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THE CLIMATE AND SECURITY NEXUS IN ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY

POLICY BRIEFING
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CONTENTS

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2	THE MEDITERRANEAN – HIGH-RISK REGION	5
2.1	SCIENTIFIC DATA ON THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE	6
2.2	CLIMATE AND POLITICAL STABILITY	8
2.3	THE RISKS OF OIL & GAS	9
3	THE CLIMATE-PEACE-SECURITY NEXUS	10
4	THE CLIMATE-PEACE-SECURITY NEXUS IN ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY	12
4.1	FOCUS: CLIMATE AND MIGRATION NEXUS	13
4.2	ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE AS PRIORITIES FOR NATIONAL SECURITY	14
5	RECOMMENDATIONS	16

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes the Mediterranean as a climate change hotspot. Despite relatively low levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the effects of global warming are felt more rapidly in this region than anywhere else in the world, with temperatures expected to rise by **20% above the global average.**

Climate change is widely recognised as a “threat multiplier”, since it exacerbates existing tensions and vulnerabilities, particularly in regions that are less resilient to its impacts. As also underlined in a [statement](#) issued by the leaders of the MED9, a group consisting of European countries with coastlines on the Mediterranean Sea – Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, and Spain – European stability, security and prosperity are closely interlinked with that of the countries on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean. Climate security must therefore be recognised as a core element in the future of cooperation frameworks adopted by these countries. Furthermore, the adoption of a climate security framework and its incorporation at a foreign policy level needs to shift from a reactive, short-term approach, focused on responding to environmental disasters and extreme weather events, to a proactive strategy aimed at anticipating and preventing the impacts of climate change on security, defence, finance and the economy.

The direct impacts of climate change are affecting countries on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean in several ways, such as (but not limited to) increased water scarcity and episodes of severe drought, food insecurity, and rising sea levels. What is more, these impacts also have indirect implications, such as increased economic and financial loss, heightened tensions, greater political instability and conflict, and they may also lead to rising migration pressure. These factors are bound to complicate the region’s security landscape, with knock-on effects for Italy and Europe. In this broader context, the ability of governments in the region to implement long-term economic development policies is also diminishing, along with their capacity to develop adequate adaptation plans. The [World Bank estimates that there could be up to 216 million climate migrants globally by 2050](#). Therefore, **over the coming decades, climate migration will play an increasingly greater role in issues of regional security.**

Faced with this scenario, Italy should prioritise the adoption of a foreign policy strategy that includes a climate security dimension. This dimension should consider the Mediterranean as its primary focus, since the significant climate vulnerabilities of this region do threaten the success of patterns of cooperation in several areas and, more generally, risk preventing the achievement of Italy’s and Europe’s foreign policy objectives.

Establishing a climate security framework must go hand in hand with establishing long term policies that respond both to the adaptation needs of the region in a changing climate and address the decarbonisation imperative in line with a climate compatible scenario. Investing in adaptation measures also means addressing the correlation between the impacts of climate change and human mobility.

Italy has the potential to become a key player in the development of international climate policies: globally, through its role in the G7 and G20 and as a member of the European Union, and regionally, as a major player in the Mediterranean and with its *Piano Mattei* (Mattei Plan),

the renewed Italian strategy towards the African continent. It is therefore **urgent that Italy recognises climate security as an integral part of its foreign policy, thus devising and implementing activities to support resilience building in countries across the wider Mediterranean region.**

It is a positive sign that, within the framework of COP29, the Azerbaijani Presidency launched the [COP29 Climate and Peace Initiative](#), an initiative that has received the support of many countries, including Italy. This initiative confirms the urgency of developing concrete actions to address the climate-peace-security nexus, recognising that these issues are now at the heart of the world's geopolitical, economic, and financial challenges. It is therefore crucial that Italy aligns with this initiative by integrating it into its broader foreign policy strategy and reflecting its principles in the implementation of its cooperation plans – starting with the *Piano Mattei* itself.

2 THE MEDITERRANEAN – HIGH-RISK REGION

The most recent Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its cross-chapter covering the [Mediterranean region](#), as well as the [First Mediterranean Assessment Report](#), both confirm that this region is a [climate change hotspot](#). In the Mediterranean Basin, the climate is changing faster than the global average: [average annual temperatures are already 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, 0.4°C higher than the average global increase](#), despite the fact that the region is responsible for just [6% of global emissions](#).

The impacts of climate change, such as rising temperatures, changing rain patterns and more frequent extreme weather events, for example, are already starting to expose and exacerbate the region’s vulnerabilities. This evolving climate scenario has direct and indirect implications for the security and stability of the entire region and with cascading effects on the political, social and economic dimensions.

Across the wider Mediterranean region, a priority area for Italy’s foreign policy, the impacts of climate change pose the greatest threat to future stability and prosperity. However, while the impacts of global warming are shared in the Basin, the level of vulnerability varies across countries and communities, as it is determined by the combination of both climatic and non-climatic factors, such as a country’s crisis response capacity, demographic growth, the resilience of its economic systems, and the level of ease of access to finance. All elements which, when taken as a whole, define a community’s or individual country’s level of resilience to such threats.

Although the Mediterranean is a single climate region, the United Nations highlights that [“throughout the past decade, gaps have persisted between Northern Mediterranean countries and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries in terms of demographic dynamics, human development, access to natural resources and environmental protection”](#).

In a context of increasing water scarcity and food insecurity combined with demographic growth, the risk of conflicts over competition for natural resources, migration from rural to urban areas, governments’ inability to maintain a subsidy system on goods such as food and energy increases. This is also coupled with inability to purchase food on the global markets, especially in the case of rising prices due to global climate shocks. Additionally, for fossil fuel producing countries in the region revenues from the hydrocarbon sector are expected to decrease following lower demand for hydrocarbons in line with the climate objectives established by the Paris agreement. A further consequence could be increased migration pressure towards Europe. Although “climate-induced migration” or “environmental migration” is so far predominantly intra-regional or intra-national, an increase in cross-border migration flows is also [to be expected](#) if emission trends continue on their current trajectory. It is therefore important to consider that climate-induced internal displacement (like all other forms of displacement) can lead to significant national political instability (due to, for example, the competition for scarce natural resources or internal conflicts between population groups), thus providing the local population further reason to migrate elsewhere.

In the context of this scenario, a priority for Italy should be to develop a foreign policy strategy that includes a climate security dimension. In particular, this dimension should consider the Mediterranean as its primary focus, since it is the region’s significant

vulnerabilities that threaten the success of any cooperative arrangements and, more generally, risk preventing the achievement of Italy's and Europe's foreign policy objectives.

2.1 SCIENTIFIC DATA ON THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

[Climate models](#) predict that the Mediterranean region will experience increasingly hotter and longer summers, whilst the likelihood and intensity of extreme weather events, including floods, torrential rain and cyclones, will also increase. As a result, in a business-as-usual scenario, temperatures are expected to increase by up to 5.6°C by the end of the 21st century, making parts of the region uninhabitable. In a medium warming scenario, average annual temperatures could increase by 2°C by 2050 and by up to 3°C by 2100. In a “less than 2°C” scenario, the temperatures could increase by up to 1.5°C.

The record temperatures recorded last year in Algeria, Morocco, Spain and Portugal, where they exceeded 40°C in some cases, offer concrete evidence of these trends, while droughts have now become commonplace even during the winter months are a cause for concern. [The European Drought Observatory](#) reports that a severe water crisis has been affecting Malta, Italy and Spain since the beginning of 2024, but the prolonged droughts in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria are more worrying.

According to [analysis](#) by World Weather Attribution (WWA), human-induced climate change has made an extreme event like storm Daniel 50 times more likely and up to 50% more intense compared to a 1.2C cooler climate. Storm Daniel initially struck Greece and Bulgaria in September 2023 before progressing on to Libya and causing around 4,000 deaths. Reconstruction and recovery operations following the floods are estimated at [\\$1.8 billion](#). More recently, [the floods](#) that devastated the region of Valencia, where a year's worth of rain fell in just a few hours, are yet another extreme weather event that global warming has rendered more intense, according to [initial analysis conducted by WWA scientists](#).

These extreme, frequent weather events confirm that the entire Mediterranean Basin behaves climatically as a highly interconnected system, one that transcends national borders and therefore new models of transnational cooperation are necessary in relation to climate disaster response, the provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations: so-called *disaster diplomacy*.

BOX 1 - WATER SECURITY

The Mediterranean region ecosystem, inefficient use of existing water resources, and the lack of cooperation between countries for the proper management of shared water reserves already make the region one of the world's regions most at risk of aridity. This is particularly relevant for the North African and Middle Eastern countries which, for years, have used more water than is naturally replenished by, for example, drawing it excessively from aquifers or relying on desalination. According to the Water Stress Index published by World Resources Institute, which measures the ratio between total water withdrawals and available renewable water reserves, all 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region suffer from "high" or "extremely high" baseline water stress levels. As a result, 180 million people in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean are facing water scarcity, and 80 million are in a state of extreme water scarcity. The World Bank predicts that the economic losses resulting from climate-related water scarcity [will reach 6-14% of GDP](#) in the Middle East and North Africa region by 2050. Climate, demographics and economic changes will have major consequences for water resource management, as well as for strategic sectors of regional economies and the respective macroeconomic implications. These issues have the potential to exacerbate pre-existing tensions, and in some cases even cause intra- and inter-state conflicts between different social groups. Across the region, [14 countries share underground aquifers and there are 21 shared drainage basins](#). Egypt, one of the driest countries in the world, depends almost entirely on the Nile for its domestic water needs, but the Nile originates in Ethiopia. Disputes over water have also caused tensions between Turkey and Iraq, as well as between Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories. The lack of cooperation between governments has prevented in some instances an effective water management. In light of reduced available resources, it is reasonable to think that sharing water basins could become a source of disputes between states.

BOX 2 - FOOD SECURITY

The region is facing a precarious situation characterised by food insecurity and a dependence on global value chains: North African countries [import approximately 40% of their agricultural products](#), a percentage that will almost certainly increase in the coming years. The rate of food dependency has to be contextualised within a future where food insecurity is more generalised: [as early as in 2015, the IPCC confirmed that a rise in global temperatures of 4°C or more](#), combined with global population growth, would pose a significant risk to the resilience of food systems and food value chains.

As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, a sudden halt in economic activity of any kind anywhere in the world can affect global supply chains and cause shortages and disruptions elsewhere; similarly, a sudden increase in crop prices caused by climate-induced drought can affect importing countries and strain social stability. [In 2019, the region's public spending on imports of agricultural products amounted to \\$81 billion](#). These costs are only easily sustainable by countries with significant foreign currency reserves which is temporarily guaranteed by hydrocarbon exports. In 2022, in the aftermath of COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, and its 107 million people experienced a period of severe food insecurity due to the [wheat crisis](#).

2.2 CLIMATE AND POLITICAL STABILITY

While inflation and disruptions to global value chains concern Southern European countries in terms of economic stability and inflationary pressures, these issues represent a ticking bomb for the resilience and stability of the social contract that exists in countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Historically, increases in food prices in the region have been associated with periods of political and social instability, with "bread riots" shaking the region in the 1970s and 1990s during times of high inflation. More recently, the role of climate change has been investigated in the onset [of the Arab protests of 2011](#), particularly regarding the inflationary crisis that followed periods of drought, exacerbating popular dissatisfaction in the Levant region and particularly in Syria.

The first economic sector to be impacted by rising average temperatures in the region will be agriculture: the agricultural sector is indeed the primary employer of the workforce. Around 11% of the population in the MENA region is employed in agriculture - compared to the European average of 4% - with peaks [in Morocco \(39%\) and in Egypt \(28%\)](#). In North Africa, approximately two-thirds of the rural population depends on agriculture for its primary source of income. In Tunisia, 62% of wheat is produced by small farmers. Rural communities, which account for a quarter of the population in the MENA region, will be the first at risk, as they are the most vulnerable and have the least resources to adapt to a changing climate.

While countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean become progressively more vulnerable to climate change, the achievement of the UN sustainable development goals is at risk. A failure to level out socio-economic inequalities and the sustained threat to people's livelihoods create the conditions for increased political instability and situations

whereby conflicts and social tensions may arise. In this macro-context, the ability of governments to undertake long-term economic development policies is significantly diminished, along with their capacity to formulate adequate adaptation plans. Furthermore, a worsening environmental, social and political context discourages investments, both foreign and otherwise, and the funding necessary to build resilience.

2.3 THE RISKS OF OIL & GAS

The dependence of some economies within the Mediterranean region on oil & gas revenues represents an additional element of uncertainty that compounds on the existing vulnerabilities. In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Europe and Italy turned their focus towards the Mediterranean region to ensure energy security, with Italy, in particular, dusting off an old ambition to become a regional gas hub. However, it has been demonstrated that [the infrastructure investments already underway in Italy are sufficient to guarantee Italy's energy security](#), also taking into consideration that [diversification](#) from Russian supplies has already been achieved.

In its scenarios, the International Energy Agency (IEA) [predicts](#) that the demand for coal, oil and gas will peak in 2030, reflecting a global trend whereby fossil fuel-based technologies will lose market share to clean energy technologies. This is particularly relevant for Mediterranean countries. Fossil fuel producing countries, such as Algeria and Libya, are closely tied to European and Italian markets given the extensive, hardwired network of pipeline infrastructures across the two shores, which complicates their transition towards other, more flexible, types of exports. Algeria has actually initiated [a process of expanding its liquefied natural gas \(LNG\) infrastructure](#), although this production is mostly still absorbed by European countries.

In scenarios aligned with the EU's climate commitments and the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, existing supply contracts are already set to exceed demand, thus necessitating a review to be undertaken sooner rather than later. More specifically, this decoupling between [supply and demand is expected by 2035](#), after which supply from existing fields in Algeria would no longer be needed due to the decrease in EU demand, estimated to decline [by 86% before 2050](#). This presents an obvious challenge for those economies in the region that depend on oil and gas exports, such as Algeria and Libya, and which are therefore more vulnerable to shocks in hydrocarbon prices and demand.

In these countries, building resilience inevitably involves diversifying their economies, implementing new domestic energy and fiscal policies, and developing adaptation strategies to cope with the ongoing climate changes.

3 THE CLIMATE-PEACE-SECURITY NEXUS

As early as 2007, the United Nations Security Council recognised the link between climate change, peace and security across a wide range of political action. In 2009, at the request of the Pacific Small Island Developing States, the UN Secretary-General produced a comprehensive report titled “[Climate Change and its Possible Security Implications](#)”, published in September 2009 and the report adopted the definition of climate change as a “threat multiplier” with the potential to exacerbate existing threats to peace and international security.

International actors are becoming increasingly aware of the interconnection between climate, security, development and peace, and are recognising the importance of integrating these dimensions into their global projections. Climate is playing an increasingly prominent role in the foreign policy strategies of various countries, especially in security and defence matters, as well as in the strategies established by international and supra-national organisations. In 2018, the United Nations established the [Climate Security Mechanism](#) as a joint initiative between its Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with the aim of helping the UN system address climate-related security risks in a more systemic way.

In 2021, NATO adopted an ambitious [Climate Change and Security Action Plan](#) to integrate climate change considerations into the Alliance’s political and military agenda. As part of its 2022 [Strategic Concept](#), NATO reiterated how the organisation “should become the leading international organisation when it comes to understanding and adapting to the impact of climate change on security”. In addition, NATO publishes its annual [Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment](#) and, in 2024, it established a dedicated Centre of Excellence – [NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence \(CCASCOE\)](#). Over the years, the organisation has become increasingly aware of the risk of redundancy in some of the climate and security initiatives being undertaken by its member countries. In order to avoid duplication resource dispersion, NATO has initiated a dialogue, albeit still in its early stages, with the European Union, which resulted in the publication of a [joint statement](#) in January 2023. Potential areas of cooperation also exist with the G7, with all G7 countries, except Japan, being NATO allies.

At the African level, the African Union’s Peace and Security Council has recently emphasized the need to urgently consider the climate-related security risks in the African continent. The “[Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment – Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change on Peace and Security across the African Continent](#)” document maps out, for the very first time, the climate-related security risks across the five African regions as defined by the AU (Northern Africa, Western Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa and Southern Africa). The document also explores the best practices already in place to address these risks, with the goal of consolidating a first common position on climate change, peace, and security for Africa.

Furthermore, [since 2015](#) the G7 incorporates a commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions, and recognised climate change as an existential threat to security in 2022 with a joint [statement](#) issued by the Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Italy, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom under the German leadership

At the European level, in 2023, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a [Joint Communication on the Climate and Security Nexus](#), which aims to establish the operational priorities around which various bodies of the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) can coordinate to ensure the climate-peace-security nexus is better integrated into the EU's external policies.

Individual countries have also gradually integrated climate security as an integral part of their national security and defence strategies, by bringing foreign policy and defence priorities together at various levels. This is the case with the United States's first [National Intelligence Estimate on Climate Change](#), which recognises geopolitical competition, the supply chains for critical raw minerals and financial instability due to increasing financial requirements of developing countries as key points for national security. In 2022, France became the first EU country to adopt a [Climate and Defence Strategy](#). In 2023, Germany published its [Strategy on Climate Foreign Policy](#) which recognises climate as a central pillar of Germany's outward projection - bilaterally, multilaterally and intergovernmentally.

What becomes obvious from this framework is that a comprehensive, long-term, sustainable, and innovative foreign policy strategies cannot overlook the key role played by climate, and that particular attention must be paid to critical issues such as food systems, disaster prevention, crisis response, economic development, and migration flows.

This means that countries must incorporate the regional and transnational dimension of climate risks into their national security concept while adopting a climate security perspective in monitoring developments, defining priorities, formulating policies to prevent risks and respond to impacts, and establishing partnerships. These reflections are even more urgent in a region as highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as the Mediterranean.

4 THE CLIMATE-PEACE-SECURITY NEXUS IN ITALIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Some steps towards integrating the climate-peace-security nexus into Italy's foreign policy can be found in the work undertaken by the Parliamentary Committee for the Security of the Republic (COPASIR). In its 2023 [information policy for security report](#), the committee highlights the following as being among the world's most significant climate-related risks: food insecurity across wide regions (especially in Africa, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific), the intensification of tensions and conflicts over water security (including the Nile), and the increase in migration flows from populations impacted by persistent adverse climatic effects and their extreme consequences.

A more detailed perspective is provided by the Italian Ministry of Defence, where the link between climate change, defence and security policies is now an established fact. In 2021, the Centre for Higher Defence Studies (CASD – Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa) developed a [geopolitical scenario for the future \(scenario 2040+\)](#) aimed at integrating a broad and strategic vision to understand the repercussions of climate change on the global order. Whilst the climate dimension has now become part of Italy's considerations in relation to national security risks, the challenge lies in identifying the appropriate tools in a time of generalized crisis in multilateralism and a phase of contraction in available financial resources. As stated in the [2023-2025 Multi-Year Defence Programmatic Document](#) "the issues of sustainable development and the risks associated with the effects of climate change remain key, a factor that is increasingly at the centre of global dynamics and may have far-reaching consequences across various dimensions (economic, political, military, social, etc.), particularly in countries located in the most vulnerable regions."

However, while the approach informed by the CASD and later integrated by the Ministry demonstrates the defence sector's attention to climate risk scenarios, such a vision, if confined solely to defence and national security, risks being overly securitarian rather than political. **Climate security requires a strategic vision that combines all the different dimensions, and which can facilitate cooperation between states as well as within multilateral contexts. If confined to a purely to security-based dimension, a foreign policy proposal on climate security would lack the dimensions of international cooperation aimed at peacebuilding, finance, multilateralism, development, and industrial competitiveness.**

An Italian approach that looks toward building greater national and regional security in the face of increasingly urgent climate issues could also advocate for broader collaboration among the countries of the Mediterranean Basin. The numerous challenges shared by the region could serve as a leverage for greater regional cooperation, turning climate challenges into opportunities for greater stability in the region. The implementation of joint solutions should prioritize resilience building, inclusive decision-making processes, and efforts toward a sustainable regional transition. In this sense, Italy can serve as a spokesperson for greater cooperation between the two shores of the Basin.

4.1 FOCUS: CLIMATE AND MIGRATION NEXUS

Migration is a priority issue in the Italian foreign policy agenda. In a search of governance framework for the migration phenomenon, the government led by premier Meloni promoted a series of international events since its inception.

The “Rome Process”, an initiative launched by the [International Conference on Development and Migration, held in Rome in July 2023](#), saw the participation of over 20 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean region. A “[strategic, global, inclusive, and multi-year platform for collective action](#)” aimed at addressing the political, socio-economic, and climatic factors underlying migration flows. In other words, it seeks to outline and implement projects that create the “conditions for people to stay” in their countries of origin, primarily by assisting with the economic development but also managing the consequences of climate change.

The Italian government has also launched the [Piano Mattei](#) (Mattei Plan), which was [presented](#) at the Italy-Africa Summit in January 2024. The focus of the plan is to foster growth and development within the African continent, so as to help remedy the root causes of migration. To support the *Piano Mattei* and provide financial support to Africa, Italy will allocate 70% of the Fondo Italiano per il Clima (FIC - Italian Climate Fund), which is managed by Cassa Depositi e Prestiti under a specific agreement. The climate focus of which is to be evenly split between efforts aimed at mitigation and adaptation. In previous [articles](#), we highlighted how the climate dimension could become a genuine opportunity for fostering development in Africa. [Although doubts remain over the coherence of the Piano Mattei with international climate commitments](#) undertaken by Italy, such as the [COP28](#) outcome which commits all parties to gradually phasing out fossil fuels, the *Piano Mattei* has the potential to offer a credible way forward for African countries and to further strengthen the ties between Italy and the continent. Italy is also signatory, along with 132 other countries, of the [UAE Consensus](#), a commitment to triple the worldwide installed renewable energy production capacity to at least 11,000 GW by 2030. In this context of international commitments, it is essential that the *Piano Mattei* and collaboration efforts across the Mediterranean region focus on renewable energy sources and the region’s significant potential as cornerstones of a renewed energy cooperation effort.

More specifically, in its efforts to foster sustainable development on the African continent, the *Piano Mattei* should consider that climate change is already a contributory factor in today’s migration flows. Already a hotspot for migration between North Africa, the Levant region, and Europe, the Mediterranean Basin will continue to be a hotbed of migration. [According to the United Nations Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#), since the beginning of 2024, at least 800 migrants have already died attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in makeshift boats involved in tragic shipwrecks. These numbers represent just a small percentage of the [29,000 migrants](#) who have lost their lives between the beginning of 2014 and the spring of 2024, making the Mediterranean “[the world’s deadliest migratory route](#)”. This crisis with no easy solution has been for at least a decade largely viewed as a security issue. As a result, migration policies of both Italy and Europe initially moved from a framework based around securitisation, towards the progressive externalization of European borders towards the southern Mediterranean countries, especially from 2015, after the so-called “refugee crisis”.

This approach has become a defining feature of the relations between Italy – and the European Union, under the guise of Team Europe – and the countries on the southern Mediterranean

shore. Over the past decade, a series of bilateral agreements aimed at controlling the EU's external borders have followed, starting with the first agreement with [Turkey](#) in March 2016, continuing with, among others, renewals of the [memorandum of understanding with Libya in 2017](#), and more recent agreements [with Tunisia under President Kais Saied](#) and with [Egypt under President al-Sisi](#) in the spring of 2024. This security-oriented approach, coupled with the externalization of its borders, has not only failed to stop migrant boats reaching the EU, it has also provided the leaders of neighbouring countries with additional political and, above all, financial leverage. A case in point is President al-Sisi in March 2024: the latest Memorandum of Understanding was accompanied by a [€7.4 billion aid package](#) to the state budget.

The pressure of growing, younger populations, limited resources, insecurity, economic inequalities, and a lack of job opportunities are just some of the reasons why people from parts of the wider Mediterranean and the African continent choose to migrate. For many African migrants, Europe is not the primary destination. North Africa remains the destination for many migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and currently serves as a buffer by absorbing part of the migration flows from the continent. Countries such as Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia host thousands of migrants from the Sahel region and from West African countries: in 2019, [the International Organisation for Migration](#) estimated between 100,000 and 150,000 legal migrants in Algeria, along with 50,000 to 75,000 illegal migrants.

[According to a global report on internal displacement](#), in 2022, natural disasters resulted in the displacement of 305,000 people throughout the Middle East and North Africa, a 30% increase on the previous year. In addition to extreme weather events, slow-onset climate impacts such as the increased scarcity of water, ecosystem degradation, rising sea levels, and the salinisation of aquifers and soil, could have significant repercussions for agriculture, food security, people's livelihoods, public health, and other economic sectors, thus putting further pressure on the socio-economic drivers that induce migration.

4.2 ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE AS PRIORITIES FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

Given the regional vulnerabilities and the dynamics involved in managing migration flows, within the framework of a foreign policy strategy that balances a new model of cooperation with North Africa with Italy's main priorities, the government and the relevant ministries cannot overlook a more focused approach on the adaptation and resilience needs of the countries in the expanded Mediterranean region. **Promoting a climate security framework must go hand in hand with policies for adapting to the impacts of climate change. Investing in climate change adaptation also means addressing the correlation that exists between the impacts of climate change and human mobility.**

While almost all the Arab states have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in compliance with the Paris Agreement, only Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia have provided their NDC estimates for the finances they will require to implement their initial or updated NDCs. According to analysis conducted by the [United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia \(UN-ESCWA\)](#) on the basis of these estimates, the financial requirement for the MENA region stands at \$570 billion up until 2030. A significant proportion of this amount will need to be met by international public financing or external financing. Furthermore, UN-ESCWA estimates that in the decade from 2010 to 2020, the region received a total of \$34.5 billion in international public climate financing, which amounts to less than 6%

of the Arab region's total estimated financial requirement for the following decade. What also makes a difference is the quality of the financing, which should be provided through grants to avoid further burdening the already severe debt situation of the countries on the southern Mediterranean shore.

Indeed, many of those countries have very limited fiscal space, which obviously restricts their ability to meet their spending commitments or to allocate additional funds for climate action. [Gross public debt in the MENA region reached a historic high of \\$1.4 trillion in 2020](#). This was largely as a result of national efforts to combat the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating an already critical public debt situation for these countries.

[According to the IPCC](#), the success of regional adaptation initiatives is compromised by a highly asymmetric and unequal geographical context, where demographic, environmental, and socioeconomic trends differ dramatically among the Mediterranean's European coastal countries, North African countries, and Eastern Mediterranean countries. The absence of any regional governance (with the sole exception of European Union Member States) hinders the implementation of ad-hoc adaptation strategies, the development of joint plans, and shared adaptation goals and targets.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The start of COP29 in Baku, the upcoming COP30 in Belem, Brazil, and the approaching presentation of the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by the countries of the Convention in February 2025 make 2025 a real turning point for climate diplomacy. On the peace and security front, the Azerbaijani presidency launched the [COP29 Climate and Peace Initiative](#), which has received the approval of several countries, including Italy, and confirms the need to promote further actions for the operationalization of concrete initiatives on the nexus between climate, peace, and security.

Italy has enormous potential to become a key player in international climate policy: globally, due to its role in the G7 and G20, as a Member State of the European Union, and regionally as an actor in the Mediterranean. Therefore, it is urgent that Italy integrates the dimension of climate security into its foreign policy, committing to interventions that support building resilience in the countries of the expanded Mediterranean region. **It is crucial that the integration of a climate security framework in Italy's foreign policy shifts from a reactive and short-term approach—focused on responding to environmental disasters and extreme events—toward a proactive approach that aims to anticipate and prevent the impacts of climate change on security, defense, economy, and finance. This preventive approach is necessary in planning resilience policies for the region with horizons for 2030, 2050, and beyond, defining Italy's role as an actor in climate diplomacy and ensuring long-term coherence in foreign policy tools for managing slow-onset climate impacts, including water and food security.**

In this context, it is important that Italy takes advantage of the opportunity to make its institutions fit-for-purpose, capable of responding to a future of regional and global uncertainty, where climate and its impacts will increasingly become the fundamental and defining variable of geopolitical processes. To this end, it is necessary to rethink climate diplomacy and institutions by overcoming a fragmented approach and extending the climate agenda cross-sectorally:

- **Integrating a climate risk management framework based on climate scenarios and the most up-to-date scientific data**, with a particular focus on cascading climate risks that directly impact Italy's system. Ideally, a climate risk map should include appropriate measures for building resilience and security based on projected climate impacts for surpassing the thresholds of 1.5°C, 3°C, and 5°C of global warming.
- **Establish regular working groups and discussion forums with experts, international partners, and the private sector within Italy's relevant ministerial departments** (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security), relevant Directorates-General, and the diplomatic corps, to increase capacity and awareness in identifying climate risks in specific areas of competence, and to review current policy tools by testing their effectiveness against climate risk. Given the systemic and horizontal nature of climate and its relevance to various policy areas, the working groups should identify critical areas, develop solutions, monitor institutional processes, and share best practices.
- **Propose an inter-ministerial task force: a level of intra-governmental and inter-ministerial coordination is needed to enabling alignment between Italy's relevant**

ministerial departments and the Prime Minister's office, ensuring coherence and integration of foreign policy initiatives in line with the Paris Agreement's climate goal, particularly the safeguarding of the 1.5°C threshold. This means ensuring that the risks, but also the opportunities, of the climate dimension, especially its impacts on security, are fully understood and represented.

- **Integrate regional risk analysis and their cascading effects on the Italian system within foreign policy strategies**, providing workable solutions and identifying governance gaps and concrete projects aimed at building resilience. In this regard, strategic and policy-oriented research can benefit from increased collaboration with centers of excellence, universities, think tanks, NGOs, and international organisations to develop further knowledge on climate risk monitoring, anticipation, and prevention. It is crucial to direct research towards the development of effective policies for managing climate risks.
- **Prioritize clean energy partnerships with southern Mediterranean countries in foreign policy**, focusing on decarbonization and diversification of economic systems, particularly relevant for fossil fuel-exporting countries like Algeria, Libya, and Egypt. Italy should support industrial strategies for the development of transition plans, to build economic resilience to shocks, including those related to climate.
- **Support Mediterranean countries in redefining climate targets and encourage ambitious decarbonization targets**: Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), along with National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), are strategic tools for the most exposed countries to receive support in appropriate multilateral contexts. Yet, they are still underutilized in Mediterranean countries or lack standardized benchmarks. An NDC, supported by an NAP, provides a roadmap for fully understanding the needs and development trajectories of each country, effectively redirecting cooperation instruments.



THE ITALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE THINK TANK

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