



The security-development dilemma and its role in achieving common security in the western Mediterranean The model of Algerian-Italian relations (2019–2025)

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Abstract

Common Security is a strategic goal pursued by the nations spanning the shores of the Western Mediterranean. This region holds significant and growing geostrategic importance given current global challenges and their impact on the Mediterranean arena, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War. Algerian-Italian relations (2019-2025) serve as a model attempting to achieve this goal by forging a successful security-development equation based on the principle of balance of interests, where opportunities are shared and common security challenges are defined. Despite real-world constraints, the Southern countries are keen to win the development bet, while the Northern countries prioritize guaranteeing comprehensive security.

Keywords: Security, Development, Common Security, Western Mediterranean, Algeria-Italy Relations.

Introduction

The strategic importance of the Western Mediterranean region is growing commensurate with the increasing challenges it faces across various levels. Its security sensitivity is highlighted by the intersections and interactions—both positive and negative—occurring between the littoral states in both the North-South and South-North directions. Irrespective of the conflicts or complementarities of interests among different actors, the overarching goal for every state on the shores of the Western Mediterranean remains the achievement

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of comprehensive and sustainable common security with its neighboring countries.

In searching for a reliable equation to achieve the desired outcome—a common security where interests are balanced between the two shores of the Western Mediterranean—the answer must rely on two fundamental components: Security and Development, and their importance in achieving comprehensive and sustainable common security.

The political, security, economic, and social instability witnessed by some Western Mediterranean countries, the stark disparities between the two shores, the historical, new, or renewed crises (driven by recent geopolitical or global influences), and the clear divergence in development indicators, all make the attainment of a successful common security model extremely difficult. The reasons for this difficulty will become apparent throughout this study. However, this fact does not preclude the attempt to establish an axis of relations between two states on the Western Mediterranean that possess a strong political will to achieve common security, backed by clear, announced plans and goals demonstrated through numerous meetings, treaties, and agreements.

In this context, the Algeria–Italy axis surfaces within international relations in the Western Mediterranean as a path of cooperation characterized by rapid progress and notable efforts. Furthermore, it possesses historical roots and political developments that may make it a model case worthy of study in this field—a potential gauge for measuring the feasibility of achieving multi-dimensional, comprehensive common security.

Thus, the main research problem of this study can be defined as follows:

Can the Algerian-Italian relationship constitute a model for common security based on a successful security and development equation in the Western Mediterranean region during the 2019-2025 period?

Sub-questions deriving from this main problem focus on the conceptual frameworks of security, development, and common security; the strategic importance of the Mediterranean theater generally and its western region specifically; the historical trajectory



of Algerian–Italian relations; attempts to formulate a new vision for these relations since 2019; and finally, establishing the foundations of comprehensive and sustainable common security between the five states of the North and their five counterparts in the South of the Western Mediterranean.

The methodology adopted in this study is primarily analytical and descriptive, alongside a historical approach tracing the path of Euro-Western Mediterranean relations and the historical depth of Algerian-Italian relations. A comparative approach is also used to highlight the evolution of the relations within the Rome–Algiers axis, comparing the pre-2019 phase with the subsequent period up to 2025.

1. Security, Development, and Regional Dynamics in the Western Mediterranean

The contours of this study can only be clearly delineated by establishing its core concepts, given that the main research problem revolves around the interactive relationship between security and development within the specific regional context of the Western Mediterranean. This necessitates clarifying the conceptual and theoretical framework of the key terms, while also articulating the rationale for selecting this geographic area—which is not merely a maritime space, but an extended geopolitical domain linking the continents of Europe and Africa, giving rise to complex, intertwined security and development dynamics.

1.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Security and Development

A researcher in the field of security studies immediately observes the significant theoretical and operational weight of the concepts of security and development. They form a central axis in most contemporary analyses of regional and international security, particularly in light of the structural transformations witnessed by the international system following the end of the Cold War.

1.1.1. The Concept of Security

The concept of security is one of the most contentious in the field of International Relations, owing to the lack of theoretical consensus on its definition and referent limits. The concept has undergone continuous evolution, keeping pace with global political dynamics. Researchers are divided between those who adhere to the

traditional security perspective and those who advocate for its broadening through critical approaches that transcend the state as the sole unit of analysis.

A- The Traditional Concept of Security

The realist school represents the primary proponent of the traditional view of security, starting from the premise that the state is the central actor in the international system. Security is therefore confined to protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity from external threats, especially military ones. According to this perspective, national security is directly tied to the state's capacity to possess military power and forge alliances to ensure deterrence against adversaries in an anarchic international environment.

Consequently, the realist approach remained confined to the narrow boundaries of the security concept, allowing states to develop their military capabilities and establish strong alliances in a manner that responds to the anarchic structure of the international system, enabling them to possess power and influence to guarantee security against any actual or potential threat (Allag&Ouifi, 2008, p. 309).

Barry Buzan's definition is among the most circulated in security literature, where he defines security as "the pursuit of freedom from threat" (Benantar, 2005, p. 7). In the context of the international system, he defines it as the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent existence and functional cohesion against perceived hostile forces of change (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 71). Thus, in the traditional view, security is reduced to the military and political dimensions and is primarily measured by the level of military capabilities and defensive alliances.

Therefore, the concept of security was linked to the state, the principal actor in international relations, referring to the protection and integrity of the state from external political, diplomatic, and military threats that could materially affect its political and legal entity and territorial integrity (Damdoun, 2008, p. 242). This sense is often termed "National Security."

However, this perspective remained restricted to a narrow view of security, focusing solely on direct military threats while neglecting other equally dangerous sources of threat. This rendered it incapable of accommodating the profound transformations in the international



security environment, especially after the end of the Cold War, when the likelihood of a clash between the Eastern and Western blocs diminished. Thus, the traditional concept of security no longer reflected the deep security shifts in global politics, leading to its expansion to encompass numerous facets (Belaïd, 2008, p. 101).

B- The Critical Concept of Security

In the context of criticizing the traditional approach, theoretical currents emerged advocating for a redefinition of security and an expansion of its referent areas. Richard H. Ullman is considered one of the earliest theorists contributing to this shift. In his article "Redefining Security," published in the Summer 1983 issue of *International Security*, he argued that confining national security to protecting the state from cross-border military attacks is a conception that is simultaneously mistaken and dangerous, as it overlooks non-military threats capable of undermining states' stability (Aouni, 2011, p. 5).

Ullman defines a security threat as "any activity or sequence of events that degrades, over a relatively brief time span, the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or substantially narrows the range of policy choices available to the state or to private, non-governmental entities (Ullman, 1983)." According to this perspective, the focus shifted from the state to the individual as a fundamental referent unit, leading to the emergence of Human Security and Global Security as essential components in critical security studies.

1.1.2. The Concept of Development

A- Linguistic Definition of Development

The term 'Development' (التنمية - Al-Tanmiyah) is relatively modern in linguistic usage. Its origin is the root "NAMA" (نَمَا), which denotes increase, abundance, and elevation, and it also means growth and fulfillment (Naji, 2010, p. 65).

Linguistically, development is understood as a deliberate, volitional act reflecting intended growth, unlike natural growth, which occurs spontaneously without external intervention.

B- Conceptual Definition of Development

Conceptual definitions of development have multiplied based on the variety of theoretical angles from which it has been approached. It has been defined as a comprehensive process

encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions, aiming to achieve a sustainable improvement in individuals' standard of living, without being confined to merely increasing the Gross Domestic Product or technological advancement.

Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim defines development as: "the full, comprehensive, and balanced emergence and growth of all the inherent capabilities and energies within a specific entity, whether this entity is an individual, a group, or a society" (Maloukhieh, 2007, p. 20).

Khalifa Al-Kuwari defines development as: "a conscious and guided societal process for creating structural transformations that lead to the formation of a self-sustaining productive base, whereby a regular increase in the average individual productivity and society's capacities is achieved within a framework of social relations that emphasizes the link between reward and effort, deepens the requirements for participation, and aims to provide basic needs, guaranteeing individual, social, and national security" (Dakhil, 2009, p. 17).

The Arabic Language Academy in Cairo defines development as: "the conversion of uninvested natural resources into productive resources, such as land reclamation or factory establishment, and the relative adjective is: developmental" (Arabic Language Academy in Cairo, 2025; Douaikat, 2016).

Operationally, development can thus be defined as a continuous and volitional process of change encompassing various aspects of society, aiming to move it from a less efficient state to a better one in terms of standard of living, services, justice, and stability.

1.1.3. The Concept of Common Security

A- Defining Common Security

The term Common Security first appeared in the report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues (ICDSI), chaired by Olof Palme, published in 1982 under the title Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival. The report articulated the concept as follows:

"Common security requires that people live in dignity and peace, find enough food, and be able to find work and support their families. Security cannot be obtained against an adversary; it can be



obtained only in cooperation with him" (Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, 1982, p. 19).

The concept of Common Security is founded on the principle of the organic interdependence of states' security, whereby no state can achieve its security in isolation from the security of others, nor solely through the accumulation of military power, but rather through cooperation, confidence-building, and the adoption of peaceful solutions to conflicts.

B- Pillars of Common Security

Common Security is based on a set of core principles, most notably:

Acknowledgement of Mutual Survival: This presupposes states' realization that their own security is contingent upon the security of others, and that attempts to achieve security at the expense of other parties inevitably lead to countervailing reactions that generate arms races and deepen mutual insecurity. Security, from this perspective, is not a zero-sum condition where one party's gain is another's loss, but a collective goal achievable only through participation.

Reducing the Military Role in International Relations: Common Security emphasizes the limited political and security effectiveness of using military force in managing international crises. Historical experiences have proven that resorting to force often exacerbates rather than resolves conflicts, necessitating the bolstering of peaceful resolution tools, such as preventive diplomacy, dialogue, mediation, and negotiation, within the framework of respecting the principles of the UN Charter.

Limiting Armaments, Especially Nuclear Arms: Nuclear deterrence is considered unsustainable and poses an existential threat to all humanity. Hence, Common Security calls for reducing strategic military arsenals, strengthening arms control regimes, and establishing security arrangements based on non-aggressive, defensive deterrence, thereby reducing the probability of sliding into destructive conflicts.

Mutual Confidence-Building: Mutual confidence-building among states holds a pivotal position within the pillars of Common Security, given its role in reducing miscalculation and preventing unintended escalation. This includes sharing military information, prior notification of maneuvers, establishing permanent

communication channels, and enhancing mechanisms for transparency and mutual control over armaments.

Cooperation in Countering Transnational Threats: Since many contemporary security challenges—such as terrorism, organized crime, irregular migration, economic crises, and climate change—are threats that do not recognize national borders, they can only be effectively dealt with through broad regional and international coordination that integrates the security and developmental dimensions.

Respect for Human Rights as a Basis for Stability and Security: Political repression and the absence of rights and freedoms are presumed to generate fertile environments for violence and instability, negatively impacting regional and international security. Therefore, protecting fundamental rights, enhancing political participation, and achieving social justice are indispensable structural components of any comprehensive security approach.

In this sense, the concept of Common Security represents a qualitative shift from the logic of deterrence and confrontation that characterized international relations during the 20th century, toward a preventive-cooperative logic that integrates security and development, and responds to the nature of complex, multi-dimensional economic, social, and environmental threats distinguishing the contemporary international system.

C- Common Security versus Collective Security

Collective Security refers to an international system based on an agreement among a group of states to consider any attack on one member state as an attack on all, with the commitment to take a collective response to deter the aggressor, thereby putting the aggressor in confrontation with the entire international community rather than just one state (Claude, 1971). This system rests on three main pillars: the collective commitment to prevent war, the agreement to identify the aggressor, and the readiness to use force collectively against them.

The United Nations Charter reinforces this conception, defining Collective Security as a mechanism aimed at maintaining international peace and security through effective collective measures to prevent and remove threats, suppress acts of aggression, and settle disputes by



peaceful means (United Nations, 1945). Thus, achieving international stability becomes contingent upon a collective response to any breach of security.

In contrast, Common Security differs from Collective Security in its fundamental principle and function. It is based on a preventive-cooperative approach aimed at addressing the roots of threats before they escalate into open conflicts, through confidence-building, enhancing interdependence, and cooperation in political, economic, and social spheres (Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, 1982). While Collective Security is essentially a punitive-deterrent system relying primarily on force, Common Security prioritizes political settlement, development, and addressing non-military, transnational threats.

Consequently, it can be argued that Collective Security reflects the logic of power that dominated the international system during the 20th century, whereas Common Security responds to the nature of contemporary complex threats, such as economic and environmental crises, and lack of development, making it more suitable for complicated regional contexts, such as the Western Mediterranean region.

1.2. The Western Mediterranean: Strategic Importance and Complex Threat Nexus

The Western Mediterranean is a geopolitical space of particular strategic importance, given its location linking North Africa and Southern Europe, and the overlap between two economically and developmentally asymmetrical spaces. Buzan and Wæver assert that semi-enclosed maritime regions, like the Mediterranean, form interconnected security spaces that transcend the logic of the single state (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 45).

1.2.1. The Geopolitical Importance of the Western Mediterranean

The Western Mediterranean region is considered one of the most sensitive geopolitical spaces in the contemporary international system, owing to its strategic location that makes it a direct link between the European northern shore and the African southern shore. This space is not merely a maritime area for exchange and navigation; it constitutes a complex arena for the intersection of security,

economic, political, and cultural interests between two asymmetrical worlds in terms of development and stability levels.

The Western Mediterranean clearly embodies one of the most intense friction zones between the wealthy industrial North and the developing South, which suffers from structural imbalances in development, employment, and governance. This generates increasing demographic pressures, intensive human mobility, and transnational security challenges, most notably irregular migration, organized crime, and the proliferation of smuggling networks (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 71).

The region's geopolitical importance is further derived from its role as a space where regional security overlaps with European security. Threats emanating from the southern shore are no longer confined within national borders but directly impact the stability of Southern European countries. In this context, George Joffé points out that political and security crises in North Africa represent a structural source of security risks directly affecting Europe, whether through migration flows or through transnational terrorism and organized crime networks (Joffé, 2004, p. 24).

This geopolitical importance is also reinforced by the Western Mediterranean being an arena for competition among various regional and international powers seeking to consolidate their political, economic, and security influence, whether through energy partnerships, security arrangements, or the management of migration and energy files. This competition renders the region an open space for the reshaping of alliances and grants Mediterranean states, such as Algeria and Italy, a significant margin for strategic maneuvering.

Therefore, understanding the geopolitical dynamics of the Western Mediterranean requires a comprehensive approach that links development imbalances on the southern shore with security concerns on the northern shore, confirming that the region's security cannot be separated from the paths of development and stability, and that any unilateral or purely military security approach will remain inadequate for addressing the roots of existing threats.



1.2.2. The Security Threat Nexus in the Western Mediterranean

A- Traditional Threats

Terrorism represents one of the most prominent traditional threats in the region, given the nature of cross-border extremist organizations and the resulting persistent security imbalance. European police reports confirm that terrorism remains a continuous threat to Euro-Mediterranean regional security (EUROPOL, 2018, p. 52).

B- Non-Traditional Threats

Irregular migration constitutes a non-traditional threat resulting from deep economic and social imbalances on the southern shore. The International Organization for Migration indicates that the Western Mediterranean route is characterized by increasing dynamism in the numbers and composition of migrants (IOM, 2023, p. 18). Furthermore, organized crime is linked to networks smuggling people, drugs, and weapons, exploiting fragile borders, as confirmed by reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021, p. 32).

C- Long-Term Structural Challenges

Developmental and economic disparities between the two Mediterranean shores are structural factors fueling instability. The World Bank affirms that the significant income gap generates persistent pressures on regional security (World Bank, 2020, p. 22). Climate change also represents a mounting threat, as the Mediterranean region is classified as one of the most affected areas globally by climate change repercussions (IPCC, 2021, p. 1143).

D- Compound Security Threats

Compound threats have emerged in recent years, including the energy crisis and cybercrime. Energy has become a central element in regional security equations, especially following recent geopolitical shifts (IAI, 2023, p. 11). Cyberattacks also pose a growing threat to critical infrastructure in the Mediterranean, particularly energy and communication networks (ENISA, 2022, p. 37).

2. Algerian-Italian Relations: From Historical Depth to Strategic Transformation (2019–2025)

Algerian-Italian relations represent a central model of strategic interaction in the Western Mediterranean, founded upon deep

historical and civilizational roots. This relationship has gradually evolved into a multi-layered partnership fueled by considerations of maritime proximity, regional security interdependence, energy interests, and transnational challenges. During the 2019–2025 period, this relationship acquired an unprecedented qualitative dimension due to accelerating regional and international shifts, most notably: the lingering repercussions of the Libyan state's collapse, the growing threats in the Sahel, the reshaping of migration and maritime security equations, and the European energy crisis following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine War in 2022, which led to a re-prioritization of European South-Mediterranean partnerships (IAI, 2023, p. 11; Farnesina, 2023, p. 4).

2.1. Historical Foundation and Shared Geo-Strategic Dimension

2.1.1. Algeria–Italy: Historical Depth and Civilizational Continuum

A- From Roman Civilization to the End of the 20th Century

The roots of Algerian–Italian interaction trace back to the Roman-Mediterranean sphere, where North Africa was part of "Roman Africa" within the ancient Mediterranean system. This made Algerian cities such as Timgad, Djemila, and Tipaza urban, commercial, and administrative centers linked to the networks of roads, trade, and authority centered in Rome (Le Bohec, 2012, pp. 45–48; Jamal, 2010, pp. 215–230). This historical context provides modern relations between Algeria and Italy with a "historical horizon" that transcends contemporary diplomacy, as the interaction between the two shores has been a structural part of Mediterranean geography since ancient times.

During the 20th century, particularly during the Algerian War of Independence, Italy's stance was characterized by a degree of positive neutrality compared to other European positions. Mediterranean interests and foreign policy calculations allowed Italy to avoid full confrontational alignment behind France, which facilitated the establishment of an early "platform of trust" post-independence. Bosworth indicates that Italian foreign policy after World War II was marked by caution regarding French colonial issues, which was reflected in Rome's less sensitive handling of the Algerian file after 1962 (Bosworth, 2006, p. 221).



After independence, Algerian-Italian relations entered a formal phase through diplomatic representation and initial agreements on economic and commercial cooperation. This gradually expanded, especially with the rising importance of the Mediterranean as an intertwined region of security, energy, and economy. With the end of the Cold War, cooperation expanded toward investment, infrastructure and economic partnerships, in parallel with the rise of regional approaches that view the Mediterranean as an "interconnected security basin" that cannot be understood through the logic of a single state.

B- Establishing the Oil and Gas Partnership: TransMed as a Long-Term Strategic Foundation

The 1970s marked the beginning of a deep strategic partnership in the energy sector between Algeria and Italy. This orientation positioned the Italian company ENI as Sonatrach's leading energy partner, especially in natural gas, within a global context marked by the restructuring of energy markets following the oil shocks (1973–1979) and Southern Europe's search for reliable, geographically proximate suppliers.

While ENI's presence in Algeria dates back to the mid-1950s, the actual foundation for cross-Mediterranean gas supplies began to materialize in the 1970s. The first agreement between the Algerian company Sonatrach and ENI was signed in 1977 for the supply of natural gas to Italy and the construction of the pipeline system named "TransMed" (Trans-Mediterranean Pipeline), conceived as strategic infrastructure, not merely a commercial project.

TransMed gradually entered service in 1983 after completing the link between Algeria, Tunisia, and Italy via Sicily, with an initial capacity estimated at around \$12.3 \text{ billion cubic meters per year (bcm/y)}\$, before supplies later expanded, raising capacity to higher levels through reinforcement projects and parallel connections (Honoré, 2018, p. 34). This infrastructure holds a dual significance:

1. For Italy: It enabled the diversification of imports and reduced the vulnerability of reliance on a single source.
2. For Algeria: It provided stable energy revenues and cemented its position in the European energy market.

Shahbazov considers TransMed a "turning point" that placed Algeria at the core of Italian and European energy security

(Shahbazov, 2021, p. 9), while Colombo argues that the pipeline transformed the partnership from a commercial exchange to a "political and security leverage" influencing the trajectory of bilateral relations and Mediterranean balances (Colombo, 2022, p. 17). Therefore, TransMed is a foundational element for understanding the subsequent strategic shift after 2019, representing the "structural memory" of mutual interdependence between the two parties.

2.1.2. Shared Geo-Strategic Dimension in the Western Mediterranean

A- Maritime Proximity and Intersecting Security Interests

The Western Mediterranean is a sensitive geopolitical space due to its semi-enclosed nature and the intertwining of threats within it. Given the relative geographical proximity between the Algerian and Italian domains, the relationship between the two countries is based on a mutual understanding that maritime threats cannot be managed with a logic of separation. Maritime security, energy security, migration flows, and transnational crime are all issues that mandate sustained coordination. In this context, Buzan and Wæver clarify that semi-enclosed seas generate "intersecting security complexes," where threats become distributed and shared among neighboring states (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 45).

Consequently, what happens on the Southern Shore affects the Northern Shore, and vice versa, particularly in:

- Security of navigation and trade routes.
- Protection of offshore energy infrastructure.
- Monitoring of irregular migration routes.
- Combating organized crime, human, drug, and weapon smuggling.

Italy treats Algeria as a key actor in the Southern Mediterranean capable of controlling its maritime space, while Algeria views the stability of Southern Europe, especially Italy, as essential for the continuation of trade and energy flows and the avoidance of accumulated security pressure in the Western Basin.

B- Cooperation in Countering Terrorism and Organized Crime Before 2019

Prior to the strategic shift after 2019, Algerian-Italian security cooperation had witnessed gradual expansion due to the rising threat



of terrorism, smuggling networks, and irregular migration. Algeria's experience in fighting terrorism during the 1990s represented a significant asset in Italy's view, as the phenomenon of terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel directly impacts Europe through recruitment, financing, and transit networks. Europol reports indicate that terrorism remains a current threat to Euro-Mediterranean regional security (EUROPOL, 2018, p. 52).

Furthermore, the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011 intensified the need for coordination due to the proliferation of weapons, the rising power of militias, and the growth of human and drug smuggling networks. Thus, operational and intelligence cooperation contributed to building a "security trust" that later became the basis for the transition from traditional security cooperation to strategic cooperation after 2019.

2.2. The Phase of Strategic Transformation and Deepening (2019–2025)

2.2.1. Drivers of Strategic Deepening

A- Shared Political Will and Institutional Path-Building

Bilateral relations saw a notable political acceleration since 2019, coinciding with the arrival of a new leadership in Algeria with the election of AbdelmadjidTebboune as President in December 2019. This was further reinforced with the appointment of GiorgiaMeloni as Prime Minister of Italy in October 2022, who prioritized the "Southern Approach" (*Approccio del Sud*) in energy, migration, and Mediterranean cooperation. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms that Algeria has become a "fundamental pillar" in Rome's Mediterranean policy (Farnesina, 2023, p. 4). This transformation is practically measured by the intensity of official visits, governmental summits, and Memoranda of Understanding.

Italian press suggests that the intensity of diplomatic activity reflects a conscious political choice to convert relations into a comprehensive strategic partnership (*La Repubblica*, 2023, n.p.). ISPI describes this trajectory as the closest alignment since the end of the Cold War (ISPI, 2023, p. 2).

The institutional dimension is also evident in the defense sector, through technical visits, meetings, and coordination on Mediterranean security. ANSA reported convergences regarding the

re-activation of military dialogue (ANSA, 2022, n.p.), while the Italian Ministry of Defence described Algeria as a key partner in Mediterranean security (Italian Ministry of Defence, 2023, n.p.). This coincided with mutual parliamentary activity and meetings on energy, migration, and security issues, as reported by *Il FattoQuotidiano* (2023, n.p.).

B- The Russia–Ukraine War and the European Gas Crisis After 2022

The Russia–Ukraine War (February 24, 2022) marked a sharp turning point in European energy security, pushing Europe to reshape its energy map to reduce dependence on a single source. Complicating matters further was Russia's gradual and sharp reduction of supplies to Europe during 2022–2023, and their eventual halt through major pipelines like "Nord Stream" after the expansion of Western sanctions on Russia, thus making energy a strategic pressure tool in the conflict. In this context, Algeria emerged as a pivotal supplier to European countries, primarily Italy, both by increasing pipeline flows and expanding investments in fields. An IAI report confirms that the shift was rapid and strategic, and that Algeria ascended to the rank of an "indispensable partner" in Italian energy security after 2022 (IAI, 2023, p. 11). *Il Sole 24 Ore* also indicates that energy agreements allowed Italy to compensate for a significant portion of its former Russian gas imports by the end of 2023 (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2023, n.p.). Consequently, energy ceased to be a purely economic matter and became a central element in European national security calculations, which increased Algeria's weight in Mediterranean equations.

C- Tense Algerian-French Relations as an Indirect Factor

The tense Algerian-French relations since 2021 contributed to a rebalancing of Algeria's European partnerships. Against the backdrop of political statements, memory files, and issues related to migration and visas, a portion of official dialogue channels was frozen for several months. The decline in French influence in files such as Libya, energy, and Maghreb security allowed for a redistribution of roles within the Mediterranean, opening the door for Italy to advance as a pragmatic partner within the European Union. *Le Monde* highlighted that the diplomatic crisis created palpable coolness and a push towards repositioning (*Le Monde*, 2021, n.p.), while ANSA indicated that the



Algerian-Italian rapprochement accelerated amid this chill (ANSA, 2023, n.p.). Rome thus capitalized on the circumstance to reassert its presence in North Africa through energy, security cooperation, and a migration approach, and Algeria found in the Italian partner a pragmatic alternative independent of traditional French perceptions.

2.2.2. Economic and Developmental Dimensions as the Driving Force of the Algerian-Italian Relationship

A- The ENI–Sonatrach Energy Partnership: From Exchange to Integration

The energy partnership between ENI and Sonatrach is the backbone of bilateral relations. However, during 2019–2025, it evolved from "supply contracts" to a "multi-track strategic partnership," including increasing supplies via TransMed. In May 2022, ENI announced the signing of a strategic agreement with Sonatrach to increase supplies starting in 2022, by raising gas flow through this pipeline (also known as the "Enrico Mattei Pipeline") to nearly \$9 \text{ bcm/y}\$, as well as expanding investment in exploration, production, and developing new projects in Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), exploration, and preparing for clean energy and green hydrogen projects.

ENI's annual report confirms that Algeria has become a strategic country in the company's plans, not just for gas but also for future projects in clean energy (ENI, 2023, p. 17). IAI supports this trend, emphasizing that energy security has become an integral part of European national security, and that Algeria is an indispensable partner for Italy after 2022 (IAI, 2023, p. 11). Thus, the energy sector becomes a "development engine" for Algeria through increased investment and technology, and a strategic leverage for Italy in ensuring supplies and market balance.

B- Economic and Commercial Diversification: Towards a Multi-Sectoral Partnership

Despite the centrality of energy, recent years have witnessed an expansion of economic cooperation outside this sector, reflecting a mutual desire to diversify the production and commercial base. Eurostat data indicates a significant rise in Algerian-Italian trade exchanges between 2022 and 2023 (Eurostat, 2023, n.p.). Cooperation has also expanded into manufacturing industries, technology transfer,

food industries, light machinery, production lines, and infrastructure, ports, and logistics projects.

In this context, *Il Sole 24 Ore* points to the increased presence of Italian companies in infrastructure and maritime transport projects, considering Algeria a key market after 2022 (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2023, n.p.).

From the developmental perspective, this economic diversification has yielded:

- Algeria's benefit from technology transfer and increased production capabilities.
- Italy finding a stable market with growing demand for machinery and industrial services.

The relationship is now based on mutual benefit rather than unilateral dependence, as the pattern of bilateral trade shows a reciprocal, two-way relationship:

- Strong energy flow towards Italy.
- Increasing industrial flow towards Algeria.

This pattern translates into gradual economic integration and reflects the increasingly diversified and sustainable nature of economic relations.

2.3. Shared Challenges and Future Prospects for Algerian-Italian Relations

2.3.1. Shared Challenges and Diplomatic/Security Coordination on Neighborhood Issues

A- The Libyan Crisis File

Libya is a crucial area for the intersection of security, migration, and energy in the Western Mediterranean. An Algerian-Italian convergence has crystallized in the assessment of the crisis, based on rejecting external military solutions and supporting the UN political track. ISPI confirms that Algeria and Italy are among the most aligned parties in their vision compared to other actors, due to their rejection of the military approach and preference for a political solution (ISPI, 2021, p. 6). This convergence is embodied in consultation on regional power balances and the exchange of security readings of risks extending from Libya to the Sahel. The two countries have worked to support UN efforts to launch the Libyan-Libyan dialogue and exchange security information about armed groups



spread in Libya, as well as holding regular consultations on regional balances and their role in the Libyan crisis, particularly the roles of Turkey, the UAE, Egypt, and France.

Italy considers Algeria to possess high regional credibility in the Libyan file due to its border location and counter-terrorism experience, while Algeria sees Italy as a less entangled European partner in internal Libyan conflicts. This strategic convergence has made the two countries a "quiet diplomatic axis" seeking to contain crises rather than escalate them.

B- Irregular Migration: Advanced Security Coordination

The Western Mediterranean represents a significant route for irregular migration, a phenomenon complicated by the intertwining of organized crime and smuggling networks. The two countries have worked on:

1. Information Exchange and Network Dismantling: Security agencies in both countries work to dismantle smuggling networks across the sea, based on intelligence exchange and tracking maritime routes. Europol points to successes in dismantling smuggling cells linked to the Western routes (Europol, 2018, p. 52). Frontex reports also underscore the sensitivity of the Western route and the importance of coordination (Frontex, 2022, n.p.).
2. Support for Maritime Border Control and Patrols: This involves enhancing maritime patrols, developing early warning systems, and cooperating on coast surveillance and early warning technologies.

C- Maritime Security and Cyber Threats to Infrastructure

Concerns are rising regarding the targeting of critical infrastructure in the Mediterranean, especially energy and communications. ENISA affirms that critical infrastructure in the Mediterranean has become more vulnerable to attacks, necessitating higher technical cooperation (ENISA, 2022, p. 37). This reinforces the need for joint policies to protect maritime lanes, gas pipelines, and coastal installations.

2.3.2. Future Prospects: Towards a Multi-Dimensional Strategic Partnership

A- The Challenge of Sustainable Reliance vs. European Energy Transition

Despite Algeria becoming a major supplier to Italy after 2022, the sustainability of this role is linked to Algeria's ability to expand production and meet domestic demand. IEA reports suggest that rising domestic consumption could affect export capacities if investments and modernization are not bolstered (IEA, 2023, n.p.). This transition will impose pressure on Algeria's oil-rent-based model, but it also opens opportunities for future partnership in clean sectors by developing energy infrastructure.

The sustainability of Euro-Algerian energy relations requires investment in modernizing the transmission network, raising the capacity of the TransMed pipeline, developing LNG projects, and establishing platforms for hydrogen export to Europe.

B- Green Hydrogen

Green hydrogen is the core of the strategic energy transformation in the bilateral relationship between Algeria and Italy, given Algeria's proximity to Europe on one hand, and its abundance of solar energy and vast desert area on the other, classifying it among the countries with the highest solar radiation rates globally. This qualifies it to possess the best green hydrogen production capabilities in Africa at a relatively low cost, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA, 2022, n.p.).

IRENA confirms the importance of the region's potential in this field (IRENA, 2022, n.p.). ENI reinforces this trend by indicating the inclusion of future projects in Algeria within its Mediterranean vision (ENI, 2023, p. 17). Furthermore, the existing infrastructure between Algeria and Italy is a catalyst for promising prospects between the two states. The presence of the TransMed pipeline, for example, can be modified to transport hydrogen, providing Italy with a direct clean energy gateway across the Mediterranean. ENI is one of the leading companies investing in hydrogen projects in Africa and the Middle East.

Given European stakes, specialists observe that Europe seeks to produce or import \$10 \text{ million tons} of green hydrogen by



2030 under the REPowerEU strategy, and Algeria is one of the main candidates to meet a portion of these orders.

Consequently, the green hydrogen project is not merely an energy project, but a developmental-security project capable of creating quality jobs in Algeria, attracting advanced technology investments, transforming Algeria into a green energy hub in the Western Mediterranean, and supporting regional stability through major long-term economic projects. IEA suggests that Algeria could become a regional clean energy center if technology and funding partnerships are available (IEA, 2023, n.p.).

C- Renewable Energy

Solar and wind energy projects constitute another area of cooperation, directly linked to both energy security and human development in the Mediterranean region. The accelerating climate changes in the Western Mediterranean, according to IPCC reports, represent a threat to food and water security, making the support of renewable energy infrastructure a requirement for achieving comprehensive security.

Italian companies—both public and private—are working to build solar plants in Algeria's High Plateaus and South, develop wind energy projects in coastal areas, integrate renewable energy into industrial and agricultural electricity grids, and support Algeria in its plan to raise the share of renewable energy to 20% by 2030.

Therefore, renewable energy projects between Algeria and Italy contribute to:

- Reducingenergycosts.
- Increasingindustrial output.
- Supporting the energy transition.
- Improvingsustainabledevelopmentindicators.
- Enhancing economic and social security.

In this context, IEA (2023) confirms that Algeria "has huge potential that could make it a regional hub for clean energy if the right technological and financial partnerships are available" (IEA, 2023, n.p.). For Italy, investment in renewable energy in Algeria is part of the strategy to reduce emissions and achieve the goals of the European Green Deal.

D- Water Desalination

This is a promising area due to the presence of specialized Italian companies in Algeria. Algeria faces increasing water stress due to rising population density, expanding urban fabric, and rapid industrial investment steps, necessitating the expansion of its seawater desalination capabilities. Italian companies such as Webuild and FisalItalimpianti are among the world's leading companies in seawater desalination. The potential for cooperation lies in: building new desalination plants, modernizing old ones, transferring technical expertise, and developing distribution networks.

World Bank reports indicate that Algeria "will be one of the Mediterranean countries most exposed to water scarcity by 2030" (World Bank, 2022, n.p.), making water cooperation a component of human security, not just a technical project.

E- Electricity Interconnection via the Mediterranean

The electrical interconnection between Algeria and Italy is a geo-strategic project for energy transition that could change the region's energy structure. The project is based on linking the Algerian electrical grid with the European grid via a high-voltage direct current (HVDC) submarine cable, allowing for the export of renewable electricity from Algeria to Europe, enhancing grid resilience, and supporting supply stability during peak periods.

European support for the project is anticipated through funding from the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Innovation Fund, and REPowerEU mechanisms. An ECFR report (2023) notes that electrical interconnection "represents one of the most ripe South-North Mediterranean cooperation opportunities for implementation if political and technical interests are aligned" (ECFR, 2023, n.p.).

Conclusion

The Western Mediterranean region constitutes a complex geo-strategic space where security and development considerations intersect, and the concept of Common Security emerges as an essential interpretive framework for understanding the current regional transformations. This study has shown that security in this space cannot be achieved in isolation from addressing structural



developmental imbalances, especially in the countries of the Southern Shore, which constitute a primary source of non-traditional threats. The case of Algerian-Italian relations during the 2019–2025 period confirms that building balanced partnerships based on the interdependence of security and development represents a pragmatic entry point for achieving regional stability. This relationship has evolved from a traditional energy partnership to a multi-dimensional strategic cooperation encompassing energy, maritime security, migration, and economic development.

Therefore, the Algeria–Italy axis can be considered a referential model that can be utilized in formulating an approach to Common Security in the Western Mediterranean, provided this trajectory is deepened by diversifying cooperation areas and strengthening institutional frameworks to ensure its sustainability amid rapid geopolitical shifts.

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