

The Use of Analytic Hierarchy Process for Measuring National Interests: Demonstrating the Case Study of the Changing Relevance of Libya for Italian Foreign Policy between 2011–2021

LILI TAKACS

University of Public Service, Hungary

takacs.lilii@gmail.com

The study employs the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to quantitatively assess the Italian national interests over a 10-year period (2011–2021) within the context of five states along the southern Mediterranean coast. By adopting a longitudinal approach, this research investigates the dynamics and relative significance of each state, thereby shedding light on potential shifts in Italy's foreign policy. The study introduces a comprehensive methodology for visualizing and analyzing national interests, offering valuable insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Mediterranean region. The findings highlight the changing patterns and relative importance of these interests over the examined period, uncovering subtle shifts in Italy's strategic outlook. By offering a detailed examination of the Mediterranean region, this study presents a detailed understanding of the complex interplay between Italian national interests and the geopolitical dynamics of neighboring states. The visualization of this data provides an overview of the evolving relationships and power dynamics, facilitating informed decision-making and policy formulation.

Key Words: national interest, Italy, Mediterranean, foreign policy, Analytic Hierarchy Process



<https://emuni.si/ISSN/2232-6022/17.63-85.pdf>

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the strategic significance of advocacy and power projection in the Euro-Mediterranean region as drivers of Italian national interests and the subsequent enhancement of the country's international influence. While the measurement and prioritization of national interests have long been explored in foreign policy research,

[64] there is a lack of widely disseminated methodologies providing quantitative outcomes crucial for informing strategic decision-making. The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is a method that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative factors, making it suitable for analyzing national interests and assisting decision-makers in setting priorities and allocating resources.

This paper utilizes the AHP methodology to examine Italian national interests in the Euro-Mediterranean region, with a specific focus on Libya. Within the study's framework, an assessment is made of the evolving significance of Libya in Italian foreign policy within the Mediterranean context, encompassing five nations along the southern shores of the Mediterranean (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt). The objective is to identify the areas of Italian interests in this region and to evaluate the progression of these interests over time. The outcomes of this analysis will enhance the comprehension of international policy choices and contribute to a more effective formulation of the Italian foreign policy in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of national interest has emerged alongside the formation of nation-states, a development closely linked to the Peace of Westphalia. According to Carl Schmitt, states engage in conflicts not primarily driven by abstract values but by their own interests. Values, in Schmitt's view, are pursued by states only when they align with their respective interests (Gaiser 2005, 17).

Defining national interest can be as challenging as attempting to define the abstract concept of 'good' in philosophy. Its complexity stems from various factors, primarily due to the close association between national interest and the dynamics of the nation-state-international system. Different schools of international relations (IR) offer diverse interpretations of national interest. In liberal theories, it is argued that national interests should be oriented towards fostering peace and harmony among states (Burchill 2005, 125). According to liberalism, the state is not monolithic, as in realist theories, because it involves a myriad of different actors and different interests (Morgan 2007, 25–26). However, Morgenthau's realism, which emphasizes the primacy of power and security in international relations, provides a contrasting perspective. In Morgenthau's view, states prioritize their own survival and the maximization of power in an anarchic international system.



This perspective highlights the competitive and conflictual nature of international politics, where national interest is fundamentally rooted in the pursuit of power and security (Morgenthau 1978).

The realist school of thought emphasizes that the dynamics of international politics are fundamentally shaped by the competition between national interests. Realists define national interest in terms of the preservation of a state's territorial and political integrity. Survival becomes the paramount national interest, with all other interests considered subordinate to it. Realists argue that without ensuring the state's existence and security, no other interests can be effectively pursued or guaranteed. Thus, the preservation of the state's survival forms the core foundation of the realist understanding of national interest (Dunne and Schmidt 2005, 164). [65]

The realist approach does not take into account the changing nature of interests independent of power factors. In this perspective, foreign policy, based on the state's capabilities, is seen as a continuous process aimed at ensuring survival, with interests considered constant (Robert and Sørensen 2003, 82). However, the determination of national interest goes beyond considerations of power and geography; it is also influenced by political traditions, ideals, internal forces, decision-makers, and historical experiences within the state. This perspective aligns with the neoclassical realist school of thought, which adopts a dual approach. According to this approach, the concept of national interest comprises two components: the (essential) elements inherent in the state's capabilities and the (changing) elements shaped by contextual factors. To effectively allocate resources, it becomes crucial to differentiate between the essential and changing elements of national interest. The necessary elements often encompass variable elements, the pursuit of which is deemed essential for national survival (Hoffmann 1995, 5). These interests are not mutually exclusive, they compete for attention and resources, and their intensity depends on the situation.

According to Glasier, a state's political, economic, military and cultural goals, which are necessary to preserve the integrity of the state, can be considered national interests (Jean 2008, 69–70).

As demonstrated, the definition of national interest encompasses various perspectives due to its inherent complexity. However, a common thread among these definitions revolves around the preservation of the nation-state. In the 21st century, the concept of national interest has evolved beyond its traditional, rigid interpretation of territorial in-

[66] tegrity and political independence, taking into account the characteristics of political, social, and economic structures. Nevertheless, regardless of the specific definitions, the acquisition of an international position and the pursuit of state objectives remain key elements shared by different conceptions of national interest, ultimately aiming to achieve political and economic advantages.

Considering these aspects, I employ the concept of national interest as follows: I perceive national interest as persistent goals applicable across various sectors that the state strives to safeguard. In cases where these interests are compromised or endangered, the state uses available coercive means to protect them. These interests are not exclusive to any particular domain and may vary in their intensity.

SECTORS OF SECURITY

The conclusion of the Cold War unveiled previously overlooked dimensions of security that had been overshadowed by a predominant focus on the military aspects of a bipolar confrontation. This limited emphasis on security threats beyond the traditional military realm began to shift in the 1990s. During this period, a sectoral perspective on security emerged, championed by scholars like Barry Buzan, associated with the Copenhagen School. This perspective highlights the societal, economic, political, and environmental dimensions of security alongside military factors. By broadening the understanding of security, this approach recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependencies of various sectors in shaping the overall security landscape (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Buzan's classification divides security threats in five distinct sectors: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. While conceptually separate, these sectors are not independent entities but instead interact intricately, resembling the interwoven structure of a spider's web. Similar to the approach outlined in the Helsinki Final Act, Buzan's conceptualization of security adopts a comprehensive understanding that extends beyond a narrow emphasis on the military domain. It recognizes the need to consider multiple dimensions and sectors of security holistically. As a result, highlighting the interdependence between these dimensions and sectors becomes crucial for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary security challenges (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998).

- *National interests in the military sector of security:* safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, protecting the state's citi-



zens, enhancing deterrence capabilities, and fostering cooperative and neighborly international relations. These interests are vital for ensuring the autonomy and integrity of the nation, prioritizing the safety and well-being of its people, establishing a credible deterrent against external aggression, and cultivating collaborative partnerships with other countries. By pursuing these objectives, states strive to maintain a secure environment that upholds their national interests and contributes to regional and global stability.

[67]

- *National interests of the economic sector*: ensuring economic prosperity and stability.
- *National interest of the political sector*: establishing a stable rule of law, guaranteeing the full respect of the law, creating a solid basis for the rule of law, protecting the constitutional order, pursuing an effective domestic and foreign policy, maintaining internal stability and the functioning of state institutions.
- *The national interests of the societal sector*: socio-political stability, maintaining the regulability of social processes, guaranteeing self-identity, ensuring the sustainability of language, culture, national traditions, values, religious and national identity, harmonising the rights and duties of the individual, society and the state, enforcing social justice, and generally protecting values that the members of society commonly share.
- *National interests of the environmental sector*: ensuring and preserving the environmental elements necessary to ensure social well-being (e.g. access to drinking water) (Gazdag 2007, 3–6).

Building upon Buzan's security theory and the aforementioned literature on national interests, I have identified Italy's interests in Libya through a comprehensive analysis:

- *Military sector*: protecting Italian citizens in Libya, preventing the infiltration of jihadist terrorism into Italy.
- *Economic sector*: ensuring stability of trade relations, guaranteeing energy security and contributing to diversification of supply.
- *Societal sector*: curbing illegal migration to Italy, reducing social tensions within Italy.
- *Political sector*: maintaining internal order and stability in Libya and a functioning institutional system.
- *Environmental sector*: preventing the spread of epidemics to Italy.

[68] These defined interests reflect Italy's strategic priorities in Libya, encompassing a range of sectors that are critical to its national security, economic prosperity, social cohesion, political stability, and public health. By understanding and addressing these interests, Italy aims to protect its own welfare while contributing to the overall stability and well-being of the region.

METHODOLOGY: ANALYTIC HIERARCHY PROCESS

To facilitate decision-making, policymakers rely on models to allocate resources effectively. Qualitative methods like the Delphi technique and the Cross Impact Analysis have been used for decades. The Delphi method involves gathering expert input through questionnaires and iterative feedback rounds, while the Cross Impact Analysis examines interdependencies between variables. While these methods provide valuable insights, there was a growing need for quantitative approaches to enhance precision and data-driven decision-making. As a consequence, hybrid models combining qualitative and quantitative elements were developed for a more robust policy analysis (Norman-Helmer 1951). In a changed international environment by the end of the Cold War, the definition of national interests has become more complex and complicated (Jean and Napolitano 2005). Compared to the methods mentioned above, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) allows for decision making based both on qualitative and quantitative criteria.

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is a methodology developed by Thomas Saaty in the 1980s for addressing multi-criteria decision problems. AHP was specifically designed to achieve a synthesis of subjective and objective elements by integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Its primary objective is to provide a structured framework for decision-makers to prioritize and evaluate alternatives based on a hierarchy of criteria. By incorporating the preferences of decision-makers and considering their relative importance, AHP enables a comprehensive and balanced analysis, enhancing the effectiveness and accuracy of decision-making processes. Saaty's development of AHP introduced a comprehensive, logical, and structured system for better comprehending decision problems. AHP achieves this by breaking down the problem into its components and organizing them hierarchically. This methodology proves particularly effective for addressing problems involving decision elements that are challenging to quantify and that require comparison. By employing a systematic approach



and considering both qualitative and quantitative factors, AHP provides decision-makers with valuable insights and facilitates informed decision-making processes (Duleba 2006, 1). Since the model was developed, it has become one of the most widely used multi-criteria decision methods among decision makers and researchers alike. Applications relevant to this study include the selection of the best alternative, the allocation and optimisation of resources, and the modelling of conflict resolution options (Vaidya and Kumar 2006). [69]

In the AHP model, the decision problem is represented through a multi-level tree structure. The top level depicts the goal, while the subsequent levels consist of criteria, sub-criteria, and alternatives. This hierarchical representation helps to organize and visualize the various components of the decision-making process, thus facilitating a systematic analysis and evaluation of alternatives.

The AHP model provides support for decision-making in situations involving competing objectives, making it suitable for evaluating national interests. Comprehensive assessment and measurement of all decision aspects, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative factors, is necessary when choosing between competing objectives. National interests, being inherently challenging to define, require a methodology capable of addressing non-quantifiable elements. Unlike the Delphi and the Cross Impact Analysis approaches, the AHP model enables the consideration of both measurable and less measurable factors by employing relative weights to establish a numerical relationship between elements within the hierarchy.

In AHP models, the decision process involves the following steps:

- Establishing the relative weights of the criteria.
- Evaluating alternatives based on the specified criteria.
- Weighting and aggregating the evaluations.

In the AHP model, pairwise comparison involves systematically comparing each criterion or alternative against every other criterion or alternative in order to determine their relative importance or preference. These comparisons are then used to derive priority weights, allowing decision-makers to quantify and prioritize the elements within the hierarchy.

In terms of national interests, the AHP method enables the establishment of a hierarchy among themes, sectors, and areas, facilitating decisions for resource allocation. Building upon the work of

[70] Bozzo, Simon-Belli, and Batacchi (2005), who quantified Italy's national interests using the AHP methodology, this study aims to analyze the evolving significance of Libya in Italian foreign policy within the Mediterranean region. The analysis encompasses five countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt) situated along the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Employing the same methodology, a longitudinal study will be conducted using data from 2011, 2016, and 2021 to assess potential changes in these states' relative importance to Italy. To maintain methodological consistency, the weighting scheme developed by Bozzo, Simon-Belli, and Batacchi (2005) for criteria and sub-criteria will be adopted.

Within the framework of the Analytic Hierarchy Process, this study examines Italy's interests in the Southern Mediterranean from three perspectives: socio-cultural, economic, and politico-military. These perspectives encompass the economic, political, and military sectors outlined in Buzan's concept of security. Since no hierarchical relationship exists among these different sectors, equal weight will be assigned to these three major aspects in the analysis. This approach avoids significant distortions in the results that could arise from weighting broad categories differently. Moreover, assigning equal weight to these aspects allows for a more accurate representation of the relative importance of each area. In essence, it facilitates a clearer understanding of whether Italy's connections to a particular country are primarily economic, cultural, or military in nature.

The following criteria and sub-criteria are used in the analysis (their weight – relative importance – is indicated with the percentage):

1 Societal-cultural aspects

- *Communication networks*: extent and intensity of communication and information flows between Italy and the other country – relative importance 28%.
- *Italians living abroad*: number of Italian citizens living in the country (this aspect is important because since 2006 Italians living abroad can vote, have a certain number of representatives in the legislature and are dealt with separately within the government) – relative importance 28%.
- *Migration*: including both legal and illegal migration, as both types of migration require the Italian government to develop policies and allocate resources. Due to changing societal



attitudes towards migration, illegal migration has a higher weighting (90–10%) – relative importance 21%.

- *Influence on Italy*: cultural influence of another country on Italy – relative importance 11%.
- *Influence by Italy*: cultural influence of Italy on the other country – relative importance 11%. [71]

2 Economic aspects

- *Raw materials*: this includes raw materials (oil, natural gas) necessary to guarantee energy security, taking into account Italy's dependence on strategic resources – relative importance 50%.
- *Finished products*: Italian exports of finished products – relative importance 25%.
- *Investment*: Italian foreign direct investment (FDI) destinations – relative importance 25%.

3 Politico-military aspects

- *Strategic-military relevance*: this sub-category includes several factors: degree and intensity of threats originating from the respective country (e.g. presence of terrorist groups in the area, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc.), strategic-military weight in a narrow sense, existence of a (strategic) partnership, etc. – relative importance 50%.
- *Historico-political relevance*: existence and depth of historical links, diplomatic relations – relative importance 25%.
- *Governmental relevance*: the importance that a government gives in its foreign policy to a given region – relative importance 25%.

In conducting the AHP analysis, I followed the aforementioned steps as outlined below:

- 1 *Determination of the relative weights of the criteria*: For this analysis, I utilized the weights from the Bozzo, Simon-Belli, and Battacchi (2005) study, as mentioned earlier.
- 2 *Evaluation of alternatives according to the given criteria*: This step involved collecting and determining source values. While some values were easily quantifiable, such as those pertaining to economic sub-criteria, others were more challenging to quantify. To address this, I sought to identify as many quantifiable sub-cat-

[72]

egories as possible and aggregated them to obtain sub-category values. For non-quantifiable factors, the relative strength of countries was determined by referencing the scale used to establish the weights. An example of this mixed calculation approach is the sub-criterion of strategic-military relevance, which incorporated several sub-categories. The country's current terrorism index (Global Terrorism Index) provided a quantifiable measure, while the strength and equipment of its military were assessed on a scale of 1–9 based on the Military Balance rankings. Additionally, a scale was utilized to evaluate the depth of strategic partnerships. A similar mixed calculation method, involving scales and absolute values, was applied to determine historico-political relevance. Factors such as the establishment of diplomatic relations, periodic interruptions in diplomatic relations, the number of Italian diplomatic missions in the country, and the number of active international treaties between the two countries were taken into account. Colonialism was also considered within this sub-category. In defining the values, an effort was made to incorporate as many quantifiable elements as possible to minimize subjectivity.

- 3 *Summary of the weighting and assessments:* Following the extraction and sorting of source values, the data series were normalized. The normalized values were then weighted, and the percentage distribution of the weighted normalized values was calculated.

By following these steps, I aimed to systematically assess and quantify the different aspects of Italy's national interests within the Analytic Hierarchy Process methodology.

By implementing the aforementioned AHP methodology, I have established a suitable approach for measuring the changing significance of national interests over time. It is important to note that I tried to minimize the impact of human decision-making and the potential for errors. However, it should also be considered that subjective and human factors still play a role in the decision-making process. The study's findings are presented as percentages, reflecting the relative importance of the assessed factors. Furthermore, the inclusion of diverse assessment criteria enables to balance the differences in size regarding the countries under examination. As a result, the employed method-



ology serves as an appropriate, but not exclusive, means of measuring and evaluating national interests.

The availability and reliability of data pose potential limitations in the application of the AHP methodology for measuring national interests. While Italian state-provided data are typically reliable, data availability and reliability in other countries may be more limited, emphasizing the importance of using data from consistent sources within each category/subcategory to prevent distortion.

[73]

IDENTIFYING ITALY'S NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN USING AHP METHODOLOGY

In 2005, Bozzo, Simon-Belli, and Batacchi employed the AHP model to define Italy's national interests and their geographic significance. Despite being conducted in 2005, the analysis continues to yield pertinent outcomes, assuming the validity of Glasier's notion of the enduring nature of national interests. The study encompassed various geographical units, including the Middle East, the North Atlantic region, the fifteen-member European Union, the Balkans, Russia, North Africa, the new EU member states (referring to those joining after the initial fifteen), Latin America, China, Turkey, the Horn of Africa, and the ex-Soviet territories. Socio-cultural, economic, and politico-military criteria were considered, each further subdivided into sub-criteria. The socio-cultural domain naturally exhibited a European and Atlantic regional emphasis, while the economic and politico-military sectors revealed the prominence of the Middle East and North African regions. The analysis revealed a comparable pattern regarding politico-military indicators. The strategic-military subcategory exhibited a relative importance of national interests pertaining to the Middle East and North Africa, accounting for 50%. The historical and political significance subcategories each obtained a score of 25%, resulting in a cumulative total of 38.9% for the three subcategories (Bozzo, Simon-Belli, and Batacchi 2005, 83).

The findings of the analysis support the significance of the Mediterranean region. Considering all the indicators and the geographical areas examined, Bozzo, Simon-Belli, and Batacchi's (2005) research concluded that Italian foreign policy should primarily concentrate on four regions: the North Atlantic, the MENA region, the 'Europe of the Fifteen,' and the Balkans. Notably, two of these regions, MENA and the Balkans, are situated within the broader Mediterranean context.

TABLE 1 Italy's National Interests in the Southern Mediterranean 2011–2021, from a Politico-Military Perspective

Country	2011	2016	2021
Algeria	14.40	16.00	13.80
Egypt	27.50	27.50	25.80
Libya	31.70	26.90	32.40
Tunisia	15.60	15.80	16.10
Morocco	10.80	13.80	11.90

NOTES In percent.

[74]

To ascertain the specific geographical focus of Italian national interests within the narrower confines of the Mediterranean, I conducted an evaluation using the AHP methodology outlined earlier. By examining five coastal countries in the Mediterranean – Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia – I sought to determine the location of Italian national interests. While acknowledging the assumption of relative constancy of national interests, I employed the AHP method in a longitudinal study to account for possible shifts in emphasis. In addition to the years 2011 and 2021, which mark the endpoints of the study period, I also incorporated data from 2016 as an intermediate year. Furthermore, it was essential to include data from 2010, the last complete year preceding the Arab Spring, for comprehensive analysis.

The data from 2011 revealed substantial shifts in the economic and socio-cultural domains, primarily influenced by the events of the Arab Spring. Although these aspects have not fully returned to their pre-Arab Spring levels, the inclusion of 2010 data compensates for the exceptional circumstances of 2011. The application of the AHP method is suitable for analyzing national interests because it allows for the consideration of potential changes through the use of weights. It is important to recognize that certain (sub)aspects, such as historico-political relevance, tend to remain relatively stable, while others (such as economic factors and migration dynamics) have undergone significant transformations.

Based on the AHP-based analysis of the economic, socio-cultural, and politico-military dimensions discussed earlier, the following results were obtained.

The politico-military aspects of Italian national interests have not experienced as pronounced shifts as the economic ones. Notably, Libya and Egypt have stood out in this regard. The distribution of interests



related to Egypt remained consistent between 2011 and 2016, while Libya's relative importance slightly declined initially but surpassed its 2011 level by 2021. Over the study period, the five countries exhibited divergent trajectories in terms of political, economic, social, and security development, with varying degrees of sustainability in achieving stability after the Arab Spring. The resurgence of Libya's relative importance can be attributed primarily to the increased relevance of its current government (as reflected in increased rates of government communication on Libya) and the inflow of modern weaponry from foreign sources due to the internationalization of the conflict. [75]

One of the main reasons for Libya's decline in relevance in the military and political aspects after 2011 was the poor equipment and weakened strength of the Libyan army, which was assessed under the strategic-military relevance sub-criterion. This sub-criterion held the highest importance in determining relevance. In contrast, the Global Terrorism Index, which measures the threat and spread of terrorism in a given country, increased for all countries. In 2011, Libya had the lowest terrorism risk among the five surveyed countries, but by 2016, it had risen to the top of the list, and by 2021, it was the second most at-risk country among the five, trailing behind Egypt. Libya's significance stands out in the sub-criteria of historico-political relevance, where significant changes were not expected. However, Libya does not score highly in other factors within this sub-criterion. For instance, compared to Italy's 21 international treaties signed with Libya up to 2011, Egypt had signed 102 treaties. Between 2011 and 2021, Italy signed new international treaties with all countries, but the pace of treaty signing with Libya was slower compared to other countries due to various reasons, such as the absence of a monopoly in power for several years. While the number of treaties signed with Tunisia increased from 77 to 103 between 2011 and 2021, the number with Libya only increased from 21 to 25.

The methodology employed allowed me to assess the significance of the contracts that were established, taking into account both the presence of a strategic partnership and its contents. Among the five North African countries bordering the Mediterranean, Italy has entered into such treaties only with Egypt and Libya, although their contents differ. The treaty with Egypt primarily focuses on social and cultural issues, while the one with Libya places greater emphasis on military and security measures in the classical sense, making it more significant in

TABLE 2 Italy's National Interests in the Southern Mediterranean 2011–2021, from an Economic Perspective

Country	2010	2011	2016	2021
Algeria	41.80	48.60	52.80	39.50
Egypt	15.50	23.80	15.50	22.50
Libya	29.50	9.70	13.50	19.30
Tunisia	7.80	12.40	11.60	10.70
Morocco	5.30	5.50	6.50	8.00

NOTES In percent.

[76]

the scale used for evaluation. Within the sub-criterion of current government relevance, which also falls under this criterion, Libya's importance in terms of government communication was prominent in 2011. Although it maintained its leading position in 2016, the gap narrowed significantly. However, by 2021, the gap had widened once again in favour of Libya.

The fluctuating importance of Libya and Egypt underscores the fluid nature of geopolitical dynamics in the region, which necessitates continuous recalibration in the priorities of the Italian foreign policy. Despite Libya's decline in certain factors, such as military strength, its increased significance in government communication reflects an understanding of soft power dynamics and the strategic value of diplomatic engagement. Furthermore, the slower pace of treaty signing with Libya highlights potential challenges in forging robust bilateral relations, signaling the need for strategic patience and adaptive diplomacy in navigating complex geopolitical landscapes.

In terms of the economic aspects, a comprehensive examination of three major factors was conducted using the previous weightings. Within the economic sector, Libya holds paramount importance for Italy due to its significant trade in energy resources, placing it alongside Algeria as a standout among the studied Mediterranean countries prior to the Arab Spring. However, the 2011 data reveal a substantial decline in Libya's relevance, primarily attributed to the collapse of its oil and gas exports, as well as the decline in Italian exports and foreign direct investment (FDI) towards Libya. In contrast, none of the other four countries experienced such a significant decrease compared to the 2010 levels, and some even displayed slight increases (e.g., Algeria exhibited an increase across all three indicators, including FDI towards Egypt). From an economic perspective, Algeria's prominence further inten-



sified in 2016, demonstrating divergent trends in national interests concerning the other countries. While Tunisia and Egypt experienced a growth in importance during the years following the Arab Spring, they had largely reverted to their 2010 levels by 2016. Conversely, Libya started a recovery after its collapse in 2011, albeit with all indicators remaining well below their pre-Arab Spring levels. Notably, Algeria's increased significance throughout this period is not solely attributable to the expansion of Italian economic interests within the country, but rather due to the decline in values observed in the other countries, particularly Libya. A significant observation is that by 2021 Algeria's relative importance compared to the other examined countries had diminished, while the relative importance of the other countries (Egypt, Morocco, Libya) had increased, with the exception of Tunisia. These shifts can be attributed to several factors, such as the surpassing of Italian exports to Algeria over those to Egypt and a notable increase in the share of energy imports sourced from Libya (rising from 12.5% to 22.84%).

[77]

The primary factor contributing to the decline of Italian national interests in Libya following 2011, specifically the decrease in energy imports, is presented in table 3. It depicts the comparative decline of Libyan exports in relation to Algerian exports, followed by a subsequent recovery.

The decline in Italian national interests in Libya following 2011, particularly in energy imports, reflects the vulnerability of economic ties to geopolitical instability, highlighting the need for strategies of diversified energy sourcing and of diplomatic engagement to mitigate risks. Additionally, the observed shifts in relative importance among Mediterranean countries underscore the dynamic nature of regional economic landscapes, requiring agile policymaking to capitalize on emerging opportunities and to navigate evolving challenges.

The percentages shown in table 3 represent the proportion of Italian oil and gas imports sourced from each respective country. While my analysis focused on measuring Italian foreign direct investment (FDI) using the AHP methodology, it should be mentioned that, in the case of Libya, the Libyan Investment Fund made significant investments in strategically important Italian companies, including Unicredit Bank and Fiat (Lombardi 2011).

The socio-cultural aspects encompass a multifaceted sub-category, wherein the relative importance of Libya has slightly decreased.

TABLE 3 Italian Energy Imports from the Southern Mediterranean 2011–2021

Country	2010	2011	2016	2021
Algeria	37.90	34.00	31.20	33.45
Egypt	3.20	3.70	2.40	1.84
Libya	35.65	9.90	12.50	22.84
Tunisia	0.30	0.60	0.70	0.10
Morocco	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	77.05	48.20	46.80	58.23

NOTES In percent.

TABLE 4 Italy's National Interests in the Southern Mediterranean 2011–2021, from a Socio-Cultural Perspective

Country	2011	2016	2021
Algeria	7.73	7.45	6.82
Egypt	21.04	24.69	19.65
Libya	29.05	27.65	24.69
Tunisia	26.29	21.05	25.88
Morocco	15.88	19.16	22.96

NOTES In percent.

Notably, significant differences were observed in the migration sub-criteria, where Libya stands out primarily due to the high number of illegal maritime arrivals in Italy, which were the largest among the countries studied during the entire period. It is important to highlight that the migration sub-item includes both legal and illegal migration, thereby reducing the relative importance of Libya, as nationals from the other four countries enter and reside in Italy legally in much larger numbers, whereas the number of Libyan nationals in this context is negligible. Although the migration sub-theme accounts for 'only' 21.4% of the socio-cultural aspects according to the AHP weighting, its significance lies in the fact that the issue of immigration has risen to the top of the Italian political agenda and has become a prominent topic in public discourse. This is primarily due to the wave of illegal migration that ensued after the Arab Spring, as well as the migration and refugee crises of 2014–2015. While the Lampedusa disaster in October 2013 and the Mare Nostrum operation had a humanitarian impact on the Italian population, the refugee crisis in 2015 and the record number of illegal immigrants arriving by sea in 2016 shifted the mainstream narrative and intensified the anti-immigration discourse (Hermanin 2019).



TABLE 5 Italian National Interests Related to Mediterranean Migration 2011–2021

Country	2011	2016	2021
Algeria	7.73	7.45	6.82
Egypt	21.04	24.69	19.65
Libya	29.05	27.65	24.69
Tunisia	26.29	21.05	25.88
Morocco	15.88	19.16	22.96

[79]

NOTES In percent.

TABLE 6 Illegal Maritime Migration to Italy 2011–2021

Country	2011	2016	2021
Algeria	0.00	0.00	0.00
Egypt	0.00	0.00	0.00
Libya	56.57	95.35	56.41
Tunisia	43.43	3.44	43.59
Morocco	0.00	0.11	0.00

NOTES In percent.

Table 5 illustrates the extent of Italian interests in migration among the five countries along the southern Mediterranean coast. Libya emerges as the country with the highest relevance in terms of migration. By 2021, Libya’s relative importance had become comparable to Tunisia and Morocco, primarily due to changing trends in illegal migration. In 2011, the Libyan-Tunisian share of sea arrivals stood at 56% and 43%, respectively, but this dominance by Libya diminished by 2016 when over 95% of sea arrivals originated from Libya. The number of sea-crossers from Tunisia and Libya fluctuates from year to year, depending on internal instability inside the two countries.

In the case of Libya, two factors contribute to a reduction in departures: either the coastal militias exert total control, therefore preventing departures (which was the objective of the Gentiloni government in supporting the coastal militias), or the opposite scenario of complete anarchy, where high levels of insecurity deter migrants from reaching the departure points. In 2021, Libya found itself in a transitional phase: a new government came into power, which was a positive development, but it has not yet been able to establish full control over the entire territory. Consequently, migration to Italy increased during this period.

[80] Applying the AHP methodology, the analysis revealed that the significance of the considerable illegal migration to Libya is counterbalanced by the inclusion of legal migration as measured through the number of granted residence permits. Despite the Italian Ministry of Interior issuing residence permits for Libyans at a negligible rate (less than 5,000), the number of permits issued to Moroccans exceeded 370,000. This disparity explains why Libya's relative importance in the migration sub-perspective does not significantly surpass that of the other examined countries.

The prominence of Libya in illegal migration shows the challenges posed by irregular migration flows and their implications for domestic politics and public opinion in Italy. Furthermore, the fluctuating dynamics of migration from Libya highlight the need for comprehensive and adaptive migration policies that address both humanitarian concerns and national security interests. By considering the broader socio-cultural implications of migration to Italy, voters expect – without success – from Italian policymakers to develop more effective strategies for managing migration flows and to address the underlying drivers of irregular migration.

Upon examining all the major criteria and sub-criteria, it can be concluded that migration is the primary area where Italian interests are most concentrated in Libya. Both in 2011 and 2016, Libya's relative importance exceeded 50% when considering illegal migration alone, and the proportion is even higher when excluding legal migration. In 2016, it reaches particularly high levels, exceeding 95%. While migration forms an extremely strong link between Italy and Libya compared to the other countries studied, it is not the sole aspect connecting the two nations. There are other areas, such as historico-political relevance and strategic importance, where Libya emerges as the country of greatest interest for Italy. However, the intensity of this connection is significantly stronger in the field of migration compared to other areas.

Overall, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) methodology allows us to draw comprehensive conclusions regarding the territorialization of Italian national interests based on a comprehensive set of criteria. Within the three broad criteria examined (socio-cultural, politico-military, and economic), it is evident that a significant portion of Italian interests is intertwined with Libya. In terms of economic interests, Algeria emerges as a focal point, primarily due to its substantial role in



TABLE 7 Relative Changes in the Italian National Interests Linked to Libya
2011–2021

National interest	2011	2016	2021
Economic	9.70	13.50	19.30
Politico-military	31.70	26.90	32.40
Socio-cultural	29.05	27.65	24.69

[81]

NOTES In percent.

the production of oil and gas. Throughout the studied period, Italian exports and foreign direct investments (FDI) to Algeria have consistently surpassed those of the other countries. However, when considering the percentage of national interests attributed to Libya alone, its economic significance, in contrast to socio-cultural and politico-military aspects, experienced a significant decline in 2011 following the Arab Spring. Subsequently, from 2011 onwards, Libya’s relative importance in the economic sector gradually increased, but it is unlikely to regain its pre-Arab Spring significance in the near future. Nevertheless, the role of oil and gas ensures that Libya remains relevant for Italy within the economic domain in the medium to long term.

Regarding politico-military indicators, the slight percentage decrease observed in 2016 does not signify a substantial change. By 2021, Libya’s relative importance in the political and military sectors has slightly exceeded its significance during the Arab Spring. In contrast to the economic and politico-military aspects, socio-cultural interests linked to Libya have experienced a slight but consistent decline over the analyzed period. Notably, the migration sub-objective exhibited a distinct change in trajectory, diverging from the 2011 trend in 2016, and eventually stabilizing around the levels observed in 2011 by the end of the period in 2021 (see migration statistics).

In the case of Libya, migration, a socio-cultural aspect, intersects spectacularly with security concerns, especially regarding irregular migration, which poses challenges to Italy’s territorial integrity and societal stability, and it has contributed to the changing Italian political landscape (e.g. see Lega’s results in the 2018 parliamentary elections). Additionally, the economic dimension, highlighted by Libya’s role in energy production, reflects both power and wealth considerations, aligning with Morgenthau’s emphasis on power and economic prosperity as essential components of national interests. Furthermore, the politico-military realm underscores Italy’s strategic calculations and geopoliti-

cal positioning in the Mediterranean region, emphasizing the importance of Libya in shaping regional security dynamics.

SUMMARY

- [82] Euro-Mediterranean advocacy and power projection form a rational strategy for promoting Italian national interests and enhancing the country's international influence. This approach encompasses a geographically defined area of prime importance, serving both economic and strategic objectives that have significant implications for both domestic and foreign policies. Given the fragmented nature of the enlarged Mediterranean region, which Rome considers strategically vital, a cooperative stance among the central powers of the region is essential. Italy, constrained by limited resources and internal challenges, cannot single-handedly provide a comprehensive response and thus requires a differentiated approach.

Utilizing the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) methodology, which encompasses both qualitative and quantitative aspects, this study examines Italian national interests within the Mediterranean region. Drawing from the theoretical underpinnings of AHP, which enables the synthesis of subjective and objective elements, the research aims to discern the evolving dynamics of Italian foreign policy priorities. By applying the AHP framework to a longitudinal analysis spanning from 2010 to 2021, the study seeks to capture shifts in emphasis and relative importance across various sectors and countries, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of Italy's strategic imperatives. This analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework of national interests, where the concept of sectors of security put forward by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) (encompassing economic, socio-cultural, and politico-military dimensions) serves as the guiding lens through which Italy's strategic imperatives are examined.

Previous findings underscore the significance of four key regions – the North Atlantic, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the 'Europe of the Fifteen,' and the Balkans – as focal points of Italian national interests. Within these regions, MENA and the Balkans, situated within the extended Mediterranean, have a particular prominence, justifying the adoption of Mediterraneanism as a distinct foreign policy for Italy. Applying the same methodological rigor to the narrower Mediterranean context and specifically examining the five states along Italy's southern shores, Libya emerges as the keystone



state for Italy from a politico-military perspective. While Algeria commands more economic interests compared to the other countries, the significance of Libya cannot be overlooked. Despite economic ties between Italy and Libya not fully reverting to pre-Arab Spring levels, the uptick in energy imports from Libya signals a resurgence in the relative importance of this country. [83]

In the realm of security dimensions within the societal sector, a slight decline in Libya's relative importance is noted. However, when scrutinizing the sub-sector of illegal migration, Italian national interests linked to Libya emerge as the most robust throughout the studied period.

In summary, the study's meticulous application of the AHP methodology sheds light on the intricate dynamics of Italian national interests within the Mediterranean, underscoring the multifaceted nature of foreign policy priorities. Through a detailed analysis integrating both qualitative and quantitative elements, the research highlights the strategic imperatives guiding Italy's engagements in the region, emphasizing the pivotal role of Libya while recognizing likewise the dynamic interplay of economic, socio-cultural, and politico-military factors in shaping the objectives of the Italian foreign policy.

Future studies could build upon this research by looking into the evolving nature of national interests over time within the Euro-Mediterranean region. This could entail conducting longitudinal analyses in extended periods as a way to capture shifts in the priorities of the Italian foreign policy and their implications. Furthermore, exploring the role of other countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region, particularly those with emerging influence or undergoing significant political transitions, could provide valuable insights into the broader geopolitical dynamics shaping the region. If reliable data is available from other countries, AHP analysis makes objective comparison possible. Additionally, investigating the impact of external actors, such as international organizations or non-state actors, on Italian national interests and regional stability would offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of forces in the Euro-Mediterranean arena.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research has been realised in the framework of the TKP2021-NVA-16 research program implemented with the support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Innovation of Hungary from the Na-

tional Research, Development and Innovation Fund, financed under the TKP2021-NVA funding scheme.

REFERENCES

[84]

- Bozzo, L., C. Simon-Belli, and P. Batacchi. 2005. 'Metodologia per la definizione degli interessi nazionali: le matrici.' In *Interessi nazionali: metodologie di valutazione*, edited by C. Jean and F. Napolitano, 53–90. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Burchill, S. 2005. *The National Interest in International Relations Theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Buzan, B., and O. Wæver. 2003. *Regions and Powers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buzan, B., O. Wæver, and J. de Wilde. 1998. *Security: A new framework for analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner.
- Duleba, S. 2006. A közép – és felső vezetői döntéseket támogató AHP-módszer, és alkalmazása logisztikai szolgáltatók kiválasztására. *Vezetéstudomány – Budapest Management Review* 37 (9): 54–58.
- Dunne, T., and B. C. Schmidt. 2005. 'Realism.' In *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by J. Baylis and S. Smith, 101–15. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gaiser, L. 2005. 'Interessi nazionali: genesi storico-politica.' In *Interessi nazionali: metodologie di valutazione*, edited by C. Jean and F. Napolitano, 23–35. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Gazdag, F. 2007. Magyarország érdekei és ezek érvényesítésének lehetőségei a nemzetközi szervezetekben (NATO, EU). <http://www.grotius.hu/doc/pub/UIVMVC/83%20gazdag%20ferenc%20%20vita%20a%20magyar%20kpol.pdf>
- Goldstein, J. S., and J. C. Pevehouse. 2008. *International Relations*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Hermanin, C. 2019. *Immigration in Italy between Two Elections: Between Myths and Reality*. Rome: Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung.
- Hoffmann, S. 1995. *The European Sisyphus: Essays on Europe, 1964–1994*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Jean, C. 2008. 'I contenuti degli interessi nazionali.' In *Geopolitica economica*, edited by C. Jean, 27–25. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Jean, C., and F. Napolitano, eds. 2005. *Interessi nazionali: metodologie di valutazione*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Lombardi, B. 2011. 'The Berlusconi Government and Intervention in Libya.' *The International Spectator* 46 (4): 31–44.
- Morgan, P. 2007. *Security in International Politics: Traditional Approaches in Contemporary Security Studies*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.



- Morgenthau, H. 1978. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 5th ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Norman, C. D., and O. Helmer. 1951. *The Use of Exports for the Estimation of Bombing Requirements*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Robert, J., and G. Sørensen. 2003. *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [85]
- Vaidya, O. S., and S. Kumar. 2006. Analytic Hierarchy Process: An Overview of Applications. *European Journal of Operational Research* 169 (1): 1–29.