

COULD THE “MATTEI PLAN” BE REINVENTED FOR AFRICA? A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Carola Cerami

Introduction

With the Russia-Ukraine War, the rise of energy and food prices, and the potential increase in conflicts and crises, many European countries are trying to replace Russian natural gas with gas from other sources, particularly from North Africa¹. Due to these fundamental changes, the question of energy independence has gained a new urgency, and commercial, energy, security and migration aspects dictate the priorities of Italian foreign policy towards the Enlarged Mediterranean and Africa.

Draghi's government and the subsequent centre-right government led by Giorgia Meloni have both relaunched Italy's foreign policy towards the Mediterranean and Africa. The so-called “*Piano Mattei*”/ “Mattei Plan” is part of this trend. It is promoted by the current Italian government and has three declared aims: 1. making Italy a logistical energy hub for Europe; 2. monitoring the migratory phenomena (with a focus on the question of refugees); 3. relaunching Italy's strategic and geopolitical role in the Mediterranean and Africa.

The ‘Mattei Plan’ takes its name from Enrico Mattei, an Italian entrepreneur, politician and public manager, protagonist of the post-war

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¹ C. CERAMI, *Italy, Turkey and China in the Eastern Mediterranean: implications for the EU* in “Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies (JBNES)”, Vol. 26, Issue 5, 2024, pp. 641–658, Routledge-Taylor & Francis, London, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2308961>

economic boom, and a symbol of the country's productive recovery after the World War II. In 1953, Mattei founded ENI, *Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi*/National Hydrocarbons Agency, a multinational company created by the Italian state as a public economic body. It was financed by the state through an 'endowment fund', whose disbursement and increase were determined by Parliament².

During the 1950s, Enrico Mattei sought to support African countries' development of their natural resources to help the continent maximize its economic growth potential and facilitate Italy's energy independence. As Europe rethinks its energy policy and seeks to wean itself off Russian gas, Italy is once more eyeing a similar strategy through its sector companies³. However, understanding the importance of the figure of Mattei himself to the internal and international life of Italy in the '50s and '60s, and analysing how this biographical moment was inserted into a multifaceted framework, characterized by the transformation of the strategic nature of the energy question as an element of international life, is a very complex task that cannot be the object of easy simplifications and slogans⁴.

The main aim of this essay is to explore historically and reflect upon the original meaning of the "Mattei Plan" and the role of ENI from the 1950s to the present, in a dynamic scenario of Italian foreign policy towards the Mediterranean and the African continent. These are the main research questions at the core of this essay: 1. Are the original "Mattei Method" and Enrico Mattei's "obsession" to overcome the energy inferiority complex applicable to Italian foreign policy in the 21st century? 2) Is it convincing – from a historical viewpoint – to re-invent the "Mattei Plan" in a profoundly changed historical, geopolitical, and cultural scenario?

The article is divided into two parts. The first part explores the role of Enrico Mattei and the original meaning of the "Mattei Plan" in the 1950s and 1960s in the Italy of the "economic miracle" and "neo-At-

² ENI was established by law no. 136 on 10 February 1953.

³ S. SCIORILLI BORRELLI, *Italy renews its 'Mattei Plan' to develop energy ties to Africa*, in "Financial Times", 11 January 2023.

⁴ E. DI NOLFO, *Introduction*, in L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio. Questione petrolifera globale, guerra fredda e politica italiana nella vicenda di Enrico Mattei*, Firenze, Loggia de' Lanzi, 1994, p. 8.

lanticism”. The international scenario in the mid-1950s was characterized by the crucial relationship between decolonization, the emergence of the “Third World” and the evolution of the Cold War. The post-De Gasperi Italian foreign policy, the first steps of ENI and the most significant initiatives of Enrico Mattei took place at that time. However, has the “Mattei Method” really left a legacy? Is it repeatable without Mattei himself?

The second part of the article analyses the current meaning of the “Mattei Plan” in Italian foreign policy towards the Mediterranean and Africa, with a focus on energy, security and geopolitics. It is also appropriate to consider whether the “Mattei Plan” will be able to pursue an effective and non-conflictual mediation policy between Europe and Africa within the framework of international development cooperation policies.

Finally, resuming the central question of this article: can history help us to assess the path of the Italian government today when threading its way towards a new Mattei Plan? The conclusion will offer a reflection on how the historical reconstruction can provide some suggestions to avoid, or at least minimize, the mistakes of the past.

1. *At the origins of the “Mattei Plan”: Oil, Decolonization and the Cold War (1945- 1962)*

At the end of World War II, Europe faced one of the most serious energy crises in its history. For the United States and European countries, the entire energy policy became a central point in the general economic reorganization of Europe. The energy question became one of the main issues of the Marshall Plan. In the period 1948-1951, the Marshall Plan funds for the purchase of oil amounted to one billion dollars out of a total of 13 billion⁵. As David S. Painter recalls, the control of strategic raw material played a key role in the origins and outcome of World War II and continued to be a source of power and policy during the Cold War. Oil gradually played a central role in the world economy⁶.

⁵ L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio*, cit., p. 49-50.

⁶ D.S. PAINTER, *Oil, resources and the Cold War, 1945 – 1962* in M.P. LEFFLER, O.A. WESTAD (eds) “The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Origins”, Vol. 1, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 486-507.

In the late 1940s, seven large oil companies accounted for almost 90 percent of world oil production. Known as the “Seven Sisters”, they included five US companies – *Standard Oil of New Jersey* (later transformed into ESSO), *Socony Vacuum* (then MOBIL), *Standard Oil of California* (SOCAL, later transformed into CHEVRON), the *Texas Oil Company* (TEXACO) and *Gulf Oil Company* (GULF) – as well as the British-owned *Anglo Iranian Oil Company* (AOIC then BRITISH PETROLEUM - BP) and the *Royal Dutch Shell* (then SHELL group), a 60 percent Dutch and 40 percent British partnership. The big oil companies were the seven richest oil companies in the world in terms of turnover. They controlled the economic cycle of oil until the early seventies, forming a real economic cartel, cooperating with each other to establish a common selling price of oil and to impose equal production rates.

These aspects are crucial in understanding the scenario in which the actions of a small Italian state company took place. Although the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) lacked its own oil resources and belonged to a country that had never been a great power, it managed to challenge the power of the “Seven Sisters”. And this story coincided entirely with the brief but intense story of the founder and first president of ENI, Enrico Mattei⁷. The creation of ENI in 1953 created a true oil monopoly. At the core of the launch of the state company was the substantial unity that was achieved in the Christian Democracy Party (the main Italian political party post-WWII), thanks to the decisive support of Alcide De Gasperi, Prime Minister from 1946 to 1953, and Ezio Vanoni, economist, senator and Minister of Finance during the De Gasperi governments.

ENI played a key role in the country’s energy supply and development policy. Mattei, with the creation of ENI, became the symbol of the political industrialist of the republican era, with a growing and ramified power, which was concentrated in the years of the “Italian economic miracle”. In just a few years, ENI consolidated its role, becoming central to the politics, economy and society of Italy⁸. With the creation of ENI, Mattei managed to build a tool through which to exercise his own power, which was strongly rooted in the national political structure and then projected on to the international scenario. Mattei’s aim to bind oil and foreign policy

⁷ L. MAUGERI, *L’arma del petrolio*, cit., p. 57.

⁸ M. CALIGIURI (eds.), *Enrico Mattei e l’intelligence. Petrolio e interesse nazionale nella guerra fredda*, Rubbettino Editore, 2022, p. 37.

in an indissoluble union was revealed from the very beginning of the company's history.

Since the end of World War II, Italian foreign policy has been based on three main pillars: a) 'Europeanism', a strong anchoring to the EEC/EU's integration project; b) 'Atlanticism', preferential relations with the United States; and c) 'Mediterraneanism', a constantly renewed perception of the strategic nature of the Mediterranean area and the research of the geopolitical and economic-commercial role of Italy as a Mediterranean country⁹. Even in the De Gasperi period, marked by the Atlantic and European choices, Italian diplomacy had paid great attention to the evolution of events in the Mediterranean area, aiming to cultivate good relations with a series of countries, from Syria to Lebanon to Egypt¹⁰.

In the international scenario, the clash between the two superpowers was moving from the "old continent" to the "Third World". In the Mediterranean and Middle East area, Great Britain and France began to find themselves in increasing difficulty. The United States feared that the rapid end of the colonial empires (especially the crisis of the French and British presence in the Mediterranean) could be filled by the Soviet Union, while the process of decolonization was forcefully imposing itself on international relations. As Odd Arne Westad recalls, the forming of anticolonial revolutionary movements and of new Third World states is inextricably linked to the Cold War¹¹.

An intensifying Cold War and its impact on global struggles for decolonization prompted many anticolonial leaders to rethink the terms of their engagement with the international system. In April 1955, leaders from thirty newly post-colonial states, gathered in Bandung, Indonesia. The meeting provided an opportunity for Third World leaders to discuss transnational anticolonial ideologies of regional, race, and class solidarities and to create an international space apart from both the imperial and the Cold War orders¹². Several African countries seemed to be heading

⁹ S. COLOMBO, A. PALM, *Italy in the Mediterranean—Priorities and Perspectives of a European Middle Power*, in "Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)", 2019, p. 7.

¹⁰ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2022.

¹¹ O.A. WESTAD, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, New York – Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 74.

¹² M.P. BRADLEY, *Decolonization, the global South and the Cold War, 1919- 1962*, in

for independence; the conference caught the moment of greatest hope and expectation in the anticolonial struggle¹³. What emerged at Bandung were the outlines of a nascent alternative international order made up of former colonial states and peoples that tilted neither to the Soviet nor to the American side in the Cold War. These leaders were deeply concerned with supporting ongoing independence struggles and realizing postcolonial and economic justice.

It was in this international scenario that Enrico Mattei came into play. ENI achieved its first relative success in Egypt, the country where anti-colonial sentiment and anti-Western radicalization were expressing the most determined political leadership in the Middle East and Mediterranean area. In Egypt, a military coup in 1952 by young army officers, intent upon reducing continuing quasi-colonial British domination and challenging social-economic inequality, brought General Gamal Abdel Nasser to power. Nasser launched a radical program of economic nationalism. He was one of the main protagonists of the Bandung conference and the subsequent “Non-aligned Movement”.

The president of ENI met Nasser for the first time at the end of 1954. This meeting had a strong influence on the progressive formation of Mattei’s anti-colonial thought. From this solidarity there emerged a model of oil agreement that was a paradigm of Mattei’s philosophy and political practice in the international context. The system that Mattei planned in Egypt, and then implemented in Iran, was called 75-25 to contrast it with the “fifty-fifty” system¹⁴. With the idea launched by ENI, the producing state was no longer a simple grantor that remained excluded from the administrative and strategic management of the oil affairs that took place on its soil; on the contrary, it could become a true partner while remaining equally free from any financial risk of initial research, and at the same time its profits could grow significantly compared to the fifty-fifty¹⁵.

Mattei’s action was favoured by the growing intolerance of the leadership of the producing countries towards the logic of exploitation adopted

M.P. LEFFLER, O.A. WESTAD (eds), “The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Origins”, Vol. 1, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 464-485.

¹³ O.A. WESTAD, *The Global Cold War*, cit., p. 99.

¹⁴ A. TONINI, *Il sogno proibito. Mattei, il petrolio arabo e le ‘sette sorelle’*, Firenze, Edizioni Polistampa, 2003.

¹⁵ L. MAUGERI, *L’arma del petrolio*, cit., p. 93.

by the “Seven Sisters” and by the increasingly strong anti-colonial wave that was manifesting itself in the world. Several times, this placed Mattei in conflict with the big international oil companies and with the sectors of the American government that were linked to them¹⁶. Mattei believed that the decolonization ferments of the Third World provided Italy with a favourable opportunity to re-enter major international politics. Furthermore, he saw the decline of the traditional European powers (France and UK) in the Mediterranean area as an economic opportunity for ENI and an open space of economic and political influence for Italy.

The Italian foreign policy in the mid-50s, encouraged by Mattei’s initiatives, tried to find a complex balance between the desire to get closer to the aspirations of anticolonial movements in the Arab world, the need for economic penetration in the Mediterranean and Middle East area, and the requirement to maintain solid relations with the United States. This new trend was called “neo-Atlanticism”, which can be understood as a combination of the Italian ambition to play an incisive role in the Mediterranean, the need to safeguard and defend national interests, and the reality of the Atlantic choice.

The desire for a more active foreign policy was also an expression of a fundamental change that was taking place in the country in those years: the transformation of Italy from a backward country, tied to a predominantly rural economy, into a predominantly industrial country with a rapidly expanding economy. This radical change had revolutionary consequences on Italian society, which was projected towards a modern consumer society: these were the years of the “Italian economic miracle”¹⁷. It was during this period that Mediterranean policy began to emerge more strongly in Italy’s international relations.

This policy had some political sources of inspiration, among which was the influence of Giovanni Gronchi, President of the Italian Republic from 1955 to 1962 and Amintore Fanfani, a leading figure of the Christian Democracy and a forerunner of some political choices¹⁸. Despite

¹⁶ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell’Italia repubblicana*, cit. p. 219.

¹⁷ A. VARSORI, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell’Italia repubblicana*, cit., p. 188.

¹⁸ F. IMPERATO, R. MILANO, L. MONZALI, *Fra diplomazia e petrolio. Aldo Moro e la politica italiana in Medio Oriente (1963-1978)*, Bari, Cacucci Editore, 2018, p. 5.

many contradictions, Giovanni Gronchi's election as President of the Republic on 29 April 1955 helped inaugurate a more assertive policy towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Gronchi was one of Mattei's major allies. As Leonardo Maugeri wrote, the relationship that was established between the two appeared to be marked by a strong character of complementarity. Gronchi became an institutional promoter of the attempt to evolve Italian foreign policy; Mattei, on the other hand, assumed the role of an active raider in the construction of new international objectives¹⁹.

There is no doubt that ENI, led by Mattei, acted as a vector of foreign policy for Italy. The two-year period 1956-1957 was key in the development of Mattei's internal and international action. A decisive event was the Suez Crisis. On 26 July 1956 Nasser announced that Egypt was expropriating the Anglo-French company that operated the Suez Canal²⁰. In the days when Egypt decided to nationalize the Suez Canal, ENI carried out the construction of an oil pipeline and a refinery inaugurated in Mostorod in the presence of Nasser who praised the Italian-Egyptian cooperation. The final humiliation of France and Great Britain during the Suez crisis strengthened the expectations of the neo-Atlanticists, who saw in the downsizing of the two European nations the opportunity to relaunch Italy's presence in the Mediterranean and to reclaim Italy's role as a "bridge" between the Atlantic Alliance and the Arab world. However, disappointingly for Italy, the Franco-British decline in the Mediterranean and the Middle East led the United States to assume direct responsibility in the region, neglecting the role of Italy²¹.

During the Suez Crisis, Mattei was already preparing to conclude the operation that would lead to a decisive turning point in oil diplomacy, and to a dangerous collision with American interests. The president of ENI finalized an agreement with Iran whose consequences would determine the objective pre-eminence of the oil factor in Italian foreign policy. The agreement signed with the National Iranian Oil Company gave birth to a joint venture, the *Società Irano-Italiana dei Petroli* (SIRIP). Tech-

¹⁹ L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio*, cit., p. 129.

²⁰ D. LITTLE, *The Cold War in the Middle East: Suez crisis to Camp David Accords*, in M.P. LEFFLER, O.A. WESTAD (eds), "The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Crises and Détente", Vol. II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 305-326.

²¹ L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio*, cit., pp. 130-136.

nically, the government of the producing country would collect 75% of the company's overall profits while the remaining 25% would go to ENI. The drastic break in the "fifty-fifty system" desired by Mattei, according to many (the United States and Great Britain and the major oil companies) would endanger the stability of the Middle East and the oil supplies of the entire region. American diplomacy began to work to prevent the ratification of the agreement. The Iranian affair immediately appeared as a piece of a more complex and systematic plan for Mattei to penetrate the oil-producing countries, creating discomfort in the American administration²². However, the Iranian episode was only the beginning, as Mattei continued his strategy with agreements or attempted agreements with Libya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Morocco, Iraq and Tunisia²³.

From 1958 to the early 1960s, Italy concluded important oil agreements with the USSR. In 1960, Italy had already reached the position of largest importer of Soviet crude oil in the Western hemisphere. Obviously, the rapid growth of Italian dependence on Soviet oil caused a new alarm in the United States. Mattei also aroused growing discontent in Italy due to fears of the international repercussions of his activism and the autonomy with which he proceeded in conducting his personal foreign policy²⁴.

The years from 1959 to 1962 highlighted some of the limitations of Mattei's action. The significant changes that affected the international oil market at the beginning of the '60s seemed destined to reduce Mattei's political space. The foundation of the *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries* (OPEC), on 14 September 1960, exposed the other side of the international oil system. OPEC was the oil-producing countries' response to the economic dominance of foreign oil companies, which exercised almost absolute control over the production chain. The creation of OPEC posed a fundamental question for ENI's strategies, which until

²² L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio*, cit., pp. 130-136.

²³ B. BAGNATO, *Petrolio e politica. Mattei in Marocco*, Firenze, Edizioni Polistampa, 2004.

²⁴ L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio*, cit., p. 230. See also: B. BAGNATO, *Prove di Ostpolitik. Politica e economia nella strategia italiana verso l'Unione Sovietica 1958-1963*, Studi della Fondazione Einaudi n. 42, Olschki, Firenze, 2003; M. BONNE, *I colloqui tra l'Unione Sovietica e l'industria energetica italiana dal 1959 al 1961: la strategia di Enrico Mattei e i suoi risvolti sulla politica internazionale*, in "Ventunesimo Secolo", Rubbettino Editore, 2011, Vol. 10, No. 24.

then had been based on the assumption that the fight against the “Seven Sisters” could be conducted in alliance with the producing countries, using the political potential of nationalist and anti-Western anxieties. During the second Arab Petroleum Congress, held in Cairo in 1960 immediately after the creation of OPEC, the same nations that a few years earlier had appeared as the natural allies of Italian oil policy attacked both the agreements between Italy and URSS and the unilateral reductions in the price of petroleum products.

On 27 October 1962, Mattei died in a plane crash, the details of which are still unclear. Enrico Mattei certainly contributed to strengthening Italy’s influence and image in several Mediterranean and Middle Eastern nations, also laying the foundations for the role that ENI would play in the following decades on the international stage as a symbol of Italian state entrepreneurship. At the end of 1962, in addition to the European networks (the AGIP brand), ENI was present in Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Liberta, Togo, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Sierra Leone. The theme of development cooperation also emerged in that period, including all forms of international cooperation aimed at promoting the economic and social progress of the less advanced states (developing countries).

As Leonardo Maugeri recalls, the instrumental use of the oil weapon allowed Mattei, given the particular conditions of the Cold War, decolonization and the Italian political system of the time, to obtain a unique and unrepeatable weight in the history of Italy’s post-war international relations. Mattei therefore inserted himself at the crossroads of epochal historical phenomena and often lived an epic and isolated struggle, which once deprived of its protagonist would not have left a legacy²⁵.

2. *The relaunch of the Mattei Plan for Africa in the 21st century: Energy, Security and Geopolitics*

Italy’s strategic priority to expand its economic and political presence in the Mediterranean region was a central organizing principle for Italy’s

²⁵ L. MAUGERI, *L’arma del petrolio*, cit. p. 311.

foreign relations, even during the 1970s and 1980s. With the end of the Cold War, while maintaining the three priority axes of foreign policy, Italy had to assume greater responsibility in addressing growing challenges to international security, with particular attention to the Mediterranean area²⁶. In particular, over the last decade, Italy has been attempting to promote its global profile by becoming a central player in the broader Mediterranean basin, placing itself at the centre of a network of Mediterranean trade, economic, and cultural routes connecting Europe with Africa and the Middle East.

Starting in 2013, the government led by Enrico Letta²⁷ and then Matteo Renzi's government²⁸ introduced elements of renewal in relations with the African continent. In those years, a new public debate on Africa opened up in Italy, fuelled by the upheavals of the Arab revolts of 2011 and the resulting increase in migratory flows. Among the priority issues were the following: the definition of a long-term strategy of collaboration with African governments to manage the migratory issue in a coordinated manner, the promotion and intensification of the presence of Italian companies on the continent and, above all, the energy issue and the development of a south-north energy axis to reduce dependence on the east-west one. The growing importance of the energy issue has further strengthened the connection between Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean area and the role of ENI.

ENI was converted into a joint stock company in 1992. Over the following decades, ENI continued to put its resources at the disposal of the country, accompanying it towards major economic and social changes. In the early 1990s, the company was listed on the stock exchange, undergoing a process of rationalization and industrial renewal based, as ever, on competitive performance and technological innovation²⁹. Since 1995, the Italian State has progressively sold the company's shares but still owns more than 30% of the share capital and therefore continues

²⁶ M. CARBONE, *Introduction: Italy's foreign policy and the Mediterranean*, in "Modern Italy", Vol. 13, No. 2, May 2008, p. 111.

²⁷ ENRICO LETTA, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic from 28 April 2013 to 22 February 2014.

²⁸ MATTEO RENZI, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic from 22 February 2014 to 12 December 2016. Closing speech at the Italy-Africa Ministerial Conference, 18 May 2016.

²⁹ <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/home.html>

to hold effective control of the company. ENI's privatization process began a new radical development phase in 2014, which aimed at responding to the challenges of climate change and the energy transition. Today ENI is a joint stock company, an Italian multinational company involved in the production and distribution of energy, with a global presence and a leading role in the Mediterranean area and Africa. ENI carries out activities in the oil, electricity generation, natural gas and engineering sectors. It ranks as the sixth oil group in the world by volume of business and has been defined by Forbes as the first company active in Italy³⁰.

The Mario Draghi government³¹ and the subsequent centre-right government led by Giorgia Meloni³² relaunched Italy's foreign policy towards the Mediterranean. The series of visits undertaken by top ranking Italian government officials accompanied by the managing director of ENI in the area, at the beginning of 2023, seems to have confirmed the Italian Mediterranean and African ambitions and the aim of making Italy a logistical energy hub for Europe³³. In July 2023, the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni convened an *International Conference on Development and Migration* in Rome, aimed at initiating a continuous international action known as the "Rome Process".

The so-called 'Piano Mattei per l' Africa' / 'Mattei Plan for Africa' (named after Enrico Mattei) is part of this project, promoted by the current Italian government, with the aim of relaunching Italy's strategic and geopolitical role in the Mediterranean region and towards the African continent. The priorities are energy, security and geopolitics.

The Plan – still in the making – builds on Italy's ambition of regaining a prominent role in the Mediterranean, in Africa and at an interna-

³⁰ C. CERAMI, *Italy, Turkey and China in the Eastern Mediterranean: implications for the EU*, cit., p. 644-645.

³¹ MARIO DRAGHI, Governor of the Bank of Italy (2006-2011), then President of the European Central Bank (2011- 2019), was Prime Minister of the Italian Republic from 13 February 2021 to 22 October 2022.

³² GIORGIA MELONI, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic since 22 October 2022.

³³ C. DESCALZI, *Eni calls for south-north energy axis between Europe and Africa*, in "Financial Times", 5 January 2023. On 22 and 23 January 2023, the Italian PM Giorgia Meloni set out on a mission to Algeria. Immediately after 28 January 2023, the Italian PM visited Tripoli, with the aim of strengthening the agreement with the Libyan government on gas and migrants. Meanwhile, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Tajani went to Turkey on 13 January 2023, Tunisia on 18 January and Egypt on 21 and 22 January.

tional level³⁴. In November 2023, the Italian government approved Decree-Law no. 161 containing “Urgent provisions for the “Mattei Plan” for development in States on the African continent”³⁵, then converted it into Law no. 2/2024³⁶. Law no. 2/2024 came into force on 14 January 2024, which defines the areas of intervention of the “The Italy-Africa Strategic Plan: Mattei Plan” and establishes the Control Room responsible for coordinating and monitoring its implementation. It is chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of representatives of the government, other public bodies, private entities and the third sector. The Plan has a four-year duration.

The main indications regarding the contents and aims of the initiative, however, came from the speech given by the President of the Council on the occasion of the ‘*Italia-Africa. A bridge for common growth*’ Summit, held in Rome on 28-29 January 2024, in the presence of representatives of 46 African countries and 25 multilateral bodies, including the highest officials of the European Union and ONU³⁷. The launch of the Mattei Plan coincides with the year of the Italian presidency of the G7 and Italy has repeatedly stressed its desire to place Africa among the major political priorities.

This is how President Giorgia Meloni explained the choice of naming the Plan after Enrico Mattei in her opening address at the Italia-Africa Summit (Figure 1):

“...We believe it is possible to imagine and write a new page in the history of our relations. Cooperation as equals, far from any predatory temptations, but also from that ‘charity-like’ approach to Africa which is so ill-suited to its extraordinary development potential. This new approach, for which our

³⁴ https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/ES0217.pdf?_1729420807520

³⁵ Disposizioni urgenti per il “Piano Mattei” per lo sviluppo in Stati del Continente africano <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2024/01/13/24A00172/sg>

³⁶ Legge 11 gennaio 2024, n. 2. Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del D.lgs. 15 novembre 2023, n. 161, recante disposizioni urgenti per il “Piano Mattei” per lo sviluppo in Stati del Continente africano. (24G00006) (GU n. 10 del 13-1-2024) <https://www.programmagoverno.gov.it/it/notizie/pubblicata-in-gazzetta-ufficiale-la-legge-n-2-del-2024-recante-disposizioni-urgenti-per-il-piano-mattei-per-lo-sviluppo-in-stati-del-continente-africano/>

³⁷ President Meloni’s opening address at the Italia-Africa Summit, 29 January 2024 <https://www.governo.it/en/articolo/president-meloni-s-opening-address-italia-africa-summit/24861>

nation wants to be the standard-bearer, is also reflected in the name of this Summit: *'Italia-Africa. A bridge for common growth'*, because this is Italy's natural vocation: a bridge between Africa and Europe. As Italians, we have the advantage of being able to build that bridge not starting from scratch, but rather based on the solid foundations that the great Italian Enrico Mattei, founder of ENI, had the foresight to envisage all those years ago. ...Mattei taught us that it was possible to combine Italy's need to make its growth sustainable with the need of partner nations to experience a time of freedom, development and progress. Today, we want to build on that intuition and write a new page of this story, together³⁸."

PIANO MATTEI

PROGETTI PILOTA

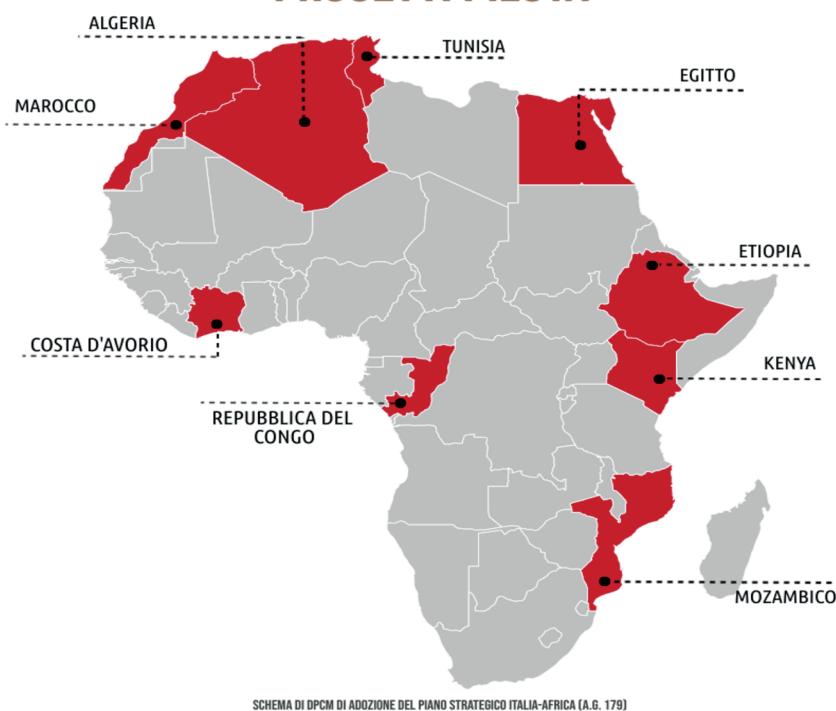


Figure 1 - https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/ES0217.pdf?_1729420807520

³⁸ <https://www.governo.it/en/articolo/president-meloni-s-opening-address-italia-africa-summit/24861>

The Mattei Plan is designed to be a policy platform, open to sharing and cooperation with African nations, a strategic plan for diplomacy, development cooperation and investment to strengthen and renew ties with the continent. For the first phase, the Government has identified a series of pilot countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Kenya) for concrete and prompt implementation actions in six sectors of intervention: health, education and training, agriculture, water, energy and infrastructure³⁹. The Plan will have an initial funding of 5.5 billion euro in grants, credits or guarantees. Three billion euro will be taken from the National Climate Fund, whereas 2.5 billion euro will come from the Development Cooperation budget. The Prime Minister also announced that the Italian development bank – Cassa Depositi e Prestiti – will launch a new financial instrument by the end of 2024 aimed at facilitating private sector participation in the Plan, which is necessary to integrate public funds and make the Italian offer more substantial⁴⁰.

Many aspects of the Mattei Plan are still being defined; however, some reflections may be appropriate in reference to this first phase. First of all, the “Mattei Plan” currently emerges as a “container” rather than a fully-defined Plan. It is therefore an evolving project, which can be more accurately evaluated based on the concrete results it will achieve.

The second point concerns the issue of migratory flows and the question relating to the “prevention and fight against irregular immigration and management of legal migratory flows”. This is a crucial theme, which requires a frank discussion involving the African counterpart, about the expansion of regular migration channels and the legal migratory flows, and about the need to look at migratory processes as a component of development processes. On this point, the position of the Meloni Government appears controversial. As underlined by the President of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki in his opening speech at the Italy-Africa Summit in Rome: “our partnership on this issue will remain limited until it culminates in a structural change in the de-

³⁹ https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Italia-Africa_MatteiPlan_6pillars.pdf

⁴⁰ ASPEN INSTITUTE, ISPI, CRESPI, IAI, ECFR, *Il Piano Mattei: Rilanciare l’Africa Policy dell’Italia*, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Position Paper del Progetto Comunità Italiana di Politica Estera, 2024 https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ISPI_FPC-Piano-Mattei.pdf

velopment model, including a new approach to managing migration flows”⁴¹. Faki then underlined that:

“The Mattei Plan, on which we would have hoped to have been consulted, is an initiative on which Africa is ready to discuss... but I would like us to move from words to deeds now. You will understand that we cannot be satisfied with simple promises that are then not kept. We know that Italy is the main hub of arrival of migrants, and this is an issue on which we must find common solutions. The emigration of young people is a tragedy for Africa itself, the partnership between us will always be limited until Africa’s development model is structurally changed⁴².”

The third point, which appears to be a priority, is the relationship between the Mattei Plan and Italian international development cooperation policies towards Africa. The international development cooperation approach is an integral and qualifying part of Italy’s foreign policy, and the “Mattei Plan” must find its strengths in this framework. Fears have been expressed of a reduction in the role of cooperation and of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation if too large a part of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided for by the Budget Law were to be directed towards financing private interests⁴³. Over the decades, Italian development cooperation has been structured and strengthened in terms of its instruments, its ambitions, and internal and external partnerships, and has also played an increasing role in the G7, the G20, and in the broader multilateral framework. In the bilateral context, development cooperation has also contributed to strengthening relations with numerous partner countries in the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America⁴⁴. The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) was established by the Italian law on international cooperation

⁴¹ ASPEN INSTITUTE, ISPI, CRESPI, IAI, ECFR, *Il Piano Mattei: Rilanciare l’Africa Policy dell’Italia*, cit., pp. 14-16.

⁴² Presidente della Commissione dell’Unione Africana, Moussa Faki, nel suo Discorso di apertura del Vertice Italia-Africa (29 gennaio 2024) <https://finanza.lastampa.it/News/2024/01/29/vertice-italia-africa-faki-unione-africana-su-piano-mattei-avremmo-voluto-essere-consultati/MTQ1XZIWMjQTMDEtMjlfVEXC>

⁴³ D. FATTIBENE, S. MANSERVISI, *The Mattei Plan for Africa: A Turning Point for Italy’s Development Cooperation Policy?* IAI Commentaries 24, 10 March 2024.

⁴⁴ https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/cooperaz_sviluppo/

(Law No. 125/2014)⁴⁵. Law 125 indicates the goals of cooperation as including the eradication of poverty, the reduction of inequalities, the protection of civil rights and personal dignity – including gender equality and equal opportunity – as well as the prevention of conflict and support for peace processes⁴⁶. In developing the contents of the Mattei Plan, the work should be reconciled with the participatory mechanisms of the Italian development cooperation policy introduced by reform law n. 125/2014. The Mattei Plan has brought Africa back as a top priority of Italy's foreign policy⁴⁷. Although energy security and addressing the root causes of migration have been seen as the main political drivers of this initiative, the Mattei Plan should aim to strengthen Italy's development cooperation and international partnership policy.

Conclusions

The Governor of the Bank of Italy, Fabio Panetta, in a recent interview with *Il Sole24ore*, reiterated that the economic revival of Africa is an absolute priority for Italy, as is the need to build renewed relations with African countries based on equal cooperation, shared interests and mutual benefits to promote economic growth and social development at the local level⁴⁸.

The renewed activism of the Italian government in its foreign policy towards the Mediterranean and Africa and its willingness to play a more active role in the regional geopolitical chessboard, could be a relevant step in the right direction. However, the relaunch of the so-called “Mattei

⁴⁵ Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) <https://www.aics.gov.it/aics/profile-and-goals/?lang=en>

⁴⁶ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Cooperazione italiana allo sviluppo. Documento triennale di programmazione e di indirizzo, 2021-2023. <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Documento-triennale-programmazione-indirizzo-2021-2023.pdf>

⁴⁷ D. FATTIBENE, S. MANSERVISI, *The Mattei Plan for Africa: A Turning Point for Italy's Development Cooperation Policy*, cit., p. 4; N. SERGI, *Il Piano Mattei con l'Africa può avere successo?* Link2007, 10 marzo 2024, p. 13.

<https://link2007.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/PIANO-MATTEI-Link2007-analisi-10.03.2024-def-1.pdf>

⁴⁸ C. MARRONI, *Panetta: Aiutare i Paesi poveri, Africa priorità*, il Sole24ore, 24 Ottobre 2024.

Plan” should broaden its scope within the “Country System” (private sector, universities, civil society) in an inclusive manner. This implies continuing to strengthen the involvement of the business world and the capitalization on the areas of Italian excellence; integrating and enhancing the Italian development cooperation approach with the implementation of the Plan; facilitating access to the allocated financial resources; and last but not least, concretely involving selected areas of civil society, in particular the education sector⁴⁹. The academic collaboration between Italian and African universities is a crucial point that must certainly be nurtured and strengthened.

The second aspect concerns the European and multilateral context. The Plan should be implemented in strong connection and entente with the European Union and should present itself as an opportunity to place Italy at the core of a series of European initiatives in the Mediterranean scenario. This requires bringing the Mattei Plan the ability to the European framework in a collaborative, efficient and inclusive manner. In this scenario, it is a priority for Italy to strengthen multilateral cooperation in the area and to promote a European policy for the Mediterranean and the Middle East that is compatible with national interests.

The third point concerns Africa. Moussa Faki, President of the African Union Commission, at the opening address of the Italy-Africa summit stressed that a key principle for the continent is freedom: “freedom to choose its partners, freedom not aligned to a single block, mutual respect. Just as we do not impose, we do not want choices to be imposed on us”⁵⁰. Over the last twenty years, the African continent has been the object of interest of new actors on the international scene: China, Russia and Turkey. The Chinese, Turkish and Russian presence has become increasingly strong and extensive, and the African continent has become the place where a new geopolitical, economic and cultural battle for international power in the 21st century is developing. In this scenario, Italy will still have to deal with a highly competitive international scenario. For this reason, it is essential to act in synergy and in a non-conflictual manner with the European Union. There are some essential points to con-

⁴⁹ ASPEN INSTITUTE, ISPI, CRESPI, IAI, ECFR, *Il Piano Mattei: Rilanciare l’Africa Policy dell’Italia*, cit., p.17.

⁵⁰ President of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki, in his opening address at the Italy-Africa Summit (29 January 2024).

sider with respect to the African continent: African individuality and the evolution of the different African countries should be developed more coherently; possible connections with African development strategies should be identified, starting from Agenda 2063; a frank and collaborative discussion should be held on the expansion of regular migration paths. The issue of immigration is the great challenge that the Italian centre-right government led by Giorgia Meloni will have to face, and Italy's international credibility will depend on the ability to pursue a balanced and non-conflictual policy of mediation between Europe and Africa.

Finally, we should return to history to illuminate the present. The current idea of the Italian government to revive Enrico Mattei's legacy is based on fragile assumptions. The so-called "Mattei Method", which that the current Italian prime minister evokes, alluding to Mattei's closeness to the African people and to a "cooperation as equals, far from any predatory temptations, but also from that 'charity-like' approach to Africa which is so ill-suited to its extraordinary development potential", is demagogical. Enrico Mattei's story took place at the crossroads of epochal historical transformations, characterized by the Cold War, the complex process of decolonization and the emergence of the "Third World". The Italian situation was also quite unique. The years of the "Italian economic miracle" gave impetus to the so-called "neo-Atlanticism", which fuelled many divisions and factions within the Italian political scenario. The growth of the Italian economy in the decade 1953-1963 provided an extraordinary impetus to the large state holdings, which became instruments of economic expansion, but also (in the post-De Gasperi period) of clientelism. The connections between Italian politics and the Cold War constituted Mattei's real battlefield. Mattei began to exercise an autonomous political power, financing political groups, carrying out an independent policy both internally and internationally, dealing directly with heads of state. As Ennio Di Nolfo recalled, with the creation of ENI, Mattei managed to build a tool through which to exercise his own power, strongly rooted in the national political structure and then projected into the international scenario⁵¹. Above all, it experienced a struggle that was in many ways isolated, which, once deprived of its protagonist, would not leave an easy legacy or could be recreated outside that historical scenario

⁵¹ E. DI NOLFO, *Introduction*, in L. MAUGERI, *L'arma del petrolio*, cit. p. 8.

and without a comparable leadership. For these reasons, the reference to Enrico Mattei in the relaunch of the current Italian foreign policy towards Africa is not based on a sound historical model but rather on an artificial revival of a significant label.

Riassunto - L'attuale governo italiano ha rilanciato la politica estera dell'Italia verso il Mediterraneo e l'Africa, e il cosiddetto "Piano Mattei" fa parte di questa tendenza. L'obiettivo principale di questo saggio è quello di esplorare storicamente e riflettere sul significato originale del "Piano Mattei" e sull'evoluzione del ruolo dell'ENI a partire dagli anni '50, nello scenario della politica estera italiana verso il Mediterraneo e il continente africano. La storia può aiutarci a valutare il percorso del governo italiano oggi verso un nuovo Piano Mattei? È convincente - da un punto di vista storico -

reinventare il "Piano Mattei" in uno scenario storico, geopolitico e culturale profondamente cambiato?

L'articolo è diviso in due parti. La prima parte esplora il ruolo di Enrico Mattei e il significato originario del "Piano Mattei" negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, nell'Italia del "miracolo economico" e del "neo-atlantismo" e nello scenario internazionale della Guerra fredda e della decolonizzazione. La seconda parte analizza il significato attuale del "Piano Mattei" nella politica estera italiana verso il Mediterraneo e l'Africa, con un focus su energia, sicurezza e geopolitica.