



# The Road to Long-Term Stability in UAE-Italy Relations

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## Summary

- The UAE-Italy relationship has advanced significantly in recent years, with deepening cooperation in areas like trade, defence, energy, and culture. The Strategic Partnership signed in 2023 has catalysed further engagement, with mutual interests in geopolitical regions such as the Mediterranean and Africa.
- Both countries share common goals in sustainability and innovation, leveraging their unique geographical positions. While challenges persist, particularly around international crises, their cooperative strategies underscore a robust, multifaceted partnership.
- This Insight delves into the bilateral relationship addressing the key issue of nurturing continuity and stability for the near future.
- It argues that the intensity and complexity of their relations, stretching from peace and security to cultural events, needs a foundation based on mutual understanding and the development of a unique diplomatic praxis.
- The Insight also examines recent trends in Italian politics and foreign policy and their implications for the bilateral relationship. It also highlights the latest \$40-billion deal between the two countries.
- To maintain the integrity of this thriving relationship, this Insight puts forth the following recommendations:
  - » Maintain the strong political momentum between Italy and the UAE, driven by trade, energy and mutual geopolitical relevance, to fully explore potential in political dialogue and global partnerships.
  - » Establish a yearly diplomatic forum to discuss bilateral relations across various sectors (political, trade, energy, defence, investments), incorporating Track II diplomacy to foster cultural understanding.
  - » Negotiate a new cooperation agreement to structure future collaborations in defence industries and military relations, ensuring continuous dialogue.
  - » Leverage both countries' geographical positions and diplomatic approaches to act as facilitators in global crisis resolution and collaborate on humanitarian missions to support civilians in conflict zones.
  - » The UAE and Italy should form a trilateral development partnership in Africa, focussing on infrastructure, renewable energy and security.



## The Issue

This Insight delves into the UAE-Italy bilateral relationship, addressing the key issue of nurturing continuity and stability for the near future. The intensity and complexity of their relations, stretching from peace and security to cultural events, needs a foundation based on mutual understanding and the development of a unique diplomatic praxis.

Italy routinely faces changes, sometimes major, in its political leadership, while the UAE inhabits a wider region characterized by sudden shocks, political turmoil and rapid social and economic changes. The sources of continuity are to be found, in both countries, in the strengths both systems can provide to one another, and at the same time creating the habit of continuous engagement at all levels of foreign policy when times are challenging for both.

This Insight scouts the main issues and potentials of this diplomatic relationship, with an eye on the current international context characterised by systemic competition. Furthermore, the Insight highlights that regardless of its changes in political leadership, Italy has shown to be reliable in key aspects of its foreign policy. The first step to long-term diplomatic relations is mutual understanding.

### Bilateral Relations

Stability in diplomatic relations over the long term requires an understanding of both countries in key policy areas, especially in domains of continuity. To do so we should take into consideration the central elements of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries highlighting the issues that are likely to endure and on which the two countries can build a solid platform for future cooperation and political negotiations. Italy needs to be understood in its long historical trajectory, political process, solid statecraft, unique design and manufacturing, and complex society. The United Arab Emirates occupies a position at the heart of the current global economy, with a promising future secured by innovation, a vibrant global community and a clear long-term vision.

Global challenges such as migration, security and energy might experience different phases, and they might occupy different positions in the priority list over time. However, a political dialogue requires a degree of method and structure. This can happen if both parties understand each other's role in the world but develop a habit of periodic consultation about on-going diplomatic issues.

Italy is a Parliamentary Republic, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a founding member of the European Union (EU). It is located at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, and the shape of its territory makes it a natural harbour and meeting point for all global routes. Its status as a Parliamentary Republic and its extensive web of diplomatic relations makes it prone to seek multilateral and bilateral forms of cooperation. Its geopolitical interests are primarily the security of Europe and the Mediterranean Sea, to include stability in North Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. The relationship with the United States is one particularly nurtured at all levels of government and from all political parties.

The alliance with the United States has survived nearly eight decades, making it a permanent element in Italian policymaking. Italy takes pride in its membership of the G7 and devoted effort to respond to the challenges of time, especially when Italy was President in 1994, 2001, 2009, 2016, and 2024.<sup>1</sup> The reform of the United Nations Security Council, under the initiative of Uniting for Consensus,<sup>2</sup> makes Italy a reliable partner for countries that believe in representation and effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy, especially in the field of peace and security. Sub-Saharan Africa has recently been prioritised due largely to migration flows through the Central Mediterranean Route.

While Italy's problem with illegal migration is far from over, this crisis has forced the country to expand its engagement, cooperation and engagement with the African continent, notably under the recent Mattei Plan announced by the Italian government.<sup>3</sup> The UAE therefore can seek Italian cooperation in working with international institutions, partnering to end conflicts in the Mediterranean and launch potential joint ventures in Africa. The participation of UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in the International Conference on Migration and Development in Rome in July 2023 represents the convergence of bilateral relations on Africa.<sup>4</sup>

International crises are frequent, especially in the context of the competition amongst Great Powers. Both Italy and the UAE find themselves navigating this challenging period of international relations. As a result, these are generally sources of tensions between countries, rather than opportunities to strengthen bonds. However, pragmatism on both sides might be the key for the establishment of a sound relationship. Italy has condemned Russian military operations in Ukraine in 2022<sup>5</sup> and has joined the European Union, NATO and other members of the international community in applying sanctions and supporting Ukraine's defence.

The War in Ukraine has had a deep impact on Italy's energy security. Italy is also concerned about the current conflicts in Gaza, and while strongly condemning the attacks by Hamas on 7 October 2023,<sup>6</sup> it has provided humanitarian support for the civilians affected by the conflict. The crisis in Yemen and the Red Sea is seen by Italy with concern. While supporting an end to the conflict,<sup>7</sup> Italy sees the security crisis there as a matter of international public order that needs first and foremost the protection of civilians and the freedom of navigation.<sup>8</sup> While the UAE and Italy might not have an identical position on these crises, there are currently no reasons why these should cause any misunderstanding. In none of the current political crises, both countries have opposite views.

## Defence Ties

Defence cooperation rests on political stability, mutual understanding, continuous dialogue, and compatible foreign policies. The UAE and Italy have a defence relationship characterized by international context and military operations, as well as defence industries. The UAE hosted during the years of the war in Afghanistan an Italian military base until 2021, when NATO operations ended. Moreover, Italy participated in the EMASoH (European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz) with naval assets (1 destroyer) and command staff.<sup>9</sup>

Since February 2024, Italy participated in Operation Aspides, an EU military operation launched in response to the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea with a mission to increase maritime surveillance in the region, escort merchant vessels, and defend against strikes.<sup>10</sup> It is a purely defensive mission, different from the Anglo-American led Operation Prosperity Guardian mandated to respond to Houthi attacks.<sup>11</sup>

Italian defence company Leonardo's relationship with the UAE dates back to the 1970s. It has supplied over 40 naval units including the Ghannatha, FalaJ 2 and Baynunah together with naval guns, integrated combat systems, naval radars, fire control systems, and missile electronics.<sup>12</sup> Leonardo has supplied over 100 helicopters to the UAE and 90% of UAE's VVIP helicopters. It has been involved in the Cyber Security Academy established at Khalifa University.<sup>13</sup> This project has expanded the width of defence industry trade relationship between the two countries.

In other projects, Fincantieri has signed a Strategic Naval Partnership with EDGE Group to enhance shipbuilding capabilities of the UAE thanks to Italian design and experience in building large naval vessels and frigates.<sup>14</sup> Augusta-Westland provides Abu Dhabi Aviation Authority with maintenance and repair of helicopters.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the newly created National Guard has met the Arma dei Carabinieri (Italy's Gendarmerie and Presidential Guard Corps) to discuss matters of common interest.

Italy has championed the development of police units with military status globally with several missions around the world. The multifaceted defence cooperation between Italy and the UAE, encompassing a broad spectrum from military operations to advanced technological collaborations and training, underscores a dynamic and robust partnership that not only enhances the strategic capabilities of both nations but also solidifies their positions within global defence and security architectures. This cooperation, rooted in continuous dialogue and mutual strategic interests, facilitates both nations' abilities to respond to regional threats effectively, while fostering an environment of political stability and aligned foreign policy objectives.

In August 2024, a significant development in the bilateral relations between the two countries was the extradition of Danilo Coppola, an Italian citizen convicted of financial crimes. This achievement underscores the success of judicial cooperation between the two nations and highlights the effective collaboration of their competent authorities.<sup>16</sup> The Treaty on Enhanced Judicial Cooperation, signed on 9 March 2022, further strengthened the framework established by the Extradition Treaty of 17 April 2019.<sup>17</sup>



## Trade and Connectivity Hubs

Further, the IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor) is a strategic infrastructure project aimed at enhancing connectivity between the three regions.<sup>18</sup> This initiative seeks to develop a comprehensive network of transport infrastructure, energy pipelines and green energy, as well as digital connectivity. It is aimed at creating economic integration across continents, providing a framework for strategic and political alignment, bolstering sustainable development and ensuring security and stability.

The UAE and Italy have both leveraged their geographical positions in the framework of this project – the UAE as the main connecting point between India and the Middle East, and Italy as the main gate of the corridor into Europe. The future of this geopolitical undertaking relies mainly on the security situation and political stability of the countries involved. This project highlights the commonalities that both Italy and the UAE share as hubs.

The United Arab Emirates and Italy are strategic partners since the agreement was signed in Abu Dhabi in March 2023.<sup>19</sup> The agreement has put an emphasis on economic and commercial cooperation. This sets a good framework for mutual direct investments in key strategic sectors such as food security, industry and high tech. Bilateral trade between the UAE and Italy has so far been positive – 8 billion euros in 2022 (marking a 19% increase from the previous year).

Italian exports to the UAE have reached a record high of 6 billion euros, showing a 28% increase from 2021, leading to a trade surplus of 4 billion euros. Italy's export to the UAE is diversified, with significant portions in jewellery, general machinery and apparel. Italy receives crude oil and refined petroleum products and metals from the UAE.

Italian investment from Italy to the UAE totalled 11.7 billion Euros by 2023. There are 354 Italian companies in the UAE employing about 8,100 people. While this is a healthy exchange, there is an imbalance with regards to the size of UAE investments in Italy, though the quality of investments is noteworthy.

The UAE's diversification away from oil and its expansion in sectors like aerospace, energy, agribusiness, and healthcare aligns well with Italy's strong industrial and technological capabilities, specifically in these sectors. This congruence presents unique possibilities that might be mutually beneficial. The UAE's strategic position as a gateway between East and West and Italy's central position in the Mediterranean reveal a common vocation by both countries as hubs. The trade composition of the two countries with Italy exporting high-value items such as machinery, jewellery and fashion to the UAE reveal interest for Italy's industrial sector and design.

The UAE has demonstrated over the last few decades a desire for economic growth, resilience and stability. This has attracted, and will attract, several Italian companies, which see in the UAE an excellent ground for long-term business strategies. The sectoral breakdown of UAE-Italy trade relations unveils common interests in food, fashion and lifestyle, which create a fertile cultural ground beyond mere statistics.

## Energy and Technology

Energy and sustainability are also important parts of the UAE-Italy bilateral relations. ADNOC and ENI relations are not just transactional, but are deeply integrated through joint initiatives in exploration, production, refining, and sustainability projects. This indicates strong mutual trust and long-term commitment for collaboration. ENI has significantly invested in the UAE's energy sector, particularly in Ghasha concession.<sup>20</sup>

Advanced projects like those involving carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS) and hydrogen technology signify an understanding in transfer and sharing of high-end technology between the countries. This is a significant step in supporting the UAE in greening its energy infrastructure. The key features of ADNOC-ENI relations are characterised in commitment to sustainability and decarbonisation, emerging technologies like hydrogen and the blending large-scale operations and local capacity building. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in March 2023 focused on accelerating energy transition and enhancing sustainability practices<sup>21</sup> Italy has provided niche capabilities to the UAE, and the nature of this relationship is built on transition and technology rather than merely on volume. This was in the spirit of COP28 in 2023, but also in line with building a long-term relationship.

The UAE, known for its strategic initiatives in technologies and smart cities could find a valuable partner in Italy's technological sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure and digital technologies. Italy has a growing tech ecosystem in high potential areas such as robotics, life sciences and fintech. Milan has established itself as a hub of innovation through initiatives like Milan Innovation District (MIND.)<sup>22</sup> Both Italy and the UAE have a deep interest in developing the start-up sector, this could lead to interesting joint ventures and exchanges both at the private sector and university levels.

Despite the danger of international crises causing misunderstanding, it is evident that the sectors analysed above rest on solid foundations. The strategic partnership between Italy and the UAE, spanning decades and encompassing diverse sectors such as defence, technology, energy, and culture, illustrates a profound alignment of interests and visions. This robust collaboration is built on a mutual understanding of each other's strategic roles in their respective regions and on the global stage, reinforcing their positions as pivotal players in regional and international affairs.

### **Trilateral Diplomacy: Abu Dhabi, Italy and Albania**

On January 15, 2025, during Dubai Sustainability Week, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Albania, signed a trilateral strategic partnership in Abu Dhabi to strengthen cooperation in renewable energy and strategic infrastructure. The agreement was signed in the presence of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, and UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Signatories included Italy's Minister for the Environment and Energy Security Gilberto Pichetto, UAE Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Masdar Chairman Sultan Al Jaber, and Albania's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Energy Belinda Balluku.

The partnership aims to develop large-scale renewable energy projects in Albania, solar photovoltaic, wind, and hybrid systems with storage capacity, part of which will be transmitted to Italy via a new cross-border electricity underwater cable. The agreement strengthens energy cooperation between Europe and the Arab world and contributes to the climate goals set during COP28. The agreement strengthens how the excellent relationship between the UAE and Italy fosters creative strategic partnerships with other countries. The continuous enhancement of their bilateral relationship, particularly through significant infrastructural and economic projects like IMEC and comprehensive defence collaborations, promises to further strengthen their ties. Both nations are committed to leveraging their strategic locations, technological prowess, and economic capacities to foster a stable, prosperous future, showcasing a model of international partnership that is adaptable, resilient, and forward-looking.

On 24 February 2025, during the State Visit of UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Rome, the UAE and Italy reaffirmed their growing bilateral ties, building on Meloni's 2023 visit to Abu Dhabi. The visit has been landmark of the diplomatic ties between the two countries because of the strategic relevance of its outcome. Over 40 agreements were signed, cementing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership spanning energy (including renewables and peaceful nuclear), defence, AI, advanced technologies, space, infrastructure, water, and culture. The UAE pledged \$40 billion in investments across Italy.

The partnership includes a high-level focus on AI and data centres (e.g. ENI\_G42\_MGX collaboration), enhanced cooperation in defence production, cybersecurity, and intelligence sharing, and mutual support in climate action, with follow-up to COP28 goals. They also welcomed the Italy\_UAE\_Albania tripartite renewable energy deal and committed to deepened engagement in Africa via the Rome Process and Mattei Plan, targeting development, migration root causes, and strategic sectors like education, agriculture, and energy. Nearly all economic, social and technological issues of the international agenda were encapsulated into the agreements. The two countries are therefore bound to explore the full potential of their strategic partnership in the coming years. Here is an overview of the agreements signed in Rome<sup>23</sup> :



ENI (Energy Oil Company)

Three main agreements:

1. Eni-Masdar-Taqa: an agreement to connect Italy and Albania with an underwater cable providing Gigawatts of renewable energy
2. Eni-MGX-G42: an agreement to create blue-powered data centre campus
3. Eni-ADQ: an agreement to share knowledge on critical minerals

ENEL (Electric Energy Company)

- » ENEL-Masdar: agreement to explore business opportunities in renewable energy in Italy, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom and United States

NEXTCHEM (Sustainable Energy Company)

- » Nextchem-Al Nowais: an agreement on circular economy and energy transition

LEONARDO (Defence Company)

- » Leonardo-EDGE: an agreement to cooperate on naval sector

Intesa San Paolo (Bank)

- » Intesa San Paolo-Masdar: cooperation on M&A in renewable energy and civil aviation

Fincantieri (Defence and Naval Company)

- » Fincantieri-Edge: an agreement to explore cooperation on underwater systems

Acea (Water Company)

- » Acea-Metito Utilities: an agreement for commercial opportunities in the field of water

TIM (Telecommunication Company)

- » TIM-Abu Dhabi Investment Office: an agreement to cooperate on cyber, quantum and the development of a Centre of Excellence on IoT (Internet of Things and AI).

CdP Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (Development Bank)

- » CdP and Abu Dhabi Investment Office: an agreement to support collaboration between their companies, with a focus on Italian firms linked to Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP). The CDP\_Amea Power and CDP\_Metito Utilities MoUs aim to identify joint projects in third countries, especially in Africa under the Mattei Plan, in key sectors such as renewable energy, desalination, and water resource management.

## **Italian Political System and Foreign Policy**

The Italian political system is often portrayed as unstable and subject to sudden changes. This is because governments since the beginning of the Italian republic have lasted on average 13 months, while since 1994 they have lasted an average of 24 months. Other political systems like France, the United States and Germany have more stable governments. While government stability is an enduring challenge in Italian politics, it should not lead to the conclusion that there is a risk of discontinuity in foreign policy. For the careful viewer there are elements that are rarely affected in Italian foreign policy. This section seeks to present such lines of continuity as a foundation for a sound common understanding between the UAE and Italy.

Italy is a Parliamentary Republic with a distinct political structure that includes a perfect bicameral parliament, consisting of the Camera dei Deputati (Chamber of Deputies) and the Senato della Repubblica (Senate of the Republic)<sup>24</sup>. In this system, the Chamber of Deputies represents the population and is elected based on proportional representation, reflecting the democratic choice of the citizens.

Conversely, the Senate represents the territories, including regions and autonomous provinces, thereby integrating a broader geographic representation into the legislative process. The President of the Republic is elected for a seven-year term, embodying the continuity and stability of the Italian state. Both Houses are elected for five years and the President might decide in case of political instability, to call an early election. The Prime Minister and the government

are dependent on the confidence of Parliament to govern, with the administration remaining in office until it retains the support of this legislative body.

This framework ensures that the government's actions are consistently aligned with the democratic will of the Parliament. In Italy, the Prime Minister acts as a "Primus Inter Pares" (first among equals) among the ministers, coordinating and guiding government policies while not holding absolute power over ministerial decisions. Each minister, such as the Foreign Minister, operates with a degree of autonomy. The Foreign Minister, specifically, directs the country's foreign policy. However, the collaborative nature of Italy's government allows other ministries to develop their own external relations initiatives, reflecting their specific domain expertise and responsibilities. This structure ensures a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to international affairs, where diverse governmental perspectives contribute to the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Examples of this approach are provided by ministries such as environment, health, and economy and finance.

In Italy, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister serve as the primary architects of Italian foreign policy, steering the nation's international agenda and diplomatic engagements. Their collaborative efforts shape Italy's response to global challenges and its interactions with other countries. While they drive the foreign policy, the President of the Republic plays a more formal role, responsible for enacting treaties and establishing diplomatic relations, which includes the accreditation of ambassadors.

Additionally, the President serves as the Commander of the Armed Forces, underscoring the ceremonial and constitutional responsibilities vested in the office, which complement the dynamic policy-making activities of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The President of the Republic has historically provided continuity and stability to Italian foreign policy, especially during periods of uncertain majorities in Parliament. This role has been notably fulfilled by President Giorgio Napolitano and President Sergio Mattarella, who both played key parts in maintaining a steady diplomatic course amidst fluctuating political landscapes in Italy.

Italy's foreign policy has been characterised by a remarkable line of continuity, primarily anchored in its alliance with the United States, a relationship that has endured for eight decades. This robust partnership covers all aspects of foreign policy, encompassing economic, political and military dimensions.<sup>25</sup> This relationship is deeply intertwined with Italy's membership in NATO, underpinning the broader international security framework that defines much of Italy's geopolitical stance. Despite the diverse political landscapes and varying views held by successive Italian governments regarding this alliance, no government has sought to deviate from or alter this fundamental relationship significantly. This steadfast alliance underscores the strategic importance of the transatlantic bond in Italy's foreign policy and its enduring commitment to collective defence.

Italy is an active and committed member of NATO, participating in nearly all its missions and activities. This involvement underscores Italy's integral role within the alliance, where it is fully integrated into NATO's command structure. This participation not only enhances Italy's own security, namely through Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, and defence capabilities, but also contributes significantly to collective security and stability within the transatlantic alliance. Italy's engagement in NATO missions demonstrates its dedication to upholding the principles of mutual defence and cooperation that are central to the organization. Italy's engagement with NATO was proven during the most difficult operations carried out by the military alliance in Bosnia Herzegovina (IFOR), Kosovo (KFOR), Afghanistan (ISAF), Iraq (NTM-I), and Libya (Unified Protector).

Italy's commitment to European integration represents its second line of continuity in foreign policy, highlighted by its status as a founding member of the European Community. This foundational role instils a deep sense of national pride across nearly all Italian political spectrum.<sup>26</sup> Although political parties such as the Northern League and the Five Star Movement have expressed critical views on specific EU policies, particularly concerning economic governance and migration, their time in government under Prime Minister Antonio Conte did not see a deviation from Italy's full participation in the Union. Despite their critical stance, when in power, these parties have maintained Italy's commitments to the EU, underscoring a broad, across-the-board recognition of the importance of the Union to Italy's political and economic stability.



This illustrates a complex yet resilient relationship with the EU, where Italy continues to play a key and active role despite internal debates on certain EU policies. Italy's membership in the European Union has had profound implications for its economic and social policies, with the adoption of the euro standing out as a pivotal aspect. The transition to the euro has provided Italy with financial stability, fostering smoother trade and investment flows within the Eurozone, and aligning its monetary policies with those of other member states, which has been critical in times of economic uncertainty.

Conversely, the European Union's migration policy has become the most contested aspect of EU membership across a large sector of Italy's political spectrum.<sup>27</sup> The migration crisis in the Mediterranean, where Italy serves as one of the primary entry points to Europe, has exacerbated these tensions. Political debates have intensified around the effectiveness and fairness of the EU's approach to handling the influx of migrants and refugees, with various parties expressing dissatisfaction over what they perceive as an unequal burden shared among member states. This ongoing crisis has spotlighted the challenges of collective action within the EU, making migration policy a focal point of contention and a significant public concern in Italy.

Over the past two decades, the European Union's approach to foreign policy has expanded significantly, marked by the establishment of its diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the development of military and civilian crisis management structures.<sup>28</sup> These efforts have facilitated the launch of various missions across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, showcasing the EU's active role on the global stage. Italy has been a committed participant in these initiatives, aligning its foreign policy efforts with those of the EU to address regional and global challenges. However, despite these advances, the vision of a fully unified Common EU Foreign Policy, where all member states consistently speak with one voice and act collectively in every circumstance, remains elusive. The diversity of national interests, historical relationships and strategic priorities among EU member states often leads to nuanced positions that can diverge. This complexity is evident in how member states respond to international crises, negotiate trade agreements, or address global security threats. While there is significant cooperation and shared goals within the EU, achieving complete unanimity on all aspects of foreign policy continues to be a challenging endeavour, reflecting the intricate tapestry of European unity and diversity.

Italy's foreign policy exhibits a strong and enduring focus on the Mediterranean and the Western Balkans, areas considered critical for its strategic interests and regional stability. In North Africa, particularly Libya, Italy prioritizes political stability as essential not only for regional security but also for managing migration flows. The country's proximity to North Africa makes it a primary destination for migrants crossing the Mediterranean, compelling Italy to actively engage in diplomatic efforts aimed at stabilizing the region.

Additionally, Italy supports the Middle East Peace Process, recognizing that sustainable peace in the Middle East directly influences Mediterranean stability and security.<sup>29</sup> In the Western Balkans, Italy has been a steadfast supporter of political and security stability for over 35 years.<sup>30</sup> Through peacekeeping missions and consistent diplomatic efforts, Italy has played a significant role in the region's post-conflict reconstruction and European integration processes. This commitment underscores Italy's broader strategic aim to foster a secure and stable environment on its borders, mitigating potential spillovers of instability and reinforcing the European integration of Western Balkan countries. These efforts not only enhance regional security but also align with Italy's overarching goals of promoting stability and cooperation across its neighbouring regions.

Italy's foreign policy demonstrates a remarkable continuity shaped by its strategic geographic positioning, historical relationships, and commitment to multilateralism. Short-lived governments have not shaken the foundation of this foreign policy. Anchored by its longstanding alliance with the United States within NATO, a robust membership in the European Union, and proactive engagement in the Mediterranean and Western Balkans, Italy has effectively navigated the complexities of international relations.

These three pillars — transatlantic ties, European integration and regional stability efforts — form the bedrock of Italy's diplomatic endeavours. Despite internal political fluctuations and diverse government coalitions, these constants have guided Italy's foreign policy decisions, ensuring a degree of predictability and stability in its international stance. This consistent approach enables Italy to contribute effectively to global security, manage migration, and support international peace, affirming its role as a reliable and pivotal player on the world stage.

## Conclusion

The bilateral relations between Italy and the UAE have experienced significant growth in terms of volume, complexity and quality, marking an era of deepened mutual engagement and cooperation. The recent elevation of these ties to a Strategic Partnership, and the historic bi-lateral summit in Rome in February 2025, herald the beginning of a long-term diplomatic relationship founded on key pillars such as economy, trade, energy, sustainability, and technology. This progression reflects a mutual recognition of the strategic benefits derived from robust collaborative efforts.

Geopolitically, Italy and the UAE are positioned uniquely, enhancing their strategic partnership's value. Italy, located at the heart of the Mediterranean, serves as a pivotal gateway between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, harnessing centuries of history that underscore its role as a central hub in Mediterranean geopolitics. This positioning enables Italy to influence crucial issues such as migration, maritime security and regional stability. On the other side, the UAE stands as a critical bridge to the East, connecting the Gulf region with broader Asian markets and serving as a focal point for trade and cultural exchanges that extend to Africa and beyond.

The UAE's strategic location, coupled with its state-of-the-art infrastructure and forward-looking economic policies, cements its role as a central player in global commerce and diplomacy. Together, Italy's centrality in the Mediterranean and the UAE's role as a bridge to the East create a powerful geopolitical partnership that leverages each nation's geographic strengths to bolster not only their bilateral interests but also their influence on a wider global scale. This unique geostrategic alignment underpins the deepening cooperation across multiple sectors, amplifying their impact on international affairs.

In the defence sector, the relationship is unleashing considerable potential, with Italy bringing its niche expertise to the forefront in areas such as naval vessels, helicopters, cybersecurity, and policing. These contributions not only enhance the UAE's strategic capabilities but also showcase Italy's strengths in critical defence technologies and systems.

Despite the challenge of relatively short-lived governments, Italy demonstrates a remarkable level of continuity in its foreign policy, ensuring that its international partnerships, including with the UAE, are maintained and strengthened regardless of domestic political changes. This continuity has been crucial in preserving trust and stability in Italy-UAE relations, allowing both nations to pursue ambitious projects and strategic objectives with confidence in each other's commitment.

Overall, the Italy-UAE relationship stands as a testament to how strategic foresight, mutual interests, and continuous diplomatic engagement can overcome internal and external challenges, paving the way for a future rich in cooperative success and mutual benefits.



## Recommendations

- The relationship between Italy and the UAE has witnessed significant momentum since 2023. This is due to important engines of foreign policy, in particular trade, energy and a mutual understanding of their geopolitical relevance. This momentum must be maintained to fully explore its potential, specifically in political dialogue and in partnership in other parts of the world.
- The United Arab Emirates and Italy should establish an annual diplomatic forum to discuss their bilateral relations at several levels (heads of state and government, foreign relations, trade, energy, defence and investments).
- The annual diplomatic forum should also consider using track-two diplomacy to foster mutual understanding and cultural relations prior to the event. This methodological approach will help the two countries steer the width of their relationship and evaluate periodically their relationship.
- The Defence Cooperation needs a new agreement between the two countries to establish a structure for future cooperation about defence industries and military-to-military relations. An agreement would, like the diplomatic forum, allow the two countries to be engaged in a constant dialogue.
- The geographical position of both countries and their approach to diplomacy suggest that both countries can operate as facilitators to the resolution of crises around the world. Track II diplomacy can be extremely beneficial in seeking these opportunities.
- Italy and the UAE should continue to cooperate on humanitarian missions around the world to alleviate the suffering of civilians in armed conflict.
- To improve regional peace, accelerate economic growth, and build strategic ties with African partners, the UAE and Italy should form a trilateral African development partnership focused on infrastructure, renewable energy and security.

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