paesi produttori, di transito e consumatori della risorsa. Inoltre, questi stati hanno siglato una serie di intese preliminari e bozze progettuali per aggregare la produzione energetica o addirittura dare vita a infrastrutture transnazionali di trasporto del gas; tutte prospettive che la Turchia non ha contribuito a delineare. La nuova postura assertiva di Ankara nel Mediterraneo orientale è al tempo stesso causa e risposta dell'esclusione a livello regionale che la Turchia ha subito. La dottrina giuridica e geopolitica della Patria Blu (*Mavi Vatan*) riafferma i diritti di sovranità marittima turca nell'Egeo e nel Mediterraneo Orientale in netto contrasto con le rivendicazioni di sovranità dei vicini litoranei. La riscoperta della centralità dell'elemento marittimo è alla base di una nuova concezione della Turchia contemporanea che, attraverso il dislocamento di basi e forze navali nei mari limitrofi e potenzialmente di tutto il globo, vuole salvaguardare la sicurezza nazionale e i propri interessi.

Al di là degli attori statuali, nel Mediterraneo orientale la partita viene giocata anche da importanti colossi commerciali dell'energia. Tra tutti, l'italiana Eni è in prima linea sia nell'estrazione del gas mediterraneo sia nella sua lavorazione, che avviene principalmente in un paio di stabilimenti atti alla liquefazione del gas siti sulla costa egiziana. Le attività di Eni cozzano con le ambizioni di Ankara di fungere da hub energetico del gas levantino e con le sue velleità di potenza marittima in opposizione ai vicini. Tuttavia, la postura di Roma nel bacino del Levante rispecchia il tradizionale approccio italiano di politica estera nel Mediterraneo: sfaccettato, poco proattivo e attento a tutelare del dialogo con tutti gli attori coinvolti nelle dinamiche. A questo quadro risponde il sostegno italiano nei confronti di un atteggiamento il più dialogante possibile con la Turchia all'interno dei consessi europei. L'importanza strategica di Ankara per l'UE è un pilastro della retorica italiana a Roma come a Bruxelles.

In conclusione, questo lavoro di ricerca propone un quarto capitolo che, alla luce dell'analisi condotta nelle parti precedenti, delinea alcuni trend nelle dinamiche mediterranee attuali, nelle posture di Roma e Ankara nell'arena internazionale e nella politica interna turca al fine di offrire delle considerazioni sulle attuali e future sfide che caratterizzano le relazioni italo-turche. Il Mediterraneo in cui Italia e Turchia giocano le loro carte è una regione

geograficamente oramai non più ristretta al bacino marittimo e alle sue adiacenti aree costiere, ma che si estende ben al di là di esse, abbracciando l'UE nel suo insieme, il Caucaso, i paesi del Golfo e l'Africa sub-sahariana orientale e centrale. Il Mediterraneo allargato è il filtro geografico necessario per comprendere le dinamiche libiche e levantine e le relazioni attuali tra Italia e Turchia. La progressiva militarizzazione della regione mediterranea e il caso di Silvia Romano rispettivamente sono due casi emblematici che permettono di cogliere la necessità di questo allargamento geografico. Al tempo stesso, l'estensione del Mediterraneo può essere intesa anche in senso partecipativo, nel momento in cui i teatri mediterranei più caldi di oggi e del prossimo futuro stanno accogliendo attori esterni di grande rilevanza, tra tutti gli USA, seppur in modo più defilato che in passato, la Russia, con una proiezione militare onnipresente nel bacino, e la Cina, la cui potenza economica ha trovato solido ancoraggio nell'area.

Italia e Turchia condividono l'ambizione di fare del Mediterraneo lo spazio geopolitico per sviluppare una certa autonomia strategica e per questo è un contesto che fortemente plasma i loro rapporti bilaterali. Se da un lato, le direttrici di politica estera di Roma – la primaria importanza di Washington e Bruxelles come centri orbitali della propria proiezione esterna – sono rimaste intatte dal dopoguerra a oggi e non vi sono particolari evidenze che suggeriscano un cambiamento di approccio nel breve periodo, dall'altro, la politica estera di Ankara è fortemente condizionata dall'egemonia politica dell'AKP e dalla personalizzazione imposta al sistema politico turco da parte di Erdoğan. Seppur il potere sia ancora saldamente in mano al presidente turco e alla sua cerchia, si registra una crescente insofferenza nella società civile turca nei confronti delle pratiche autoritarie sempre più estese e dell'infelice situazione economica, che si traducono in una maggiore forza di attrazione dell'opposizione politica. Il futuro dunque delle relazioni tra Italia e Turchia, e tra UE e Turchia, non può che dipendere dalla tenuta del sistema di governo dell'AKP e dal consenso nei confronti del suo leader. Le relazioni italo-turche continuano ad essere sostenute da un'importante partnership economico-commerciale, cui però viene affiancata una decisiva collaborazione sui temi che rendono così scottante il Mediterraneo contemporaneo: difesa, energia e migrazioni.

Introduction

From ancient times the Mediterranean Sea served as a link between the lands around its shores. The basin has traditionally been home to diverse religious and cultural identities, many political experiments, and growing economic exchanges. It is common practice to refer to peoples living on the Mediterranean coastal areas as a unique Mediterranean civilization. The shared belonging to the geographical area centred on the Mediterranean is claimed to shape even the particular identity of the communities settled around its shores. Throughout history, the Mediterranean maritime basin has spurred political, economic, and cultural ties between the cities, empires, and nation states that have characterized the political organization of the communities living the Mediterranean region. Phoenician and Cretans economically unified the Mediterranean; Greek colonies and Hellenistic reigns forged a far-reaching cultural homogeneity; the Mediterranean unification at a political, economic and administrative level was finally sealed by the Romans. Then, the Arab colonization of Southern Mediterranean shores shattered the unity of the Mediterranean. After that moment, each portion of the basin started to be dominated by particular hegemonic powers – the Ottoman Empire, the Italic maritime republics, the ancestors of modern European states, such as France, Spain, England, Russia. While the contacts between the Western and Eastern parts of the Mediterranean never definitely ceased – Christianity had a leading role in nurturing that connection – the Northern and Southern parts of the basin have reconnected only since the XIX century.¹ The welding of all the Mediterranean questions and dynamics has characterized the modern times. This makes the Mediterranean basin an increasingly intertwined space which considerably shapes the policies of the actors engaged in the basin.

The Mediterranean is the linchpin of this dissertation, focused on the relations between Italy and Turkey. Being major players in the basin, Italy and Turkey conceive the Mediterranean as their natural external outreach. In the last decade, their relations have been shaped by their growing engagement in the fickle dynamics of the Mediterranean region, a geopolitical hotspot of escalating

¹ Chabod, F., *Storia politica del Mediterraneo*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2014, pp. 96-117, 161.

regional and international tensions. In particular, Rome and Ankara have been playing crucial roles in the increasingly entangled questions of Libyan troublesome stabilization and Eastern Mediterranean gas bonanza's management.

This thesis aims to analyse the development and the characteristics of the current Italo-Turkish relation in the light of their involvement in the Libyan and Eastern Mediterranean contexts. It investigates some ongoing trends in the Mediterranean in the attempt to assess the relevance of the Mediterranean in the partnership between Italy and Turkey and identify the key elements that are likely to define their interaction in the forthcoming future.

The main argument of this work is that the Mediterranean dynamics appear to be central aspects in the current state of relations between Italy and Turkey. The common belonging to the Mediterranean space and the Italo-Turkish interaction in the basin's hotspots forge almost every domain of their partnership.

Significant attention in the academic literature has been given to the analysis of Libyan proxy war and the particular events concerning the Eastern Mediterranean. Also, Turkish foreign policy has been extensively analysed since Turkey's assertiveness has largely impacted the Mediterranean power dynamics. The troubled relationship between Ankara and Brussels has also been broadly discussed. On the contrary, no relevant literature has focused on the bilateral relations between Turkey and Italy alone. So, this work has tried to describe Italo-Turkish relations through a considerable use of institutional sources – such as ministries' official websites – and declarations of Italian and Turkish representatives when discussing bilateral ties. There is a greater use of Italian sources rather than Turkish ones since it appears to be much easier for the writer to collect references in Italian and from Italian news channels.

The dissertation focuses on very recent developments; thus, the reasoning is based on several pieces of news and think tank's researches and analysis. The events taken into consideration cover a timespan of up to the end of year 2021.

The current relevance of the topics debated in this research sparks interest in me. The Mediterranean dynamics have been at the core of my Master Degree's

Programme, and a strong attraction to the most recent developments affecting the region originated from my studies. The topic of this thesis has given me the occasion to deepen my knowledge not only of Italian and Turkish stances on major Mediterranean issues, but also of broader international dynamics underpinning the regional power politics.

During the writing of this thesis, I worked for the Permanent Representation of Italy at the European Union. This experience provided me with a unique insight into many of the current issues debated in this work. Some Italian diplomats had also interesting discussions with me on the topic of my thesis. My daily job at the Representation and the enriching exchanges of view with the personnel let me better contextualize the analysis discussed here.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first provides the reader with a general overview of Italo-Turkish relations in the last two decades, at both multilateral and bilateral level.

The second chapter serves the scope of evaluating how the role played by Italy and Turkey in and with Libya has impacted their partnership. After a preliminary brief history of modern Libya, the reasoning depicts Italian and Turkish engagement with Libya, with a particular focus on developments occurred in the last decade.

The third part of this work describes the ongoing power dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean conceived as a geopolitical regional hotspot of its own. Through an analysis of the recent gas discoveries, maritime disputes, and growing tensions affecting the area, this chapter presents Turkey's and Italy's stances on the issues.

The fourth and final chapter of the thesis aims at drawing some considerations on the current relations between Italy and Turkey in the Mediterranean, while also identifying the forthcoming challenges the two countries are likely to face. In doing so, it provides an insight of some general trends touching the region as well as Italy's and Turkey's current foreign approaches.

Italy-Turkey relations: an overview

Thanks to their geographical projection, Italy and Turkey are key regional actors in the Mediterranean basin, and this characteristic has necessarily shaped their relations throughout history. In order to assess the current state of their relationship, it is necessary to depict a general background of their relations. In conducting their foreign policies, Italy and Turkey have developed strong ties in both multilateral and bilateral contexts. The analysis moves from the multilateral frame of relations, in which Turkey and Italy are just two powers among many others, to focus on the Italian-Turkish bilateral partnership during the last two decades.

1. Multilateral relations

Turkey is located in both Europe and Asia, not only conceived as geographical entities but also as historical and cultural identities. As member of the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Turkey shares a deep-rooted tie with European countries and the West. Meanwhile, Turkey is part of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) which is the multilateral framework for political, economic and social relations between the European Union (EU) and the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.¹ Furthermore, the EU and Turkey are associated by a Customs Union agreement which came into force on 31 December 1995. In terms of trade and foreign direct investments, Brussels and Ankara are major economic partners: in 2019, Turkey ranked fifth as EU's trading partner and the EU is Ankara's first import and export partner; in 2018, FDI reached 22.8 billion euros of inward stocks and 58.5 billion euros of outward stocks.² Last but not least, EU-Turkey relations have been sealed by the prospect of Turkey's EU membership. As we will see in the following paragraphs, Turkey's

¹ The UfM was established in 2008 as the structural outcome of the Barcelona Process (Euro-Med Partnership). The UfM is a regional cooperation initiative of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

² European Commission, *Trade. Turkey*, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/turkey/>. Last accessed: 7 September 2021.

bid for EU membership has been at the core of the Italo-Turkish relation for about a decade. The Ankara agreement, which made Turkey an associated member to the European Economic Community (EEC), dates back to 1963. After that, Ankara applied for EU membership in 1999, but negotiations did not start until 2005. Sixteen out of thirty-five accession process' chapters have been opened since then and just one was closed. After 2007 negotiations and thereby convergent cooperation between Brussels and Ankara tended to curb due to vetoes and resistances posed by some EU members, such as Sarkozy's France and Cyprus.³ The Turkish government's authoritarian counter-reaction following the 2016 coup attempt eventually deadlocked Turkey's accession talks. Nonetheless, the European Union and Turkey continued to exchange views on crucial issues within various political frameworks, namely High Level Dialogues between the two and recurring bilateral summits. Lately, a renewed trade deal to revise EU-Turkey Customs Union has been considered too.

EU-Turkey relation acquired additional political value when Ankara officially became the external stronghold to the "fortress Europe". Following the 2011 Arab uprisings and the related Syrian civil war, the flow of migrants trying to reach EU member states through the so-called Balkan route dramatically soared. Italy was directly invested by the flow of migrants moving across the Western Balkans and eventually crossing Italian north-eastern borders. Unable to deal with the migrant crisis, in March 2016 the EU reached an agreement with Turkey. According to it, Turkey committed to prevent the smuggling of irregular migrants towards Greece in exchange for a 6 billion euros five-years financial allocation. In addition, for each migrant returned from Greece to Turkey, the EU would have resettled one refugee in a member state.⁴ Even if the refugee deal with Turkey has always been pictured as a success by the EU, and a five-years extension of funds was granted to Turkey on 6 April 2021, it epitomizes the current lack of credibility of European Union's role as a normative power in the

³ Müftüleri-Baç, M., *Assessing Turkey's Foreign Policy Choices toward the European Union*, in: "Insight Turkey", Vol. 19, No. 1, 2017, p. 121.

⁴ The EU also lifted visa requirements for Turkish citizens in perspective of entering the Schengen area. See *EU-Turkey Refugee Deal: five years on*, in: "TRT World", 18 March 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/eu-turkey-refugee-deal-five-years-on-45126>. Last accessed: 30 September 2021.

world politics.⁵ The political outcome of the 2016 refugee deal is a Turkish strengthened bargaining chip, as proved by Erdoğan's showdown in March 2020, when Turkey opened European borders and did not stop the flow of migrants while Europe responded with the promise to raise funds.⁶

2. Bilateral relations

Italy and Turkey established official diplomatic relations in 1856, when Turkey's ancestor, the Ottoman Empire, sent a diplomatic mission in the Italian territory.⁷ Being on opposite sides during the First World War, their relations ceased until the establishment of the Kemalist Turkey, when fascist Italy was the second country, after the Soviet Union, to recognize the Turkish Republic.⁸ Italian-Turkish relations have flourished and deepened since then. However, at the dawn of the third millennium, a major diplomatic incident involved the two powers: Ocalan's stay in Italy. Despite political pressures coming from parts of the government, Italy eventually avoided to jeopardize its strong relationship with Turkey and refused to grant Ocalan political asylum. The tension eased, and a change of government in Rome paved the way to prosperous bilateral relations.

During the first decade of the century, Italy became the main sponsor of Turkey's accession to the EU, while their economic partnership continued to grow.

The second decade of the XXI century has been characterized by a more complex relationship shaped by both Turkey's undemocratic downturn and the new international order as resulted after the 2011 Arab Spring. Even if their political relations experienced ups and downs, during the last two decades Italian-Turkish relations have been continuously sustained by increasing economic ties. Indeed, the economic dimension plays a leading role in the Italian-Turkish partnership.

⁵ For details regarding the concept of "normative power Europe" see Manners, I., *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*, in: "Journal of Common Market Studies", Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002, pp. 235-258.

⁶ *EU-Turkey Refugee Deal: five years on*, in: "TRT World".

⁷ Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Relations between Turkey and Italy*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-italy.en.mfa>. Last accessed: 5 October 2021.

⁸ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussata alla porta. Viaggio nel paese sospeso tra Europa e Asia*, Milano, EGEA, 2011, p. 92.

2.1. Ocalan in Italy

On 12 November 1998 Abdullah Ocalan, leader and founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK), landed in Rome to seek political asylum. Ocalan's political thought and activism, at the time aiming to build a Kurdish national state through guerrilla actions⁹, incurred Turkey's wrath. After founding the PKK in 1978, he sought refuge in Syria, and from there Ocalan inspired and guided the Kurdish-Turkish conflict.¹⁰ When tensions between Ankara and Damascus rose, Ocalan left Syria and his exile eventually reached Italy. Italian newly-formed government guided by Massimo D'Alema (*Democratici di Sinistra*, DS) found itself in an extremely thorny situation: despite the centre-left government coalition would have gained prestige in terms of international image, hosting Ocalan threatened Italy's relationship with Turkey as well as ties with European allies, most of whom considered Ocalan a terrorist – Germany even issued a search warrant against Ocalan. Ocalan flew to Italy with Ramon Mantovani, Italian deputy and head of Foreign Affairs division for *Rifondazione Comunista* (extreme left party). During the previous months, Ahmet Yaman, National Front for the Liberation of Kurdistan's representative in Italy, addressed the Italian Parliament pleading the case of Ocalan's «visit» to Italy.¹¹ Ahmet Yaman and Akif Hassan, leader of PKK's diplomatic body, together with Italian members of the government, arranged Ocalan's arrival to Rome granting the PKK's leader the possibility to obtain political asylum. Nevertheless, diplomatic pressures coming from Turkey and the United States, as well as Turkey's threat to impose economic sanctions to Italian enterprises operating in and with Turkey, led D'Alema to deny Ocalan the political asylum and invite him to leave Italy. For the PKK's leader what follows is a chaotic journey between European embassies escaping Turkey's and its allies' secret services. Ocalan's

⁹ In more recent years, Ocalan's political thought has deeply evolved, moving from the Kurdistan revolution project to a wider philosophy which combines communalism, ecologism and jineology into a specific form of government known as "democratic confederalism".

¹⁰ The Kurdish-Turkish conflict has occurred between Turkey and various Kurdish rebel groups operating in the country, especially in the south-eastern Turkey. The PKK has been designated as a terroristic organization by many countries, including Turkey.

¹¹ Ansaldo, M., *Ocalan, La trattativa con D'Alema: il governo era d'accordo sull'arrivo*, in: "La Repubblica", 30 gennaio 2002, <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2002/01/30/ocalan-la-trattativa-con-alema-il-governo.html>. Last accessed: 8 October 2021.

escape eventually ended in Kenya where he was arrested, then incarcerated in İmralı, a Turkish island, where he has been jailed since then.¹²

In Italy, Ocalan's affair nurtured a huge political and judicial debate over the right of asylum and constitutional limits of extradition. However, Italy's change of attitude proved that Rome was not willing to compromise its strategic relationship with Turkey and its other Western allies.¹³

2.2. 2001-2009

In the early 2000s major changes affected Turkey's politics. In 2001 the Virtue Party, an Islamist political force, split, and the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) was founded by the former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The AKP obtained sudden popularity among Turkish people, prostrated by the chronic instability of Turkey's political system and by a period of economic crisis. At 2002 general elections, the AKP obtained 363 out of 550 seats, and Erdoğan's party has been ruling Turkey ever since. The AKP successfully boosted the economic recovery, and, after the 1999 application for EU membership, the adhesion process remained a top priority in Turkey's political agenda.¹⁴

In the meantime, Silvio Berlusconi was appointed Prime Minister of Italy leading a centre-right government. A wide pro-Turkey political front, including Berlusconi's party, *Forza Italia*, as well as *Alleanza Nazionale*, the right-wing conservative party successor of the post-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, promoted a major commitment to the Italy-Turkey bilateral partnership and sponsored Turkey's adhesion to the EU. The traditional Atlanticism of the Italian foreign policy, the growing commercial exchange between Italy and Turkey, and the Mediterranean ambitions of Rome led the Italian government to take a

¹² *I mesi di Ocalan in Italia*, in: "Il Post", 21 March 2013, <https://www.ilpost.it/2013/03/21/i-mesi-di-ocalan-in-italia/>. Last accessed: 8 October 2021.

¹³ Romano, S., *Il caso Ocalan e il dilemma del governo D'Alema*, in: *Lettere al Corriere*, in: "Corriere della Sera", 23 June 2007, <https://www.corriere.it/solferino/romano/07-06-23/01.spm>. Last accessed: 8 October 2021.

¹⁴ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussava alla porta*, pp. 151-153.

decisive stance on the matter.¹⁵ In addition, a close personal friendship between Berlusconi and Erdoğan made the bilateral relations even more close.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the EU-centred alignment between Ankara and Rome raised criticisms among other Italian political parties. For example, *Lega Nord*, a right-wing party which was part of Berlusconi's government coalition, strongly opposed Turkey's EU membership on historic and, most of all, religious grounds. Indeed, Italian public debate was fuelled by Islamophobic views, exacerbated by the global war on terror following 9/11 terrorist attacks. Right-wing parties, such as *Azione Sociale*, the more centrist *Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro* and the aforementioned *Lega Nord*, invoked a supposed European cultural and religious homogeneity to prevent Turkey from joining the EU. On the left, concerns over the perspective of Turkey's full membership were clearly stated by Eugenio Scalfari, journalist and former Socialist deputy, in an article published by *La Repubblica*: not only was Turkey geographically, economically, culturally and religiously different from any of the EU member states, but also it might have served as the United States' European foothold.¹⁷

In 2004, Italy and Turkey broadened their reciprocal commitment creating the Ita-Turk Dialogue Forum, an annual convention based on the "people to people" approach, thus involving Italian and Turkish civil societies' representatives and businesses. The event was sponsored by the Italian and Turkish Foreign Ministries, Unicredit, and the Center for Strategic Research; it takes place alternately in Rome and Istanbul. The Ita-Turk Dialogue Forum has often served as a preferred appointment to discuss and deepen bilateral ties in the realm of politics, economy, and culture.¹⁸

In November 2005 an official visit to Ankara and Istanbul by the President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gianfranco Fini, and the undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Roberto Antonione, sealed the excellent relations between Italy and Turkey. Italian officials and Turkish counterparts reaffirmed the alignment of their views on major

¹⁵ Dottori, G., *Tra Roma e Ankara nulla è più scontato*, in: *La Turchia secondo Erdogan*, in: "Limes", No. 10, 2016, pp. 173-175.

¹⁶ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussa alla porta*, p. 194.

¹⁷ Guida, M., *Italy's various faces towards Turkey*, in: "Insight Turkey", Vol. 6, No. 4, 2004, pp. 22-25.

¹⁸ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussa alla porta*, p. 75.

international issues, including Turkey's accession to the European Union. The President of Italy joined the Economic Forum on Italy-Turkey industrial cooperation, which took place on 24 November, and affirmed that, besides great political relations, the economic dimension was an essential part of the Italian-Turkish fruitful partnership. «Italy believes in Turkey» said Ciampi.¹⁹ The shared Mediterranean identity, the celebration of the Italian community in Istanbul and Turkey's friendly hospitality fostered the enthusiasm of the Italian delegation in Turkey.²⁰

In 2006, Italy and Turkey celebrated 150 years of diplomatic relations, and meanwhile a centre-left coalition won the Italian general elections. The relations between Rome and Ankara were not affected by the change of government; indeed, in 2007 the Italian Prime Minister, Romani Prodi, visited Erdoğan ensuring Italy's support to the «long-term objective» of Turkey's accession to the EU, and granting Italy-Turkey bilateral relations the status of strategic partnership.²¹

As briefly mentioned in the first paragraph of this work, Turkey-EU negotiations suffered a setback after the Republic of Cyprus accessed the EU in 2004. Nicosia became a new member of the EU right after rejecting by referendum the UN Annan plan, which designated a political solution for the long-standing issue of Cyprus. The Annan plan was endorsed both by the EU and Turkey. Consequently, the confrontation between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus started to directly affect Turkey's accession talks. Nicosia vetoed almost every proposal on the EU-Turkey partnership and the opening of new accession's chapters. Ankara began to lose faith in the European project, since it appeared that the EU was no more a valuable *super partes actor*.²² Once again Turkey found Italy standing at its side: a government-sponsored office overseeing Northern Cyprus' interests opened in Rome.²³ In

¹⁹ Ambasciata d'Italia ad Ankara, *Visita di Stato del Presidente della Repubblica Italiana Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (21 - 24 Novembre 2005)*, https://ambankara.esteri.it/ambasciata_ankara/tr/ambasciata/news/dall-ambasciata/2011/07/visita-di-stato.html. Last accessed: 12 October 2021.

²⁰ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussava alla porta*, p. 195.

²¹ *La Turchia nell'UE: un traguardo strategico*, in: "La Repubblica", 27 gennaio 2007, <https://www.repubblica.it/2007/01/sezioni/esteri/prodi-turchia/prodi-turchia/prodi-turchia.html>. Last accessed: 13 October 2021.

²² Müftüler-Baç, M., *Assessing Turkey's Foreign Policy Choices toward the European Union*, p. 130.

²³ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussava alla porta*, p. 213.

addition, in 2007 Italian deputies Maurizio Turco and Marco Perduca (*Partito Radicale*) flew to Northern Cyprus and obtained its citizenship to oppose EU's inaction regarding the Turkish-Cypriot isolation.²⁴

Despite the steady deterioration of EU-Turkey relations, the new Italian Foreign Minister, Massimo D'Alema, finally leaving behind Ocalan's diplomatic incident, stated that not only was the re-launch of negotiations possible but also necessary. In an article published by the New York Times, he listed the benefits of Turkey's accession perspective: first, the European-inspired modernization of Turkish state; second, the enormous significance of engaging with such a big Islamic country and developing economy; third, the potential projection of peace and prosperity towards the Black Sea region and the Middle East; finally, the energy security factor. Both the EU and Turkey must have taken «concrete acts» to renew their commitment to each other. D'Alema mentioned the Cyprus issue as the pivotal question to overcome, and affirmed that keeping the «Union's doors» open was a moral duty towards the peoples of South-Eastern Europe.²⁵

In 2008 Berlusconi was appointed head of the Italian Government again. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, sponsored the creation of the «Friends of Turkey» group, then re-named «Turkey Focus Group», which gathered together Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Sweden, and urged to resume Brussel-Ankara talks and accession process. Italy committed itself so strongly to the cause that Berlusconi even defined himself «Turkey's advocate in Europe».²⁶ The perspective of Turkey joining the EU served the aim of shifting to the south the EU's borders, thus balancing the distribution of power and influence, which were strongly held mainly by continental European countries, namely Germany and France.

Moreover, Berlusconi and Erdoğan inaugurated a bilateral forum of discussion between Italy and Turkey, known as «Turkey-Italy Intergovernmental

²⁴ Turco, M., *Cipro Nord: Turco e Perduca richiedono la cittadinanza onoraria della Repubblica Turca di Cipro Nord contro l'isolamento della parte settentrionale di Cipro e l'immobilismo dell'Unione Europea*, https://www.maurizioturco.it/comunicati_stampa/2007/2007_07_21_cipro_nord_turco.html. Last accessed: 17 October 2021.

²⁵ Bildt, C. & D'Alema, M., *It's time for a fresh effort*, "Governo italiano. Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale", 1 September 2007, https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/interviste/20070903_articolo_dalemabildt.html. Last accessed: 17 October 2021.

²⁶ Marsili, C., *La Turchia bussava alla porta*, p. 223-224.

Summit”. Its first edition was held on November 2008 in Izmir²⁷; the second took place in Rome in 2012²⁸; on 2 October 2020 Italian Foreign Minister, Luigi Di Maio, and his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, discussed the preparations for the third Intergovernmental Summit.²⁹

Italy’s strong advocacy towards a fully European Turkey was reaffirmed once again when the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, visited Ankara and Izmir in 2009. At Ankara University he gave a lecture retracing Turkey’s path towards Europe. Citing the European Commission’s October 2009 Progress Report evaluating at what level Turkey met the criteria for accession, he stressed that Turkey still needed to reduce the military influence on Turkish civil and political life, grant an independent judiciary system, and protect minorities and freedom of religion. Napolitano firmly claimed that a European Turkey represented a crucial and necessary step towards a «power Europe» able to react to the challenges posed by a global and dynamic system of relations. Being Turkey a potential energy hub and acting as a «bridge» between Europe and the Muslim world, its EU membership would have given prestige to the entire Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area. In the last section of his lecture, Napolitano addressed both Turkey and EU member states wishing they would be willing to replace any strictly national attitude with a broader constructive cooperation, to avoid obstructionism and vetoes as decision-making mechanisms in order to create an effective «global Europe».³⁰

2.3. 2009-present

The year 2009 marked an important shift in Turkey’s foreign policy. In May 2009, Ahmet Davutoğlu, academic and Erdoğan’s chief foreign policy advisor in

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 198.

²⁸ Governo italiano. Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *Italia-Turchia: summit a Roma per la cooperazione e lo sviluppo*, 4 May 2012, https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/20120504_italia_turchia.html. Last accessed: 15 October 2021.

²⁹ Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Visit of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to Italy*, 2 October 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-italya-yi-ziyareti-2-10-2020.en.mfa>. Last accessed: 15 October 2021.

³⁰ Portale storico della Presidenza della Repubblica, *Conferenza del Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano: “Eredità del passato e sfide del futuro: Turchia e Europa nei nuovi equilibri del mondo globale”*, 18 novembre 2009, <https://archivio.quirinale.it/aspr/audiovideo/AV-001-000890/presidente/giorgio-napolitano/conferenza-del-presidente-della-repubblica-giorgio-napolitano-eredita-del-passato-e-sfide-del-futuro-turchia-e-europa-nei-nuovi>. Last accessed: 14 October 2021.

the previous years, was appointed Foreign Minister as part of a cabinet reshuffle. Davutoğlu had been the brains behind the Middle Eastern and Caucasian policy of Turkey during the prior decade, and unlikely his predecessor Ali Babacan, whose main expertise was the relationship with the European Union, Davutoğlu did not perceive the European dossier being the top priority of Turkey's foreign policy. Davutoğlu's appointment, and subsequent Turkey's foreign policy reorientation, occurred after an extended stall of Turkey-EU negotiations, when the European perspective seemed no more as close as it was in the past.³¹

Davutoğlu's work "Strategic depth" (*Stratejik Derinlik*, 2001), his political manifesto, reached huge popularity and shaped Turkey's foreign policy since the AKP became Turkey's ruling party. According to this doctrine, Turkey's geographical location, Ottoman historical legacy, and Muslim-majority society naturally connect Turkey with the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Central Asia, therefore Ankara has the potential to act as regional leader. Strategic Depth has allowed Turkey to counterbalance its dependence upon the West, and forge diverse alliances and partnerships so that, increasing its weight on a regional scale, it can preserve its independence and bargaining chip on a global context.³² The main drivers of the Strategic Depth concept have been Islamic ideology, conceived as a religious rediscovery of common roots and belonging, and economic pragmatism, which has directed the neoliberal expansions of AKP's backbone, namely the Anatolian Tigers.³³ What Davutoğlu defined as Strategic Depth doctrine, Erdoğan commonly referred to as "neo-Ottomanism". In 2005 Erdoğan addressed the nation on TV and claimed that Turkey's foreign policy was driven by neo-Ottomanism, an approach relying on strategic depth, multidimensional policy, and pivotal centrality of Turkey. Ottoman roots of Turkey have been praised and celebrated in the public discourse; hence, Turkey has dismissed its secular image to assume a renewed pious and deeply-rooted Muslim attitude.³⁴

³¹ Marsili, C., *La Turchia alla porta*, pp. 178-179.

³² Walker, J. W., *Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine*, in: "Insight Turkey", 2007, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 33-34.

³³ "Anatolian Tigers" is the expression with whom Turkey's Islamic Anatolian bourgeoisie is known. The Anatolian Tigers are the traditional AKP's electorate.

³⁴ Özel Volfová, G., *Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavours: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP*, in: "Die Welt Des Islams", No. 56, 2016, pp. 494-4955.

Within this framework, the well-known slogan “zero problems with neighbours” encapsulates Turkey’s approach to the region: Turkey designated peace, stability, and security as firm foundations of its politics; thus, thanks to its «increasing tools and capabilities» in the fields of economic development and democratic standards, Turkey presented himself as ready to assume responsibilities and pro-active initiatives in its region, in the forms of cooperation and partnerships with its neighbours. Turkey conceived problems with the neighbourhood as potential opportunities for cooperation rather than sources of conflict. Turkey aspired to implement its foreign policy view on a global scale, but ascribed a preeminent importance to its immediate proximity. The idealistic “zero problems with neighbours” principle led Turkey to conduct a multidimensional foreign policy based on win-win approach through peaceful means.³⁵

As said, the Strategic Depth doctrine influenced AKP’s foreign policy since the party won the general elections in 2002. Indeed, the international state system as resulted after the end of Cold War first, and post-9/11 then, led Turkey’s global role to shift «from a Western geo-strategic military deterrent to an exemplary model of a Muslim-majority, secular, and democratic nation»³⁶. However, only the replacement at the head of Foreign Ministry in 2009 spurred Davutoğlu’s view to be widely and officially adopted by AKP’s political discourse. The shift of Turkish foreign policy did not result in a sudden abandonment of its traditional Western allies, but it did translate into a general reconsideration of Turkey’s foreign policy’s geopolitical priorities. Consequently, besides the European rhetoric, Turkey and Italy started to rethink, at least in their official discourses, their cooperation, with a view to foster the stabilization of the Balkans, the Mediterranean region, and the Middle East.

In March 2011, Alfredo Mantica, Italian Foreign Ministry undersecretary, inaugurated in Istanbul the celebrations of the Italian unification’s 150th anniversary. The Italian government chose to commemorate in Turkey such an historic day for Italy to honour Italy-Turkey healthy relations and compare Italian unification process to the European one, in the perspective of Ankara finally

³⁵ Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbours*, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa>. Last accessed: 26 October 2021.

³⁶ Walker, J. W., *Learning Strategic Depth*, p. 32.

joining the Union. In that occasion, Mantica remarked that Europe represented undoubtedly the common house for the peoples of Italy and Turkey, but also added that if certainly Brussels was the final destination, the starting point should have been a strong political compliance on respective neighbourhoods and «strategic depths», these being Southern-Eastern Europe for Rome and Eastern Mediterranean for Ankara.³⁷ The Italian-Turkish relation started to be conceived as a multifaceted partnership encapsulating a broader spectrum of areas of interests, not only limited to the European dossier. This became a tangible approach when in 2011 the Arab World was hit by an intense series of popular uprisings. In Tunisia, Libya and Egypt the anti-government mass protests swept long-time authoritarian regimes away, and created a new pattern of instability all over the southern shore of the Mediterranean, alongside the Syrian civil war which resulted from the Syrian upheavals. Turkey needed to revise considerably its policy of zero problems with neighbours: it started to cut its ties with some Arab leaders, namely Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, in order to preserve its international credibility and carve out a significant role for itself in the post-revolutionary regional adjustment.³⁸ At the same time, due to deep-rooted political and economic ties with countries like Libya and Tunisia, Italy pursued the ambition to be a game-changer actor in areas invested by the unrests. As a result, since 2011, alongside traditional discussions on bilateral relations and EU-Turkey partnership, recurring talks between Rome and Ankara have included, and frequently prioritized, their cooperation on the stabilization of the Mediterranean area. Already in 2012, an official declaration released by Italy's government Special Envoy for the Mediterranean, Maurizio Massari, implied a change of perspective in the relation with Turkey: Massari acknowledged the increasing weight acquired by Ankara in the Middle Eastern and North African regions, and showed Italy's «interest and goodwill» to closer cooperate to share political considerations and options.³⁹ In the words of the

³⁷ Governo italiano. Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *Il Sottosegretario Mantica a Istanbul*, 16 March 2021, https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/20110316_unitaitalia_mantica_a_istanbul.html. Last accessed: 26 October 2021.

³⁸ Özel Volfová, G., *Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavours: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP*, pp. 505-506.

³⁹ Governo italiano. Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *MEDITERRANEO: Massari ad Ankara, Italia sponsor della Turchia in Europa*, 7 February 2012,

Italian official, Italy wanted to remain the «sponsor of Turkey in Europe», however Turkey's new autonomous regional role rebalanced the relation between the two countries. As it will be broadly analysed in the following chapters of this work, Italian and Turkish interests in the region have usually converged, setting up a double pattern of cooperation and competition. Italian and Turkish foreign policies in the area have struggled with uncertainties, which have led to geopolitical reorientations, and dealt with intertwined ties with other actors involved in the area. The resulting pattern of relations, thus the Italy-Turkey partnership too, is fluid and unpredictable, switching between breaches and rapprochements.⁴⁰

The long-standing friendly relation between Turkey and Italy suffered a setback after Turkey's government brutally repressed the Gezi Park protests in 2013. The violent reaction of Turkish authorities to the anti-government demonstrations was deeply condemned by Italian officials. According to Italian Foreign Minister Emma Bonino (*Radicali Italiani*, RI), the right to peacefully demonstrate evaluates the health and maturity of a democracy. Turkey presented itself as unable to comply to basic democratic standards, jeopardizing its possibility to follow the path of democratization and adhere to the EU.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Gezi Park events were only the first step of a gradual but steady erosion of Turkish democratic system. The severe government counter-reaction to the 2016 failed coup and the 2017 referendum, which turned Turkey into a presidential republic, settled Turkey's authoritarian backsliding. From 2013 onwards, Erdoğan have successfully encouraged the concentration of powers in the hands of the executive, the disintegration of checks and balances system, the violation of right of expression and press freedom, the practice of arbitrary detentions and imprisonments. Together with the EU and its Western allies, Italy has regularly expressed its growing concerns about Turkish undemocratic turn. However, the partnership between Italy and Turkey has not suffered much from the remarks: their partnership encompasses multiple fronts, and respective

https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/20120207_mediterraneo.html. Last accessed: 28 October 2021.

⁴⁰ Dottori, G., *Tra Roma e Ankara nulla è più scontato*, pp. 175-179.

⁴¹ Camera dei Deputati. Presidenza del presidente Laura Boldrini, *Informativa urgente del Governo sugli sviluppi della situazione in Turchia*, 12 June 2013, https://www.esteri.it/mae/audizioni/20130612_resoconto_informativa_ministro_bonino_su_turchia_camera%20dei%20deputati.pdf. Last accessed: 28 October 2021.

interest to further develop their economic ties and fruitful collaboration has undoubtedly been a priority for both of countries. The most recent diplomatic scratch on the matter between Rome and Ankara occurred on April 2021 and involved the new Italian Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, when he explicitly defined Erdoğan «a dictator». In response Erdoğan summoned the Italian Ambassador in Turkey, called for formal apology and froze a huge state-driven purchase of Italian products. Erdoğan's harsh reaction had more a domestic value rather than a potential effect on bilateral relations; on the other hand, Draghi needed to remark that Italy, and Europe, do not neglect Turkey's disregard to democratic principles and rule of law, even if Turkey represents an essential regional actor to deal with.⁴²

When Erdoğan was elected President of the Republic in 2014, Davutoğlu was appointed Prime Minister, and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu replaced him at the head of Turkey's Foreign Ministry. Since then, Çavuşoğlu has been directing Turkey's foreign policy. Çavuşoğlu's appointment responded to the need of changing Turkey's foreign approach in the second half of the decade, which has been characterized by the deterioration of Turkey's domestic and regional security situation as well as by a growing concentration of power in the President Erdoğan. This has resulted in a more assertive, autonomous, and transactional approach in Turkey's foreign policy.⁴³ Moreover, as it will be thoroughly investigated in the third chapter of this work, the significant gas field discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean waters influenced a redefinition of strategy in Turkey's foreign policy. The renewed centrality acquired by the sea has led Turkey to adopt the neo-Kemalist approach known as *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland) as the new official narrative. The doctrine of *Mavi Vatan* aspires to revive the ancient maritime Turkish power and extend its influence in the neighbourhood. Strategic Depth and *Mavi Vatan* doctrines aim at the same purpose, i.d. the expansion of Turkish sphere of influence, but the former unfolds through traditional land trajectory, the

⁴² Baldelli, P., *Italia-Turchia: cosa si cela nelle parole di Draghi? Intervista a Federico Donelli*, "Geopolitica.info", 22 April 2021, <https://geopolitica.info/italia-turchia-cosa-si-cela-nelle-parole-di-draghi-intervista-a-federico-donelli/>. Last accessed: 28 October 2021.

⁴³ Haugom, L., *Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan: A change in international orientation?*, "Comparative strategy", Vol. 38, No. 3, 2019, pp. 211, 213.

latter unravels through deployment of naval forces and control of maritime routes instead.⁴⁴

The presence and interests of both Italy and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean has added a new factor to the equation of their relations. National ambitions, bilateral longstanding disputes, regional alliances and global dynamics spread over the Eastern Mediterranean basin. For Ankara and Rome, it represents another additional element shaping their Mediterranean partnership.

The Mediterranean-wider extent and strategic relevance of Italy-Turkey cooperation had emerged in occasion of Silvia Romano's release. Italian aid worker Silvia Romano was abducted in southeast Kenya in November 2018 by the terrorist group *Al-Shabaab*. The group is based in southern Somalia, but it operates in the neighbouring countries too. Since 2011 Turkey has developed remarkably strong relations with Somalia, consisting of political and security engagement, as well as significant economic investments. In addition, it is widely assumed that Qatar played a prominent role in Romano's release, giving its major involvement in Somalian politics. The post-2011 strategic alignment between Ankara and Doha did the rest. At the end of 2019, the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MIT) was asked to find Romano by the Italian External Intelligence and Security Agency (*Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Esterna*, AISE); after the MIT informed the AISE that Romano was alive and located in Somali city of Jilib, the Italian government urged Turkish intelligence services to free the Italian aid worker. In May 2021, Romano finally flew back home.⁴⁵

More recently, the case of Erdoğan's threat to expel Western diplomats from Turkey demonstrated once again the importance of Italian-Turkish relationship. In mid-October 2021, Turkish President declared ten Western diplomats "*persona non grata*" over their support of a Turkish philanthropist who was imprisoned during 2016 post-golpe purges. The measure involved diplomats from the US, Germany, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden. After these countries released official

⁴⁴ Santoro, D., *La corsa turca agli oceani*, in: *Il turco alla porta*, in: "Limes", No. 10, 2020, p. 56.

⁴⁵ Cannon, B. J. & Donelli, F., *Turkey's involvement in the release of Silvia Romano in Somalia*, "ISPI", 26 May 2020, <https://www.ISPionline.it/en/publication/turkeys-involvement-release-silvia-romano-somalia-26310>. Last accessed: 29 October 2021.

statements remarking their complete allegiance to the principle of non-interference in host country's domestic affairs, Erdoğan backed down his threat celebrating the Western response as a major diplomatic victory for Turkey. Italy, the UK and Spain did not sign the joint communiqué, so they did not figure on the list. Soner Cagaptay, an historian and expert of Turkey, argued that the diplomatic quarrel showed the «emergence of a sub-group within the Western family of nations adept at skipping confrontation with Ankara», and Italy appears to be part of it.⁴⁶

2.4. Italo-Turkish economic relations

In the last two decades, Turkey and Italy have enjoyed healthy and strong economic relations. Since 2000, the volume of bilateral trade between Italy and Turkey has been increasing. In 2000, Italy's trade with Turkey counted 4.3 billion US dollars of exports and 2 billion US dollars of imports. By 2019, Italy exported to Turkey 9.3 billion US dollars' worth, while the value of imports from Turkey equalled 10.6 billion US dollars. In particular, their economic exchange grew at an increasing rate until 2008, then it declined for a few years, and since then it expanded again reaching the peak of 10.7 billion US dollars of Turkish exports to Italy (2018) and 13.6 billion US dollars of Turkish imports from Italy (2012).⁴⁷ In 2019, Italy ranked fourth as Turkey's import partner (behind Germany, China, and Russia) and sixth as Turkey's export partner (behind Germany, the UK, the UAE, Iraq, and the US).⁴⁸ From an Italian perspective, Turkey has not been displayed in the top ten trading partners' in the last decade; however, in 2019, Turkey occurred to be the fifth destination for Italian products outside the EU. It is important to notice that even if the monetary value of exchange between Turkey and Italy continued to grow, the percentage value of Turkish exports to Italy dropped over the years. This can be explained by the fact that Ankara has started

⁴⁶ *Lo scontro diplomatico fra la Turchia e alcuni suoi alleati, spiegato*, "Il Post", 25 October 2021, <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/10/25/erdogan-ambasciatori/>. Last accessed: 29 October 2021.

⁴⁷ World Integrated Trade Solutions, *Italy Imports by country in US\$ Thousand 2000-2019*, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/ITA/StartYear/2000/EndYear/2019/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/BY-COUNTRY/Indicator/MPRT-TRD-VL>. Last accessed: 18 October 2021.

World Integrated Trade Solutions, *Italy Exports by country in US\$ Thousand 2000-2019*, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/ITA/StartYear/2000/EndYear/2019/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/BY-COUNTRY/Indicator/XPRT-TRD-VL>. Last accessed: 18 October 2021.

⁴⁸ *Turchia, "Atlante geopolitico"*, Treccani, 2019, p. 802.

to increase the number of national markets for its goods and services. Thus, Italy has not suffered a setback as one of Turkey's top trading partners; however, Turkey's amount of trade volume exported to a specific country shrank.⁴⁹ Despite other Turkey's trade partners, China and Russia being cases in point, Ankara enjoys a more balanced and complementary economic relation with Rome, which led the two countries to sign cooperation agreements with reference to third countries.⁵⁰

Regarding the extent of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the last two decades, Italian FDI amounted to a maximum of 5.6 per cent of total FDI in Turkey (2005); Turkish FDI in Italy made up more than 1 per cent of overall FDI in Italy only twice (2005 and 2006). With 970 million US dollars of FDI flowing into Turkey, in 2020 Italy topped the list of major foreign investors in the country despite the pandemic effect on global economy.⁵¹

The wide number and variety of Italian firms in Turkey explains the relevance of their economic ties: more than a thousand Italian enterprises maintain their presence in Turkey, while encompassing many sectors, such as the automotive (Fiat Chrysler), confectionery (Ferrero), infrastructure (Astaldi, Ansaldo, Telecom), energy (Eni, Edison), and defence (Finmeccanica, Leonardo). Furthermore, Italian and Turkish companies have often cooperated, particularly concerning huge infrastructural projects.⁵² Back in 2007, Italy, Turkey and Greece signed a 3 billion euros deal to develop the Interconnection Turkey Greece Italy (ITGI) system of gas pipelines⁵³; in 2016 the Astaldi Group, together with Turkish firms, completed the construction of the third bridge across the Bosphorus, known as the Yavuz Sultan Selim bridge. The Astaldi Group built also a part of the Anatolian motorway and the international terminal of the Milas-

⁴⁹ Ekim, S. & Bilotta, N., *Italian-Turkish Economic Relations: An Overview*, "IAI Papers 20", No. 25, 2020, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Gianotta, V., *Building a Turkey-Italy partnership based on mutual interests*, "Daily Sabah", 6 August 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/08/06/building-a-turkey-italy-partnership-based-on-mutual-interests>. Last accessed: 18 October 2021.

⁵¹ *Italy tops list as Turkey draws over \$4.6B in foreign investment*, "Daily Sabah", 11 February 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/italy-tops-list-as-turkey-draws-over-46b-in-foreign-investment>. Last accessed: 18 October 2021.

⁵² Ekim, S. & Bilotta, N., *Italian-Turkish Economic Relations*, pp. 7-8.

⁵³ *Firmato l'accordo fra Italia, Turchia e Grecia sul gasdotto da 3 miliardi di euro*, "Il Sole 24 Ore", 26 luglio 2007, https://st.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnline4/Economia%20e%20Lavoro/2007/07/bersani-gasdotto.shtml?refresh_ce=1. Last accessed: 18 October 2021.

Bodrum Airport. On the other hand, a Turkish company, Yilport Holding, struck a deal with the Ionian Port Authority to revamp the port of Taranto, through an investment of 400 million euro, and the pledge to manage the port for almost 50 years.⁵⁴

Economic exchange between Turkey and the EU, and thereby Italy, is mainly regulated by the EU-Turkey Customs Union agreement which dates back to 1995. Italian officials, together with their European colleagues, have called for a comprehensive revision and modernization of the Customs Union agreement, especially after Turkey's European perspectives have considerably faded.

At the same time, Italo-Turkish bilateral economic summits aiming to strengthen the existing relations have been encouraged at government level. Besides recurring high level summit, in 2017 the Italian Minister for the economic cooperation and his Turkish counterpart joined the first meeting of the Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO) whose aim is to increase investments and enhance further collaboration on science, technology, culture, and tourism.⁵⁵ The JETCO was created in 2013, but only after a four-year stalemate the two countries resumed the project. A second JETCO meeting occurred in December 2020 and addressed the need to further exploit Italian-Turkish industrial synergies, to increase the flow of bilateral investments, to promote Italian products into the Turkish market and to encourage future collaborations on third markets. Once again, the Italian Foreign Minister, Luigi Di Maio, stressed that only a revised Customs Union agreement would pave the way to a constructive win-win economic relation.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ekim, S. & Bilotta, N., *Italian-Turkish Economic Relations*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Governo italiano. Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *Second session, in virtual format, of the Italy-Turkey Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO)*, 12 December 2020, https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/12/seconda-sessione-in-formato-virtuale-della-joint-economic-and-trade-commission-jetco-italia-turchia.html. Last accessed: 18 October 2021.

II The Libyan match

Nowadays both Italy and Turkey play a significant role in the Libyan scenario; however, Italian and Turkish presence in Libya is anything than new. Indeed, Turkey's ancestor, the Ottoman Empire, ruled the Libyan territory for centuries before it fell in the hands of the Kingdom of Italy in 1912. Libya gained its independence after the World War II, but the Western-aligned kingdom of Libya was swept away by Qaddafi's Jamahiriya, which developed a problematic and fickle relationship with the West. 2011 Arab revolts shattered the country, turning Libya into a major international playground of foreign countries' power politics.

A hundred years after the Italo-Turkish war, Ankara and Rome found themselves directly involved in Libya again. Nevertheless, the two powers are no more opposite warring parties because their engagement in the region is formally an alliance. Their cooperation aims at the stabilization of the country and the cessations of the hostilities, which serve both strategic interests. However, Turkey's increased bargaining chip on Libya after its direct military intervention to support the Tripoli-based government in 2019 has dimmed Italy's role in the Libyan match. In addition, Turkey has not always welcomed Italy's traditional multifaceted approach towards the Mediterranean that Rome has applied also with regard to the Libyan crisis. The most recent international, regional, and Libyan developments suggest a renewed European entente upon Libya's stabilization process, while Turkey fears the demilitarization of the country and the isolation that it may suffer in Libya as well as happened in the Eastern Mediterranean. The resulting pattern of relations between Ankara and Rome on the Libyan dossier is a comprehensive cooperation yet vulnerable to greater geopolitical and geostrategic considerations encompassing the regional and international contexts.

In order to comprehensively assess Italy-Turkey partnership in Libya, this chapter first provides the reader with a brief overview of Libyan history – particularly focusing on post-2011 troubled events; second, it depicts Italian and Turkish engagement with the country; finally, it shows convergences and divergences of Italo-Turkish partnership in Libya.

1. Libyan history: an overview

Before the colonial age, the territory currently known as “Libya” has never been a unified area, neither has it been populated by culturally homogeneous peoples. Libya is made of three historical regions: Tripolitania in the north-west, Fezzan in the south-west, and Cyrenaica in the east. From 1551 to 1911, the wilayat¹ of Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica were ruled by the Ottoman Empire. The administrative division of what it will become the Libyan territory, the sparse population, and the geography – deserts cover vast areas of Libyan hinterland and serve as natural barriers between populated areas – prevented the development of a cohesive national identity and reinforced the existing local tribal affiliations.

As it will be further discussed in the following paragraph, Italian colonial ambitions headed towards Tripolitania and Cyrenaica at the beginning of the XX century. In 1911 Italy waged war on the Ottoman Empire, and in November it declared the annexation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. In 1934, the Italian colony was unified and renamed “Libya” after the Latin expression with whom Romans defined the north African part of their Empire.

During the World War II, Libya became a major battlefield until the British Army guided by Field Marshal Montgomery defeated the Axis troops and forced them to leave Africa. A joint British-French military administration ruled Libya in the immediate afterwar, deepening the ties with the *Senusiyya*, a deep-rooted religious confraternity. The *Senusiyya* had gained political relevance during the pre-colonial and colonial era, serving as a local government in Cyrenaica in accordance with the terms of Ottoman and Italian rules. The Allies engaged to determine the future political order of Libya according to the popular will; however, Libyans could not agree whether to opt for an independent monarchy ruled by the *Senusiyya*, an independent republic or a preparatory period of mandatory administration. Eventually, in 1949 Idris al-Sanusi, the Emir of Cyrenaica, unilaterally declared the independence of Cyrenaica which was followed by the decision to create an independent, unified and sovereign Kingdom of Libya (UN Resolution 289/1949). On 2 January 1952, Libya became a constitutional federal

¹ A wilayah is an Arabic word used to define an administrative division of the territory. In this context, it refers to the Ottoman wilayat, also known as vilayet in Turkish, that were the administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire.

monarchy ruled by Idris al-Sanusi. The Kingdom of Libya emerged as a weak state: its national identity was feeble, its new political structures did not replace the inherent localism, and its economy was the poorest in the Mediterranean region. Thus, King Idris I started to rely on international support striking military and economic agreements with the West, on which depended the survival of the Kingdom.

As many other Arab countries were experiencing, oil discoveries represented the turning point for Libyan history. In the 1950s and 1960s, Libya became a major oil exporter and joined the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1962. The characteristics of the Libyan oil – quality, quantity and position – have made Libya one of the greatest and more competitive petroleum exporting countries of the world.² Since then, Libya started to clearly demonstrate the features of a rentier state: its economy relies mostly upon external rent; the creation of wealth is centred around a small fraction of society – a small group of people generates the rent while the majority of the population engages only with the distribution and the utilization of such wealth – and the government is the principal recipient of the wealth.³ The increasing wealth was not invested in the consolidation of state structures and welfare, but enriched tribal groups and technocrats loyal to the kingdom.

In such a context, Libyan population revealed to be extremely porous to pan-Arabist rhetoric coming from the neighbouring Nasserist Egypt. In 1964, popular uprisings spread all over the country after Nasser defined the western military basis in Libya a threat for the Arab World; moreover, the decision to not take part to the Six-Day War worsened the popular contrast towards the Western-aligned foreign policy of the Kingdom. The international posture of Libya, together with the weakness and corruption of the state, nurtured a growing discontent towards the Senusi and paved the way for the 1969 Army's coup. The "Free Officers" movement leaded by Muammar Qaddafi successfully overthrew the Kingdom and established the Arab Republic of Libya whose main ideological drivers were «freedom, socialism, and Arab unity».

² Guazzone, L., *Storia contemporanea del mondo arabo. I paesi arabi dall'impero ottomano ad oggi*, Milano, Mondadori università, 2016, pp. 171-173.

³ Beblawi, H., *The Rentier State in the Arab World*, in: "Arab Studies Quarterly", Vol. 9, No. 4, 1987, pp. 384-386.

Nasserist policies characterized the first period of power consolidation, but since the beginning of his regime Qaddafi started to develop a unique ideological view alternative to capitalism and Marxism-Leninism – the Third International Theory. The Third International Theory was institutionalized in the Arab Libyan popular and socialist Jamahiriya, a neologism meaning “State of the masses”. The first step of Qaddafi’s permanent revolution consisted in the dismissal of the traditional representative state structures to promote a model of direct democracy through local popular committees; the second aspect of the new political system was the complete nationalization of Libyan economy; finally, Qaddafi imposed a radical reorientation of Libyan foreign policy, embracing Third-Worldism and anti-imperialism. Libya’s support to revolutionaries and even terroristic organizations all over the world antagonised western countries, in particular France and the USA, and Arab countries too.⁴ Libya-US aloof relations turned into open hostility when the USA stopped supplying Libya with arms in 1979, bombed Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986 as retaliation for an anti-US attack in a nightclub in Berlin, put Libya on the “rogue state” list and imposed economic sanctions over the country with the 1996 Iran and Libyan Sanctions Act (ILSA).⁵ Along with the growing opposition with Washington, Libya started to experience a broader international isolation due to new political and economic sanctions imposed at first by the European Community in 1986 and then by the United Nations in 1992 (UN Resolution 731/1992 and UN Resolution 748/1992). The UN sanctions enforced an embargo against all flights to and from Libya since Qaddafi’s regime was accused of the deadly bombings of 1988 Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie (Scotland) and 1989 UTA Flight 772 over the Ténéré desert (Niger). In the second half of the 80s, Libya suffered from an economic recession because oil rent curbed. Qaddafi introduced some measures of economic liberalization and lessened the more unpleasant revolutionary policies as a response to international isolation and growing political discontent active both in domestic and foreign contexts.

In the first decade of the XXI century, the Libyan government embraced a process of reconciliation with the West and introduced a systemic reform of the

⁴ Guazzone, L., *Storia contemporanea del mondo arabo*, pp. 173-191.

⁵ Tosti di Stefano, E., *Cronologia*, in: Folco Biagini, A. (ed.), *Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell’ordine internazionale*, Roma, Castelvechi, 2020, pp. 166-167.

regime. In 2003, Libya brought Lockerbie prime suspects to the international justice, thus the UN dismissed the sanctions against the country. Then, Qaddafi engaged to abandon Libyan nuclear weapons programmes and in 2004 the European Union and the USA revoked their sanctions too. Washington proceeded with the disapplication of the ILSA towards Libya and the cancellation of Libya from the rogue state list. The normalization of US-Libya relations was celebrated by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's official visit to Tripoli in 2008. Meanwhile, Qaddafi designated his son Saif al-Islam as his potential successor and sponsor of the regime's political and institutional reforms as well as mediator with the Libyan Islamic and secular opposition.⁶

The inherent Libyan political and economic weakness and the persistent tribal dimension of Libyan socio-political system dramatically emerged when Libya was hit by violent uprisings in the wake of 2011 Arab revolts. The Libyan anti-regime protests started on 17 February 2011 in Benghazi and in the following days spread all over the country. The clashes between the rebels and Qaddafi's forces are known as First Libyan Civil War. The regime started to use heavy weapons to crush the protesters despite widespread international condemnation. Meanwhile, Libyan opposition gathered in the National Transitional Council (NTC) to organize the revolts, free the country and plan free elections. At the end of February, the United Nations and the European Union imposed sanctions on Qaddafi and his family for the persistent violations of human rights. France recognized the NTC as the only legitimate body representing the people of Libya; however, some western countries, Italy among them, adopted a more cautious attitude. On 17 March 2011 the United Nations agreed on Resolution 1973 imposing a no-fly zone over Libya, demanding an immediate ceasefire and allowing the use of all means necessary, except for foreign occupation, to protect civilians, by virtue of the UN principle "Responsibility to Protect". In accordance with the terms of Resolution 1973/2011, France, the UK, and the USA started "Harmattan", "Ellamy" and "Odyssey Dawn" bombing operations against Qaddafi's troops. Italy joined its western allies after a few weeks of hesitation, and the control of military operations was taken over by NATO-led operation "Unified Protector" which lasted from 31 March 2011 to 31 October 2011. While

⁶ Guazzone, L., *Storia contemporanea del mondo arabo*, pp. 191-193.

trying to overthrow the last pockets of resistance, the Libyan NTC engaged to form a new transitional government, recognized and supported by the international community reunited in a group known as “Friends of Libya”. The rebels controlled almost all Cyrenaic territory at the end of April 2011; in August they conquered Tripoli, and eventually Qaddafi was captured and killed in Sirte at the end of October 2011.

In September 2011 the UN established the United Nations Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL) as a special political mission to support Libyan transitional authorities in their post-conflict efforts for the stabilization of the country.

Despite Qaddafi’s death and the end of his decade-long regime, Islamists and secularist forces clashed within the NTC, and tribal affiliations exacerbated contrasts among ex-rebel forces. In March 2012 secessionist militias even declared the independence of Cyrenaica. In the meantime, a coalition of moderate and liberal forces – the National Forces Alliance – won 2012 elections of the General National Congress (GNC), the legislative body of the new Libya. The Justice and Construction Party, affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, ranked second with 10,27% of votes. The NTC was dismissed and its functions were taken over by the GNC. The GNC committed to elaborate a new constitution in eighteen months and appointed Ali Zeidan, former ambassador and Qaddafi’s opposer, as new Prime Minister of Libya. Nevertheless, Libya’s political and social context remained shattered by sectarian clashes and was extremely porous to Salafist jihadism. Indeed, in September 2012 a jihadist militia, *Ansar al-Sharia*, stormed the US consulate in Benghazi and killed the US ambassador Cristopher Stevens. A year after, the US Navy Seals captured a Libyan terrorist in Tripoli, and the US Secretary of State declared that the Libyan government had been informed about the raid. As a response, some radical combatants kidnapped the Libyan Prime Minister Zeidan for a few hours for his alleged complicity with Washington, demonstrating that the new Libyan government and political order did not enjoy sufficient and widespread legitimacy. In March 2014 an oil tanker left Libyan coasts from a harbour controlled by Cyrenaic

secessionists and submitted to naval blockade; consequently, Zeidan was dismissed by the GNC.⁷

In this highly fragmented political context, Khalifa Haftar, a General based in Cyrenaica, emerged as a new military and political protagonist in the fight for the control of Libya. Prior the revolution, he took part to Qaddafi's 1969 coup and became a top officer. When suffering a hard defeat during the Libyan-Chadian war, Qaddafi disavowed Haftar, and, as a consequence, he unsuccessfully opposed the Libyan regime for years, even planning an invasion of Libya immediately uncovered and crushed by Qaddafi. After that, Haftar exiled to the United States, where he remained until the breakout of the First Libyan Civil War, when he came back to Libya to join the rebels and overthrow Qaddafi's regime.⁸ Haftar's anti-Islamist forces, reunited in the Libyan National Army (LNA), gained the control over the eastern part of the country in an offensive, known as Operation Dignity. Together with Zintan-based militias, Haftar launched an attack against the GNC headquarters in Tripoli to demand its dissolution and new elections. 18% of Libyan voters participated to the general elections for a new legislative body, the House of Representatives. The Islamists performed poorly in the election, won by moderate forces, and convened in a loose coalition, known as Libyan Dawn. Thus, in August 2014 two different political realities emerged in Libya: the House of Representatives, secular and newly elected, based in Tobruk (eastern Cyrenaica) and backed by Haftar's forces, and the National Salvation Government, an Islamist and Tripoli-based GNC's political fraction. The former has been supported by Egypt, in close touch with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia; the latter has been sustained by Turkey and Qatar. Therefore, it may be inferred that the Libyan state did collapse, and regional powers stepped in.

To solve the crisis, the UN sponsored a political dialogue process between the two blocks to form a new government of national unity. At the end of 2015, Libyan parties stroke the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in Skhirat which designated the politician Fayez al-Sarraj as the head of the new Government of National Accord (GNA). With the Resolution 2254/2015, the UN Security Council

⁷ Tosti di Stefano, E., *Cronologia*, pp. 168-171.

⁸ Anderson, L., *The Unravelling*, "The New Yorker", 16 February 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling>. Last accessed: 15 November 2021.

recognized the future Libyan executive and the GNA proclaimed itself the legitimate new Libyan government, even if the Tobruk's House of Representatives did not approve the Skhirat agreement. The competition between the GNA and Haftar's LNA was not only political but became more and more military. In 2016, Haftar's forces took control of important oil ports in the Gulf of Sidra, engaging in various battles with GNA-aligned corps and militias, and in 2017 they played a significant role in freeing Libyan cities from IS. Haftar's military successes steadily increased its bargaining chip on Libya's stabilization process, ensuring him the status of al-Sarraj counterpart. Indeed, in July 2017 Haftar was invited in Paris by the French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss with al-Sarraj the future of Libya. The two Libyan leaders agreed on a ceasefire and committed to organize new general and presidential elections the following year – elections which did not take place due to the persistent instability of the country.⁹

In the meantime, Libyan disorders and multiple decentralized powers have turned Libya into fertile land for migrants smuggling and trafficking. Increasing numbers of migrants have left Libyan shores in order to get to Europe. The migrant crisis culminated in April 2015, when a shipwreck occurred off the Libyan coasts causing the death of as many as 700 migrants – more than 1,000 people according to more recent estimates. What is still the deadliest shipwreck in the Mediterranean pushed Brussels to adopt a series of initiatives to oppose migrants smuggling routes from Libya. The EU launched the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation SOPHIA (EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA), the first maritime security operation in the central Mediterranean established by the EU. SOPHIA headquarter was located in Rome since Italy was given operational command.¹⁰

The rivalry between the GNA and LNA exploded on 4 April 2019 when Haftar launched a military offensive against the GNA. The LNA besieged Tripoli for 14 months until forces loyal to al-Sarraj's government regained the lost ground thanks to Turkish military intervention. The major involvement of foreign powers

⁹ Tosti di Stefano, E., *Cronologia*, pp. 172-175.

¹⁰ Ministero della Difesa, *EUNAVFOR MED Operation SOPHIA (conclusa il 31 marzo 2020)*, https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/eunavfor_med/Pagine/default.aspx. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

in what is known as the Second Libyan Civil War – lasting from 2014 to 2020 – was decisively condemned by Ghassan Salamé, head of the UNSMIL from 2017 to 2020. He called for an immediate cease of foreign states’ support to local warring groups – through mercenaries, arms, financing, or direct military involvement – because it created «a vicious circle where their proxies call for intervention in their fight, and their own ambitions bring more divisions».¹¹

The UN-led Conference on Libya held in Berlin on 19 January 2020 promoted a pacific solution to the crisis together with the end of foreign intervention, especially to comply with the arms embargo imposed on the country by the UN.¹² The efforts of Libyan opposing parties were sealed in October 2020, when the GNA and the LNA officially signed a ceasefire in Geneva under the UN-led negotiation framework.

In March 2020, the EU launched the EUNAVFOR MED Operation IRINI to implement the UN arms embargo, while ending Operation SOPHIA. The mission is charged of performing inspections of vessels on the high sea off the Libyan coasts «suspected to be carrying arms or related material to and from Libya». In addition, Operation IRINI is requested to monitor illicit exports from Libya of petroleum, train the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy, and gather information and patrol the area to fight human smuggling and trafficking.¹³

Aiming to unify the GNA and the LNA-backed cabinet based in Tobruk, in March 2021 the transitional Government of National Unity (GNU) became Libya’s sole executive. Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, an engineer who headed a major state-driven construction firm under Qaddafi, was appointed as Prime Minister of the GNU and was selected in the UN-led Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) on 5 February 2021. The first round of the LPDF, which brought together various representatives of Libyan society, had been held in Tunis from 7 to 15 November 2020. The parts had agreed on a roadmap to «credible, inclusive and democratic national elections, to be held on 24 December 2021».¹⁴ Although the leadership

¹¹ *Libya civil war: UN envoy Salamé says foreign intervention must end*, “BBC news”, 18 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51161758>. Last accessed: 15 November 2021.

¹² Tosti di Stefano, E., *Cronologia*, p. 175.

¹³ EUNAVFOR Med operation IRINI, *About us*, <https://www.operationirini.eu/about-us/>. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

¹⁴ UNSMIL, *Libyan Political Dialogue Forum*, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/libyan-political-dialogue-forum>. Last accessed: 15 November 2021.

of the future unique Libyan army is likely to be a non-negotiable clause for Haftar, and the extensive – maybe irreconcilable – social and political fractures within the Libyan society still remain a huge concern for the observers, the agreement reached in Berlin, endorsed by the UN and leading to the formation of the GNU, represented an historic step towards the potential reunification and stabilization of Libya.

On 12 November 2021, ahead of scheduled elections, an international conference on Libya was held in Paris. The summit was convened by France, Germany, Italy, the UN, and Libya's interim government and presidency with the purpose to support a Libyan-led process to implement a political solution to the protracted Libyan crisis. Several regional and international leaders gathered in Paris to attend the conference, and the outcomes demonstrate a large yet not general consensus upon number of important issues. First of all, the parties pledged support for holding the presidential elections on 24 December, as scheduled. Second, the conference rejected all foreign interferences in the Libyan political process, thus urged the full application of the UN Action plan for withdrawing mercenaries and foreign forces from the Libyan territory, which had been approved in October 2021. Third, the international community agreed on the safeguard of Libya's major economic and financial institutions as well as on the protection of human rights and international law.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the international community's efforts, Libya's long-awaited presidential election scheduled in December 2021 has been postponed. Security threats along with harsh disputes over the eligibility of the candidates prevented Libyan electoral commission and related parliamentary committee to allow the regular development of the elections.¹⁶

In the light of the foregoing, Libyan political situation as well as Libyan peace process remain unstable. In such a changing context, Italy and Turkey have a strong interest in favouring peace and political stabilization, but their

¹⁵ *Libyan conference in Paris pledges support for elections in December*, "Euronews", 13 November 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/11/13/libyan-conference-in-paris-pledges-support-for-elections-in-december>. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

¹⁶ *Libya elections: Presidential poll postponed*, "BBC News", 23 December 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59755677>. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

strategies need to take into consideration a wide range of contrasting options and implications that make the Libyan match hard to definitely win.

2. Italy and Libya

Italian ambitions towards Libya date back to the XIX century. At the time, the Kingdom of Italy was a young state in search of international prestige, domestic consensus, and new markets for its industrial expansion. Italian foreign policy developed towards two directions: the Balkans and Africa. In 1882, Italy joined the Triple Alliance, a defensive alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany, and entered Bismarck's European system of alliances. Along with a strategic anti-French relation with Berlin and Wien, Rome vigorously engaged in the colonial rush undertaken by all major European nations. Once Tunisia fell into the hands of France causing a growing hostility between Paris and Rome, whose African ambitions were at first directed to Tunis, Italian political clout within Bismarck's system grew. Therefore, in 1887 the Triple Alliance was renewed favourably to Italy in what is recalled as the de Robilant system. The de Robilant agreements granted Italy territorial compensations in the Balkans in case of an Austrian enlargement in the region, and at the same time Berlin agreed it would side with Rome if Italy engaged in war with France. In 1891 the Triple Alliance was renewed, and the de Robilant clauses became part of the deal. In a couple of decades, the most influent European powers conveyed to allow Italy to occupy Cyrenaica and Tripolitania: first, the United Kingdom through the 1887 Mediterranean Agreements; second, Germany during the 1891 Triple Alliance's renewal; third, France with the 1902 Prinetti-Barrère Pact; then, Russia through the 1909 Racconigi Bargain with Italy; and finally, Austria-Hungary declared its consent when signing the 1902 Triple Alliance's renewal.¹⁷

Italian colonial ambitions were nurtured by a vehement nationalist rhetoric which interpreted the conquest of the Italian «Fourth Shore» – i.e. Libyan territory – as the natural realization of Rome's Mediterranean vocation. According to the most prominent Italian nationalist and leader of the Italian Nationalist Association, Enrico Corradini, the conquest of new colonies would have promoted national

¹⁷ Barié, O., *Dal Sistema europeo alla Comunità mondiale. Storia delle relazioni internazionali dal Congresso di Vienna alla fine della Guerra fredda*, Celuc Libri, 2009, pp. 350-373, 400-404.

solidarity and cohesion, as well as avenged the stinging humiliation of Adowa (1896). Through nationalist propaganda, mainly spread on the columns of the weekly newspaper *Idea Nazionale* founded in 1911, nationalism acquired moral legitimation. Besides that, the nationalist rhetoric appealed to economic pretexts. On this basis, Libya would have served as a new market for the country's growing economy and a new home for its surplus population; moreover, it would have provided Italy with raw materials and employment for its proletariat. The epitome of the high-flow rhetoric is undoubtedly encapsulated by the proclamation of the poet Giovanni Pascoli: «The great proletariat has been stirred herself». However, the majority of Liberals and Conservatives believed that the costs required for the seizure of Libya might have exceeded the economic rewards of Libya's colonization. Embracing a realistic attitude, they were definitely more convinced to embark the country in the colonialist venture once they realized that it was just matter of time before all the remaining Ottoman territories on the southern Mediterranean shores fell in the hands of other European powers. The Italian Left as well as the formally neutral Catholic movement was divided between the ones who strongly opposed Libya's colonization and the ones who endorsed the project.¹⁸

In March 1911, Giovanni Giolitti, the prominent statesman who had served as Italian Prime Minister three times between 1892 and 1909, formed his fourth government. It has been frequently alleged that the public opinion and the fierce nationalist rhetoric, which was monopolizing Italian political discourse, influenced Giolitti to launch the Libyan colonial campaign. Nevertheless, in his memoirs he claimed no mass hysteria pushed him to moving war against the Ottomans. Indeed, he argued that the occupation of Libya figured as the third point in his new government's programme, and through his official speeches he tended to divest the Libyan venture of all sacrality and moral value given by Italian nationalists and cultural elites. In a famous public speech, he said: «There are facts which impose themselves as a veritable historical fatality». In this way he contended that Libya's colonization was not an identity mission for the Kingdom, but a mere historical stage in the development of the state. The "historical fatality"

¹⁸ Cunsolo, R. S., *Libya, Italian Nationalism, and the Revolt against Giolitti*, "The Journal of Modern History", Vol. 37, No. 2, 1965, pp. 187-194.

principle served the reconciliation with the moderate and progressive elements of Italian political life who opposed the war.¹⁹ By contrast, the same famous speech has been differently interpreted by the scholar Angelo Del Boca, one of the most prominent historians of Italy's colonial Empire and related war crimes. He stated that Giolitti's words were definitely out of character, resembling Corradini's and Italian nationalists' pompous rhetoric. According to Del Boca's view, the "historical fatality" principle represents an irrational justification for a colonial project that had no realistic reasons as driving forces.²⁰

The Italian economic penetration in Libya through the action of the *Banco di Roma* started before the Italo-Turkish war for the control of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and paved the way for the military occupation of the country. On 29 September 1911 the Italian Prime Minister declared war to the Ottoman Empire, and at the beginning of November Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were proclaimed Italian domains. On 18 October 1912 the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Italy signed the Ouchy Treaty which recognized the Italian sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, unified under the Roman-age name of "Libya", and a financial compensation to the Ottomans for the loss of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. However, Italy gained effective control over the Libyan territory only in the thirties. Indeed, the Italian war effort encountered a strenuous Turk and Arab resistance, and the outbreak of World War I stalled the process of subjugation of the entire Libyan territory. At the end of the conflict, Italy controlled only the coastal regions of Libya, and in 1917 the Italian government signed the Acroma agreements with the *Senusiyya*, whereby Idris' rule was recognized over the eastern part of Cyrenaica and Italian rule over the rest of the region. In the immediate afterwar, Italy began the occupation of Libyan internal areas too. In 1923, the Italian General Rodolfo Graziani seized Misrata completing the occupation of Tripolitania; he then successfully proceeded with the conquest of Fezzan and Cyrenaica's areas still under control of Senusi rebels guided by Umar al-Mukhtar.²¹

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 203.

²⁰ Del Boca, A., *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire*, Neri Pozza Editore, Vicenza, 2015, p. 52.

²¹ Vagnini, A., *Dall'Amministrazione italiana al regime di Gheddafi*, in: Folco Biagini, A. (ed.), *Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell'ordine internazionale*, Roma, Castelveccchi, 2020, pp. 47-49.

The occupation and pacification of Libya happened to be unexpectedly long and hard processes for the Italian army and government. In order to completely crush the Arab and Ottoman resistance and subjugate Libyans to colonial rule, Italian troops committed horrendous war crimes which burdened Italian-Libyan relations for long time. The aforementioned historian Del Boca described atrocious retaliations and gallows set up by Italians to the detriment of Arab insurgents – according to official estimates, between one and four thousand Arabs were killed after the battle of Shar al-Shatt, for instance. In addition, thousands of Arabs were deported to penal colonies all over southern Italy to strangle the uprising against Italian troops. Last but not least, Libyan resistance was opposed with the installation of concentration camps which served the aim of denying rebels the popular support. Pietro Badoglio, Italian governor of Libya since 1929, and Graziani organized and carried out the forced mass evacuation of population living in the Jebel Akhdar and in Marmarica (Cyrenaica). Around 100 thousand Libyans, half of Cyrenaica's population at the time, were conducted through strenuous marches in the desert in sixteen camps of concentration. It is now generally recognized that Italy executed acts of genocide in Cyrenaica during the colonial rule.²²

The Italian colonization of Libya started with the construction of rural villages to settle Italian peasants and their families. However, the colonization resulted unsuccessful until the thirties, when the Fascist government created the Authority for the Colonization of Libya (1932) to promote the agricultural exploitation of the territory, and Italo Balbo became the new Italian governor of Libya (1933-1940) increasing the economic investments for the development of the colony. The new phase of Italian colonial venture in Libya was sealed in 1937 by the official visit of Mussolini, who favoured the state-driven settlement of thousands of Italian colonists. At the time, Italian settlers were estimated to be 120 thousand and represent 13% of Libya's population. In 1939, Mussolini officially included Libya within the national territory. During the Italian colonization of the country, Libyan political life was dominated by Italian colonists and authorities, preventing Libyans from nourishing a deep sense of national identity,

²² Del Boca, A., *Italiani, brava gente?*, pp. 53-55, 83-84.

creating legitimate state structures, and developing economic and social elites different from the tribal and religious local leaders.

Italians were definitely expelled by Libya after the World War II. However, Rome continued to yearn for the control of its former colony, and it actively sponsored its cause within the international community striking an agreement with London in 1949 – the Bevin-Sforza plan – to co-administer Libya. The proposal was submitted to the United Nations and consisted in a ten-year trusteeship to Britain in Cyrenaica, Italy in Tripolitania, and France in the Fezzan; after which the country would become independent.

When Libya became an independent kingdom ruled by Idris al-Sanusi, Italy signed a bilateral treaty with Libya in 1956. The agreement regulated the economic cooperation between the two countries and all the matters related to the former Italian colonial rule. In particular, the 1956 treaty granted Italian citizens living in Libya their stay in Libyan territory.

Oil discoveries marked the turning point of Libyan – and Arab world – history. Italy notified the presence of oilfields along the Libyan coast during the colonial period, and in 1940 Italian government entrusted the *Azienda generale italiana petroli* (Agip) with the first oil explorations, then stopped because of the WWII. In the afterwar, the Anglo-Americans replaced Italians with the oil explorations in Libya, and in the fifties, they localized a huge oilfield in Zelten, located at the regional border between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. The Libyan Prime Minister Ben Halim conducted a forward-thinking and careful oil policy which avoided monopolistic oil concessions to a few Western companies.²³

At the time of Qaddafi's coup, Italy was one of the first Western countries to recognize the new regime. In a parliamentary speech, the Italian foreign minister Aldo Moro (*Democrazia Cristiana, DC*) claimed that the new Libyan government's recognition served the purpose of stability in the region since it would have maintained the status quo and avoided the widening of URSS' sphere of influence in the Mediterranean. However, the forced expulsion of Italians from the former colony and the requisition of their properties ordered by the new Libyan leader forced Italy to revise its friendly attitude towards Qaddafi as early as 1970. Looking for a mediation, Moro met his Libyan counterpart Buwaysir in Beirut, and

²³ Guazzone, L., *Storia contemporanea del mondo arabo*, pp. 179, 181-3.

despite the fierce rhetoric, the two paved the way for a new phase of bilateral relations. Buwaysir insisted on the suffering endured by Libyans during Italian colonialism and called for a compensation in order to build the bilateral relation on a new basis; Moro responded that every crime committed to Libyans had been actually perpetrated by the Fascist regime, which had ended in 1943 and was completely rejected by the Italian democratic republic. The anticolonial rhetoric served the consolidation of the new-born Libyan regime, as well as the post-colonial attitude of Italian government was needed to bring Libya and its precious oil close to Rome. At the time, the Libyan crude oil was estimated to cover 28% of Italian energy imports. The expulsion of the Italian population from the Libyan soil was clearly a Qaddafi's propaganda operation since the confiscation of Italian properties in Libya did not affect Eni and FIAT plants. In conclusion, even if the ideological distance between Rome and Tripoli seemed historic-grounded and unbridgeable, both of them did not want to compromise their cooperation.

In 1971, joint efforts of Italian secret services, *Servizio Informazioni Difesa* (SID), and British and American intelligences prevented a coup against Qaddafi seizing a ship directed to Libya. The vessel was about to be carried with weapons and mercenaries paid by a former prominent figure of the Libyan monarchy. Therefore, Italian-Libyan cooperation included security aspects and encompassed economic and trade sectors – in exchange for oil, Italy supplied Libya with skilled labour, goods and services and arms. The new relations between the two countries were regulated by a series of intergovernmental agreements arranged by Moro and Qaddafi during their 1971 meeting. The principle “oil for arms” which stood at the basis of the renewed relation between Tripoli and Rome alarmed Washington since the US considered the non-aligned Libya an unreliable and potentially dangerous partner.

Despite Italian concessions to Libya, Qaddafi continued to call for a postcolonial renegotiation of the agreement which regulated the bilateral relations with Italy since 1956. For the Italian government, the revision of 1956 agreements would have meant an excessive political exposure that was not ready to accept. Replying to the continuous requests on the matter, Italy widened its engagement with Libya sealing a framework agreement in Rome in 1974 which pledged goods, freighters and oil tankers together with weapons to Libya in exchange for 30

barrels per year of oil provisions. From a political perspective, the framework agreement legitimated Qaddafi's regime and served Italian domestic and foreign policy goals. Indeed, the strengthening of Italian-Libyan ties, thus of the Mediterranean region, would have secured Italian energy supply and prevented Qaddafi to finance Italian terrorist groups. Moreover, a reinforced Euro-Mediterranean alliance would have boosted Italian political clout in the European Economic Community (EEC) and the containment of the URSS in the region.

Reflecting the upsurge of instability within the wider Mediterranean and a new phase of Cold War, Italian-Libyan bilateral relations started to strain in the eighties. Qaddafi's Libya was involved in major and dramatic terrorist events which had some direct rebounds in and for Italy. Among those, Rome and Milan witnessed the brutal assassination of many Libyan political dissidents ordered by the Libyan executive, and a Libyan-financed terrorist organization perpetrated a deadly attack in Fiumicino airport. However, Italy did not want to cease the dialogue with Qaddafi and, in the framework of a slight disagreement with US attitude towards Middle East and the Mediterranean, refused to grant the US the concession of military basis for the 1986 bombing on Tripoli, which was described by Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti (DC) as a huge mistake. Italian government even informed Qaddafi of the imminent attack.

In the following years, despite the growing pressure and international measures of condemnation over Libya, to which Italy inevitably agreed, Rome continued to act as a mediator within the West, and in particular with Washington, to ease the tensions with Libya. The end of bipolarism, American strategic reasons, and Libyan détente towards Western countries encouraged the US to a reorientation of its policy with Libya. Italy took a decisive step in that direction in 1998 when Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini (*Rinnovamento italiano*) signed a joint declaration with his Libyan counterpart Umar al-Muntasser. In that occasion, Italian government declared its goodwill to make «a big gesture» to fix all past mistakes.

In order to proceed to the renegotiation of a comprehensive treaty on their bilateral relations, Italy needed to wait until Libya re-joined the international community after Qaddafi ordered the dismissal of Libyan nuclear programme in 2003. Once again readmitted on the international stage, Qaddafi resumed his

complaints and anti-Italian rhetoric that had characterised the first years of its regime fulfilling his need to regain domestic clout. Then, the Italian Foreign Minister D'Alema resumed the dialogue between Italy and Libya, even signing a treaty to control migration flows in 2007, and he effectively paved the way for the renegotiation of a framework treaty for the normalisation of bilateral relations. Indeed, after Berlusconi was appointed Prime Minister anew, on 30 August 2008, Italy and Libya signed a friendship, partnership and cooperation treaty for developing a special and privileged relation. The historic rapprochement between Rome and Tripoli was celebrated declaring the 30 of August the "Day of Italian-Libyan friendship" to contrast the "Day of Revenge" that had been previously proclaimed by the Libyan regime every 7 October to celebrate the expulsion of Italians and Jews from Libya.

In 2011 Libya witnessed the violent outbreak of anti-regime uprisings. Italy needed to take time in order to safeguard its huge interests in Libya. Until the end of February Rome promoted a cautious approach demonstrating it was unwilling to cease its special relation with Libya. However, Berlusconi did condemn the violence and admit that the Qaddafi's regime had lost the control of the country. Libyan revolts threatened bilateral trade relations, Rome's energy supply, and international security. In addition, Italy feared an Islamist upsurge in a freed Libya as well as a sharp increase of illegal migrants' flows. The Italian government defined a strategy of action consisting in the separation of the military aspects of the crisis from the political ones. The plan aimed to negotiate a ceasefire between the regime and the rebels, and only afterwards Italy would have promoted the dialogue between the parties. In the meantime, Obama endorsed the French-Britain strategy to support Bengazi's rebels, thus the legitimacy of Italy's implicit alignment with Qaddafi weakened even more within the international community and Rome's traditional allies. Consequently, Berlusconi stepped away from the scene to hand the Libyan crisis to the Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. On 9 March 2011 the Italian government authorized an undercover mission to get in contact with the newly-established NTC gathering Qaddafi's opposition. A few Italian emissaries met Mustafa 'Abd al-Jalil, NTC's spokesperson, and Mahmud Jibril, *de facto* NTC's prime minister. The mission served the scope of opening

the dialogue with Libyan insurgents with a view to mediate future potential intra-Libyan talks.

The turning point for Italy's cautious approach came on 17 March 2011. That evening the UN Security Council endorsed the Resolution 1973/2011 imposing a no-fly zone over Libya and authorizing the use of force in order to protect Libyan civilians. Italy's Prime Minister Berlusconi and other high officials of the state were at the theatre in Rome celebrating the 150th anniversary of Italy's unity. Berlusconi, some of its ministers, and the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, gathered to define Italy's strategy on Libya. The head of the Italian government strenuously continued to oppose an Italian direct military intervention by virtue of Benghazi treaty and loyalty to Qaddafi, whereas the other Italian officials pushed for the alignment to the UN and NATO allies' positions. Eventually Berlusconi yielded, yet he adopted a non-combat approach. Italy put seven military bases, logistics, reconnaissance flights, and *Suppression of Enemy Air Defences* (SEAD) at the international coalition's disposal. Rome wanted to prevent unilateral actions that might have jeopardized its interests in Libya; thus, Italy along with the UK became one of the greater advocates of the multilateral approach and a vehement supporter of the NATO-led unified operation. Until the end of March 2011, the Italian government kept in touch with Qaddafi and the Libyan regime trying to act as a mediator and safeguard its position in Libya. At the end of the month, military operations were unified under the NATO and it became clear that the international intervention was seriously undermining Libyan infrastructures and downsizing pro-regime forces leading to a purported Qaddafi's fall. Consequently, Rome decided to proceed towards an open fight against Qaddafi's rule and support the anti-regime forces. After signing a gentlemen's agreement with 'Abd al-Jalil to regulate Italian presence and Eni's activities in Libya, on 25 April 2011 Berlusconi authorized Italian air force to open fire. Despite Berlusconi's initial hesitation, Italy's contribution to the fall of Qaddafi's regime was substantial. Italy's intervention under NATO let Rome protect its interests in Libya; however, Qaddafi's death and fall sealed the end of the special and unique relation between Rome and Tripoli.²⁴

²⁴ Palma, L., *Il nostro miglior nemico. Gheddafi, l'Italia e il Mediterraneo dalla Guerra Fredda alle Rivolte arabe*, in: Folco Biagini, A. (ed.), *Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell'ordine internazionale*, Castelvecchi, Roma, 2020, pp. 65-85.

In the post-revolution, Italian authorities decided to provide Libyans with capacity-building and training programmes through a series of military operations: Operation *Cirene* from 2011 to 2013 and Operation *Coorte* under the Italian Military Mission in Libya (*Missione militare italiana in Libia*, MIL) between 2013 and 2015.²⁵

The following years were characterized by various attempts to ensure a reliable and legitimate political system to Libyans. Since 2014, the tensions between the factions controlling different parts of the Libyan territory have blown up. At the time, the Italian government was headed by Matteo Renzi (PD), who decided to adopt a more assertive policy towards Libya. The new attitude was clearly stated in the Italy's Defence White Book published in April 2015 and in an article issued a month later on "Foreign Affairs" by the Foreign Minister of Italy, Paolo Gentiloni. In the former, Italy presented itself as ready to play a proactive role in the management of the Euro-Mediterranean crisis, starting with Libya; in the latter, Gentiloni envisaged a «pivot to the Mediterranean» for Italy, consisting in a deeper engagement of the country in leading the multilateral efforts to oversee a series of key domains for the future of Libya and its stabilization. Among those aspects, the management of migration flows and the fight against terrorism represented the top priorities of Italy's agenda. Despite US insistence to send some troops on the ground, Renzi continuously refused to consider military options and prioritized a comprehensive political and diplomatic approach. At the end of 2015, Italy's mediation efforts resulted in a peace conference held in Rome to foster intra-Libyan dialogue and set the ground for a political agreement between Libyan militias and political groups. The Rome peace conference led to the historic Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) of 17 December 2015. In Skhirat (Morocco), Italy and its Western allies mediated the dialogue between the two centres of powers operating in Libya at the time, the Tripoli-based GNC and the Tobruk-based House of Representatives. Despite the efforts of the international community to involve all the parties interested, the fragmentation of Libyan society and politics prevented the UN to effectively identify the different interlocutors. Therefore, the Tobruk parliament as well as

²⁵ Ministero della Difesa. Esercito, *Missione bilaterale di assistenza e supporto in Libia (MIASIT)*, http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Libia-MIL.aspx. Last accessed: 16 January 2021.

other militias excluded from the LPA never recognized and explicitly boycotted the internationally supported GNA established through the Skhirat agreement. Such a motley socio-political context compelled Italy to encourage the overture of a parallel dialogue beyond the LPA. Through this multifaceted strategy of Italy, as well as of other foreign powers, the militias unrecognized by the structured LPA and the ones that did not benefit from it strengthened their military and political clout and legitimization.²⁶ The construction of a military hospital nearby Misrata airport under the Operation “*Ippocrate*” carried out by the Italian army represents an interesting case in point. Between September and December 2017, through the Operation *Ippocrate* Rome deployed a 300-trooper task force to provide the Libyan forces fighting against Daesh with healthcare.²⁷ Even if the construction of the Misrata field hospital responded to an explicit request of the GNA, Operation *Ippocrate* supported the militias operating in the city and the surrounding of Misrata that in the near future would oppose the settlement of the GNA in Tripoli.²⁸

In January 2017 Italy reopened its embassy in Tripoli after a two-year hiatus.²⁹ It was the first step of the major engagement of Italy with the GNA guided by al-Sarraj. Since 2015, Italy and the EU were coping with the migrant crisis, a period of dramatically increased movement of migrants towards Europe from the Middle East and Africa. The migrants crossed the Aegean Sea and then reached Europe through the so-called Balkan route; alternatively, they crossed the Mediterranean Sea to make landfall in the southern Europe’s shores. The latter route was and still is the deadliest pathway of migration. Italy was particularly affected by the surge of migrants and this phenomenon started to entail a wide range of political considerations. Most of the migrants reaching Italian coasts came from Libya, where the constant political instability prevented a centralized control over migration flows crossing and leaving the territory.

²⁶ Termine, L., «*Un mondo diverso*». *La politica estera italiana verso la Libia dopo il 2011*, in: Folco Biagini, A. (ed.), *Tripoli, Italia. La politica di potenza nel Mediterraneo e la crisi dell’ordine internazionale*, Castelvecchi, Roma, 2020, pp. 91-93.

²⁷ Ministero della Difesa. Esercito, *Libia – Operazione Ippocrate – Schieramento di un ospedale da campo in Libia*, http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Libia-Operazione-Ippocrate.aspx. Last accessed: 11 January 2022.

²⁸ Termine, L., «*Un mondo diverso*», p. 92.

²⁹ Tosti di Stefano, E., *Cronologia*, p. 174.

Italy's foreign approach in the Mediterranean region, namely with Libya, began to particularly focus on the migration dossier, since it fiercely animated the domestic public debate. The government guided by Paolo Gentiloni (PD) struck a deal with the Libyan GNA signing a Memorandum of Understanding aiming to control migration flows and foster Libya's stabilization. By virtue of this agreement, Rome has provided the GNA with funds, training, and equipment to manage land and maritime borders. The Libyan border patrol and coast guard mainly benefit from the Italian-Libyan deal.

Besides the Memorandum of Understanding, Rome started an active campaign to open the dialogue with and between the number of tribes controlling Libya's porous southern border. The objective of Italian diplomatic efforts was to mitigate the conflicts between the groups controlling the area in order to better regulate migration routes from sub-Saharan Africa and hinder migrant smugglers. On 31 March 2017 southern Libya's tribes – Tebu, Tuareg, Suleiman – signed in Rome a peace deal for the control of Libyan borders with Algeria, Nigeria, and Chad. The Italian government committed to promote the development of the Fezzan region in exchange. Two months later, Italy agreed with Libya, Chad, Mali, and Niger to create a direction cabin for contrasting the smuggling of migrants. The widespread approach on migration conducted by the Italian government with Libya was sponsored by Italy's Interior Minister Marco Minniti and effectively reduced the number of migrants reaching Italy in the short term. Nevertheless, the bargaining chip acquired through those deals by the different actors operating in the Libyan territory seriously threatened the purpose of bolstering the GNA's legitimisation within Libya and in the international community. Meanwhile, the growing role played by outside powers, such as Egypt, Russia, and the UAE, which were gradually replacing Trump's USA, embroiled in a major retrenchment from the wider Mediterranean, provided a significant support to Haftar and his forces. The power balance shift resulted in a further weakening of UN-led efforts to strengthen the Tripoli-based government, to the detriments of Italian strategy in Libya.³⁰

Since 2018, the Operation *Ippocrate* and the training activities delivered for the benefit of the Libyan Coast Guard were rearranged under a unique

³⁰ Termine, L., «Un mondo diverso», pp. 94-96.

system, the “Bilateral Assistance and Support Mission in Libya” (*Missione bilaterale di assistenza e support in Libia*, MIASIT) aiming to sustain the Libyan GNA with a view to the country stabilization and the control of illegal migrants’ routes. The MIASIT provides security assistance and health and humanitarian aid.³¹

On 12 and 13 November 2018, the Italian government held in Palermo an international conference on Libya to revamp the UN roadmap for the Libyan political stabilization. The Italian government was headed by Giuseppe Conte (independent), who was charged of restoring Italy’s strength in the management of the Libyan crisis by US President Trump a few months before the Palermo conference. For the first time, Rome opened up to Haftar in an official occasion organized by Italy itself. General Khalifa Haftar did not participate to the plenary sessions of the conference, but he had some bilateral talks with some of the representatives in Palermo. In his first government (2018-2019), Conte developed a policy of wary overture towards Haftar in the light of the general elections that would have been held in spring 2019 and may have rewarded the Cyrenaica-based General. Italy’s political and diplomatic efforts to embroil all Libyan parties into the conference and engage with the major external powers involved in the Libyan scenario were not compensate. Indeed, not only did many important leaders – Trump, Putin, Merkel, and Macron among them – miss the summit, but significant allies such as Turkey left the conference. In addition, Libyan tribes and militias autonomously controlling important areas and/or cities – from Zintan to Misrata – did not participate to the international summit. Italian mediation’s credibility deteriorated, since the Palermo conference has been seen by foreign powers as a unilateral act to restore Italian centrality upon Libyan events. Nevertheless, the summit has partly relaunched the UN roadmap, and Italy’s efforts have not been completely fruitless. In accordance with Italian orientation, Palermo’s outcomes focused on the reorganisation of Libya’s economic and financial institutions and the greater involvement into the political dialogue of military groups and factions that effectively control the Libyan

³¹ Ministero della Difesa. Esercito, *Missione bilaterale di assistenza e supporto in Libia (MIASIT)*, http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Libia-MIL.aspx. Last accessed: 16 January 2021.

territory.³² Even though no binding documents were signed, the negotiators agreed on the UN's top priorities for the conference: the organisation of a national conference in Libya and a new date for the general elections in the following year; however, no target dates were outlined.³³

When al-Sarraj called its major allies for help— Algiers, Ankara, London, Rome, and Washington – to respond to Haftar's attack to Tripoli, Rome abided by its traditional approach to avoid any military intervention. Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed the importance of diplomatic and political means to favour Libyan peace process and stabilization. In accordance with the EU's official position, Italy refused every kind of external interference on Libyan conflict.³⁴ The Italian Foreign Minister claimed Rome was adopting a realist approach towards the Libyan crisis. In the words of Di Maio, Italy's policy was not driven by a principle of «equidistance» but of «realpolitik» and aimed at fostering the dialogue with all the parties, Libyan and not-Libyan, involved in the conflict.³⁵

The absolute priority of Libya for Italy's foreign policy should not be underestimated by the refusal of militarily backing Fayeze al Sarraj. As a case in point, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently decided to broaden the Italian diplomatic network in Libya through the appointment of a new consul in Benghazi, after an eight-year hiatus due to the attack against then-consul Guido de Sanctis, and a Special Envoy to Libya to guarantee Italy's participation to all multilateral initiatives sustaining Libyan peace process.³⁶

Moreover, the new Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, appointed on 13 February 2021, chose Libya as a destination for his first foreign visit. The Turkish and Russian military intervention on the ground capitalized Ankara's and

³² Varvelli, A., *Libia: conferenza di Palermo, il bilancio dell'Italia*, "ISPI", 12 December 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/libia-conferenza-di-palermo-il-bilancio-dellitalia-21773>. Last accessed: 12 January 2022.

³³ *La conferenza sulla Libia non è stata un successo*, "Il Post", 14 November 2018, <https://www.ilpost.it/2018/11/14/conferenza-libia-palermo-fallimento/>. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

³⁴ *Libia, Sarraj, chiede aiuto a 5 paesi*, "Ansa", 20 December 2019, https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2019/12/20/sarraj-italia-e-altri-paesi-ci-aiutino_dabbc10-cb61-4522-bae4-c60b85411bd5.html. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

³⁵ De Marchis, G., *Di Maio: "Sulla Libia serve realismo. L'Italia non si schiera nella guerra"*, "Repubblica", 18 December 2019, https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/12/18/news/di_maio_sulla_libia_serve_realismo_l_italia_non_si_schiera_nella_guerra_-301014094/. Last accessed: 16 January 2022.

³⁶ Rossi, E., *Unire le forze, per il bene dei libici. Parla l'inviato speciale amb. Ferrara*, "Formiche", 14 January 2021, <https://formiche.net/2021/01/unire-le-forze-per-il-bene-dei-libici-parla-linviato-speciale-amb-ferrara/>. Last accessed: 16 January 2022.

Moscow's influence on Libya's stabilization process and future arrangement, resulting in a demotion of Italy's role in the management of the crisis. Draghi met his Libyan counterpart Dbeibeh to rebuild Italian-Libyan deep-rooted friendship and held a series of talks to relaunch Libyan exports and trade relations particularly with European partners. In the view of the two politicians, Italy-Libya cooperation will encompass the energy sector, health care, infrastructures, and culture. Moreover, a joint visit of Italian, French, and German Ministers of Foreign Affairs to Tripoli had preceded Draghi's official visit to reinforce the EU's positioning and regain the lost ground.³⁷

In the Italo-Libyan current partnership, the economic dimension takes on great importance. In late May, Dbeibeh participate to the first edition of the Italian-Libyan business forum to meet Italian majors' executives. Eni, Leonardo, Fincantieri, and other significant Italian business heavyweights attended the meeting. Indeed, even though the militarization and the internationalisation of the Libyan crisis have jeopardized Italy's political influence and room for manoeuvre on Libyan events, from the Italian perspective, strengthening Libyan economy is an essential step both to revive the bilateral partnership between Rome and Tripoli as well as to promote a process of institution building and legitimacy among Libyan society. According to Rome's strategy, an economic stabilization of Libya can positively affect the relationship with Italy even on the management of the migration issue.³⁸

3. Turkey and Libya

Nowadays Turkey is Libya's closest ally. Indeed, Turkey's military intervention to support the GNA in 2020 prevented the entire Libya to fall into the hands of Haftar's rule. Ankara deployed its military formations in Libya and equipped Libyan forces with high-technology military furniture which resulted to be essential in order to push Haftar's forces out of the western part of the country. But this is not the first time Turks help the people of Tripoli to free themselves from invaders in Libyan history. In fact, back in 1551 the Ottoman Turks provided

³⁷ *La visita di Draghi in Libia*, "ISPI", 6 April 2021, <https://www.ISPIonline.it/it/pubblicazione/la-visita-di-draghi-libia-29901>. Last accessed: 14 January 2022.

³⁸ Cristiani, D. & Colombo, S., *Making Sense of Italy's Renewed Economic Diplomacy towards Libya*, "IAI Commentaries 21", No. 35, 2021, p. 2.

whom we can consider the ancestors of modern western Libyans with considerable military support to expel the Knights of St. John from Malta. Since then, the Ottomans extended their rule over the territory of current Libya which became part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries before being seized by Italy in 1911. In the light of the foregoing, Libya and Turkey share deep-rooted historical, cultural, and religious ties that have favoured their partnership throughout the recent developments.³⁹

After the independence of Libya, Turkish-Libyan relations developed primarily in the economic domain. During the forty-year Qaddafi's regime, Ankara enjoyed good political and economic relations with Libya. In particular, since the 1970s, Ankara has had extensive economic interests in Libya, especially in the construction sector. From 1972 onwards, the monetary value of contracts signed between Libya and Turkish firms are estimated to amount to \$40 billion.⁴⁰

When 2011 uprisings burst out in the Middle Eastern and North African region, Ankara committed to extend its outreach all over the regional arch through political, military, and economic means. With regard to the military intervention on the ground during 2011 Libyan revolutionary context, at first Turkey adopted a cautious approach through a strong opposition to Western-led air strikes. Turkey tried to persuade Qaddafi to abdicate hoping to a shift in power as bloodless as possible. Despite the sudden intervention of its NATO's allies, Ankara resisted military action against Libya until it was clear the operations were handed over by NATO and unified under a single multilateral command. At the end of March 2011, the Turkish parliament approved the motion to send a naval force off Libya to patrol the area submitted to the UN arms embargo.⁴¹

When siding with the rebels, Turkey recognized the NTC as the legitimate representative of Libyans and sent humanitarian aid. In particular, Ankara has held a dialogue with the political elites based in Misrata, a city whose identity has been hugely shaped by the Ottoman legacy. However, Turkish promptitude in the

³⁹ El-Gamaty, G., *Turkey's role in the Reconstruction of Libya*, "Insight Turkey", Vol. 22, No. 4, 2020, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁰ Zoubir, Y. H., *The Protracted Civil War in Libya: the Role of Outside Powers*, "Insight Turkey", Vol. 22, No. 4, 2020, pp. 15-16.

⁴¹ *Turkey reluctantly joins NATO operations against Libya*, "France24", 24 March 2011, <https://www.france24.com/en/20110324-turkey-allows-nato-command-libya-military-operations-vote>.

Last accessed: 17 January 2022.

various contexts hit by the 2011 uprisings clashed with a general defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood's affiliates, ideologically close to the AKP's political identity.⁴²

Since 2015, the new Libyan GNA established by the Skhirat agreements has found a loyal ally in Erdoğan. Throughout its all existence, Turkey has been an important supporter of al-Sarraj's government and its close macrocosm of militias with Islamist foundations. Nevertheless, the major turning point for Turkey in the Libyan game came after the attack launched by Haftar against the GNA in April 2019. Turkey accused the Cyrenaica-based General of committing a coup d'état and war crimes. Ankara started to secretly send military equipment to Tripoli, and a few weeks after the beginning of the conflict some Turkish military trainers landed in Libya. Despite Turkey's help, the battling fronts were unbalanced since Haftar was backed by a vast international coalition gathering the UAE, Egypt, Russia, and France. On the contrary, Al-Sarraj's allies did not show any willingness to come to the GNA's rescue, even if the situation on the ground was worsening day by day. Such a precarious context represented a great opportunity for Turkey to secure its position in Libya and prompt Tripoli to coordinate with Ankara. Turkey envisaged a formal alliance with the GNA to make its military intervention on Libya's side manifest and even deploy more forces on the Libyan ground. In exchange, the Tripoli-based government would have assured Ankara the demarcation of their maritime border, a fundamental piece for Erdoğan's Mediterranean great game. Therefore, on 27 November 2019 Erdoğan and al-Sarraj signed two remarkable Memoranda of Understanding to seal their security and military cooperation as well as their maritime boundaries. Less than a month later, al-Sarraj called its international allies for help in the battle of Tripoli, but only Ankara responded to the Libyan plea notwithstanding UN arms embargo imposed on Libya and by virtue of their already-signed agreement. Turkey deployed troops, air defence systems, and artillery to the benefit of the GNA. Turkish Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) Bayraktar TB2 turned out to be extremely effective in pushing Haftar's offensive back. In addition, Turkey relocated in Libya funded mercenaries from Syrian battlefield associated to groups close to jihadist terrorism. The Turkish-backed GNA's counter-offensive

⁴² Raineri, L., *Nelle Libie non tutto è perduto*, in: *Il turco alla porta*, "Limes", No. 10, 2020, pp. 107-108.

in May 2020 reconquered al-Watiya airbase, located southwest of Tripoli, a strategic target for the GNA to retain its gains in the western part of Libya and cease LNA's supply lines. Eventually, GNA's military operations supported by Ankara successfully crushed Haftar's troops and relegate them eastward the city of Sirte, which has a vital value in Haftar's support lines because it is directly connected to al-Jufra airbase used by Russian air force to sustain the mercenaries of the Russian Wagner Group, aligned with the LNA.

Turkey's foreign policy around Libya and its direct military intervention on the ground responded to many yet interlinked Turkish strategic reasons. Even though the formal official argument offered to justify Ankara's direct military intervention in Libya has always relied on the legitimacy of the response to an allied government's – the GNA – call for help, Turkey's major engagement in Libya since 2019 has aimed to secure Turkish political, economic, energy, and military interests in Libya and, at the same time, has served broader Turkey's geopolitical and geostrategic objectives.

As previously said, Turkey and Libya enjoyed good bilateral relations before the upsurge of 2011 revolts. Their ties encompassed political, economic, and energy domains; thus, Turkey has cultivated significant interests in Libya. When Qaddafi was overthrown and 2011 uprisings burst out, Turkish firms had to withdraw their projects and experienced massive economic losses. Libya is appraised to have not paid to Turkey about \$15 billion in contractual obligations. In addition, Libya's reconstruction after a decade of deadly civil wars raises the stakes of Libya's economic appeal.⁴³ Turkey is indeed interested to invest and participate in the post-conflict rebuilding of Libya. This strategic priority for Turkey may be welcomed by the new Libyan sole executive because new Libya's Prime Minister Dbeibeh happens to be a businessman in the construction sector from Misrata.⁴⁴ Besides the reconstruction of the country, Turkey is deeply interested in safeguarding the series of deals signed with al-Sarraj, before Dbeibeh's GNU replaced the GNA. Those agreements have embraced economic, energy, and security sectors. First, the Turkish-Libyan cooperation in the construction sector

⁴³ Zoubir, Y. H., *The Protracted Civil War in Libya*, pp. 15-17.

⁴⁴ Dalay, G., *Turkey's Libya Policy: New Flexibility, New Goals*, "ISPI", 27 May 2021, <https://www.ISPIonline.it/it/pubblicazione/turkeys-libya-policy-new-flexibility-new-goals-30609>. Last accessed: 18 January 2022.

has been extended. Second, the GNA has authorized the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) to perform some exploration activities in the Libyan waters. Third, Turkey is likely to spend its freshly acquired bargaining chip in the Libyan match to earn the formal concession and upgrade the capacity of al-Watiya air and Misrata naval bases.⁴⁵ In April 2021, Turkey managed to secure the deals previously signed through the sealing of a series of Memoranda of Understanding in the energy, infrastructure, and media domains with newly-formed Dbeibah's government.

Turkish direct engagement in the Libyan conflict entails also geopolitical considerations. Indeed, Turkey's intervention is part of the regional power fray occurring within the Arab world. The growing LNA's support from Turkey's great foes, namely, Egypt and the UAE, has pushed Ankara to openly intervene in the conflict for gaining greater influence in the region. The animosity among Arab forces also hinges on ideological facets underpinning different esteems of political Islam. While Egypt and the UAE do not look favourably on the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology as a way to decline political Islam, Turkey and Qatar are the main regional sponsors of Muslim Brotherhood's affiliates all over the Middle Eastern and North African region.

The second geopolitical and geostrategic reason which has driven Ankara's assertiveness in Libya pertains the Turkish role in the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation. Through the November 2019 Memorandum of Understanding on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas with the GNA, Turkey has ensured that the Libyan proxy war and the competition in the Eastern Mediterranean have been tied up together. As it will be thoroughly analysed in the third chapter of this work, in the Eastern Mediterranean Turkey has been suffering from growing exclusion both from security networks and the marketing of Eastern Mediterranean gas which associate nearby all littoral states, alongside European significant players and with the US endorsement. Despite its contested legality, the Turkish-Libyan Memorandum has broken the isolation of Turkey and assured Ankara a role in the Eastern Mediterranean plot. Erdoğan has declared that the Memorandum «has foiled certain conspiracies» against Turkey.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Tanriverdi Yasar, N., *In Libia prende forma la grande strategia Mediterranea di Ankara*, in: *Il turco alla porta*, "Limes", No. 10, 2020, pp. 126-127.

⁴⁶ Zoubir, Y. H., *The Protracted Civil War in Libya*, pp. 16-17.

Furthermore, the maritime geopolitics which is partly driving Turkey's Libya policy has been demonstrating by the significant deployment of Turkish naval vessels offshore Libya and by the major exploitation of the Turkish naval forces in the conduction of the counter-offensive against the LNA when backing al-Sarraj's Tripoli government. Turkish Navy's operations in Libyan waters have been the first structured naval activities performed by Ankara far away Turkish mainland.⁴⁷

The recent developments of Turkey's Libya policy concern the attempts to include the Eastern Libya in the country stabilization process. In order to secure its interests in Libya, Ankara needs to open channels of communication with the eastern part of the country and so with the main Haftar's backers. The recent efforts undertaken by Turkey and Egypt to normalize their relations fits into this strategy. In 2021, Ankara resumed diplomatic relations with Cairo, and for the first time since 2013, Turkish officials went to Egypt. In May, Erdoğan inaugurated the new phase of Turkish-Egyptian relations after some preliminary rounds of talks. A second round of meetings occurred in late summer 2021 in Ankara.⁴⁸ Libya has been at the core of the disagreement between the two countries after the rupture of their diplomatic ties; however, the Turkish-Egyptian renewed dialogue may initiate a new phase even on the Libyan dossier. In particular, the UN-led international community's demand to withdraw the foreign mercenaries and troops from Libya may be central in the talks between Turkey and Egypt. Ankara is willing to retreat pro-Turkish Syrian soldiers, in exchange for the withdrawal of Wagner Group's Russian mercenaries close to Cairo, but it appears that Turkey is unlikely to forsake its forces operating in Libya in the light of the security agreement sealed with al-Sarraj's GNA.⁴⁹ Turkey adopted a defiladed role during the Paris Conference on Libya held in November 2021 which particularly insisted on the necessity to withdraw the foreign military forces from Libya to guarantee a political and Libyan-led peace process. But, from Turkish

⁴⁷ Morengi, D., *La nuova postura della Marina turca e le crescenti ambizioni di Ankara nel Mediterraneo*, "Ce.S.I. Centro Studi Internazionali", 3 August 2020, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/articoli/1167/la-nuova-postura-della-marina-turca-e-le-crescenti-ambizioni-di-ankara-nel-mediterraneo>. Last accessed: 19 January 2022.

⁴⁸ *Turkey, Egypt hold 2nd round of political talks in Ankara*, "Daily Sabah", 7 September 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-egypt-hold-2nd-round-of-political-talks-in-ankara>. Last accessed: 19 January 2022.

⁴⁹ Dalay, G., *Turkey's Libya Policy*. Last accessed: 18 January 2022.

perspective, the militarily abandonment of Libya would definitely abate its influence on Libyan and Mediterranean events.

4. Libya's significance in the Italo-Turkish current partnership

Italy and Turkey have always been on the same side throughout all the post-2011 Libyan events. Their policies on Libya aim at the stabilization of the country which serves strategic interests for both of the countries. While some of these interests' domains overlap, namely, in the economic and energy sector, some others are first concerns for just one of the two powers, such as the migration issue for Rome and military assets for Ankara. Thus, Libya represents a top priority for both foreign policy's agendas.

Italian and Turkish officials have continuously praised their bilateral constructive efforts in the stabilization of Libya. Both Italian and Turkish officials have hailed the close bilateral dialogue on Libya and assured that the two countries will further cooperate on the Libyan dossier under UN auspices to ensure a political and permanent solution to the crisis.⁵⁰

Italo-Turkish cooperation on Libya is undoubtedly a strong commitment for both of the countries; however, their approaches towards Libya have been slightly different especially since 2018. At the time, Italy started to open the dialogue with Haftar therefore legitimating its role in the Libyan struggle for power. On the contrary, Ankara has always adopted a strict policy of condemnation against LNA's leader and its international supporters. When the Italian government held the Palermo conference to revive the UNSMIL's roadmap and facilitate the dialogue between all Libyan parties, Haftar included, Turkey walked away from the table in protest.

Eventually, Italy's «realpolitik» towards Libya appeared to be vain and resulted in an increasing marginalisation of Rome from Libya, whereas Turkish consistent assertiveness on Libya has considerably enhanced Ankara's influence in the country. The unbalance has pushed the former to try to regain the lost appeal and the latter to seek to maintain its grip on the ground.

⁵⁰ 'Turkey, Italy positively contributed to political solution in Libya', "Daily Sabah", 12 March 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-italy-positively-contributed-to-political-solution-in-libya>. Last accessed: 19 January 2022.

Recently, there has been a convergence between Italian, French, and German interests in Libya which turned into concrete political efforts to coordinate a European action towards the country. Rome, Paris, and Berlin desire to demilitarize and de-internationalise the Libya crisis, control migration flows and reopen the oil fields.⁵¹ Paris has reoriented its foreign policy on Libya towards the traditional “Italian posture”. Alongside this European renewed arrangement, Italy and France have recently signed an historic deal – the Treaty between the Italian Republic and the French Republic for enhanced bilateral cooperation - which is going to further broaden the cooperation between Paris and Rome on various dossiers, after some years of strained relations even upon their Mediterranean foreign policies.

The alignment between the EU most important member states might jeopardize Turkey’s political and economic clout on Libya. In particular, Turkey has been at loggerheads with France in almost every Mediterranean facet of international competition, Libya not excluded. To be a case in point, while praising Italo-Turkish joint work in Libya, Turkey’s Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu criticized EU’s naval mission IRINI, mandated to implement UN arms embargo on Libya, claiming that it is «not balanced» since it ignores «constant arms transfers to Haftar by France». In response, Italy’s Foreign Minister Di Maio described IRINI as a balanced naval operation which controls the arrival of all arms from all direction.⁵² Ankara has always acknowledged Italian efforts to hold the balanced stance within the EU and in the Mediterranean issues, but once the “Quirinale Treaty” will turn into concrete policies Italy may lose its mediation role in the eyes of Turkey, in the context of war-torn Libya too.

The cooperative framework between Italy and Turkey in Libya is not immune from weaknesses. Indeed, both Rome and Ankara bear strong energy interests in Libya through the massive investments and engagement of Eni and the TPAO. While the two actors converge on the need to fully restore Libyan oil and gas production, they also compete for obtaining larger energy market shares.

⁵¹ Fenili, D. R., *Italy’s New Approach to Libya*, “RUSI”, 24 August 2020, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/italys-new-approach-libya>. Last accessed: 19 January 2022.

⁵² *Turkey says will work with Italy for Libya peace, excoriates EU*, “France24”, 19 June 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200619-turkey-says-will-work-with-italy-for-libya-peace-excoriates-eu>. Last accessed: 19 January 2022.

In addition, Italian and international observers fear that the successful Turkish intervention in the Libyan conflict may become for Turkey a model of warfare to be exported in the wider Mediterranean. The large use of mercenaries and drones instead of conventional soldiers and weaponry has recorded a positive cost-benefit assessment. However, Italy traditionally opposes any kind of military intervention in conflicts, so it may not welcome Turkish increasingly assertive military posture in the region.

Finally, since Turkey's leverage increased in Libyan stabilization process, Ankara holds a significant bargaining chip upon Italy on migration-related questions. Turkey is the south-eastern stronghold of "fortress Europe", while Libya serves the same scope to Italy, but in the south-central Mediterranean. Turkey controls the Balkan Route, and, to some extent, it has become an important player to deal with in the management of the Central Mediterranean Route. For Italy, this means Turkey can play a leading role in curbing the number of migrants crossing both the Balkans and the Mediterranean Sea towards Italy.

III

The Eastern Mediterranean morass

The Eastern Mediterranean is a maritime region which embraces the Eastern waters of the Mediterranean Sea along with its coastal zones and countries. The Eastern Mediterranean region has traditionally undergone turmoil and instability, but only recently the whole region has topped policymakers' agendas. Indeed, bilateral disputes, regional tensions and even broader interests converge in the Eastern Mediterranean, making the region a playground for many, whereas intertwined, geopolitical and energy matches.

The strategic importance of the region conceived as a whole has emerged in the last decade, due to the post-2011 destabilization in North Africa and Middle East, and after the discovery of extensive gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean waters. Besides the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the unsolved Cyprus crisis, the failure of 2011 Syrian uprisings and the subsequent war, the rise and fall of the Islamic State, and the sharp growth of migration flows crossing Turkey and reaching Greece have summoned international attention towards the Eastern Mediterranean and led to international responses, often through foreign countries' involvement on number of dossiers. In addition, the presence itself of gas resources has set the ground for the establishment, or usually the resumption, of international competition over the definition of maritime exploitation rights and the management of the Eastern Mediterranean gas. However, the considerable energy prosperity has represented also an opportunity to enhance regional dialogue and favour cooperation between some littoral states.

Being the meeting point between Europe's southern and eastern neighbourhoods, the Eastern Mediterranean represents a core interest for Brussels, willing to ensure energy security and counterbalance Russian presence in the region after US' major retrenchment. At the same time, Syrian and Libyan proxy wars have settled the fray within the Sunni Muslim world, pitting Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt – as well as Israel – against Turkey and Qatar, and the rivalry has impinged upon the demarcation of maritime borders in the Mediterranean basin.

In this context, Italy and Turkey have been playing significant roles, and the developments in the region have inevitably affected their relation. Despite adopting a defiladed attitude towards the Syrian crisis and all related issues, Italy has been intensely involved in the energy equation of the Eastern Mediterranean. Not only has Rome significant economic interests in the management of the Mediterranean gas – the Italian energy company Eni has been conducting several drilling activities and is a leading company in the extraction of the Levantine gas – but it also promoted the establishment and joined many coastal countries in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), a multilateral platform to promote structured policy dialogue and build a regional gas market. On the other hand, Turkey has carried out a multifaceted foreign policy after 2011, as it has been mentioned in the first chapter of this work, encompassing the Syrian battlefield, the control of migration flows heading towards EU borders and, of course, the gas exploration activities within its – as Ankara claims – maritime borders. The Levantine gas’ issues have been merged with the conflict in Libya with the November 2019 Turkish-Libyan agreement sealing Turkish-Libyan maritime borders and related offshore resources’ exploitation rights, in exchange of Turkish military assistance to the GNA. Italian-Turkish alliance in Libya has therefore acquired a new dimension, being directly connected with the maritime quarrels in the Levantine basin.

Since the aim of this work is to assess Italian-Turkish relations in the Mediterranean basin investigating the contexts where the two actors mainly interact, this chapter will be particularly focused on the gas disputes emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean and the EMGF framework of cooperation. In fact, the relation between Rome and Ankara unfolds between Turkish regional isolation, and therefore renewed activism in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Italian mediation efforts in Brussels and with regional actors.

After furnishing some preliminary specific vocabulary related to the law of the sea and a brief theoretical frame of analysis, this chapter provides the reader with an overview of gas fields’ discoveries and subsequent quarrels over the definition of maritime borders between the regional actors, with a particular focus on Turkey’s strategy – inspired and nurtured by *Mavi Vatan* doctrine – and its activism in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Following an analysis of the origin,

the objectives and the development of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), the chapter presents Italian stance on the matter developed through the prominent role of Eni as an agent of energy diplomacy and Rome's mediation efforts in Brussels. Finally, it is claimed that Italian action in the Levantine basin reflects Rome's traditional foreign policy approach in the Mediterranean region.

1. Preliminary definitions

In order to fully address the issues related to the Eastern Mediterranean gas resources, it is necessary to provide some preliminary definitions of crucial and recurring concepts, related with the law of the sea, a body of public international customs and treaties which regulate peaceful relations on the sea.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), «The exclusive economic zone is an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, subject to the specific legal regime [...]».

In the exclusive economic zone, the coastal State has:

(a) sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds;

(b) jurisdiction as provided for in the relevant provisions of this Convention with regard to the establishment and use of artificial islands, installations and structures; marine scientific research; the protection and preservation of the marine environment; other rights and duties provided for in this Convention.».¹

Normal baseline: According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), «Except where otherwise provided in this Convention, the normal baseline for measuring the breadth of the territorial sea is the low-water line along the coast as marked on large-scale charts officially recognized by the coastal State.».²

¹ *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)*, Part V. Exclusive Economic Zone, Article 55, Article 56, 1982.

² *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)*, Part II. Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone, Article 5, 1982.

Continental shelf: According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), «The continental shelf of a coastal State comprises the seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance.»³

2. Theoretical framework of analysis

The monetization perspective of the Eastern Mediterranean gas bonanza requires to set up an interdependence pattern among importers, exporters, and transit states. Neighbouring states efforts to develop and transport natural resources such as gas and oil, while sidelining foreign firms, is referred as “resource regionalism”. The main form of resource regionalism is the pipeline hypothesis. Energy infrastructures are complex, often costly and compel close policy coordination among different actors, thus promoting multi-level and multilateral dialogue. The pipelines projects to extract Eastern Mediterranean gas are an example of resource regionalism. Cooperation in the monetization of natural resources usually spills over into other domains, for example in developing joint defensive initiatives to safeguard energy infrastructures.

According to the liberal tradition, what is called “peace pipeline hypothesis” holds that the economic linkages between states cooperating in energy development favour peace since they increase trade and investments, thus curbing potential sources of conflicts and strengthening interdependence. This is presented as a win-win approach, and in such a hypothesis the mere existence of natural resources would push regional countries to cooperate. However, liberal theories do not succeed in explaining the lack of cooperation between Turkey and the EMGF members.

According to realists, states’ choices for regional cooperation are guided by security concerns. The source of regionalism lies on the balance of power within the region itself; cooperation with some countries or conflict with others are chosen by the main actors when they sense a disequilibrium in power relations.

³ *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)*, Part VI. Continental Shelf, Article 76, 1982.

Finally, constructivists argues that inter-state relations are a product of a historical process, therefore resulting in gradual change in the identification of national core interests.⁴

In this work, it has been mainly adopted a realist approach in the explanation of power relations' development in the Eastern Mediterranean [Demyrol, Tanchum, Tziarras]; however, some constructivist theories have been also embraced.

3. Gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, potential markets and gas routes

The first discovery of significant reservoirs of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean dates back to 1999, when Noa gas field was located offshore Israel and the Palestinian territories. In 2000, another gas field, which was named Mari-B and contained 45 billion cubic metres of natural gas (BCM), was found southeast of Noa. After the findings of Noa and Mary-B, exploration activities accelerated leading to the game changer discoveries of major gas reservoirs from 2009 onwards. In January 2009, the US oil company Noble Energy – acquired by Chevron Corporation in 2020 – notified gas-bearing sands in the northern part of Israeli Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The gas field was named Tamar, and its amount of gas was estimated to be 240 BCM. Later that year, southeast of Tamar, Noble Energy located the smaller gas field of Dalit (8 BCM). In 2010, Noble Energy together with the Israeli energy companies Delek Drilling and Ratio Oil and Gas discovered the giant Israelian reservoir of Leviathan, with an estimated volume of 500 BCM of gas. In the following couple of years, exploration activities successfully continued with the discovery of Aphrodite off the southern coast of Cyprus (120 BCM) and minor fields of Tanin, Karish, Dolphin, Tamar SW, and Shimshon in Israeli EEZ.⁵ The giant gas field of Zohr was found in 2015 in the Egyptian EEZ, with an estimated 845 BCM of natural gas. Italy's Eni and France's Total announced Calypso (170-230 BCM) and Glaucus (142-227 BCM)

⁴ İpek, P. & Gür, V. T., *Turkey's Isolation from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum: ideational mechanisms and material interests in Energy Politics*, "Turkish Studies", Vol. 23, No. 5, 2021, pp. 2-5.

⁵ Israeli government. Ministry of Energy, *Exploration History*, <https://www.energy-sea.gov.il/English-Site/Pages/Oil%20And%20Gas%20in%20Israel/History-of-Oil--Gas-Exploration-and-Production-in-Israel.aspx>. Last accessed: 7 December 2021.

gas field discoveries offshore Cyprus in 2018 and 2019. Another estimated giant gas field was found by Eni in 2019 in the Nour prospect, offshore Egypt.⁶

However, Eastern Mediterranean gas reserves are appraised to exceed the amounts of gas hitherto discovered. The perspective of more and bigger discoveries of energy reservoirs in the basin has pushed coastal states to define their maritime borders, therefore their national jurisdiction and rights of exploitation, and pursue intense drilling activities.⁷

Gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have not revolutionised energy global markets, since the estimated resources represent only 2% of global energy reservoirs; however, they have definitely been a regional game changer in view of energy interdependence perspectives.⁸ Overlooking the Levant basin, there are very diverse countries that can differently benefit from Levantine gas exploitation. Lebanon, Jordan and the Gaza Strip are nearby markets with increasing domestic demand; Israel and Cyprus are medium weight states whose gas reserves exceed their domestic demand, so they are potential gas exporters; Turkey is the largest regional gas market due to its growing population and developed industrial sector; Egypt is a demographic giant and has the greater gas field of the region as well as a developed energy industry. On a broader scale, the European Union represents a potential great market for the Mediterranean gas since Brussels has developed a strategy for the diversification of its gas supplies.

In terms of export options, the Eastern Mediterranean gas can be exported as liquefied natural gas (LNG) or through pipelines. The LNG option allows exporters not to rely on third parties, but the construction of new LNG plants raises environmental concerns, and its cost is relatively high compared to pipeline solutions. In the Eastern Mediterranean there are not LNG facilities nearby hitherto discovered gas reservoirs. Thus, in the first place, one of the options on the table has been to pipe gas to Egypt through existing pipelines for domestic

⁶ Dentice, G., *Mediterraneo orientale: nuove dinamiche e sfide emergenti*, Ce.S.I Centro Studi Internazionali, February 2021, p. 6.

⁷ Demiryol, T., *Between security and prosperity: Turkey and the prospect of energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean*, "Turkish Studies", Vol. 20, No. 3, 2019, p. 448.

⁸ Pistelli, L., *Nella partita dell'EastMed perdono quasi tutti*, in: *Il turco alla porta*, "Limes", No. 10, 2020, p. 131.

consumption, and there, handle gas to be re-exported from the existing LNG terminals in Idku and Damietta, located on the Nile delta.

Concerning pipeline options, the two projects – a sub-sea pipeline from Leviathan field (Israeli EEZ) to Ceyhan (southern Turkey) and the East Mediterranean pipeline (commonly referred to as EastMed) – are continuously halted by political considerations. The Leviathan-Ceyhan route would supply both European and Turkish markets, that are looking for diversification of their supplies, and complement Caspian and Middle Eastern stocks. The pipeline would pass through Cypriot EEZ, but Nicosia is likely to ban the project due to the unsolved Cyprus issue that hinders peaceful relations between the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey.⁹ Alternatively, the Leviathan-Ceyhan pipeline might pass through Syria and Lebanon, a perspective that raises security concerns owing to the abiding political and economic instability of the two countries.

The second option – the EastMed pipeline – has gained much more fortune in the international scene, and the EU even designated the EastMed as a “Project of Common Interest”, a label given to infrastructure projects the EU prioritises to achieve its energy policy. EU’s Projects of Common Interest benefit from accelerated permitting procedures and fundings.¹⁰ In January 2020, the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, and Israel agreed on the EastMed project, even if Egypt, whose gas reservoirs are the largest in the region, did not participate to the deal. The EastMed pipeline would directly connect Mediterranean gas fields to Europe, with exit points in Cyprus, Crete and mainland Greece, and would have an intersection with the Interconnector Greece Italy (IGI) project. The length and depth of the EastMed pipeline made it the most ambitious and expensive project of all proposals, with an estimated cost of \$20 billion and a capacity between 10 and 16 BCM per year. The EastMed would pipe gas from the Levantine basin to Greece, and then from Greece to Italy – through the aforementioned IGI project. Doing so, the EastMed pipeline would reach Cyprus and Greece by crossing what Turkey claims to be its own EEZ.¹¹

⁹ Demiryol, T., *Between security and prosperity*, pp. 449-450.

¹⁰ European Commission, *Projects of Common Interest*, https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/infrastructure/projects-common-interest_en. Last accessed: 9 December 2021.

¹¹ Demiryol, T., *Between security and prosperity*, pp. 450-451.

Indeed, longstanding quarrels among regional players and benefits that vary from state to state hamper the coordination needed to put into practice each of these projects. In the Eastern Mediterranean basin, gas discoveries have reawakened deep-rooted animosities as well as set the ground for new disputes. On the other hand, the perspective of nearby low-cost energy supply, energy independence, and/or profits pushed some coastal state governments, and other significant actors such as the European Union, to enhance cooperation and launch common projects of development for the Mediterranean gas.

4. The East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF)

To fully develop the potential of the Mediterranean gas, cooperation efforts were institutionalized with the establishment of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). A 2018 Egyptian initiative created a platform aiming to promote structured policy dialogue on gas reserves, prompting Mediterranean countries to develop a sustainable regional gas market. At first, Egypt, Cyprus and Greece proclaimed their willing to set up the Forum, and opened the platform to further coordination with regional allies and international organizations. The initiative was embraced by the rest of EMGF's founding members: Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine. In January 2019 EMGF member states gathered in Cairo to define the structure of the Forum and its main objectives. The following meetings officially established the EMGF as an international organization and even constituted the EMGF Gas industry Advisory Committee (GIAC) aiming to include the private sector within the cooperative framework and to reach a balanced relation between the public and private sector. The EMGF attracted the interest of foreign countries and international organizations, which applied for membership or observer status. Nowadays, the EMGF has eight members – Cyprus, Egypt, France (since 2021), Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Palestine – and three observers – the United States of America, the World Bank Group, and the European Union; the GIAC includes 32 members among state-owned entities, transmission system operators, international oil companies, service companies

and EPC contractors¹², international financial institutions, and multiple organizations.

The EMGF aims to set common strategies based on a shared vision, shape a competitive regional gas market, secure supply and demand, and coordinate members' efforts to improve resource development.¹³

The EMGF gathers almost every Eastern Mediterranean coastal state, as well as Italy and France. Lebanon decided to not participate in the organization owing to the unsolved maritime border dispute with Israel, but the greater absentee is undoubtedly Turkey. Turkey, which has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, claims that the EMGF has clearly the objective of isolating Ankara and contrasting its expansionist vocation. It must be alleged that, except for the ambiguous role of Italy, which will be further analysed in detail, EMGF members indeed support anti-Turkish stances through the Forum, and that the EMGF reduces the importance of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) – which pipes Azeri gas to Turkey – and the TurkStream – siphoning Russian gas to Turkey.

5. Maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey's maritime disputes with the Republic of Cyprus and Greece

The first gas discoveries in the Levantine basin encouraged coastal states to demarcate their EEZs through bilateral agreements for the exploitation of Mediterranean gas. In fact, according to the UNCLOS, EEZ extends to a distance of no more than 200 nmi (nautical miles) off from the state coastal baseline, and the EEZ can be unilaterally declared by each state. But, when two states' EEZs overlap, the accordance of the two is required to define their respective EEZs. This has usually occurred between Levantine countries, since most of them – Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus – did not sign the UNCLOS and have long shores overlooking the tight portion of eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Republic of Cyprus started signing bilateral EEZ delimitation agreements in 2003 with Egypt, then it agreed EEZ demarcation with Lebanon in 2007, followed by the

¹² The label "EPC" stands for Engineering, Procurement & Construction. The EPC contract is a type of construction contract whereby the contractor is asked to deliver the complete project to the employer.

¹³ Emgf.org, *Overview*, <https://emgf.org/about-us/overview/>. Last accessed: 20 December 2021.

deal with Israel in 2010.¹⁴ The administration of the southern part of Cyprus unilaterally divided its maritime zone into 13 licensing blocks for energy exploration. In response to the agreements sewed up by Nicosia, Ankara and Lefkoşa delimited their continental shelves in September 2011. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus even issued licenses to the Turkish Petroleum Joint Stock Company (TPAO) to perform energy explorations in maritime blocks which partly overlapped the blocks drawn by the Republic of Cyprus.¹⁵ As previously mentioned, November 2019 witnessed the EEZ agreement between Turkey and the Libyan GNA. The Turkish-Libyan EEZ delimitation agreement has been deeply questioned by the international community because, according to the agreement, Turkish and Libyan waters would overlap Greek EEZ and a portion of Egyptian waters. In June 2020, Greece and Italy designated their EEZs; two months later, Athens signed a EEZ bilateral agreement with Cairo too.¹⁶

Comprehensively endorsed EEZ bilateral demarcation in such a narrow portion of sea implies an overall agreement on the criteria on which coastal lines are defined; however, the redrawing of Mediterranean maritime borders through aforementioned EEZ agreements is perceived by Turkey as a major threat for its maritime sovereign rights. Hence, Turkey has firmly opposed EEZ bilateral agreements between Levantine countries.

First, Ankara has strongly contested Cypriot maritime borders because they prevent the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – which is recognised by Turkey alone – to benefit from natural resources around the island. Turkey holds that gas fields belong to both communities living the island, thus drilling activities of international energy companies in disputed water are labelled as illegal by Ankara. Turkey did not welcome 2003 Cypriot-Egyptian EEZ agreement arguing it infringes Turkish continental shelf. Ankara has been pushing for a multilateral approach that do not imperil third parts' rights and do grant Northern Cyprus a percentage of gas exploitation revenues. This has not been contested by the Greek administration of Cyprus; however, Nicosia has repeatedly argued that it

¹⁴ Dentice, G., *Mediterraneo orientale: nuove dinamiche e sfide emergenti*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ Ongun, Y., *Turkey in an Increasingly Complex Eastern Mediterranean: How Turkey Can Defend its Interests and Alleviate its Isolation in the Region*, in: Tanchum, M. (ed.), *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters. Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021, (pp. 47-58), pp. 48-49.

¹⁶ Dentice, G., *Mediterraneo orientale: nuove dinamiche e sfide emergenti*, p. 6.

has non-negotiable rights to develop the gas hitherto discovered and the management of such resources will be administered together once the island will be reunited under a shared settlement. Unless the Cyprus question is solved, Turkey is not likely to abandon its claims on behalf of the Turkish administration of Cyprus and adhere to energy cooperation initiatives.¹⁷

Second, Turkey has rejuvenated deep-rooted wrangles with Greece over the designation of their maritime border in the Aegean Sea. The two Mediterranean countries have quarrelled over that contention for years, even before Greece signed the Montego Bay convention on the Law of the Sea. Their disputes hinge on different interpretations of the delimitation of the continental shelf: according to Turkey, Turkish continental shelf should be measured from the continental mainland – i.e. the Anatolian peninsula – and thus Greek islands – i.e. the Dodecanese – should not be included to define the Greek continental shelf. On the other hand, according to Greece, all islands should be taken into account to determine Greek and Turkish continental shelves and economic zones. Athens invokes the UNCLOS, but it must be mentioned that the UN agreement does not take into account uninhabitable islets. Turkey argues that some Greek islands of Dodecanese – with particular reference to the island of Kastellorizo (*Meis* in Turkish) that lies approximately 2 km off the west coast of Turkey – must not fit under the UNCLOS regulation owing to their proximity to Turkish coasts. Indeed, Greek stance on the matter steadily hinders Turkey to be entitled to economic rights to almost the whole Aegean Sea. Ankara rejects the Montego Bay Convention, that it has never signed, and argues that the specific territorial morphology of Greece and Turkey in the Aegean requires a *sui generis* judicial regime to regulate the breadth of territorial waters, the EEZs, and the continental shelves.¹⁸

Turkey's maritime claims as described above rely on a particular legal vision encapsulated by the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, which drives current Turkey's foreign policy.

¹⁷ Talbot, V., *Turkey and the West in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: Dalay, G., Lesser, I., Talbot, V., Tastan, K., *Turkey and the West. Keep the Flame Burning*, German Marshall Fund Policy Paper, No. 6, 2020, p. 15.

¹⁸ Denizeau, A., *Mavi Vatan, the "Blue Homeland". The Origins, Influences and Limits of an Ambitious Doctrine for Turkey*, *Études de l'Ifri*, April 2021, pp. 8-9.

6. *Mavi Vatan* and Turkey's activism in the Eastern Mediterranean

In the 2010s the changing regional environment encouraged Ankara to shift its geopolitical strategy from traditional land trajectories towards the sea, and increase its assertiveness in the basin. The new doctrine, known as *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland), is an ambitious body of legal principles with a geopolitical vocation which has recently gained huge popularity within Turkish official narrative and among international observers. The origins of *Mavi Vatan* dates back to 2006 when the now-retired admiral of the Turkish navy Cem Gürdeniz, at the time responsible for strategic planning at the sea, contested the “map of Sevilla”, a map of EU's maritime borders and member states' EEZs developed in 2004 by the University of Sevilla, and identified a much broader Turkish EEZ than the one drawn by the Spanish geographers, the “Blue Homeland” indeed. Other prominent navy officials shared the maritime view of Gürdeniz, and their publications have given the doctrine tremendous popularity. The consecration of *Mavi Vatan* within the military occurred in 2019, when Turkey's coastal seas – the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea – were involved in a joint naval exercise named “Mavi Vatan 2019”.

The *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, as alleged by its authors, has its roots in Kemalism and does not identify itself with a particular party or political group. Turkey's ruling party, the AKP, has adopted *Mavi Vatan* as its vision to conduct its foreign policy; nevertheless, Gürdeniz strenuously lays claim his doctrine has been conceived for the Turkish state rather than for a specific political party.

Mavi Vatan is a comprehensive doctrine made up of a legal framework that shapes a geopolitical vision. As recounted in the previous paragraph, the doctrine rejects Greek and Cypriot maritime claims as well as the UNCLUS, which is acknowledged to favour states with nearby islands, such as Greece. *Mavi Vatan* supporters see Greece as a state which does have control over islands off its coasts, but has also a clearly-identified yet limited continental shelf. In *Mavi Vatan* view, the aforementioned island of Kastellorizo happens to be included in the Anatolian continental shelf even if the Greek sovereignty over the little island has never been questioned. Moreover, *Mavi Vatan* calls for the demilitarization of all Greek islands laying nearby the Turkish coast, in accordance with a particular interpretation of post-WWI treaties, namely the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and

the Montreux Convention (1936). On the contrary, Greek views on the same treaties allows Athens to deploy weapons in those islands.¹⁹ As formulated by its founder, the “Blue Homeland” represents the zone of Turkish «interests and jurisdiction over fresh and sea waters between the 25th and 45th eastern meridians and the 33th and 43th northern parallels»²⁰. In order to define the demarcation of the EEZs, the *Mavi Vatan* vision adopts the principle of equidistance sealed by 1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone and 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf. The equidistance was hereon defined as «the line every point of which is equidistant from the nearest points of baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea of the two states is measured».²¹ In the Black Sea, this concept does not broaden the breadth of the EEZ already recognized by and to Turkey. But, in the Aegean and Mediterranean Sea, *Mavi Vatan* body of principles extends the Turkish «interests and jurisdiction» to the Eastern half of the Aegean Sea, leaving Greek islands with 6 nmi-width territorial waters (the breadth agreed between Turkey and Greece before the latter signed the UNCLOS), and encroaches both Greek and Cypriot EEZs. Moreover, in the Mediterranean *Mavi Vatan* borders touches Libyan and Egyptian EEZs. Finally, on behalf of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, Ankara claims a portion of sea comprised between Cypriot, Syrian and Lebanese waters.²²

Alongside the judicial body of principle, the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine aims to raise a maritime *Weltanschauung*, a conceit of the world, and awareness of Turkey’s potential maritime role among Turks.²³ *Mavi Vatan Weltanschauung* evokes a precise strategic view hinging on the sea, whose centrality in 21st century geopolitics is the theoretical postulate of *Mavi Vatan*. The Eastern Mediterranean is interpreted by doctrine’s theorists as the major security concern for Turkey, where a Greek imperialist attitude jeopardizes Turkish interests with the consent of the Western powers. This entails a proactive policy in the

¹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 5-9.

²⁰ C. Gürdeniz, *What Is the Blue Homeland in the 21st Century?*, “United World”, July 31, 2020, cited in Denizeau, A., *Mavi Vatan, the “Blue Homeland”*, p. 10.

²¹ *Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone*, Part I, Section I, Article 12, 1958.

²² Denizeau, A., *Mavi Vatan, the “Blue Homeland”*, p. 10.

²³ Ansaldo, M. (ed.), *‘La Patria blu nel mondo post-occidentale’. Conversazione con l’ammiraglio Cem Gürdeniz*, in: *Il turco alla porta*, “Limes”, No. 10, 2020, p. 69.

Levantine basin – see the Turkish-Libyan EEZs delimitation which shatters the maritime *enosis* of Greece and Cyprus – and a spread mistrust of the West. The economic interest in the region is also a priority for Turkey: the discovery of gas has opened new perspectives of profit for Ankara, encompassing the direct exploitation of these resources through gas inspection and extraction and the control of gas routes to Europe, thus performing as a major regional energy hub. Being right in the middle of the Levantine maritime basin, Cyprus assumes a unique geostrategic role in the vision of the Turkish navy. This is why *Mavi Vatan* theorists argue that Turkey should oppose the reunification of the island and consolidate its position in the northern part, protecting its rights.

Despite being anchored in the regional context, with the absolute dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean, the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine has a global vocation. Indeed, the control of the Eastern Mediterranean secures the pathways to the Horn of Africa, where Turkey has been notably increasing its engagement since the 2000s. At the same time, the Eastern Mediterranean appears to *Mavi Vatan* supporters as the bridge between the Mediterranean basin, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region.

A maritime vision as such implies the prominence of the navy within the Turkish armed forces, the modernization of the fleet and the opening of new naval bases around the world. Therefore, *Mavi Vatan* strategy appears to require a broader militarization in the conduction of the national foreign policy. At first, Ankara bought equipment from NATO allied countries (the USA, France, etc.), but then it has started to develop a domestic naval industry thanks to specific state-sponsored programs aiming to acquire strategic autonomy. Despite Turkish efforts, a general lack of technology still forces Turkey to rely on traditional allies for supplying missing components.²⁴

Nurtured by the famous new doctrine, Turkey has started to adopt a more proactive role in the Eastern Mediterranean. Especially during 2019 and 2020, Turkey's posture became particularly aggressive, while in 2021, once increased its bargaining chip after military successes in Libya, Ankara has demonstrated to be open to the dialogue with some of the littoral neighbours.

²⁴ Denizeau, A., *Mavi Vatan, the "Blue Homeland"*, pp. 10-14, 26-27

In response to Cypriot EEZ delimitation, Turkey hampered the activity of international energy companies operating in Cypriot EEZ deploying its vessels against Italian Eni's drill ship Saipem 12000 operating in Calypso field in January 2018 and also called an ExxonMobile's drill ship for a stop of its activity in a close offshore portion of sea. In response, Washington deployed the United States Sixth Fleet to convoy ExxonMobile vessel.

In late spring 2019, Turkey's proactive policy in the Eastern Mediterranean became more explicit and aggressive when the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu announced that two Turkish vessels would have started to drill in waters northeast and west of Cyprus. In full solidarity to Cyprus, Brussels repeatedly called Turkey for the halt of drilling activities.²⁵ After reiterated Turkish actions, the European Union tagged those drilling activities as illegal and imposed restrictive measures on Turkey on July 2019. The EU-Turkey negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement stalled, as well as EU-Turkey high-level dialogues were suspended. Moreover, the EU reduced the pre-accession assistance for the year 2020 which serves to foster a reformist agenda in Turkey and ordered the European Investment Bank to revise its lending active to Turkey. Since Ankara did not cease its drilling activities, on November 2019 the Council of the EU adopted a framework for restrictive measures which makes possible to «sanction individuals or entities responsible for or involved in unauthorised drilling activities» in the Eastern Mediterranean. The framework of sanctions involves a travel ban to the EU for persons and an asset freeze for persons and entities.²⁶ In November 2020 two persons were placed under restrictive measures, and the sanctions regime were extended by one year.²⁷ In November 2021 the regime was prolonged by another year.²⁸ Also Washington harshly reacted to Turkish

²⁵ Talbot, V., *Turkey and the West in the Eastern Mediterranean*, p. 16.

²⁶ Council of the EU, *Turkey's illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council adopts framework for sanctions*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/11/turkey-s-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-framework-for-sanctions/>. Last accessed: 14 December 2021.

²⁷ Council of the EU, *Sanctions regime against illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean extended by one year*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/06/sanctions-regime-against-illegal-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-extended-by-one-year/>. Last accessed: 14 December 2021.

²⁸ Council of the EU, *Unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council prolongs the sanctions regime by one year*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/11/11/unauthorised-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-prolongs-the-sanctions-regime-by-one-year/>. Last accessed: 14 December 2021.

Eastern Mediterranean activism releasing the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act which allowed new security assistance for Cyprus and Greece, partially lifted the arms embargo imposed on the island of Cyprus since 1987, and promoted the creation of an Energy Centre to facilitate energy cooperation among Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and the United States.

Concerning the Greek-Turkish maritime disputes in the Aegean Sea, it must be mentioned that Turkish momentous role in the Libyan conflict has tightly linked the Libyan scenario to the maritime competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey's military success in backing the Tripoli-based GNA enhanced its leverage in the Eastern Mediterranean, and November 2019 Turkish-Libyan memorandum of understanding on maritime borders showed that Turkey wanted to enter the great game of gas in the Levantine basin. The maritime agreement sewed up with Tripoli states that Turkey and Libya have adjacent waters – a claim that has been questioned by other littoral states – and grants economic rights to Turkey in the waters around Crete and in the western part of the Cypriot EEZ. In addition, the agreement has a strategic value since it interrupts the maritime adjacency of Cypriot and Greek EEZs, hence threatening the construction of the EastMed pipeline, which would require the passage through the EEZ claimed by Turkey.²⁹ In addition, in August 2020 Turkish-Greek relations reached a tense tipping point when Ankara sent the *Oruç Reis* energy exploration ship, escorted by warships, in the contested waters of the Aegean Sea in the proximity of the Greek island of Kastellorizo. Athens reacted sending military vessels to patrol the area, and a mild collision between a Turkish and Greek warship occurred. The incident raised concerns especially among the EU officials, that called for a de-escalation and constructive dialogue between the parties. In September the *Oruç Reis* headed back to Turkey in an effort to ease the tensions and prioritize a diplomatic approach. Once again, in October 2020 the *Oruç Reis* was charged of a ten-days exploration mission in the Eastern Mediterranean, then prolonged to another term of ten days, that halted the continuation of the Turkish-Greek dialogue. Greece interpreted these series of

²⁹ Talbot, V., *Turkey and the West in the Eastern Mediterranean*, pp. 15-17.

unilateral acts as a provocation from Turkey.³⁰ Eventually, at the beginning of 2021, after a five-years hiatus, the two neighbouring states resumed their talks to address their longstanding disputes over the redefinition of their maritime boundary, the air space, and the status of Aegean islands. However, the first rounds of talks failed to reach a preliminary breakthrough whereby starting negotiations.³¹

7. Regional partnerships and Turkey's isolation

Gas discoveries have turned local sovereignty claims over maritime boundaries into great geopolitical clashes to alter wider Mediterranean power relations. In fact, the redesignation of the Eastern Mediterranean maritime space as drawn by the Republic of Cyprus and Greece as well as the establishment of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum definitely thwarted Turkey's aims of acting as a regional leader and being an energy hub to supply European markets. The establishment of the EMGF in particular has epitomized and strengthened the existing partnerships and squabbles as well as the isolation of Turkey within the region. The Eastern Mediterranean gas rush along with AKP's strategic visions and its assertiveness in the Mediterranean basin eventually put Turkey at loggerheads with most of the countries in the region, from traditional partners such as Syria and Israel, to historic opponents like Greece and, most of all, the Republic of Cyprus. At the same time, Turkey started to face growing problematic relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as with some European countries headed by France. In the last years, these patterns of enmity and perspectives for cooperation have settled two fronts, pitting Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, with the support of the UAE and France, against Turkey, backed by Qatar.³²

Back in the first 2000s, despite being in traditional bad terms with the Republic of Cyprus – especially after Nicosia rejected the Annan plan – and

³⁰ Gentili, C., *La Oruc Reis torna nel Mediterraneo orientale*, "Sicurezza Internazionale", 12 October 2020, <https://sicurezzainternazionale.luiss.it/2020/10/12/turchia-la-oruc-reis-torna-nel-mediterraneo-orientale/>. Last accessed: 19 December 2021.

³¹ Maltezou, R., *Greece, Turkey hold talks on maritime disputes in Athens*, "Reuters", 16 March 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-turkey-idUSKBN2B82PL>. Last accessed: 19 December 2021.

³² Tziarras, Z., *The Stakes for Greece and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, pp. 29-30.

Greece, Turkey enjoyed good relations with Israel. In particular, the two countries usually discussed joint projects of energy cooperation. However, between 2008 and 2010 their partnership started to slacken when Turkey explicitly opposed Israeli campaign “Operation Cast Lead” in the Gaza Strip (2008-2009). The crisis was sealed by the *Mavi Marmara* incident in May 2010, when a Turkish flotilla carrying pro-Palestinian activists and goods for Gaza was intercepted and boarded by an Israeli commando. The *Mavi Marmara* incident led to the end of the security cooperation between Turkey and Israel and the official downgrade of their partnership. In the meanwhile, the first discoveries of gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean occurred, and Israel decided to side with the RoC signing a bilateral EEZ delimitation agreement in 2010. Since then, efforts towards the normalization of the Turkish-Israeli ties have been taken, even with the support of the US President Barack Obama; however, Turkish governmental officials and Erdoğan himself continued complaining about Gaza blockade, Israeli policy over the Strip and Trump’s decision to move the US embassy in Jerusalem, thus preventing the restoration of healthy ties between the two countries. Finally, in 2011 Turkey withdrew from the US-Turkish-Israeli joint annual naval exercise “Reliant Mermaid”, which was replaced by a US-Greek-Israeli joint annual exercise. The new security alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean basin was officially shaped by the 2011 Israeli-Cypriot defence agreement and 2015 Greek-Israeli status of forces agreement, whereby a foreign country’s military forces station in a host country.³³ Plus, in 2011, Israeli and Greek heads of state visited Cyprus; in 2013, the three countries signed an energy memorandum of understanding, and then started to regularly meet to discuss their cooperation upon various matters.³⁴

The trilateral alliance between Greece, Israel, and the Republic of Cyprus was expressly endorsed by the United States that, while relinquishing the Middle East, witnessed with growing concern Turkey’s wider diplomatic protraction in the region and the unconditional support of Ankara to Muslim Brotherhood affiliates during the Arab revolts and the aftermath. Detachment between Turkish and US politics grew after Turkish middle-2010es domestic political evolutions, and as a

³³ İpek, P. & Gür, V. T., *Turkey’s Isolation from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum*, pp. 14-16.

³⁴ Mitchell, G., *Israel’s Quest for Regional Belonging in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, pp. 18-19.

reaction to the American support of People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG), the armed branch of the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD), in Syria. Turkey acknowledges the PYD to be the Syrian wing of the Turkish Kurdistan Worker's Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdîstan*, PKK). Moreover, the US condemned Turkey's drilling activities in the contested waters south of Cyprus, and eventually joined the EMFG as an observer.³⁵

Another trilateral partnership, the Greece-Cyprus-Egypt one, has taken shape in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Since 2013, after sweeping away Muslim Brotherhood's elected President Mohamed Morsi, Egypt has been ruled by the traditional military élite in the person of al-Sisi. Morsi's overthrow represented a bitter pill to swallow for Turkey but, on the contrary, for Athens and Nicosia it meant more space and opportunity for bilateral and then trilateral cooperation with Cairo. In the last decade, Turkish-Egyptian hostility was manifested through diplomatic controversies, expulsions of ambassadors, and provocations on the media. Ankara started to host many Egyptian Muslim Brothers flown away from their homeland as well as many Egyptian opposition satellite channels. The Turkish *longa manus* over Syria, Libya, the Horn of Africa, and eventually even Sudan, which bestowed the Red Sea island of Suakin to Turkey in 2018, deeply worried Cairo and further strained their ties. To counterbalance Turkey's new regional clout, trilateral summit with Athens and Nicosia have been held annually since 2014. Maritime cooperation in the tourism, energy and military domains is at the core of the new trilateral partnership. Nevertheless, in 2021 Turkey and Egypt seemed to be willing to re-open their dialogue since the two countries held some bilateral talks that might lead to a future rapprochement.³⁶

Besides regional actors, the Eastern Mediterranean basin has become a tinderbox also for the Gulf states. The involvement of external actors definitely raised the stakes of the Eastern Mediterranean energy and geopolitical match. In finding wealthy and powerful allies, the regional fronts of animosity have benefited from the inner rivalry within the Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain on one side; solely Qatar on the other (in general, Oman and Kuwait

³⁵ İpek, P. & Gür, V. T., *Turkey's Isolation from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum*, pp. 19-20.

³⁶ Shama, N., *Egypt: Threats and Interests in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, pp. 69-71.

have adopted a neutral attitude). Since the outbreak of the Arab uprising, the former faction started to conduct an active foreign policy to increase its leverage all over the Arab world. Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Manama sided with al-Sisi at the time of the Egyptian coup d'état; the EAU directly supported General Haftar in the Libyan conflict, and with the agreement of Egypt, the block imposed an embargo on Qatar in June 2017. Qatar was accused of supporting Muslim Brotherhood affiliates all over the Arab world through its widespread broadcast channels too. In response, Qatar turned its gaze to Turkey. In 2014 the two countries signed a military agreement which allows Turkey's military presence in Qatar. The blockade imposed on Qatar by its neighbours brought Doha and Ankara even closer, and Qatar is now the second-largest investor in Turkey. Finally, the consolidation of the front against Turkey occurred with the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement (2020) sealing the normalisation of the relations between Israel and, in order, the UAE and Bahrein, thanks to the US mediation of Trump's administration. Abu Dhabi has benefited from Turkey's strained relations with its traditional Western partners, such as the US, the European Union, and NATO countries in general.³⁷ More recently, the Al-Ula Declaration signed in January 2021 impelled Qatar and the other Gulf states to set out on a path of reconciliation. The agreements were made between the GCC countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – at the presence of representatives from Egypt, the USA, the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The Al-Ula Declaration spurred the talks between Ankara and Cairo, and may set the ground for a broader regional rearrangement.

The strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean has been also recognized by the European Union, however EU member states' policies in the area usually do not converge. The Eastern Mediterranean gas has been labelled by the EU as the key instruments to pursue Brussels' energy diversification strategy, and EU member states' actions have focused on energy-related domains. First, European energy companies have been operating in the basin since the first discoveries in the early 2010es and nowadays Italian Eni and

³⁷ Al-Tamimi, N., *The GCC in the Eastern Mediterranean: Growing Significance, Competing Agendas*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, pp. 77-79, 85-87.

French Total are among the major corporations involved in Mediterranean gas exploration and extraction activities.

Second, as mentioned above, EU and its member states' have steadily engaged in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF): Italy is one of the founding members; France entered the organization in March 2021, and the EU itself became an observer in July 2021.

Third, gas reserves have aggravated long-standing disputes between Turkey and some EU member states – namely Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, leading the EU eventually to take a stand against Turkey's exploration activities in the contested waters. The EU imposed sanctions on Turkey, but EU member states proposed two different approaches towards the country, one firm and assertive – sponsored by Cyprus, France, and Greece – and the other more cautious and open to dialogue – endorsed by Germany, Italy, Malta, and Spain. Between 2020 and 2021, Turkey appeared to be willing to favour a de-escalation of tensions, and in March 2021 the EU presented a positive agenda towards the EU to rejuvenate their ties through a constructive approach.³⁸

8. Italy's Eni in the Eastern Mediterranean

Commercial companies, usually backed by Western governments, have been playing a major role in the Eastern Mediterranean energy match. The first Israeli and Cypriot gas fields were discovered by US-Israeli companies' partnership, luring growing number of international energy enterprises into the basin; then, the giant Zohr field located in the Egyptian EEZ in 2015 increased even more the relevance of the Eastern Mediterranean basin from the energy point of view. The discovery of the Zohr field was announced by Eni, the largest Italian energy company. Eni holds the larger stakes in the Levant basin, mainly in the Egyptian sea, but it owns also exploration blocks off the Republic of Cyprus and Lebanon.³⁹ Even if Eni is considered to be a private company, the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance holds 30.33% of Eni's shares, directly or via

³⁸ Talbot, V., *The Eastern Mediterranean: A Testing Ground for the European Union*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, pp. 132-137.

³⁹ Bowlus, J. V., *Eastern Mediterranean gas: Testing the field*, "European Council on Foreign Relations", May 2020, https://ecfr.eu/special/eastern_med/gas_fields. Last accessed: 26 December 2021.

the *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti Spa*⁴⁰, making Eni an important tool for Italy to conduct its economic and energy policies. Since the very constitution of the company in 1952, Eni's founder Enrico Mattei developed tight ties with Mediterranean states, thus Eni is now one of the most prominent energy companies operating in the basin. Eni's Eastern Mediterranean energy activities are at the core of the energy diversification strategy sought and developed by both the EU and Italy, willing to reduce their energy high-dependence on Russian gas supplies.

As a lead operator in the Eastern Mediterranean, Eni has decided to combine Egyptian, Greek, Cypriot, and Israeli natural gas and carry it as LNG to international markets via Egypt. The plan promoted by the Italian company rely on a cost-effective evaluation, since pooling the Levantine gas allows energy companies to cut costs down, and gas conversion to LNG eases its transport to European market.⁴¹ Eni's longstanding close relationship with Egypt has ensured the feasibility of this project. Indeed, Eni has engaged with Egypt since 1954, and the first discoveries of oil and gas fields occurred in 1961 and 1967 respectively. In the middle 2010es, increasingly-populated Egypt started importing energy, thus the discovery of Zohr gas field definitely changed the Egyptian energy security equation. The Zohr gas reserves are estimated to be able to fulfil decades of Egyptian gas demand, and Eni has become the leading major supplying Eastern Mediterranean gas to Egyptians.

Egyptian idle LNG facilities in Idku e Damietta began to attract Eni's interest, particularly with regard to the Damietta plant, which has stopped production since 2012. After a preliminary agreement reached on December 2020 with Cairo, in March 2021 Eni announced the deal signed with Egyptian government, the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC), the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) and the Spanish company Naturgy, aiming to restart Damietta liquified natural gas plant for processing excess Egyptian gas. Eni holds 50% of SEGAS Holding, which is the owner of Damietta

⁴⁰ Eni.com, *Azionisti*, <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/chi-siamo/governance/azionisti.html>. Last accessed: 27 December 2021.

⁴¹ Tanchum, M., *The Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis: a Regional System Perspective on the Mediterranean's New Great Game*, in: Tanchum, M. (ed.), *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters. Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021, p. 13.

liquefaction facility. Damietta plant has a capacity of 7.56 BCM per year and resumed production in the first month of 2021. The LNG produced in Damietta is sold directly by Eni to its European customers.⁴²

Eni's Eastern Mediterranean strategy, based on Levant gas pooling and Egypt's LNG processing, leaves no role for Turkey and its ambition to become a regional energy hub. Ankara has not welcomed the proactive role of Italy's Eni in the Eastern Mediterranean, even stopping one of its drill ships off the Cypriot coasts in 2018, as recalled in paragraph 6. of this work. Within this framework, Eni-endorsed energy cooperation deals between Cairo, Nicosia, and Jerusalem to allocate Cypriot and Israeli excess gas production to Egypt for being processed in Damietta and Idku LNG facilities have angered Ankara.

Tensions with Turkey has not eased when the French energy company Total also entered the Mediterranean gas game catapulting Paris in the Eastern Mediterranean quagmire. France's Total has partnered with Italy's Eni since 2019. Total holds minority stakes in all Cypriot licensing blocks issued to Eni, as well as in some gas exploration operations in Egypt's waters.⁴³

Paris has been promoting operations and partnerships that directly hinder Turkish interests all over the Middle East and North Africa. The two reached a tipping point of tension in June 2020 when a French and Turkish naval vessel were involved in an incident near Libya's coastal waters. France accused Turkey of violating the arms embargo imposed on Libya, while Turkish authorities held that the French vessel was responsible for harming the Turkish merchant ship carried with humanitarian supplies. In reaction, France withdrew from NATO's mission Operation Sea Guardian, which supports maritime situational awareness, pursues deterrence and counter-terrorism actions and enhances capacity building. The two NATO countries raised the stakes of their antagonism dispatching military assets and furthering the cooperation with their Mediterranean allies – Libya for Ankara, Cyprus and Greece for Paris.⁴⁴ In

⁴² Eni.com, *Eni closes agreement with partners for restart Damietta liquefied natural gas plant in Egypt and amicable settlement of Union Fenosa Gas disputes*, 10 March 2021, <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2021/03/eni-closes-agreement-partners-restart-damietta-liquefied-natural-gas-plant-egypt.html>. Last accessed: 28 December 2021.

⁴³ Dessì, A., *Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean: Navigating Complexity, Mitigating Conflict(s) and Fishing for Compromise*, in: Tanchum, M. (ed.), *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters. Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021, p. 108.

⁴⁴ Dessì, A., *Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean*, p. 104.

addition, France has been guiding the hard line's front against Turkey within EU institutions, while Germany have led a group of member states much more likely to adopt a diplomatic and tenderer approach towards Turkey. Among them, there has been Italy. Thus, Eni's energy operations and commercial partnership in the Eastern Mediterranean seem to cripple Italian official positioning by the side of Ankara and undermine Italian-Turkish healthy relations. However, Italy has traditionally embraced a multifaced, yet sometimes naïve and detrimental in the long term, approach in the international scene and tended to nourish friendly relations with most of the countries overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

9. Italy's Eastern Mediterranean policy

Italy's Eastern Mediterranean policy can be considered as the epitome of Italy's traditional foreign approach in the wider Mediterranean region. Thanks to its unique position in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy perceives itself as the natural bridge between the northern and southern-eastern shores of the basin. Prompting this vocation, Rome has strenuously tried to conduct an autonomous Mediterranean foreign policy and invest in staunchly engaging with Middle Eastern and North African countries. Traditionally, Italy's Mediterranean policy has been mainly driven by economic interests, thus pursuing stronger bilateral relations with oil and/or gas exporter countries such as Algeria, Libya, and Egypt. The origins of this energy-driven foreign policy in the Mediterranean dates back to the sixties, when Italian leading party, *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), coordinated with Enrico Mattei's Eni, which was a state-owned company at the time, to perform a strategic policy of rapprochement towards Iran and other Middle Eastern-North African countries – the so-called *Neoatlantismo*.

Since the end of the World War II, Italy's foreign policy has been prioritizing the ties with the USA and the EU integration project. Since Washington and Brussels have been the foreign policy's first concerns for Rome, Italy's policy in the Mediterranean has yielded to friendly and stable relations with its Western allies and committed to Italy's position within international organizations, such as NATO and the EU. Italy can be considered a middle power, unable to conduct a completely autonomous foreign policy in each of its spheres of interest because it lacks resources and reliability to do so. In the concrete Eastern Mediterranean

scenario, this means that Italy tends to cultivate its multi-faceted relations with almost all the actors involved and keep all options open rather than leading the political initiative towards a clear direction that eventually would cut off some of its partners. Italy tends to adapt to the conditions of the system, which are determined by most proactive actors, rather than trying to modify them.⁴⁵ All things considered, Italy's foreign policy in the Eastern Mediterranean may seem inconsistent and muddled. In the short term, Italy can benefit from the friendly ties and interests cultivated with all the actors involved in the context, and its alleged neutrality might grant Rome a role of mediation; however, in the long term, Italy might suffer from an exclusion when an escalation between the parts occurs, and it might be perceived as an unreliable player.

Rome is highly engaged in the Eastern Mediterranean region, promoting lines of cooperation with actors of both sides of the regional juxtaposition. On one side, Italy is one of the founding members of the EMGF, has enjoyed close relations with Greece and Cyprus, also because the three are all EU member states, and its most powerful energy major – Eni – has strengthened the ties with al-Sisi's Egypt and even partnered with France, paving the way for a comprehensive rapprochement between Rome and Paris after years of strained relations; on the other side, Italy aims to be a mediator in the Eastern Mediterranean morass, thanks to its close relations with the left out player of the Eastern Mediterranean great game: Turkey.

The isolation of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean and its increasing antagonism with a number of European countries – not to mention the undeniable tension with the United States – would seem to be substantial reasons for Rome to fully embrace a stance against Ankara. However, the top priority in Italian foreign policy agenda represented by the Libyan dossier justifies the Italian dual approach in the Eastern Mediterranean. Besides their traditional friendly relationship, Italy and Turkey have deepened their partnership once they started cooperating in the Libyan conflict to support the Tripoli-based government. Italy has relevant energy interests in Libya; in fact, Eni controls around 45% of the Libyan gas and oil production, and almost all of Eni's fields are located in the

⁴⁵ Colombo, M. & Vignoli, V., *Rome's Foreign Policy. Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean: Between Continuity and New Challenges*, "ISPI", 10 September 2020, <https://www.ISPionline.it/it/pubblicazione/italy-eastern-mediterranean-between-continuity-and-new-challenges-27357>. Last accessed: 30 December 2021.

western part of the country, which was led by the internationally-recognized GNA directly supported by Turkey.⁴⁶ Regarding Italy's energy security concerns, it must be added that Italian and Turkish energy cooperation extends to the TANAP-TAP pipelines system, which carries Azeri gas to Italy via Turkey and Greece. Ankara and Rome have participated in joint military exercises, both bilaterally and under NATO patronage; Italy also joined the international drill Operation Mediterranean Shield carried out by the Turkish Naval Forces in 2020.⁴⁷

While conducting military exercises with Turkey, Italy participated to the Greece-led Quadrilateral Initiative Operation Eunomia to perform combined and joint naval-air drills in the Eastern Mediterranean. Back in 2017, Italy joined *Iniochos*, a Greek multi-national air force exercise in the Eastern Mediterranean, which witnessed the participation of UAE's pilots, in a clear anti-Turkish demonstration.⁴⁸ Another important rapprochement of Italy towards one of the two geopolitical fault lines of the Eastern Mediterranean has been the signing of the "Treaty between the Italian Republic and the French Republic for enhanced bilateral cooperation" between Rome and Paris. The historic treaty pursues a deepening and extension of Italian-French bilateral relations, mainly leading to rebalancing of the EU's power relations. The renewed entente will encompass the two countries' foreign policies and will set a pattern of enhanced coordination in the EU negotiating processes, which will affect even the Eastern Mediterranean-related quarrels.⁴⁹ The "Quirinale Treaty" may pave the way for a reorientation of Italy's ambiguous role in the Eastern Mediterranean, but Rome has always been unwilling to jeopardizes its relations with Ankara. Italian representatives have continuously claimed the strong commitment of Italy to its relations with Turkey, even within the international organizations that Turkey perceives as hostile to Ankara's Mediterranean policies. Massimo Gaiani, Italian Ambassador to Turkey, explicitly mentioned Italy's actions within the EMGF that prevented it to adopt anti-Turkish stances. Even the renewed rapprochement

⁴⁶ Tanchum, M., *The Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis*, pp. 21-23.

⁴⁷ Dessì, A., *Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean*, pp. 109-111.

⁴⁸ Tanchum, M., *The Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁹ Alcaro, R., *The Italy-France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy*, "Istituto Affari Internazionali", 22 December 2021, <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/italy-france-treaty>. Last accessed: 2 January 2022.

between France and Italy has been described by Gaiani as a unique opportunity to make the case of Turkey to Paris and Brussels and mitigate the tensions in order to build a system of relations beneficial for all the parties involved. The Italian Ambassador to Ankara reiterated the need for Turkey and the EU to rethink their relation with a view to re-open the accession process.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Gencturk, A., *Italian Ambassador hails 'excellent' relations with Turkey*, "Anadolu Agency", 1 December 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/italian-ambassador-hails-excellent-relations-with-turkey/2435425>. Last accessed: 7 February 2022.

IV

The Mediterranean and the challenges ahead in Italo-Turkish relations

The analysis provided in the previous chapters of this work show that the Mediterranean space and dynamics have lately played a prominent role in Italo-Turkish relations. The Mediterranean is a common cornerstone of both Italian and Turkish foreign outreach. Particularly, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean are the current regional hotspots encapsulating both tensions and patterns of cooperation between the actors involved, Rome and Ankara among the others. A comprehensive assessment of the Italy-Turkey partnership in the light of their Mediterranean role cannot disregard a final wider evaluation of the ongoing trends in the region with the aim to provide the reader with an insight of current Italian and Turkish foreign postures and realms of cooperation. Whilst acknowledging the unpredictability of the future in such an evolving and fast-paced world, the considerations on this chapter serves also the purpose of presenting the challenges ahead and the factors that may determine some changes or, on the contrary, reinforce the settled dynamics of Italo-Turkish relations in the near future.

1. The extent of the Mediterranean space and the influence of external actors

When talking of the Mediterranean space, it is necessary to define the geographical extent of the space we are referring to. As stated in the introduction, the focus of this work has been the ongoing dynamics embracing the south-central and eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent coastal states. With reference to the themes of this thesis, the considerations have obviously hinged on two countries, namely Italy and Turkey, and a bunch of neighbouring land and maritime spaces, such as Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the light of the analyses unfolded in this work, it appears that the Mediterranean relations need to be conceived through a wider frame, which embraces the Mediterranean Sea and its very adjacent coastal regions, but it also extends northward, eastward and southward. The South-Central Mediterranean

and the Eastern Mediterranean in particular is home to regional powers – Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, and Egypt – that affects geopolitical developments in Europe, western Asia, the Gulf, and Africa. Indeed, the Mediterranean dynamics cannot be fully understood without enlarging the view towards Brussels, thus considering the EU a fully Mediterranean actor, the Caucasus, where the energy game and the geopolitical competition expands, the Gulf, whose states are leading actors in the evolving Mediterranean, and the south-central Saharan states and the Horn of Africa, increasingly relevant regions whose long-lasting instabilities impinge upon the Mediterranean coastal areas.

Once widened the frame, it must be also taken into consideration the significant influence of external actors on the Mediterranean dynamics. Particularly, three great powers have been deeply impacting the regional environment in the last years. One of them, the USA, has lately opted for a progressive disengagement from the area, but its leverage as a great power and Western leading actor still affects, even if not directly, the Mediterranean relations. Two other great powers – Russia and China – have been increasingly engaging with the region and their clout has strongly affected the Mediterranean power dynamics. Moscow has been projecting its military power on almost every war-torn context in the region and its proximities – Syria, Libya, Caucasus – while Beijing has clinched significant economic deals throughout the region.

Gas discoveries above all deteriorated the regional tensions and brought about foreign states' entanglement in the area. This is the case for the EU and its members, the US, the Gulf states, and Russia. But besides energy prosperity, the Mediterranean has also been touched by migration flows and terrorist threats that make it a vulnerable neighbourhood for the EU. European and Western attitude and rhetoric is met by increasing defiance by the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, which are moving towards partners less critical of their human rights records and of their economic results, such as Russia, the Gulf states, and China. The latter in particular, while eschewing geopolitical embroilment in the Eastern Mediterranean, sees the region as a crossroads of

global maritime and land trade routes and a unique gateway to European dynamic markets.¹

2. The militarisation of the Mediterranean

The persistent political instability, the emergence of armed conflicts, and the involvement of an increasing number of actors exacerbated the power competition in the South-Central and Eastern Mediterranean. As provocations escalated, the response for many of the countries involved has been to flex their muscles through a more prominent military approach. The militarisation of foreign policy has become extremely common in the South-Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey to be a case in point. The notably development of the Turkish Navy reveals the centrality acquired by the sea in the recent Turkish external projection's strategy. The Libyan conflict has represented the rehearsal setting of this new military assertiveness in the Mediterranean. Turkey has deployed consistent amounts of vessels offshore Libya, with deterrence, logistic and fire support duties.² The Turkish-backed GNA counter-offensive against Haftar's troops ended in victory thanks to the massive use of the Bayraktar TB2 armed drones of Baykar Defence, whose Chief Technical Officer is Erdoğan's son-in-law. In the last decade, Turkey has developed an advanced military industry, and Turkish defence exports started to considerably grow. Experts have coined the concept of "drone diplomacy" whereby Turkey has been projecting its power particularly in the African continent signing million-dollar contracts and military cooperation deals. Turkey offers its costumers cheap prices and high-quality defence technology, as proven by the military successes collected in Libya, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh.³

Like Turkey, many other states operating in the Mediterranean have opted for a militarisation of their foreign policy. The Russian military projection in the Mediterranean is a clear example of this trend. As Moscow proceeded with the

¹ Lons, C., *China in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Discreet Player*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, pp. 114-115.

² Morengi, D., *La nuova postura della Marina turca e le crescenti ambizioni di Ankara nel Mediterraneo*, "Ce.S.I.", 3 August 2020, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/articoli/1167/la-nuova-postura-della-marina-turca-e-le-crescenti-ambizioni-di-ankara-nel-mediterraneo>. Last accessed: 28 January 2022.

³ Calik, E. S., *Turkey's drones diplomacy in Africa*, "Middle East Monitor", 7 January 2022, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220107-turkeys-drones-diplomacy-in-africa/>. Last accessed: 28 January 2022.

modernization of its fleet, a Russian permanent naval taskforce was set up in the Mediterranean in 2013.⁴ Russia deployed its troops on Syrian battlefield, then it progressively replaced them with Wagner Group's mercenaries. As seen, the Libyan conflict has been also a major theatre for Russian military projection.

Egypt, Israel, and Greece have signed defence cooperation agreements and performed many joint naval drills too. Nowadays, in the Mediterranean the power competition's linchpin is the sea; therefore, national navies have recently acquired a prominent role for all the state actors involved in the region.

A growing militarisation has even affected Europe's border management. Facing increasing migration flows and security threats, the EU responded with an intensification of policing and law enforcement activities across the Mediterranean as well as the externalisation of border controls and other border functions, such as the asylum procedures and migration management in general, to the territory of third countries. In order to stop the flow of migrants, Brussels has enhanced border patrol activities through a strengthened mandate for Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA).⁵

The militarisation trend of the Mediterranean includes the increasing usage of mercenaries, private military companies (PMCs) and proxies by foreign actors in almost every regional conflict. Instead of deploying their conventional armies, states tend to sponsor groups of soldiers to fight in conflicts that may be politically undesirable to engage in. Mercenaries and proxies provide their sponsor with an effective tool of warfare for whom employers are not accountable neither domestically nor internationally. Furthermore, sponsoring states limit military costs of war, official casualties, and formal direct involvement in a conflict through the usage of mercenaries, PMCs, and proxies. The practice of outsourcing warfare to those military entities by mainly Russia, Turkey, and the Gulf states is so widespread in the Mediterranean that the region can be considered the global epicentre of this alarming trend.

First and foremost, it should be borne in mind that mercenaries, PMCs, and proxies differ from one another, albeit the rationale behind their usage is

⁴ Mamedov, R., *Russia: Towards a Balance of Interests in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: Talbot, V. (ed), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, ISPI, Milan, 2021, p. 107.

⁵ Liperi, M. S., *The EU's Externalisation of Migration Management Undermines Stabilisation in the Western Balkans*, "IAI commentaries 19", No. 27, April 2019, p. 1.

usually the same. Mercenaries are paid soldiers primarily motivated by financial interests, and their usage is limited in scope. The practice of employing mercenaries in a war beyond its own national borders poses some risks to deployers both for ethical and legal reasons. In addition, mercenaries are difficult to properly control.

PMCs, of whom Russian Wagner Group can be considered the most popular and active entity, are established businesses operating under formal authorization of the sponsoring state. PMCs may be not overtly licensed by the sponsor, but they are hired and controlled by it.

Proxies are state or non-state groups of individuals fighting for a common cause; they are moved by ideology rather than financial interests. Since proxy forces belong to the communities affected by the conflict, they are more likely to be accepted by the population. Through sponsoring proxy actors, the employer state averts the risk of openly engage in war and also secures political support in the country. On the other hand, proxies are more expected to develop an autonomous political agenda that may diverge from the sponsor's one.

For the aim of this work, it is interesting to evaluate the extent of mercenaries and proxies in the Libyan long-lasting war. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has frequently decried the disturbing foreign presence in the Libyan battlefield and even defined the Libyan war as the perfect epitome of the concept of "proxy war". In fact, Libya has witnessed a significant presence of mercenaries and PMCs hired by foreign powers, as well as Libyan proxies have been supported by external state actors. Native Syrian fighters have been sponsored both by GNA's backers – between 7,000 to 15,000 Syrian mercenaries are estimated to have entered Libya through Turkey – and LNA's supporters; the EAU have deployed Chadian warriors and Sudanese mercenaries via private security companies. Alongside over one thousand Wagner Group's soldiers hired by Russia, Turkey has employed a private security company to train its Syrian mercenaries in Libya. Qatar has allegedly supported radical Islamist formations, such as the Benghazi Defence Brigades. In 2020 the ceasefire reached between the warring parties explicitly required the withdrawal of all mercenary forces operating in the Libyan conflict but, despite that, no paid soldier has left the Libyan soil.

The practice of patronising armed combatants has some significant implications for both the regional developments and the international conflict management. At the regional level, the usage of mercenaries, PMCs, and proxies have linked different conflicts one another and exacerbated the existing tensions, muddling the dynamics and weakening the stabilization of the war-torn countries. Turkey and Russia have reallocated their Syrian mercenaries in Libya; Ankara has also re-deployed them to support Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This trend increases cross-border movement of weaponry, deteriorates regional security, and facilitates the spread of conflicts all over the region since states appear to be not accountable for their warfare conduction in foreign theatres. This is highly problematic even at the international level, since there are no law enforcement instruments to effectively hold sponsoring states responsible for outsourcing war to all sort of mercenaries.⁶

3. Current trends of Italian and Turkish foreign policies

Italo-Turkish cooperation is a traditional anchor of Italian and Turkish foreign policies. As analysed throughout this work, since the post-war the two countries have always enjoyed a friendly partnership that is unlikely to abate in the near future. Nevertheless, the general trends in the conduction of their foreign policies have been affecting the extent and the domains of their bilateral relations and their cooperation in third-party scenarios.

In international studies, Italy has traditionally been considered a middle power. A middle power has a moderate capacity to influence the posture of other countries or sway the international system due to its lack of resources and/or credibility. For Italy, foreign policy is a tool serving the scope of adapting the Italian particular political system to the pressure, challenges, and strains coming from the outside with the foremost objective of safeguarding the very existence of its domestic political order. Thus, Italian foreign approach minimizes the effects on internal politics of any external stress through the adoption of a specific international posture, namely inactivity. Inactivity is neither acquiescence to positions and demands of allies and adversaries nor cooperation with them.

⁶ Guzansky, Y. & Marshall, Z. A., *Outsourcing warfare in the Mediterranean*, "Mediterranean Politics", Vol. 27, No. 1, 2022, pp. 1-4, 7-10.

Indeed, inactivity entails a degree of action aiming to avoid any commitment that may threaten Italy's domestic politics. It must be noted that such an approach does not tame foreign policy within domestic politics, making the former only a residual aspect of the latter, but inactivity implies a rational and wilful process of strategic decision-making of its own.

Some inner characters of Italian domestic politics clarify the reasons why Italian decision-makers are so committed to protect the survival of their domestic political system that they tend to opt for an inactive approach in the international arena. First, Italian governments are in a systematically stronger position compared to the parliament, particularly in the recent years, and thus makes it easier for the government to focus the foreign policy-related discussions on an ideological level rather than on the analytical evaluation of the problems. The prominence of the government entails a rhetorical manipulation of the foreign policy to the benefit of the ruling party or coalition and a general widespread scant attention assigned to international affairs in the political debates. When there is the need to adopt a stance or a particular action on foreign policy matters, Italian governments have usually downgraded the decision-making process to lower institutional figures or entities – see the case of Italian participation to Western-led support to Libyan revolutionaries in 2011. Generally, these actors are less visible than the leading figures in the government, and they usually bear particular interests – Eni to be a case in point. Furthermore, the key sensitive decisions are often presented as parts of a wider set of decisions that need to be adopted or rejected as a whole. This practice divests the parliament of its inherent role and reduces foreign policy's relevance and autonomy.

Second, Italian modern state arose in a specific historical context which has shaped the forms whereby Italy still conducts its foreign policy. The survival of Italian political order as emerged from the WWII depended on the stability of the conditions which had made that system possible. Even if most of those circumstances have faded away, the strategy and the style of Italian foreign policy have not radically changed.⁷

⁷ Isernia, P. & Longo, F., *The Italian foreign policy: challenges and continuities*, "Italian Political Science Review", Vol. 47, No. 2, 2017, pp. 115-118.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, the resultant approach in Italy's foreign policy has been strongly affected by a lack of international credibility, especially in the long-term perspective, due to institutional weakness and government instability. As a response, Italy has – often unsuccessfully – striven to conceive a foreign policy detached from the contingency and anchored to a wider vision and consistent role in the international arena; a «foreign policy of the country, not only of a government», as D'Alema put it in 2007.⁸

That being said, Italian foreign policy orientation has not changed that much over the years. Italy's foreign approach has traditionally hinged on the US and the EU. Rome has always hovered around Washington and Brussels despite the many changes in governments, whatever their political colour. Although minor changes of posture have occurred with some leaders or in some limited circumstances, the general and long-term pattern complies with the scheme of yielding to friendly and stable ties with the West. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this foreign orientation assigns all the other contexts and actors a secondary role restrained by Italy's compliance with its Western allies and within the multilateral organizations. At the same time, Italy has usually presented itself as the Western bridge towards the southern Euro-Mediterranean region. In a quest for developing some strategic autonomy, Rome has been conducting a more independent Mediterranean policy yet never completely detached from its orbiting centres located northward and westward. In the near future, Italy is likely to stick to the trend of prioritizing its membership, thus its commitment, to the EU and the Atlantic alliance while trying to carve out a space of autonomous action in the southern and eastern neighbourhood, even if a proactive role at government level has not to be expected.

On the other hand, the evaluation of Turkey's foreign approach should consider many more variables than the analysis on Italian policies and expect some changes in the future. Indeed, not only has Turkish foreign policy under Erdoğan's rule experienced some adjustments – besides a few continuities, of

⁸ D'Alema, M., cited in: Caffarena, A. & Gabusi, G., *Making sense of a changing world: foreign policy ideas and Italy's national role conceptions after 9/11*, "Italian Political Science Review", Vol. 47, No. 2, 2017, p. 126.

course – in regard to previous trends in Turkish foreign policy, but it has also dealt with reorientations within the Erdoğan's era itself.

Two prominent traits of Turkish current foreign policy have been the focus on national security and the quest for greater strategic autonomy. The former has gained much more emphasis in the recent years rather than in the first period of AKP's rule, while the latter has consistently been a traditional aspect in Turkish foreign approach, even before Erdoğan took power as it has its foundations in Turkey's history. The national security prioritization has induced Ankara to develop a policy aiming to contain regional unrests and oppose the enemies of Turkey home and abroad. The focus on national security has two interconnected dimensions: domestic and external. Therefore, Ankara has usually conducted security policies whose outreach has unravelled beyond the national borders. To be a case in point, Turkey's long-standing struggle with the Kurds has moved from having a sole domestic dimension – the conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdîstan*, PKK) – to covering its foreign extension with Turkey's participation to the Syrian war and the designation of the People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG) as a terrorist organization. The YPG are the military branch of the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD), the Syrian-Kurdish party affiliated to the Turkish PKK. In the attempt to crush all the real and perceived threats to Turkey's national security, the Turkish state has defined as terrorist groups the Gülen Movement (FETÖ), an Islamist movement and former AKP's ally, the Islamic State (IS), and the People's Revolutionary Party/Front (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*, DHKP-C), the Turkish Marxist-Leninist party. Besides the focus on the protection of its national security, Turkey's foreign relations are driven by the quest for greater strategic autonomy. This is a recurring trait of Ankara's attitude in conducting its foreign policy since the foundation of the republic and its historical roots can be found in the strong dependence on Western powers suffered by Turkey since then.

In concrete terms, Turkey seems to favour a foreign policy based on assertive methods, transactional approach, and flexible alliances in order to pursue its priorities of safeguarding national security and gaining more strategic autonomy. The assertiveness appears to characterize both Turkish diplomatic

style and military outreach. Plus, Ankara is trying to develop a national and technologically advanced defence industry to prevent Turkey from relying too much on foreign supplies and military support. To pursue its foreign policy goals, Turkey prefers adopting a transactional-based approach, which means policies are decided more by coinciding interests and opportunities than institutionalized affiliations or shared values. Turkey tends to favour flexible alliances with diverse states on different issues rather than developing a firmly one-directional foreign policy. Such an approach implies that the cooperation with a specific actor is limited in scope and time. The transactional and interest-based style matches with Turkey's tendency to compartmentalise issues in foreign relations – Turkey-Russia relations to be a case in point.

The features of Turkey's current foreign policy as depicted above have been particularly characterizing Erdoğan's rule since the latter part of the past decade. The change in government's foreign attitude can be understood through the attempt to contextualize it in some significant developments Turkey has recently experienced. First and foremost, the Arab revolts and their aftermath have led to some significant regime-changes in the Middle East-North Africa, attracted new international actors in the area while some others have withdrawn from the region, and deteriorated the security environment of Turkey's neighbourhood. All these situations have compelled Turkey to alter its approach towards its close southern-eastern neighbourhood and, by extension, with nearly all the international actors involved.

Second, Turkey's growing disenchantment with its Western allies deepened. The mistrust towards the West has begun in the first decade of the 2000s when Turkey's bid for EU accession stalled and the Republic of Cyprus joined the Union. Along with that, Turkey perceives also the US as a friend not to be trusted since, in the eyes of Turkey, Washington is reluctant to attach some importance to Turkish national interests.

Third, the progressive concentration of power in the executive has favoured a gradual personalization and AKP-characterization of Turkish foreign policy. President Erdoğan himself and his close advisers directly manage the conduction of Turkey's relations with the outside world, and the bureaucratic institutions have been sidelined in the decision-making. Turkish new foreign

approach resembles Erdoğan's populist style and serves its domestic power ambitions.

Finally, Turkey's incumbent governing coalition includes the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), in addition to Erdoğan's AKP. Once lost its political appeal on the broad and extensive coalition that supported AKP's early rule, Erdoğan has tantalized the nationalist right in Turkish politics through increasing references to nationalist themes, like national security, and methods, such as the hard-hitting assertiveness.

Consequently, Ankara has moved from a soft power diplomacy to a hard power approach in almost every domain of its external relations. From presenting itself as a regional leader and a political-cultural model for the Muslim world, Turkey has opted for a securitization of its foreign policy with a strong focus on the protection of its national interests home and abroad. Within the framework of this Turkish foreign policy adjustment, unfavourable political and economic developments for Turkey tend to be presented as foreign attacks to the country's security, sovereignty, and stability.⁹ The notion of "crisis" serves the scope of sealing the legitimacy of Erdoğan's governance and, at the same time, holding the grip to power. Erdoğan's charismatic leadership needs the circumstance of the crisis to demonstrate that he is the only one able to cope with it and successfully overcome the difficulties Turkey faces. Within this pattern, Turkey's foreign policy is often functional to the creation of an enemy and a crisis, thus benefitting the domestic stability and AKP's consensus hinging on Turkish society's nationalists and conservative fringes.¹⁰

4. Signs of AKP's political decline and its consequences on Turkish foreign policy

As seen, an essential factor it must be taken into consideration when looking at the future of Turkish foreign priorities and outreach is Turkey's domestic policy. Turkish political system has been dominating by the current ruling party, the AKP, and its leader, Erdoğan, for the last twenty years. AKP's

⁹ Haugom, L., *Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan: A change in international orientation?*, "Comparative strategy", Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 210-217.

¹⁰ Donelli, F. & Dentice, G., *Sovranismo islamico. Erdoğan e il ritorno della Grande Turchia*, Webinar organized by the "Società di Letture e Conversazioni Scientifiche", Genoa, 27 April 2021.

ideology – Islamic-conservatism populism – and President Erdoğan’s personalisation of power have extensively shaped Turkey’s politics, thus a change in power might turn into a revision or an adjustment of current Turkish foreign policy’s trends. This is why it is necessary to investigate how strong AKP’s grip on Turkey’s political system is and what kind of challenges it has been currently facing.

Turkish political regime has been classified as a “competitive authoritarianism”, in which substantial democratic institutions coexist with serious abuse. This means that competition in the political arena is real yet uneven. In the case of Turkey, the ruling party and its close affiliates control the media and the public space tilting the electoral playing field in favour of Erdogan’s AKP although the competition still remains multiparty. Turkey’s competitive authoritarianism implies that the AKP could lose elections, though it is much more difficult for the opposition to win the polls than for the incumbent party. Indeed, in case of opposition’s preeminence in the pre-electoral phase or in the immediate afterwards, the authoritarian aspects of the regime would set in motion in order to reverse the outcomes.¹¹

Hitherto, AKP’s political success has mostly depended on good economic results; however, since 2018 Turkish economy has been experiencing a crisis due to a continuous deprecation of the Turkish lira. Contested economic manoeuvres pressured by Erdoğan himself – consisting in a series of sharp cuts of policy interest rate – have hindered government’s efforts to curb inflation. In 2021 Turkish lira logged its worst record in all AKP’s ruling. Among economists and observers, scepticism over Erdoğan’s economic recipe has been growing. At the same time, popular discontent has severely increased and threatened AKP’s political dominance.¹²

Recently, it appears that the AKP and Erdoğan have been losing popularity, even in their traditional strongholds and among their usual electoral base. The first great representation of AKP’s loss of popularity occurred in

¹¹ Esen, B. & Gumuscu, S., *Killing Competitive Authoritarianism Softly: The 2019 Local Elections in Turkey*, “South European Society and Politics”, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2019, p. 320.

¹² *Turkish lira slips as inflation seen soaring higher*, “Reuters”, 4 January 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/stocks/turkish-lira-weakens-inflation-soars-highest-erdogan-era-2022-01-04/>. Last accessed: 21 January 2022.

occasion of 2019 local elections. On 31 March the long-lasting rule of AKP lost its grip on local government in Turkey's major provinces and metropolitan areas, though Erdoğan's party gained the majority of the votes in the country. It has been the greatest electoral defeat to the AKP since the beginning of its rule in 2002. Municipalities have represented the origins of AKP as a political force and the main sources of its constant popularity. Erdoğan himself started his political career serving as mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998. Therefore, in 2019 losing both Istanbul and Ankara, alongside other major cities and provinces in the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts and in northern and central Anatolia, mostly to the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), has been hard to process for the AKP. Particularly, Istanbul elections generated a contention between the AKP and the CHP. Once the official results were announced – 48.8% for CHP candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, and 48.5% for AKP's candidate, Binali Yıldırım – the AKP contested the vote count and called for a re-run. In May, through a questionable decision which had clear political foundations and weak legal motivations, the Turkish Supreme Electoral Council (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu*, YSK) agreed for a re-run of Istanbul elections. Before the second run of local elections occurred, many pro-government voters reoriented their support to CHP's candidate after YSK's contested decision, and İmamoğlu's popularity raised. Eventually, on June 23 İmamoğlu won Istanbul elections collecting 54.2% of the votes against AKP's 44.9%.

2019 local elections and the electoral defeat suffered in Istanbul were hard bits to swallow for Erdoğan's AKP. The erosion of the party's consent in metropolitan districts and relevant cities, such as Istanbul and Ankara, has shown AKP's and Erdoğan's vulnerability in the long run. Opposition mayors can now build a solid local base and gather support for their parties. Moreover, opposition ruling may threaten AKP's clientelist networks which have fostered the party's local base. AKP still holds the power in Turkey and its influence in the country's politics will not be easily eroded.¹³ Nevertheless, 2019 local elections challenged its, until then undisputed, supremacy.

Unless economic stagnation ends, in the near future 2019 electoral outcomes' scheme will happen again in bigger and more important elections. The

¹³ Esen, B. & Gumuscu, S., *Killing Competitive Authoritarianism Softly*, pp. 317-338.

next important Turkey's round of voting is scheduled for the year 2023, an historic date in which Turkey will celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic. In June 2023 Turkey will hold both presidential and parliamentary polls, and Erdoğan is unlikely to slam its opponents as easily as it has happened for twenty years. The most significant threat in the eyes of the AKP is the pro-Kurdish opposition gathered in the Peoples' Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*, HDP). Despite not performing at its best in 2019 local elections, the HDP was a decisive factor in influencing the vote against the AKP in the metropolitan districts gained by the opposition. Erdoğan has been carrying on its policy of HDP's criminalization and has denied the quest for early elections proposed by the opposition.¹⁴

Far-reaching disaffection with AKP's rule and Erdoğan's figure has spread among the youth too. One of the last waves of popular protests hit Istanbul at the beginning of 2021. After the appointment by government decree of Melih Bulu as rector of Boğaziçi University, students took to the streets. Melih Bulu was not chosen amidst the academic staff, and he is close to the ruling party. According to students and protesters, Bulu's appointment threatens the traditional autonomy of the high-profile academic institute. The protests attracted huge national and international attention, and Erdoğan accused the demonstrators to be terrorists. Some of the young protesters have been arrested in a pattern of recurring suppression of domestic dissent by the government.¹⁵

The Turkish civil society has frequently demonstrated to be keen on taking to the streets to protest against the progressive erosion of Turkish rule of law and government's abuse of power. Turkish civil society has been traditionally characterized by a strong democratic resilience and attentiveness with regard to the protection of fundamental rights. Despite the government's attempts to silence any kind of opposition, Turkish civil society's sensitivity makes it difficult for Erdoğan to muffle democratic claims.

¹⁴ *Elections will be held as scheduled, in 2023: Erdoğan*, "Hurriyet Daily News", 23 November 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/elections-will-be-held-as-scheduled-in-2023-erdogan-169568>. Last accessed: 24 January 2022.

¹⁵ Talbot, V., *Turchia: da giovani e USA sfida a Erdogan*, "ISPI", 15 February 2021, <https://www.ISPIonline.it/it/pubblicazione/turchia-da-giovani-e-usa-sfida-erdogan-29284>. Last accessed: 27 January 2022.

The erosion of AKP's large consent and the growth of a more effective political and public opposition will definitely affect the future of the relations between Turkey and both Italy and the EU. Until the next polls, Erdoğan and his AKP are going to use any tool to increase their clout upon Turkish electorate and bolster their political support. The future is unpredictable, but what is certain is that Turkish domestic politics' developments do, and will, definitely affect Turkey's posture in the international arena.

5. The Mediterranean as the linchpin of Italo-Turkish cooperation

In order to comprehensively assess the relations between Italy and Turkey in the light of their Mediterranean roles, it appears necessary to frame their partnership within the features depicted above. Only a wider Mediterranean in which many foreign powers interact can explain the extent of Italo-Turkish relations. Italian aide Silvia Romano's release is an emblematic example of such extended cooperative and highly participated relationship. Also, when discussing Mediterranean issues, the inclusion of external actors is essential to evaluate the importance of both Rome and Ankara in global powers' regional ambitions. For instance, both Italy's and Turkey's role in the Mediterranean serves somewhat the scopes of the US in the region. In the last decade, Washington has opted for a major withdrawal from the Middle East and North Africa. Under Obama administration, the US started to reorient their foreign outreach towards the Indo-Pacific handing over the security of the wider Mediterranean to multilateral organisations or to allied states' initiatives. The strategy of "leading from behind" was inaugurated in 2011 when the US avoided being commander-in-chief of anti-Qaddafi operations. Since then, Washington has usually charged Rome to bear Western interests at international gatherings, particularly on Libya, and entrusted Ankara with the regional containment of external actors. In fact, for the US Turkey represents the Mediterranean stronghold against the increasing leverage acquired by Russia and China, which are both at loggerheads with Washington.

US withdrawal from the Mediterranean and the consequent slight autonomy acquired by both Rome and Ankara has increased their leverage in the area, spurring their regional cooperation.

Italy and Turkey are well anchored to the West, despite the more and more assertive anti-Western rhetoric recently adopted by Ankara. Particularly, their adhesion to NATO makes Italy and Turkey leading actors of the Western security architecture in the Mediterranean. Turkish purchase of Russian S-400 national missile defence system has strongly angered Washington¹⁶, but it can be seen as part of recent Turkey's transactional and multifaceted foreign approach. Indeed, Turkey's cooperation on defence with traditional NATO allies has also deepened: at the time of Ankara's decision to buy S-400 surface-to-air missile batteries from Russia, Turkey held talks with the Franco-Italian EUROSAM consortium to develop a long-range air and missile defence system. In 2017, Turkey, Italy and France signed a joint statement of intent to reinforce their cooperation in the production of air and missile defence systems. Despite the ambitions, the contracts with French firms have been halted due to political considerations, and even in this domain Italian mediation efforts in the Mediterranean theatres of confrontation between Paris and Ankara appear to be essential to reinforce Turkish compliance to its NATO allies.

EU-Turkey relations also represent an extension of Italo-Turkish ties. While the relation with the US pivots mostly on defence and security issues, EU-Turkey relation is multi-layered. Due to their geographical proximity, EU and Turkey have been seeking a constructive bilateral dialogue. While being an important market for European goods and services, Turkey is essential to the EU to reach its goals of energy diversification, migrations flows' containment, and south-eastern borders' securitization. On the other hand, Ankara needs Brussels to supply its domestic market and export its products, as well as an extensive relation with the EU enables Turkey to comply its power ambitions and play its cards in the Mediterranean. Almost all of the challenges of the EU-Turkey relation hinge on the Mediterranean space; maritime disputes, energy supplies, migrants from the Middle Eastern and South Asian war-torn regions forge indeed the relations between Brussels and Ankara.

If in the first decade of the XXI century, the relations between Italy and Turkey hinged on the Turkish bid for accession to the EU; nowadays, even if the

¹⁶ *Turkey's Russian air defence systems and U.S response*, "Reuters", 1 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/turkeys-russian-air-defence-systems-us-response-2021-10-01/>. Last accessed: 6 February 2022.

perspective of Turkish adhesion to the EU remains still an option in the words of Italian officials¹⁷, the Italo-Turkish relations are more and more centred on the Mediterranean region. Particularly starting from 2011, Italo-Turkish partnership started to be conceived as a multifaceted partnership encapsulating a broader spectrum of areas of interests, not only limited to the European compass. Within this framework, Libya and the Levantine basin undoubtedly represent the two Mediterranean main dossiers of cooperation, and competition, between Italy and Turkey.

¹⁷ Gencturk, A., *Italian Ambassador hails 'excellent' relations with Turkey*, "Anadolu Agency", 1 December 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/italian-ambassador-hails-excellent-relations-with-turkey/2435425>. Last accessed: 7 February 2022.

Conclusion

The research question this thesis tried to answer is what kind of role plays the Mediterranean in the current relations between Italy and Turkey. The topics discussed in this work suggest that in the last decade the Mediterranean has acquired a greater centrality in the relation between Italy and Turkey. The fact of being Mediterranean countries and pursuing a multi-front Mediterranean agenda shapes the partnership between the two countries. Recently, the significant turmoil of the Arab revolts and their afterwards as well as the discovery of a considerable amount of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean basin have raised the stakes of the Mediterranean great game. Rome and Ankara have thus started to develop an outstanding presence in many Mediterranean scenarios. Italy's and Turkey's stances on the Mediterranean and the way the two countries interact in the regional hotspots – Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean in particular – affect Italo-Turkish relation as a whole. The Mediterranean dimension of the relation between Rome and Ankara has gained more relevance, and it is strictly linked to the Italo-Turkish cooperation pivoting on the EU, within the broader Western alliance, and in third countries.

In a more and more extensive and intertwined Mediterranean, it is difficult to compartmentalise the different trajectories undertaken by a single state's foreign policy. Italy and Turkey operate in the Mediterranean as part of bigger strategies and in response to intra-regional transitions or external incentives. However, in doing research to evaluate the extent and the significance of the Mediterranean dimension of Italo-Turkish relations, this thesis demonstrated the great relevance of the Mediterranean dynamics in shaping current Italo-Turkish relations.

The partnership between Italy and Turkey has deep historical roots and it is now healthy and extensive. Their ties encompass a series of realms – trade, energy, defence, security, migration, cooperation in third countries – and broaden from bilateral to multilateral dimension. The Mediterranean is a key region for the Rome and Ankara to strengthen their cooperation in order to enhance broader regional stabilization, which serves both countries' interests.

Almost all the issues discussed in this work are very recent, so the evaluation of some trends and developments is necessarily provisional. As of the beginning of February 2022, some of the dynamics depicted in this work are quickly evolving. For instance, the US are conducting a wide-range approach to the Gulf States that it may change the pattern of confrontation within the Arabian Peninsula; Washington has also recently decided to undermine the EastMed project; in Libya two prime ministers threaten the political unity of the country once again; Turkey and the UAE have been engaging in a comprehensive bilateral rapprochement after years of strained relations. The developments that the wider Mediterranean is currently experiencing do not compromise the research conducted in this thesis, but they do leave this work open for further updates and investigations.

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