

## The Italian Piano Mattei:

Unlocking the role of green energy among security issues, economic development and migration control

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As Italy is about to unveil the details of its strategic plan for Africa, "Piano Mattei", the paper analyses how the country could use this ambitious initiative not just take a central stage in foreign policy during its G7 Presidency, but also to revitalise the nation's green energy strategy.

### Key Propositions

- ▶ Although the plan encompasses various objectives stemming from the development of infrastructures and the Italian agro-food business, its overarching goals are that of enhancing national energy security and of combating irregular migration flows. Such an intersection of interests however is difficult to achieve without a long-term strategic vision.
- ▶ While Italy aims to become the energy hub of the Mediterranean, it should increase its efforts in promoting green investments and institutional capacity building in Africa. This in turn can boost economic development in the Continent and eventually contribute to reducing economic migration.

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## 1 Italy within Multiple International Crises

While Italy grapples with multiple crises, the political response from Meloni's government is grounded in a strategy known as "Piano Mattei", which has been formally approved on January 12 and will be presented during the Italy-Africa conference in 28-29 January 2024. This Plan not only takes a central stage in the Italian foreign policy but also stands as one of the pillars of the Italian G7 Presidency. "Piano Mattei" aims to establish an *ad hoc* institutional system to facilitate private and public cooperation to implement investments in the African continent.<sup>1</sup> Although the plan encompasses various objectives stemming from climate change, to develop infrastructure and boost Italian agro-food business, its overarching goals are that of enhancing national energy security and of combating irregular migration flows.<sup>2</sup> As climate change and current economic crises result in increasing migration flows from Africa, the unjustified Russian aggression in Ukraine, and the consequent sanctions have compelled Italy, like many other EU member countries, to devise alternative schemes for securing gas.<sup>3</sup> While trying to secure new gas suppliers in the continent, Italy should also consider the clean energy goals set by the National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate (PNIEC). According to this plan, the country needs to strengthen its commitment to decarbonization in line with the EU target to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, and to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 Italian Piano Mattei: too good to be true?

Although Italy has to face a fierce competition in Africa, ultimately also by regional powers such as China, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and even Russia<sup>5</sup>, for Meloni's government Piano Mattei can be successfully implemented as it can count on well-established relations in the African continent. Indeed, the first Italian Piano Mattei traces back to the 1950s, when Enrico Mattei, then President of the Italian Energy Public Company ENI, forged agreements to promote economic cooperation between Italy and African oil-producing states, with the aim of fostering the industrial and social development of Africa while safeguarding Italy's energy security.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, although the new Piano Mattei has been presented in Italy as the country's most significant geopolitical project in recent years, it is not an unprecedented strategy for Italy. Moreover, the government still needs to clarify the concrete steps of the Plan, which should be defined during the Italy-Africa conference on 28-29 January 2023. Certainly, achieving the dual goal of managing migratory flows while ensuring energy supplies from African countries is a challenging and costly endeavour. While Italy aims at relocating part of its economic and industrial production to Africa, especially in manufacturing sector to create favourable conditions that could discourage Africans from emigrating, it seems to be focusing primarily on gas supply. To date, ENI is the second producer of gas and oil in Africa after the French TotalEnergies, and in the aftermath of the energy crises in 2022, ENI increased its presence in the continent ratifying new agreements in Congo, Mozambique, Angola, Algeria, Egypt and Libya.<sup>7</sup> Lack of investments in sustainable energy

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<sup>1</sup> Gazzetta Ufficiale (2023). Disposizioni urgenti per il «Piano Mattei» per lo sviluppo in Stati del Continente africano. Decreto-Legge 15 novembre 2023, n. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Coticchia, F., & Mazziotti di Celso, M. (2024). Still on the same path? Italian foreign and defence policy in the Enlarged Mediterranean. *Mediterranean Politics*: 1-10.

<sup>3</sup> Donolato, G. (2023). Un legame energetico da sciogliere: le sfide per l'Italia. *La Russia nel contesto post-bipolare (RUSPOL)*: 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica (2023). Piano Nazionale Integrato per l'Energia e il Clima. June, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Kabandula, A., & Shaw, T. M. (2018). Rising powers and the horn of Africa: conflicting regionalisms. *Third World Quarterly*: 39(12), 2315-2333.

<sup>6</sup> El Houssi, L. (2022). La funzione diplomatica della Presidenza della Repubblica verso l'Africa negli anni Sessanta. In: *Repubblica del presidente: istituzioni, pedagogia civile e cittadini nelle trasformazioni delle democrazie*: 71-87.

<sup>7</sup> Ecco Think Tank (2023). INPUT PAPER AL WORKSHOP Piano Mattei: quali priorità e strumenti per l'Africa?

might be counter-effective, undermining the full potential of the Piano Mattei in terms of economic growth, security and migration control. As a matter of fact, only climate migration is expected to account for up to 10% of all African cross-border population movement by 2050.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, as outlined by the Nairobi Declaration, signed in September 2022 by leaders of 40 African countries, “Africa is warming faster than the rest of the world and if unabated, climate change will (...) hamper economic growth and wellbeing”. Although Africa has 40 % of the world’s renewable energy resources, only 60 billion USD have been invested in renewable energy in the last decade. Italian investments and the Piano Mattei should not confirm this trend.<sup>9</sup>

### 3 The role of the EU and Germany in the Italian Strategy?

Apart from reducing migration, the strategic vision behind the Piano Mattei is to make Italy the energy hub of the Mediterranean. Building on its geographical positions and on the connections already established with many African countries, Italy could supply energy to other European countries. While the Italian companies’ investments on green energy seem to be limited, the Italian plan involves constructing new pipelines to North Africa that would in turn allow Rome to export natural gas and hydrogen to northern European countries, making Italy the “gateway” between Europe and Africa. In particular, when it comes to green energy, Italy is counting on the South2Corridor, a European plan engaging private companies, which aims to provide the EU with 20% of the hydrogen it needs by 2030, connecting Africa to Europe through Italy and using 70% of repurposed gas pipelines.<sup>10</sup> Italy seems also to be relying on the EU Global Gateway initiative, which aims at supporting renewable hydrogen projects in Africa. Yet, there are also public-private funds Italy could use to implement sustainable energy projects in the African continent itself such as the Italian Fund for Climate from Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, the national bank for the promotion of developmental projects. Such a Fund was launched in 2022 by the Italian Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance and it has a total capacity of 4.2 billion euro to finance environmental projects in 140 of the ODA recipients countries, many of which are in the African continent.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Prime Minister Meloni committed to invest 5 million euro to Africa’s sustainable energy future through the Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa (SEFA). At the same time, those investments should be coupled and possibly proceed in line with effective cooperation projects managed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to boost institutional capacity building like other EU countries are doing. For instance, Germany, a country to which Italy aims to supply energy through the pipelines across its territory, has been engaging with governments in the African continent since its last G20 presidency in 2017 to boost several projects in the field of health and environment as well as energy security. Already in 2023, according to a Reuters survey, 43% of companies in Germany aimed to increase their investments on energy supply in Africa.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, through the G20 Compact with Africa, Germany has been trying to improve conditions for sustainable private sector investments in Africa, involving 13 countries, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia. In the aftermath of the G20 Compact with Africa conference, in November 2023, the Government of Germany has pledged to invest 4 billion euros in Africa’s green energy until 2030 for building a stronger, reliable cooperation with Africa and realise climate-friendly energy supply based on

<sup>8</sup> African Climate Mobility Initiative (2022). [The African Climate Mobility Report - Addressing Climate-Forced Migration & Displacement](#).

<sup>9</sup> African Union (2023). [The African leaders Nairobi declaration on climate change and call to action](#).

<sup>10</sup> South2 Corridor project (2024). [South2Corridor](#).

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2023). [DAC list of ODA recipients](#).

<sup>12</sup> Wagner, R. (2022) [German companies plan to invest more in Africa in 2023](#). Reuters. December, 2023.

green hydrogen. Yet, the African continent does not only necessitate of the capital investments for building infrastructures and economies of scales, it also needs to set up an adequate institutional system. Indeed, political stability and rule of law remain among the biggest Achilles heels when it comes to invest in Africa, which discourages private investors who could be potentially interested in investing in the area. For instance, Foreign direct investments in Africa, at the global level, have been decreasing in 2022 to \$45 billion from the record of 80 billion USD set in 2021 due to international instability coupled by usual factors such as political and legal uncertainties in the continent, which makes the development of the private sector quite modest.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, the Cooperation Office, GIZ, which works on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the European Union (EU), is cooperating with various Ministries from more than 23 African countries and within the African Union as well to support the institutional capacity building and strengthening local governance.

#### **4 A Strategy that lacks a vision?**

While the details of the Piano Mattei remains to be fully discovered, what seems central is that it needs to have an effective green energy strategy in the African continent. This is especially strategic, since the latter is expected to become a very competitive sustainable energy market by 2030, building on its water, solar and natural resources. Investing primarily on fossil fuel and traditional source of energy such as gas, could pay off in the short term. Yet, in the long run, Italy risks finding itself again at the dependence of others, and even if it can leverage on its strategic geographic position, it will be subjected to the volatility of energy prices. At the same time, since the goal of Piano Mattei is also to control migration flow, investing in clean energy in Africa could also help in fighting climate change, which is one of the causes of migration. The general hope is for the Plan not to have any hidden agenda, far from the above recommendations. Indeed, without an effective green energy strategy, the Plan could end up becoming just a propaganda tool to help the Italian right-wing government to depict a new, progressive and developmental image of itself against its political detractors. On the other hand, it could end up being an empty box, easily fillable by the interests of well-established Italian companies, which might not be necessarily focused on investing resources against climate change or for a more sustainable economic growth.

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<sup>13</sup> UNCTAD (2023). [Investment flows to Africa dropped to \\$45 billion in 2022](#). July, 2023.