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The Quirinal Treaty: a unique opportunity
for France and Italy to overcome the
'proximity paradox'

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Alla mia Abba adorata

*la nostra Quercia
nobile ed eterna
sacra e invincibile*

*Tu sei ...
danza segreta di rami
rami che spronano
che cullano
che donano*

*Tu sei ...
fresca ombra nel calvario d'estate
rifugio asciutto nelle tempeste*

*Tu sei ...
radici che edificano e uniscono
radici che proteggono*

*Tu sei ...
tronco possente
infiniti fragili anelli
accogli tutte le braccia che ti amano*

*sei il porto silenzioso
sei l'aurora
sei la casa*

*Ecco, sì,
Abba che è quiete, luce, casa*

Abba che è casa

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INTRODUCTION

Franco-italiano o italo-francese? Impossibile rispondere. Nel tricolore cambia solo una tonalità, il verde al posto del blu. I cliché si ereditano, sono una tentazione irresistibile per cercare di semplificare ciò che semplice non è. Tutto è simile all'apparenza, niente è veramente uguale.¹

Building on Italy and France's 'profound friendship', 'historic commitment [...] to European unity' and 'common interest in the Mediterranean',² Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and French President Emmanuel Macron, in the presence of the Italian Head of State Sergio Mattarella, signed, on 26 November 2021, the Treaty between the French Republic and the Italian Republic for a Strengthened Bilateral Cooperation. Dubbed the Quirinal Treaty after the sumptuous residential palace of the Italian president of the Republic where the signing ceremony was held,³ this bilateral agreement between the Italian Republic and the French Republic had no easy genesis, and it was the fruit of long and arduous negotiations. In fact, along the five-year-long bumpy road that led to the signature of the Quirinal Treaty, we witnessed some of the lowest points in the history of Franco-Italian relations; suffice it to think of the exchange of strong accusations on migration issues between French and Italian Ministers, or the support expressed by some representatives of the Italian government to the yellow vest movement in France, which then led to the diplomatic crisis of 2019 culminating with the recall to Paris of the French ambassador in Rome Christian Masset on 7 February 2019,⁴ an unprecedentedly dramatic case in the recent history of France and Italy (to find earlier such cases, one has to wind back the clock at the least to World War II, when Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini declared war on France in 1940).⁵

It may seem odd that, despite the geographical and cultural proximity between France and Italy, the negotiations of a bilateral treaty proved to be such an arduous task; indeed, it is quite odd that, more generally, the relations between two countries that are often referred to as 'cousins'⁶ or

¹ Ginori, A. (2012). *Falsi Amici: Italia-Francia: relazioni pericolose*. Fandango Libri.

² Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

³ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

⁴ France24. (2019, February 15). Recalled French ambassador returns to Rome, invites Italian president to Paris.

⁵ France24. (2019, February 7). France recalls Italy ambassador after worst verbal onslaught 'since the war'.

⁶ Perna, R. (s.d.). France & Italy: Estranged Cousins. *Cultural Confidence: the art of global success*.

‘sister nations’⁷ are oftentimes so uneasy. This phenomenon is perfectly encapsulated in what the President of the *Institut pour les Relations Economiques France-Italie* (henceforth IREFI), Fabrizio Maria Romano, calls "paradosso della prossimità" (proximity paradox).⁸ According to Romano’s own definition, the proximity paradox is a concept that explains how two countries, such as France and Italy, are so close that they cannot really see and understand what the other is like. In the realm of trade and business, this paradox can be a particularly dangerous trap: the entrepreneur, blinded by the alleged cultural proximity, underestimates the risks that are always involved in the negotiation, often with great losses:⁹ take, for instance, the unsuccessful acquisition of Chantiers de l'Atlantique by the Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri -more will be said later. Proximity, therefore, gives the illusion that reciprocal understanding is easy and immediate, almost natural. The relationship is left untouched, what is done spontaneously seems sufficient.¹⁰ It is true that French and Italian cultures are similar in many ways, but as the Italian analyst Riccardo Perna rightly warns, “we are far from knowing each other as we should, in order to be able to work together without the misunderstandings and disagreements that different cultures generate”.¹¹

The Quirinal Treaty comes at a time when the relations between France and Italy have touched historic lows, and for this reason it represents a unique opportunity for the ‘two sister nations’ to reset their relationship and start on a clean slate with a new institutional text that encompasses and regulates all areas of cooperation, from foreign policy to European affairs, from economic integration to security and defense, from migration policy to education and research. With its ambitious program¹² that launches a wide number of exchange and dialogue initiatives, the Quirinal Treaty, we will argue, seems to have the potential to bridge the cognitive gap between France and Italy, and overcome, once for all, the proximity paradox, allowing Paris and Rome to finally take full advantage of their geographical and cultural proximity, as well as the complementarity of their economies. While acknowledging the volatile nature that has characterized the Franco-Italian relations over the last decade as well as the reservations over the future success of France and Italy’s Treaty for Enhanced Bilateral Cooperation, in the following chapters we shall defend the thesis that the Quirinal Treaty

⁷ Bertrand, G. A. (2016). *La France et l'Italie: Histoire de deux nations soeurs de 1660 à nos jours*. Armand Colin.

⁸ Zoppo, A. (2022, July 1). Oggi all'Ambasciata francese il 5° Forum bilaterale delle imprese promosso da Irefi Italia-Francia, l'intesa è hi-tech. *Milano Finanza*.

⁹ IREFI. (s.d.). Presentazione dell'Interculturale: <https://irefi.eu/rapporti-economici-francia-italia>

¹⁰ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

¹¹ Perna, R. (s.d.). France & Italy: Estranged Cousins. *Cultural Confidence: the art of global success*.

¹² Programma di Lavoro Italo-Francese. (2021, November 26). Trattato del Quirinale.

could really be a gamechanger for Franco-Italian relations, aspiring to surmount the proximity paradox. But it could also go beyond that: we will argue that, in a period clouded by a more inward-looking Germany, a more disengaged United States, a more assertive Russia, a rising China, economic uncertainty, Brexit and a pandemic, the strengthening of the relationship between Paris and Rome goes beyond merely bilateral dynamics, to impact positively on the process of European integration.¹³

The first chapter will provide an overview of the Franco-Italian relations and attempt to illustrate all their nuances, detailing Paris and Rome's strong economic ties, but also bringing to the fore all the ambiguities and problems hidden behind the strong economic indicators. Here the concept of proximity paradox will be introduced to help us understand the ambiguous nature of Franco-Italian relations, as well as the reasons why a structured bilateral treaty such as the Quirinal Treaty was needed. The second chapter will first explain how the external context was favorable for signature of a Franco-Italian bilateral treaty, before relating the difficult journey that brought the Quirinal Treaty to life. Its content objectives will then be analyzed in detail. In the third and final chapter, we will first argue that the Quirinal Treaty could be ultimately interpreted as a decisive step towards overcoming the proximity paradox; then the controversial question of European integration will be addressed, reporting the arguments against the feasibility of the European-oriented undertakings of the Treaty, before demonstrating that not only is France and Italy's bilateral cooperation compatible with, but it will deepen the European project.

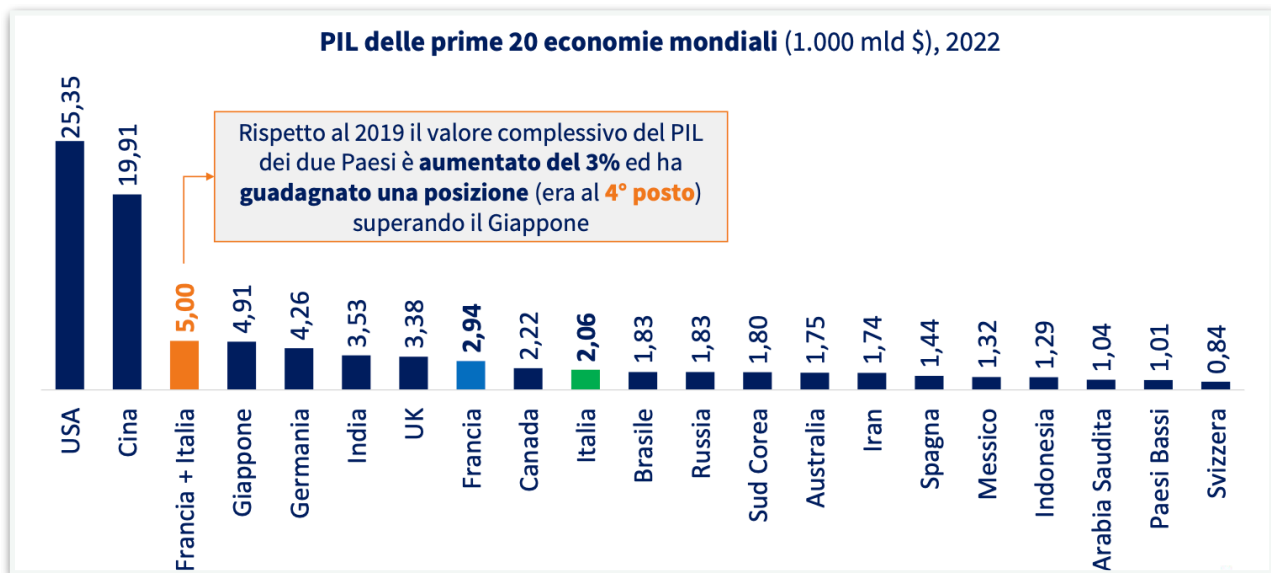
¹³ RFI. (2021, November 27). France and Italy sign cooperation pact as Merkel exit sets challenge for Europe. *Radio France Internationale*.

1. A THORNY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

1.1 A Strong Economic Partnership

Together, France and Italy constitute the third largest economy in the world (Figure 1). As one economic entity, they would be the 4th economy for good export and the 2nd for service export worldwide (2nd and 1st respectively in the EU).¹⁴

Figure 1: Top 20 countries per GDP



Source: The European House - Ambrosetti based on FMI data, 2022

They represent for each other key economic partners. France is the second largest market for Italian exporting companies, after Germany. Population growth, high per capita income and stable consumption levels make France a target market for Italian companies. Franco-Italian economic relations stand out in Europe for several peculiar factors:

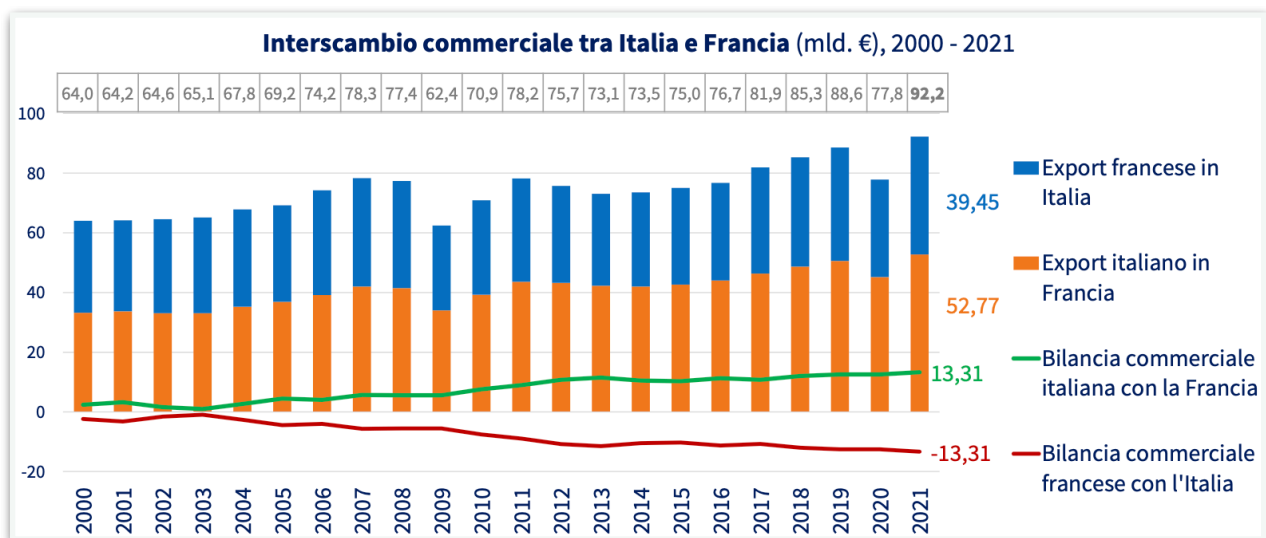
- high degree of interdependence of the two economies
- geographical and cultural proximity

¹⁴ Data from The European House - Ambrosetti: <https://www.ambrosetti.eu>

- intra-industrial trade (especially in the automotive, pharmaceuticals, agri-food, and electronics sectors)

In 2019, the last “normal” year before the pandemic, total trade amounted to over 80 billion euro, however the covid-induced crisis does not seem to have altered the picture:¹⁵ in 2021, Franco-Italian bilateral trade reached an all-time high of EUR 92.2 billion, with an increase of 15.4 billion euro compared to 2020 and a positive balance for our country of 13.6 billion euro (Figure 2). According to ISTAT, 2021 was a historic year for Italian exports to France, which surpassed pre-Covid levels at around EUR 53 billion (50.5 in 2019 and 45 in 2020). Italy is also confirmed as the third largest supplier (after Germany and China) and the second largest customer (after Germany) of France.¹⁶

Figure 2: Franco-Italian Bilateral Trade



Source: The European House - Ambrosetti based on EUROSTAT data, 2022

1.1.1 Methodology

In theory, French Exports to Italy should coincide with Italian Imports from France and French Imports from Italy with Italian Exports to France. In reality, there are sometimes profound differences

¹⁵ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

¹⁶ Data taken from InfoMercatiEsteri: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/paese.php?id_paesi=68#

between the data reported by two survey systems, ISTAT for Italy and French Customs for France. This is explained by the fact that French customs use the rule of origin and therefore classify as of non-Italian origin many Made in Italy products that are first processed in non-EU countries and then refined in Italy (such as textiles and clothing and leather goods). Such products for the ISTAT classification are instead attributed to Italian exports to France while France attributes them to the country of first processing (origin). This divergence, which has always existed, has become more pronounced with the increase in Italian exports and globalization.¹⁷ For the sake of completeness, we will briefly report data from both sources here.

1.1.2 ISTAT Data

According to data from ISTAT, trade between the two countries (import + export) increased from €76.48 billion in 2020 to €91.95 billion in 2021, with a net growth of 20.2%. In particular, Italian exports to France rose from €45.19 billion in 2020 to €52.77 billion in 2021, an increase of 16.8%; while Italian imports from France rose from €31.29 billion in 2020 to €39.19 billion in 2021, an increase of 25.2%. Although Italy's trade surplus with France remains one of the most important globally (4th in value behind that with the USA, Switzerland, and the UK), it is slightly down (-€ 320 thousand) compared to 2020, as exports have increased less than imports.

The main sectors contributing to the growth of Italian exports to France in 2021 include:

- taps and fittings (+24%)
- automotive components (+15.9%) and goods transport vehicles (+26.8%)
- refrigerators (+28.5%)
- coaxial and fiber optic cables (+43.9%)
- plastics (+27%)
- furniture (+23%)
- and footwear (+23.2%)

¹⁷ Eurostat. Le chiffres du commerce extérieur:
https://lekiosque.finances.gouv.fr/site_fr/etudes/methode/UE.asp

1.1.3 French Customs Data

In 2021, total France-Italy trade (Import + Export) increased significantly (+18.8% vs 2020) to stand at €84.86 billion after a 2020 of strong crisis linked to the economic consequences of the pandemic (€71.42 billion -11.9% vs 2019). Italy is France's second customer country with €38.9 billion of French exports in 2021 (+20.8% vs 2020) and the third supplier country with €45.9 billion of imports from France (+17.2% vs 2020).

At the sectoral level, the Franco-Italian economies continue to show a high degree of complementarity. The most relevant sectors are machinery manufacturing (mechanics), automotive, electronics, plastics manufacturing, clothing, furniture, and pharmaceuticals.

Italian imports are driven by the Mechanics, Automotive and Plastics and Electronics sectors, which are the most important sectors by value in 2021. On the export side, Italy buys from France mainly Cars, Mechanics, Pharmaceuticals, Plastics and Electronics.

Figure 3: Franco-Italian Bilateral Trade

	2019	2020	2021	Quota % italiana 2019	Quota % italiana 2020	Quota % italiana 2021	Var % 20/19	Var % 21/20
Export della Francia	37 586 113	32 232 648	38 930 469	7,6	7,7	8,1	-14,2	+20,8
Import della Francia	43 500 153	39 189 626	45 924 615	7,6	7,9	7,8	-9,9	+17,2
Saldo francese	-5 914 040	-6 956 978	-6 994 146				+17,6	+0,5

Source: TDM - Global Trade Atlas (data from Direction Nationale des Statistiques du Commerce Extérieur)

In the ranking of France's main trading partners, Italy ranks 3rd behind Germany and China in terms of global trade (import + export) with €84.9 billion in goods traded in 2021 and a 7.9% share (Germany: €149.1 billion and a 13.9% share, China €87.7 billion and an 8.2% share). In 2021, Italy ranks 3rd in the ranking of supplier countries, and confirms this position obtained in 2018, behind

Germany and China and ahead of Belgium, Spain and the United States. On the export side, Italy ranks 2nd among customer countries, behind Germany and ahead of Belgium, Spain and the United States.

1.1.4 Italian presence in France

Italy is the sixth largest investor country with a 6% share, behind Germany (18%) USA (15%), and the UK (9%), Belgium (7%) and the Netherlands (6%). Italy launched 96 productive investment projects in 2021 (it was 94 in 2020 and 118 in 2019). A striking indicator is the number of Italian companies present in France: In total there are more than 1,700, where approximately 73,000 people are employed (figure 4 shows the top 5 Italian enterprises in France per number of employees). Jobs created and/or maintained were 2,199 in 2019 (+47%), 1,139 in 2020 (-48%) and 1,803 in 2021 (+58%).¹⁸

Figure 4: Top 5 ITA Enterprises in France

Società madre	Addetti
Assicurazioni Generali Spa	7.000
FCA Group - Stellantis FIAT Chrysler Automobile	7.000
Prysmian Spa (componenti elettroniche)	3.500
Edizione Holding – Autogrill	3.000
Compagnie Industriali Riunite – CIR Spa (editoria, meccanica e componentistica auto)	2.000+
Saipem Spa (genio civile)	2.000

Source: Istituto nazionale per il Commercio con l'Estero

Italian investments are concentrated in the regions of Ile-de-France (24% of projects), Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (16%) and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (12%).¹⁹ Parigi – Île-de-France is one of the

¹⁸ All data is taken from BuisinessFrance. *Bilan des investissements internationaux en France 2021*.

¹⁹ Ambassade de France en Italie. La relation France-Italie. Available at: <https://it.ambafrance.org/-La-relation-France-Italie->

most dynamic regions for business relations between Italy and France: This region houses the branches of more than 700 Italian companies, representing 35,000 jobs, and receives 24% of new Italian investment projects. Paris-Saclay is the cluster of excellence, home to research centres and universities in the most advanced tech sectors, and as many as 8,000 start-ups.

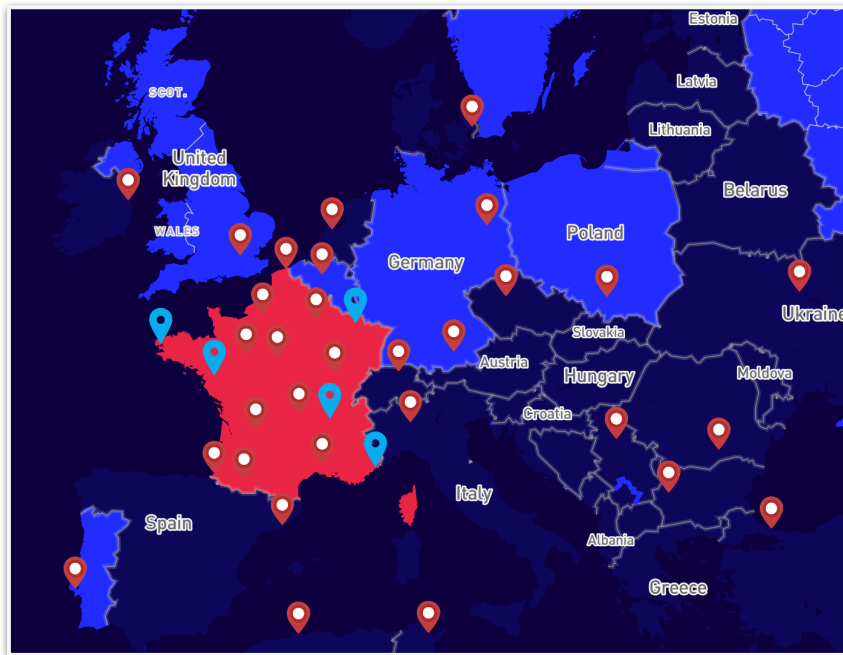
1.1.5 French presence in Italy

France is the leading investor in Italy with a stock of EUR 66.6Bn in 2020, as well as the leading foreign employer in Italy, with 280,000 people employed. There are more than 1,800 French subsidiaries in Italy, mainly concentrated in the north-west (60%). Italy is the 5th destination country for French investments abroad, with 5.3% of the total net French stock abroad. The French presence in Italy is dense and long-established, some companies having settled in the Peninsula more than a hundred years ago.²⁰

Given the relevance of the innovation sector today and in the Quirinal Treaty as we shall see, as well as its preponderance in the French economy, a special mention should be made to the recent initiatives in Italy by ‘La French Tech’. This term is used to identify the community that brings together all players in the start-up ecosystem: entrepreneurs, innovation centers (incubators, accelerators, etc.), investors and all public bodies that contribute to the ecosystem’s growth and entrepreneurial development. Specifically, at the public level, the initiative is coordinated by the French Tech Mission, within the Ministry of the Economy, and implemented at the national and international level by organizations such as Bpifrance, Caisse des Depots and Business France. At the international level, French Tech's strategy is mainly based on the activities of 48 communautés that foster the development of French start-ups in their countries of reference but also promote France's attractiveness to local entrepreneurs and investors.

²⁰ Ambassade de France en Italie. La relation France-Italie. Available at: <https://it.ambafrance.org/-La-relation-France-Italie->

Figure 5: French Tech Communautés in the World



Source: La French Tech (<https://lafrenchtech.com/en/>)

In 2016, a communauté was established in Milan. French Tech Milan is an extremely diverse and dynamic ecosystem. It involves entrepreneurs, technology and & multi-sector company leaders, investors, associations, incubators and accelerators in order to foster discussion, debate and give feedback on innovations and start-ups in Italy and France.²¹ The objectives of French Tech Milan are:²²

- Structuring and organizing the ecosystem: by federating in Italy a French Tech community made up of companies, investors, public and private players capable of facing the challenges of the market and seizing its opportunities
- Facilitating the integration of innovative new French Tech companies, supporting their development and strengthening their presence on the Italian market
- Encouraging all forms of Franco-Italian collaboration: technological, entrepreneurial, R&D

²¹ La French Tech. *French Tech Milan: a bridge for startups and scaleups between France and Italy*. Available at: <https://lafrenchtech.com/en/community/milan/>

²² Ibid.

- Promoting funding schemes between French and Italian startups, so that our companies can be even more innovative and creative

1.1.6 Franco-Italian Partnerships

The quantitative dimension is complemented by the increasing integration of national champions and industrial collaborations. In 2018, the merger between France's Essilor and Italy's Luxottica, manufacturers of ophthalmic lenses and eyeglasses respectively, created a transnational group with a turnover of more than EUR 14 billion in 2020.²³ The fashion sector, as well as the banking and insurance sectors, are the subject of cross-border acquisitions and investments that have recently involved realities of the size of Bulgari, Loro Piana, Findomestic or, in less recent years, the BNL group, and further mergers could give rise in the future to new players with even more global weight in the credit sphere. French-Italian microchips manufacturer STMicroelectronics has acquired Paris-based Ima Wisebatt specializing in simulations and virtual prototypes of electronic systems for connected objects.²⁴

The creation of cross-border giants capable of competing globally touches the traditional secondary industries, starting with automotive: the reference is obviously to the merger between FCA and PSA in Stellantis, listed on both the Paris and Milan stock exchanges. With more than EUR 150 billion turnover in 2021 and almost 300.000 employees on all continents, the French-Italian giant would currently be the sixth largest car manufacturer in the world in terms of sales volumes, with the potential to return to the fringes of the podium once the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 have been completely overcome, both in socio-economic terms - the inevitable market contraction experienced during the acute phases of the pandemic - and in terms of production - the continuing shortage of microprocessors that has been affecting the manufacturing industry for over a year.²⁵ With unprecedented concentration of both human and economic capital, Stellantis enabled the major European automotive brands - and the intricate ecosystem of their suppliers - to make up the ground they lost to their competitors or face further technological challenges, one being the use of hydrogen

²³ Fubini, F. (2020). Così Francia e Italia si stanno fondendo sul piano produttivo: da Psa-Fca a Luxottica (e la moda). *Corriere della Sera*.

²⁴ ICE Agenzia, Ufficio di Parigi. (2022). FRANCIA: Congiuntura economica e Commercio Estero.

²⁵ Stellantis N.V. (2021). *Annual Report and Form 20-F for the year ended December 31, 2021*.

in the automotive sector, either as a fuel cell power supply for electric motors or directly as a fuel in more classic combustion engines.²⁶

Besides industrial partnerships, it is also important to mention technical and scientific cooperation, which in the case of France and Italy is particularly successful. The ThalesAleniaSpace and Telespazio joint ventures are the most immediate example of Franco-Italian cooperation in the space sector, a cooperation that is also reflected in numerous participations in joint European programs. In the field of electronic technologies, mention should be made of the example of industrial policy represented by the semiconductor manufacturer STmicroelectronics, a company under Franco-Italian control whose strategic value remains strong.²⁷

²⁶ Alverà, M. (2020). *Rivoluzione Idrogeno*. Mondadori.

²⁷ Darnis, J.-P. (2020). Una visione strategica delle relazioni franco-italiane: per un trattato bilaterale? . *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*.

1.2 Beyond Data: A Fragile Equilibrium

All the data reported above point to the high degree of complementarity and interdependence of the economies of France and Italy: we have shown that there is a consolidated common industrial backbone, based a capillary network of bi-national companies (around 4,000), including SMEs, innovative companies and start-ups, on large-scale merger operations (e.g. Stellantis and EssilorLuxottica), but also industrial collaborations in key sectors such as electronic components (e.g. STMicroelectronics), military shipbuilding (e.g. between Fincantieri and NavalGroup), and the aerospace sector (e.g. between Avio and ArianeGroup and/or between Leonardo and Thales).²⁸ Nevertheless, not everything is as rosy as economic indicators may suggest. In the following sections, we shall go beyond the numbers, with the aim to illustrate the complexities of the Franco-Italian relations.

1.2.1 Resistance to integration: The case of Fincantieri

Success stories of industrial cooperation are accompanied, for example, by frictions and resistance to integration driven by considerations of national interest, especially in sectors that are considered particularly strategic. It should not surprise us that both countries' legal systems have substantial regulations on the so-called 'Golden Power', namely the right of a government to interdict the foreign acquisition of a national company if the relevant sector falls within the list of strategic assets for state security.²⁹ The French government's veto on Fincantieri's bid to purchase the STX shipyards falls within this case. The operation for the purchase of a majority shareholding in France's Stx, owner of the Atlantic shipyards in Saint-Nazaire, by Fincantieri, Italy's large state-owned shipbuilding company, had been initiated during François Hollande's presidency (2012-2017) and under him an agreement in principle had been reached for the complete sale. When Macron took office, however, the agreement, not yet signed, was widely questioned, and then renegotiated, envisaging the purchase by Fincantieri of a 50% direct control and an additional 1% shareholding on loan from the French government, which would have had the option of withdrawing it in the event of failure to fulfil the industrial commitments made by the Italians.³⁰ European antitrust authority was also called in by France in order to assess whether or not the transaction was likely to give rise to excessive

²⁸ Data from InfoMercatiEsteri: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/paese.php?id_paesi=68#

²⁹ Donativi, V. (2019). *Golden powers. Profili di diritto societario*. Giappichelli.

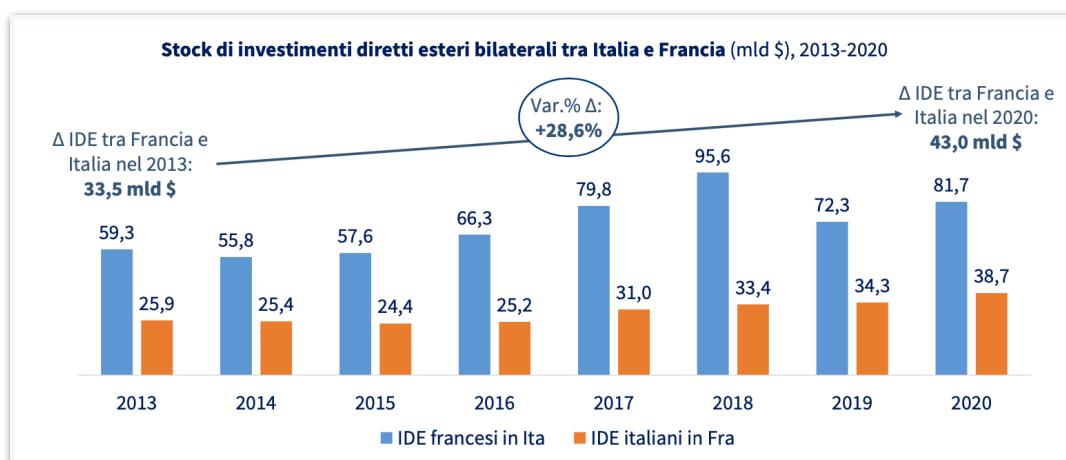
³⁰ Patel, T. Migliaccio, A & Amiel, G. (2021). France, Italy, Pull Fincantieri Shipyard Deal on Pandemic. *Bloomberg*.

concentration and thus infringe the European Union's rules on respect for competition. A judgement that, however, the authority never issued due to the breakout of the pandemic. Following numerous postponements, European antitrust finally decreed that, given the long time elapsed, it was necessary to renegotiate a new agreement, which, as we know, never materialized.³¹

1.2.2 FDI and M&A asymmetry

If we now look specifically at investment indicators, the business relationship between Italy and France remains unbalanced. The gap between French FDI in Italy and Italian FDI in France (figure 6) is increasing even though Italian investments in France are at an all-time high: the stock of French investments in Italy amounts to EUR 81,7 billion, less than half the stock of Italian investments in France. These amount to EUR 38.7 billion, and despite marking an historic maximum, have risen at a lower rate than French investments over the last decade, meaning that, despite the growth, the gap in FDI is growing wider and wider.

Figure 6: FDI between Italy and France



Source: The European House - Ambrosetti based on Banca d'Italia, Banque de France and Eurostat data, 2022

³¹ Vargiu, G., & Piccinini, A. (2022). COOPERAZIONE E CONCORRENZA ECONOMICA TRA ITALIA E FRANCIA. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

The asymmetry is also marked in M&A transactions, where in 2019-2021 France registered 118 operations valued EUR 13,3 billion, while Italy closed the year with only 47 operations, for EUR 3,3 billion (figure 7). Among the main operations, we may recall the acquisition of the Italian Parmalat and Nuova Castelli by the French Lactalis for EUR 4 billion and 270 million respectively, the acquisition of the Creval (Credito valtellinese) by Credit Agricole, the investment in Italy worth EUR 200 million by the French French holding multinational corporation and conglomerate LVMH, the acquisition of the Italian Aersud Elicotteri by the French Airbus (more in figure 7).

Figure 7: M&A between Italy and France



Source: The European House - Ambrosetti based on MergerMarket data and others, 2022

These numbers and indicators explain, to a certain extent, the origin of the widespread sentiment, amongst Italians, that the 'French go to Italy to do their shopping', to use an expression that the CEO of IPSOS Italia (a multinational market research and consulting firm with headquarters in Paris) Nando Paglioncelli used during the 5th edition of the 'Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l'Europe',³² an expression meaning that industrial acquisitions are a mainly a unilateral phenomenon that favors France. The mistrust and hostility that derives from this sentiment clearly jeopardizes the commercial relations between France and Italy. We will come back to this in section 1.3 where the concept of proximity paradox is introduced.

³² 5th edition of the 'Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l'Europe'. Available at: <https://youtu.be/JMm8HZRhDRU>

Besides economic integration, there are several other issues that have provoked frictions and tension between France and Italy, revealing the complexity behind the rosy façade of the Franco-Italian relationship. Such issues range from managing irregular migrants at the French–Italian border to supporting different war factions in Libya, and even in areas where their interests are more closely aligned, such as counterterrorism and migration control in the Sahel, or energy relations in the East Mediterranean, cooperation has not always been optimal.³³ We will deal with the issues of migration and sovereignty first in the following paragraphs.

1.2.3 French–Italian border: sovereignty and migration control

"Italy will no longer be helpless and cowardly. We will no longer accept being Europe's refugee camp". These are the words spoken by Italy's interior minister Matteo Salvini in October 2018, as he established an ad-hoc border patrol after French officials continued to return migrants who crossed over to France from Italy.³⁴ The straw that broke the camel's back was the episode that saw French local police dropping off two migrants in the woods of the Italian village Claviere. To Salvini's tweets accusing French authorities of "abuse" and "hostile acts", France answered that in returning migrants back to Italy, French officials were acting under the aegis of EU law.³⁵ According to the Dublin agreement migrants must seek asylum in the European country where they first arrive. Salvini, however, claimed that Italy and France had not signed any bilateral agreements on such matters, and that, by dropping off migrants in Italian territory, France does not give Italian authorities the possibility to process them and carry out border checks.³⁶

Another episode linked to irregular migration control, but also to sovereignty discourse, is the well-known Bardonecchia incident, which also dates back to 2018, when some French officials crossed the Franco-Italian border to carry out an inspection. The Bardonecchia incident brings under the spotlight the difficulty of coordinating sovereignty exclusivity and cross-border cooperation, as a

³³ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

³⁴ Béranger, A. (2018, October 21). France-Italy border dispute over migrants - is the EU breaking up? *Radio France Internationale*.

³⁵ Euronews. (2018, October 21). Italy to patrol Alpine border after "hostile acts" by French officials. *Euronews*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

result of multilevel governance in the EU.³⁷ Transnational flows and the increasing sharing of territorial jurisdictions put nationalism under pressure by challenging traditional forms of sovereignty as based on the exclusive authority of the state over its territory. This often produces further media backlash, which has emphasized, especially in Italy, the territorial incidents and the content of the agreements with France with polemical force.³⁸ Going back to Bardonecchia, French customs officers on duty on a Paris-Milan train disembarked at Bardonecchia station (Italian territory) to screen a suspected non-EU citizen. Although the action was part of the cross-border cooperation in the field of border police, the fact that the French officials did not request any authorization from their Italian counterparts or give any prior information sparked a controversy on the legitimacy of the behavior.³⁹ Managing complex border phenomena, such as irregular migration and drug trafficking, clearly requires new and more efficient forms of sovereignty: the pursue of nationalist and sovereign interests will not only not solve the problem but will also damage France and Italy's bilateral relations.

More classic instances of territorial disputes between France and Italy concern the Mont Blanc and maritime areas. The question concerning the Mont Blanc is a thorny one because it goes beyond merely sovereignty issues to touch a more symbolic dimension: what is at stake here is the control of Europe's highest peak, and there is nothing more seductive for nationalisms than primates and excellences to be claimed as unique to one's own of the territory.⁴⁰ The Franco-Italian dispute over the Mont Blanc border has existed for decades: the 4,810-metre-high mountain marks the Alpine border between the two countries but there is actually no physical boundary separating France and Italy,⁴¹ so should the border line pass through the peak (according to the Italian interpretation) or leave the entire summit to France? The lack of clear territorial boundaries in Mont Blanc over the years has brought about several frictions between the 'two sister nations'. For instance, when the French Prefecture of Haute-Savoie announced in 2020 that a decree would be implemented to protect the Mont Blanc natural site, intended to contain Alpine traffic and sustain plants and wildlife, Italy

³⁷ Marconi, M. (2022). L'INTRECCIO DI VECCHIE E NUOVE FORME DI SOVRANITÀ NEI RAPPORTI TERRITORIALI ITALO-FRANCESI. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*.

³⁸ Vanti, M. (2016). "Le «mystère» des frontières maritimes franco-italiennes fait polémique en Italie". *Corse Net Infos*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/392cBA6>.

³⁹ Marconi, M. (2022). L'INTRECCIO DI VECCHIE E NUOVE FORME DI SOVRANITÀ NEI RAPPORTI TERRITORIALI ITALO-FRANCESI.

⁴⁰ Turrini, P. (2021). Territory: The Dispute with France over the Territorial Boundary in the Mont Blanc Area. *The Italian Yearbook of International Law Online*, 30(1), 497-502.

⁴¹ Euronews. (2020). Italy upset with France over Mont Blanc protection zone. *Euronews*.

formally expressed its “strong opposition” through the Italian embassy in Paris,⁴² claiming that the new measures would affect also Italian territory and therefore cannot be implemented without Italy’s assent. “Such unilateral measures which cannot and must not affect Italian territory”⁴³, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio declared. The tension over the 2020 decree for the protection of natural habitats represents only the last episode of a century-long territorial dispute that dates back to 1860, when the controversial Treaty of Turin was signed; a dispute which is still far from being resolved.⁴⁴

Not less controversial, from a territorial point of view, is the dispute that revolves around the agreement signed by Italy and France in Caen in 2015 on the Delimitation of Territorial Waters and Maritime Jurisdiction. The agreement, however, was never ratified by the Italian Parliament and thus never materialized, leaving a grey zone over the determination of the maritime boundaries between France and Italy and the respective fishing rights in the maritime zone off Liguria and North of Sardinia.⁴⁵ It is no surprise that this ambiguous territorial delimitation led to collisions between the two countries. Suffice it to think of the Mina incident, when, on 13 January 2016 the French authorities accused the Italian fishing vessel Mina of violating French territorial waters and arrested the boat crew. The Italian fishermen were arrested whilst fishing red shrimps off the Ligurian coast, between Ventimiglia and the Mentone Bay, and they were released only through the payment of a EUR 8300-deposit. Eventually, the French authorities apologized, admitting that the arrest was executed based on an erroneous determination of the territorial jurisdiction.⁴⁶ Following these events, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mr Benedetto Della Vedova on 12 February 2016 intervened before the Camera dei Deputati (Chamber of Deputies), insisting on the urgency of signing a bilateral agreement to “fill a legal void and settle clear boundaries for their rights over coastal maritime areas”.⁴⁷

⁴² Euronews. (2020). Italy upset with France over Mont Blanc protection zone. *Euronews*.

⁴³ Archivio Notizie MAE. Nota sul Monte Bianco. Available at: https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stamp/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/10/nota-farnesina-monte-bianco.html

⁴⁴ Iannizzi, G. (2021). The long-lasting border issue on the Mont Blanc. *Swiss Diplomacy Student Association*.

⁴⁵ Pili, M. (2021). “Italia-Francia, affari & lo scippo del mare sardo”. *L’Unione Sarda*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3yhzmdQ>.

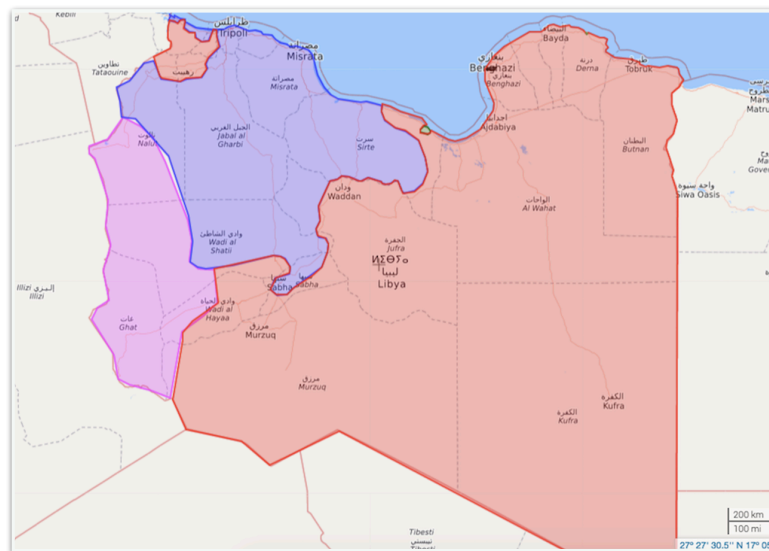
⁴⁶ Italy’s Diplomatic and Parliamentary Practice on International Law. (2016, January 13). Negotiation and Signature of the Caen Agreement on the Delimitation of Territorial Waters and Maritime Jurisdiction between Italy and France.

⁴⁷ Camera dei deputati. (2016). Resoconto Stenografico - Seduta di venerdì 12 febbraio 2016.

1.2.4 Foreign affairs: Divergences on the Libyan dossier

Moving to the realm of foreign policy and especially the Mediterranean, typically regional dynamics such as energy interests and migration/terrorism control have often been at the root of Franco-Italian hostilities. The competition between France and Italy has mostly played out in the Libyan civil war, where Rome and Paris found themselves objectively on opposite sides of the fence supporting Fayeza al-Serraj's Government of National Accord (henceforth GNA) and Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army, respectively.⁴⁸ France was, in fact, one of Egypt's largest weapons supplier and supported, together with Cairo, eastern Libyan forces against the western GNA, which was militarily backed by Turkey and Italy.⁴⁹

Figure 8: Libya in 2018



The forces allied with the Tobruk government, the one supported by Russia and Egypt are shown in red; the forces allied with the Serraj government of national accord, with the capital Tripoli, are shown in purple; the territories controlled by Tuareg militias are shown in pink (Source: Liveuamap)

As a former Italian colony, Libya has historically represented for Rome a strategical area which many national interests are clustered. Most importantly, it has been both a major transit country for African

⁴⁸ Palma, L., & Stefano, E. T. (2022). COOPERAZIONE E COMPETIZIONE NEL MEDITERRANEO. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

⁴⁹ Tanchum, M. (2020, September 23). Turkish Military Maneuvering Pushed Italy and France to Join Forces in the Mediterranean. Now What? *Foreign Policy*.

migration to Europe and a major supplier of Italy's oil and natural gas.⁵⁰ ENI's strong presence in Libya -now it controls about 45 percent of Libya's oil and gas production- was made possible by the GNA under Prime Minister Fayed al-Sarraj, who granted ENI permission to maintain stable energy production in the areas controlled by the GNA-aligned militias supported by Turkey. In 2019, Libyan gas accounted for 8 percent of Italy's total demand.⁵¹ Moreover, Libya has acquired increasing importance since 2014-2015 when the migration crisis began, with hundreds of thousands of migrants arriving in Libya to attempt the crossing into Europe.⁵² Rome's decision to support the GNA and Turkey, therefore, reflects the desire to protect its own energy interests as well as to restore the rule of law in Libya, as a way to contain the migration flow.⁵³

While Italy's economic interest lay in the country's West, especially in Tripoli, controlled by the GNA, France is mostly concerned with stabilizing the lawless South, where a combination of smugglers, criminal networks, and terrorists represent a real threat for France's traditional sphere of influence in the Sahel region,⁵⁴ where there are approximately 5000 troops deployed.⁵⁵ In light of this, Paris' support to Haftar can arguably be understood as driven by the belief that he is in a better position to uproot Libya's jihadism and restore security.⁵⁶ Moreover, it should not be forgotten that France too has economic interests in Libya itself. Until the beginning of 2018 ENI was the only international company present in Libyan territory; under the security and protection of local militias, Italy's largest energy company was to produce and distribute oil and gas in Libya. However, since the spring of 2018, Total, the main French energy company, made a return in the country through acquisitions and company participations in the oil sector, thus entering into competition with the Italians. One could argue, therefore, that France's involvement in Libya was mainly at the detriment of the Italians for at least two reasons: firstly, to establish itself, as opposed to Italy, as Europe's most important leader in Africa, and secondly, to compete with Italy in the regional oil business. It is no surprise that the Italian media and politicians ferociously attacked France, condemning its opportunistic behavior, and considering it one of the main reasons behind the start and continuation

⁵⁰ Fasanotti, F. S., & Fishman, B. (2018, October 31). How France and Italy's Rivalry Is Hurting Libya. *Foreign Policy*.

⁵¹ Tanchum, M. (2020, September 23). Turkish Military Maneuvering Pushed Italy and France to Join Forces in the Mediterranean. Now What? *Foreign Policy*.

⁵² Fasanotti, F. S., & Fishman, B. (2018, October 31)

⁵³ Tanchum, M. (2020, September 23).

⁵⁴ Fasanotti, F. S., & Fishman, B. (2018, October 31).

⁵⁵ *The Economist*. (21 July 2014). François Hollande's African adventures: The French are reorganizing security in an increasingly troubled region.

⁵⁶ Fasanotti, F. S., & Fishman, B. (2018, October 31).

of the civil war. As then Minister of Defense Minister Elisabetta Trenta declared in 2018: “Indeed, it is undeniable that the country is in this situation today because someone, in 2011, put their interests before those of the Libyans and Europe itself”.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Il Post. (2018, September 4). Perché Italia e Francia litigano sulla Libia. *Il Post* .

1.3 The Proximity Paradox: a new lens for reading Franco-Italian relationship

The numbers and facts reported in section 1.2 showed just how fragile the relationship between France and Italy is. Despite their geographical and cultural proximity, the complementarity and interdependence of their economies, and a solid common industrial backbone, France and Italy have a troubled history, whose complexity we have attempted to briefly illustrate above. The last decade, as we have showed, has been particularly problematic for the ‘two sister nations’, with issues ranging from resistance to economic integration to engagement in Libyan civil war on opposing sides, from cross-border migration control and to sovereignty disputes, not to mention the diplomatic incident of 2018-19, culminating with the recall to Paris of the French ambassador in Rome Christian Masset on 7 February 2019, an unprecedented case in the recent history of these two founding Member States of the European Union⁵⁸ -we will come back to this crucial episode in the next chapter.

The elusive and, at times, paradoxical nature of the relationship between these two countries, which are so close and yet so distant, has often been the subject of many studies and has drawn the attention of many scholars. Notably, in 2015, Fabrizio Maria Romano and Olivier Mellerio founded IREFI (Istituto per le Relazioni Economiche Francia-Italia), an independent 'bilateral' association whose main mission is to facilitate business relations between France and Italy. Well aware of the complexities of the relationship between the neighbors, the founders' idea was to put together entrepreneurs, managers and representatives of public and private institutions from both countries, with the aim to deepen mutual knowledge and foster trust and openness towards one other; in other words, the ultimate goal was and is to overcome what Fabrizio Maria Romano defines “proximity paradox”. This concept, as foreshadowed in the introduction, explains how two countries, such as France and Italy, are so close that they cannot really see and understand what the other is like. Proximity gives the illusion that reciprocal understanding is easy and immediate, almost natural, when, in fact, it is not. Yes, French and Italian cultures are similar in many ways, however, as the Riccardo Perna rightly warns, “we are far from knowing each other as we should, in order to be able to work together without the misunderstandings and disagreements that different cultures generate”.⁵⁹

The proximity paradox, we will argue in the final sections of this chapter, has generated over the years incalculable economic losses and political breakdowns, and we will show that many of the

⁵⁸ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

⁵⁹ Perna, R. (s.d.). France & Italy: Estranged Cousins. *Cultural Confidence: the art of global success*.

problems and disputes discussed in the previous section 1.2 can be ultimately traced back precisely to this proximity paradox: arguably, the numerous misunderstandings experienced by France and Italy are caused by cultural-political reasons, rather than economic ones, meaning that oftentimes the breakdowns do not stem from divergent interests, but rather from mistrust, prejudice, a lack of mutual knowledge, and a distorted perception of reality. Before starting our discussion, we will present and analyze the results of a survey called “Two countries in the mirror: Franco-Italian industrial relations and perspectives. The citizens' point of view”. This survey will shed some light on France and Italy’s mutual knowledge, thus preparing the ground for our discussion on repercussions of the proximity paradox on the political-economical dimension, for, as former Minister of Justice Paola Severino declared, “distances of understanding often result in economic, financial and cultural distances, which generate negative political and financial consequences for our countries”.⁶⁰

1.3.1 IPSOS Survey: What do the French and the Italians know and think about each other?

This survey was Sponsored by EDISON and conducted by multinational market research and consulting firm IPSOS, under the leadership of Professor Marc Lazar. Its results were first revealed on 7 July 2022 during the fifth edition of the Franco-Italian Dialogues for Europe, an initiative launched in 2018 by Luiss Guido Carli and Sciences Po universities in collaboration with The European House - Ambrosetti. By gathering around a table French and Italian leaders from academia, politics and industry on a regular basis, the Franco-Italian Dialogues for Europe aim at strengthening and consolidating bilateral relations in a European perspective. Significantly, the Dialogues are the only bilateral initiative that is mentioned as *best practice* in the Roadmap attached to the Quirinal Treaty, as we shall see later.

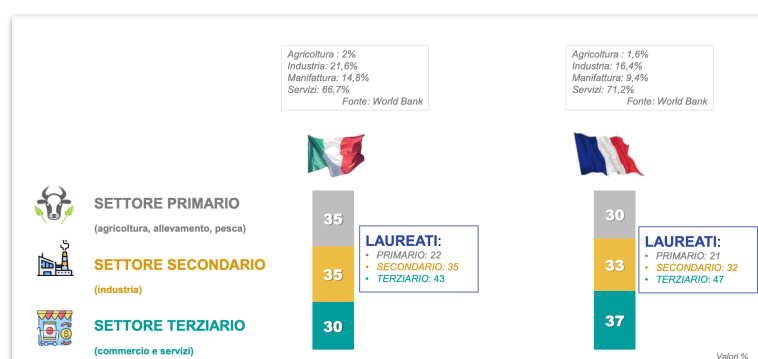
The survey was carried out among a representative random sample of the Italian and French population aged 18 to 75 according to gender, age, level of schooling and geographical area of residence. 1,000 interviews were carried out in Italy and 1,000 interviews in France, through a CAWI system, from 19 to 30 May 2022. The population was confronted with questions regarding macroeconomic phenomena, Franco-Italian commercial relations, and the Quirinal Treaty, with the objective to measure French and Italians’ knowledge of the respective countries but also their own, as well as to dispel a number of clichés and stereotypes.⁶¹ Starting with macroeconomic phenomena, the population showed a very vague knowledge: asked which sector of their economies contributes

⁶⁰ 5th edition of the ‘Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l’Europe’. Available at: <https://youtu.be/JMm8HZRhDRU>

⁶¹ Ibid.

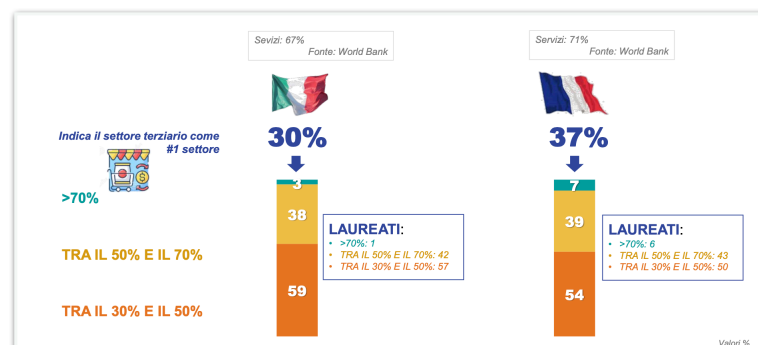
the most to the national GDP, citizens are more or less equally divided in attributing to each of the three macro-sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary) the greatest weight in terms of contribution, both for their own country and for their cousins across the Alps. In proportion, Italians seem to attribute more weight to the industrial sector for both countries than the French, who, in turn, attribute more to the tertiary sector (figure 9). But even among those (about one third) who identify the tertiary sector as preponderant, there is a striking underestimation of the relative weight of this sector in terms of contribution to national GDP, which is 66.7% for Italy and 71.2% for France (figure 10).

Figure 9: Which sector contributes most to GDP?



Source: IPSOS

Figure 10: What is the contribution of the tertiary sector to GDP?

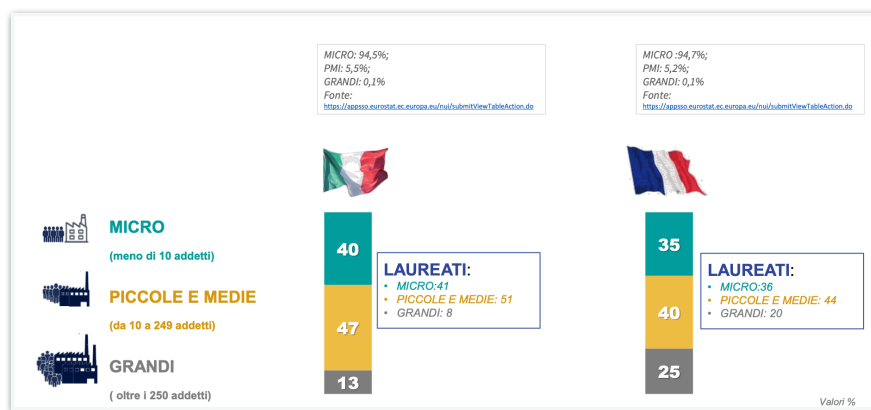


Source: IPSOS

Interestingly, and worryingly, even university graduates show a distorted perception of their own country's economic structure: services, which actually constitute the country's main sector of the economy accounting for 67% of GDP, are placed third by the Italians. Same story with different percentages in France (figure 9). But even in the 30% of Italians who guessed right, most have no conception of the sector's importance on the overall budget. Again, similar story with different percentages in France (figure 10).

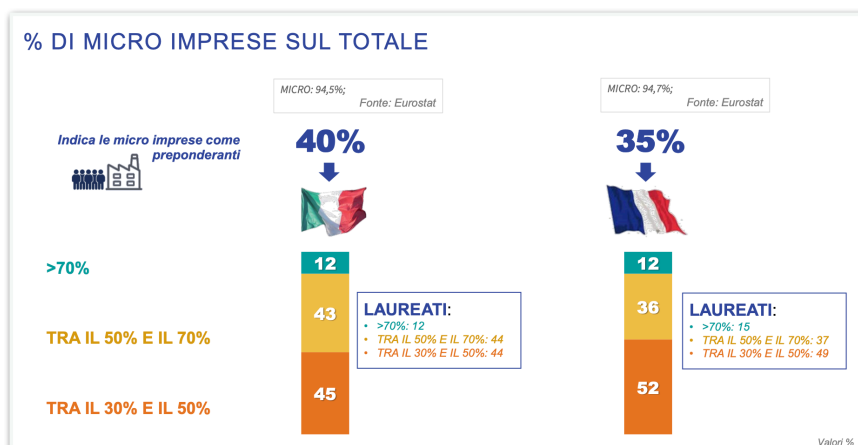
The same goes for the type of enterprises. Here, too, the population shows a distorted view of reality. For both countries, almost 50 per cent of the population surveyed think that small and medium-sized enterprises prevail, when in fact the economies of France and Italy are heavily based on micro enterprises: these account for 94,7% and 94,5% respectively (figure 11). And again, even those who guess correctly have no idea of the weight of micro enterprises on the total number of enterprises (figure 12).

Figure 11: Which is the predominant type of company in your economy?



Source: IPSOS

Figure 12: How much do Mirco companies contribute to GDP?

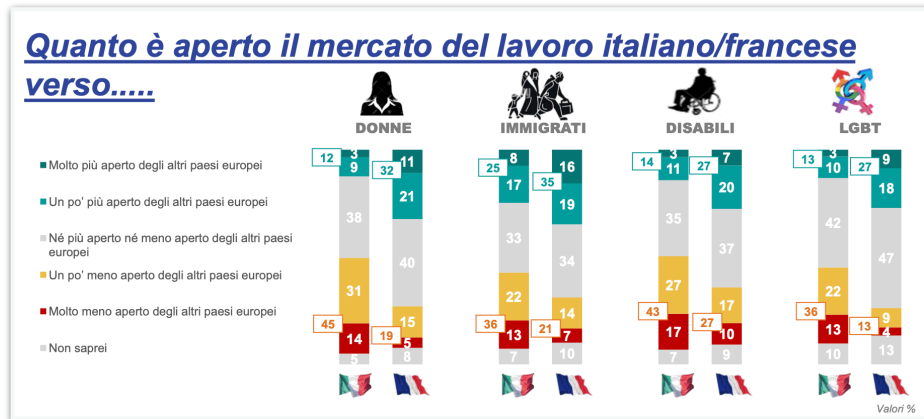


Source: IPSOS

Another interesting element that has emerged from the survey is the tendency of the Italians to have a much more pessimistic outlook than the French on their own country in comparison with the other European countries. The possible reasons for this will be discussed later. For now, suffice it to note

that, for example, the opinions given by the Italians on industrial policies, repercussions of the war in Ukraine, and the labor market are very negative, more than the French: e.g., figure 13 on inclusiveness of labor market shows that the percentage of Italians holding negative views almost always doubles that of the French).

Figure 13: Labor Market



Source: IPSOS

Moving to Franco-Italian economic and industrial relations, French and Italians underestimate the strong commercial ties that unite them. Asked about the nature of the relationship between the French and Italian companies, we record rather fragmented and divergent answers: on the whole, the French hold a more positive view, with only 12% considering this relationship conflictual compared to 23% of Italians and as many as 27% consider it collaborative compared to 16% of Italians (figure 14).

Figure 14: Relations between Italian and French companies



Source: IPSOS

When it comes to the main area of collaboration between the respective companies, again there is no agreement among the citizens, although the French are slightly more inclined to indicate fashion, agribusiness, culture and automotive as possible areas of collaboration between French and Italian companies (figure 15). More interestingly, approximately 30% of both French and Italians declared “I do not know” or “None of the options”, revealing lack of knowledge or interest; in either case, indeed, something to reflect upon.

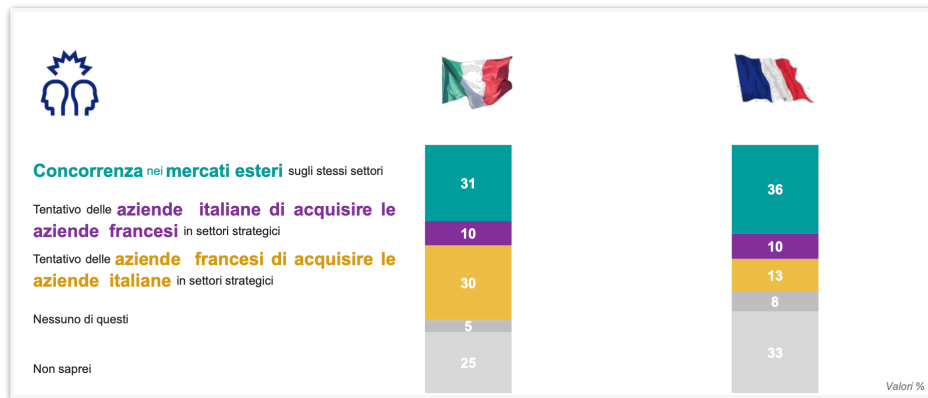
Figure 15: What is the main area of collaboration between Italian and French companies?



Source: IPSOS

Finally, looking at the reasons for clash between Italian and French companies, what emerged from the survey is quite striking: 30% of the Italians think that the clash is due to France’s attempt to acquire Italian companies in strategic sectors (figure 16), showing a feeling of threat on the part of Italians towards French shoppers; a perception that is not shared by the French: only 13% hold that view. Here again, approximately 30% of the surveyed population of both countries do not know.

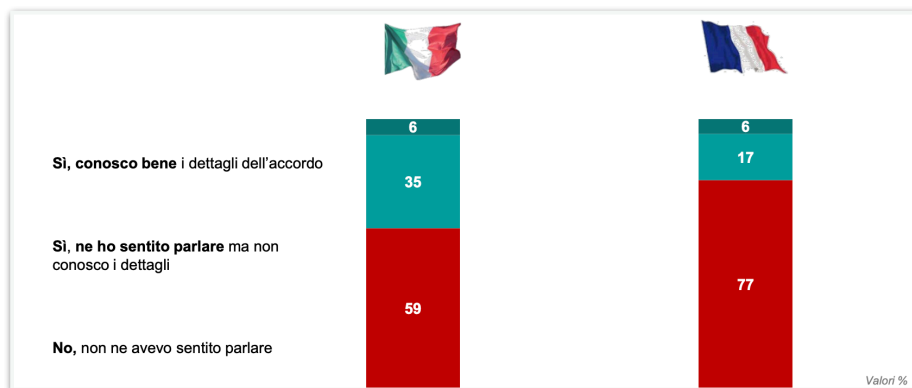
Figure 16: What is the main reason of clash between Italian and French companies?



Source: IPSOS

One last element should be mentioned, concerning the third and last topic area of the survey: when asked if they knew the Quirinal Treaty a shockingly high percentage of both Italians and French answered “NO”, 59% and 77%, respectively (figure 17).

Figure 17: Do you know the Quirinal Treaty?



Source: IPSOS

Vice-President of LUISS Guido Carli Paola Severino during the fifth edition of the Dialogues commented the results of the survey, saying that Italians and the French are above all united by errors of perception and a significant knowledge deficit about the business reality and economic structure of their countries. We often see that reality deviates from how the Italians imagine it in relation to the

French and the French in relation to the Italians. Moreover, we see that Italians' perceptions are further removed from reality compared to the French, but also to their European neighbors. Interestingly, since 2014, Italians' perception of reality has been measured with certain indicators (e.g., how many foreigners in Italy? How many unemployed? etc.); comparing the average answer with the real data, Italy turns out to be the country with the greatest distance between perception and reality in Europe.⁶² We are more inclined to emphasize social alarms and amplify the extent of the phenomena that worry us. This inevitably leads to Italians' proverbial pessimism about their own economy. IPSOS Ceo Paglioncelli also pointed out that in pre-Covid times only 15% of Italians held a positive opinion on Italian economy, which is striking if we then look at countries such as Peru and Mexico, where the satisfaction rate was much higher, 62% and 57%, respectively.⁶³

Now, what is relevant for our research is understanding whence this pessimism stems. Is it innate cultural pessimism, or rather the result of negative narrative by the state and the media? An interesting element that emerged from the survey is that the percentage of university graduates is extremely low: within the population sample, we see 17% for Italy, half the French percentage. Poor education, therefore, play a big role, but there must be more to it. We would argue that communication, in particular, should also be taken into account: culturally, in Italy, state narrative emphasizes the country's negative traits, rather than highlighting its virtues and merits. The many successes and excellences are often overshadowed by the resounding failures.⁶⁴ A survey on Italy's records shows that one in three Italians knows that Italy holds the record for the most UNESCO heritage sites in the world, while only one in 5 knows that Italy is the second main manufacturing country in the EU. But it is not just how we tell our own story that affects us; it is also how we tell the others' story, especially in relation with us. An erroneous perception of reality in this case may have serious repercussions on the bilateral relations and lead to episodes such as those between Italy and France that we discussed in section 1.2, from territorial disputes to economic losses. In the following paragraphs we will attempt to explain how these misunderstandings came about.

1.3.2 The Fincantieri incident had no reason to exist

⁶² 5th edition of the 'Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l'Europe'. Available at: <https://youtu.be/JMm8HZRhDRU>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Darnis, J.-P. (2020). Una visione strategica delle relazioni franco-italiane: per un trattato bilaterale? . *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*.

The IPSOS survey has showed that a significant percentage of Italians and French consider the relations between their respective companies competitive or conflictual, 61% for Italy and 44% for France. Not only does this indicator show a distorted perception of reality, but, crucially, it generates a diffuse sense of competition and mistrust that is detrimental for two ‘natural partners’⁶⁵ like Italy and France, whose economies and industries are highly complementary and interdependent. We should not forget that there are approximately 4000 companies on either side of the Alps, creating a dense network of production facilities, decision-making centers and sales outlets that account for 400,000 jobs.⁶⁶ Moreover, the number of partnerships and cross-investments (Italian ones in France, French ones in Italy as well as joint ventures between the two countries) is quite striking and goes against widespread Italian sentiment that the ‘French come to Italy to do their shopping’, namely industrial acquisitions being mainly a unilateral phenomenon that favors France. According to data collected for 'L'Economia' of the Corriere della Sera by KPMG, the acquisitions of Italian companies by French companies since the 2000s have been 344 for a transaction value of EUR 47.3 billion; conversely, the acquisitions of French companies by companies with an 'Italian' majority shareholding have been 177 for a value of EUR 37.8 billion⁶⁷ (not much lower!). Here is a list⁶⁸ of some recent examples of partnerships and cross-investments that show just how deeply the two economies are intertwined and how unfounded Italian hostile sentiments seem about the French-favored unilaterality of investments and acquisitions:

- **ITA**, the Italian company born from the ashes of Alitalia, has launched a major growth and fleet renewal plan with **Airbus** (a multinational European aircraft manufacturer based in France) and the leasing company Air Lease Corporation. ITA is to receive no less than 84 new aircraft over the next few years to reach a fleet size comparable to the one Alitalia had before the crisis. On 15 October 2021, ITA succeeded Alitalia as Italy's national carrier. To this end, it purchased part of the fleet from its predecessor, but also signed several agreements to receive at least 84 aircraft - Airbus alone - in the coming years.
- The French ceramic tile manufacturer **Desvres** was acquired by the Italian group **ABK**.
- After Germany, **Doctolib** heads for Italy with the acquisition of start-up **Dottori.it**, which operates a platform for medical examinations.

⁶⁵ The European House - Ambrosetti. (2019). Francia e Italia, due partner naturali.

⁶⁶ Ambassade de France en Italie. La relation France-Italie. Available at: <https://it.ambafrance.org/-La-relation-France-Italie->

⁶⁷ Fubini, F. (2020). Così Francia e Italia si stanno fondendo sul piano produttivo: da Psa-Fca a Luxottica (e la moda). *Corriere della Sera*.

⁶⁸ ICE Agenzia, Ufficio di Parigi. (2022). FRANCIA: Congiuntura economica e Commercio Estero.

- Founded in 2016, **Wash Out**, a 2020 subsidiary of the Telepass group specializing in electronic toll collection services, last year recorded a 67% increase in its turnover. Already active in six cities on the Italian peninsula, Wash Out is now landing in Paris and Rennes before operating in Lyon and Nice. The Italian start-up's offer is washing at home or in the office, without water thanks to more ecological products.
- French-Italian microchips manufacturer **STMicroelectronics** has acquired Paris-based **Ima Wisebatt** specializing in simulations and virtual prototypes of electronic systems for connected objects
- **Sadevinox**, based in Annecy (Haute Savoie), is one of the companies that have joined the Franco-Italian Accelerator created by Bpifrance, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, Elite-Groupe Euronext and Team France Export. Under this program, 40 French and Italian companies, with a turnover between 5 and 50 M€ and international experience, will benefit from comprehensive 12-month support, enabling them to increase business opportunities in both countries. Sadevinox, a manufacturer and distributor of stainless-steel wire, is aiming for strong growth in its transalpine business. The company plans to increase its exports to Italy, which currently account for only 5% of its foreign sales.
- The **LVMH group** announced in December an agreement with Italian eyewear manufacturer Marcolin to acquire its 49% stake in **Thélios**, the joint venture created between the two companies in 2017 to produce eyewear located in Longarone. The French luxury giant thus strengthens its position in the optical sector by becoming the sole owner of Thelios
- **Crédit Agricole Assurances** announced in early December 2021 that it had signed an agreement with Italian energy producer Edison to acquire a 49% stake in **Edison Renewables**, Edison's renewable energy platform.
- The historic Milanese brand **Bindi**, controlled by the BC Partners fund through the Forno d'Asolo group, active in the production and distribution of frozen pastry products, has reached an agreement to acquire **Gelpat Tradition**, a Saint-Auvent company that produces pate à choux and éclairs. With the addition of Gelpat, the Forno d'Asolo range will be expanded through the launch of new French haute patisserie specialities.
- **Mobilconcepts-MetalCo** French distributor of the Italian manufacturer MetalCo, associated with l'AREP (subsidiary of the SNCF - French State Railways), Marbre d'Ici and Forces Pures, has won the tender to design the street furniture for the Olympic Village of the Paris 2024 Games. The contract amount is €600,000 and MetalCo will propose environmentally friendly materials, low carbon cement from recycled local demolition waste, and reused wood. MetalCo, which has a turnover of € 4 M and employs 13 people, specialises in shadow

furnishings, and has already realised the Montpellier tramway furnishings in France and the concrete and steel furnishings on the avenue Daumesnil and the Place des Fêtes in Paris.

- The Italian insurance group **Generali** announced at the end of January 2022 an agreement to acquire **La Médicale**, the health professions insurance company controlled by Crédit Agricole Assurances (CAA), for the sum of EUR 435 million.
- The French pharmaceutical group **Sanofi**, which has 70 plants in more than 30 countries, is investing a further EUR 50 million in Italy to strengthen existing plants. From one of them, located in Anagni, will come the anti-Covid vaccine developed in collaboration with GlaxoSmithKline, an alternative to those of Pfizer and Moderna, and designed to combat variants more effectively. For Sanofi, Italy is the third largest country in terms of revenues, after France and Germany, and the decision to produce the new vaccine in Anagni, currently in phase 3, the one preceding its marketing, will reinforce its importance within the group.
- Placed in receivership on 29 September 2021, the Lyon-based fashion house **Zilli**, a specialist in luxury men's ready-to-wear since 1965, has found buyers. The Dubai-based investment fund Negma Group, part of Seddiqi Properties, and the Milan-based advisory firm specializing in restructuring and acquisitions, **FAI Futuro**.
- The Italian company **Lucart's** €80m investment project at its French site in Laval-sur-Vologne (Vosges) aims to increase its industrial capacity, decarbonise its steam production and improve its logistics. Italian toilet paper manufacturer Lucart is preparing to increase the production capacity of its Laval-sur-Vologne (Vosges) plant by 60%.

In this light, Paris' decision to nationalize the STX France shipyard to prevent an Italian firm taking majority control, thus "protect[ing] the country's strategic interests",⁶⁹ was hardly comprehensible, especially if we consider that it was a South Korean company that, prior to its collapse, held a two-thirds stake in STX France. Why then, as the then Industry Minister Carlo Calenda commented, would Paris allow a South Korean company and not an Italian firm to take majority control?⁷⁰ The IPSOS survey provides a lens for reading this episode: France and Italy's scarce appreciation of the already-strong reality, but also of the potential, of their commercial ties, coupled with sentiments of mistrust

⁶⁹ Reuters. (2017, July 27). French shipyard move 'incomprehensible' says angry Italy. *Reuters*.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

and competition, oftentimes work against the interests of both countries, provoking commercial incidents, such as that of Fincantieri.

One last element that should be factored in, when considering Italy's sentiment of hostility towards France over the strong acquisition operations carried out by big French companies, is Italy and France's scarce knowledge of their different economic trajectories over time: throughout the 1990s, Italy, committed to reducing its very large public debt, proceeded massively with a series of privatizations, while France tried to resist European regulations for the liberalization of markets and services as much as possible, aiming to maintain its 'national champions' in various sectors, with the survival of a dirigiste model of economic policy.⁷¹ Ignoring this when examining the two countries' economic policies will inevitably create misunderstandings.

1.3.3 The Libyan arena: unjustified asymmetry

As we have seen in section 1.2, Rome and Paris found themselves objectively on opposite sides of the fence, supporting Fayez al-Serraj's Government of National Accord and Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army, respectively. According to many,⁷² Paris' decision to side with Haftar derived from divergent interests from Italy, such as the French company Total's energy interests in the country or the ambition to uproot Libya's jihadism and restore security in the lawless South -near France's traditional sphere of influence in the Sahel region- something that, according to Paris, Haftar was in a better position to guarantee.

We argue, however, that Paris' strategy stems more from a political consideration. Rome's initiative to take the matter in its hands by holding its own conference on Libya on 12-13 November 2018 in order to coordinate European action, was not well received by Paris, which saw its leadership role in Libya put in jeopardy. Macron, who considered and still considers himself the standard bearer for the EU, saw Italy's initiatives as a threat to his political vision.⁷³ In this light, Trump's recognition of Italy's fundamental role in the stabilization of Libya and North Africa, during Italian Prime Minister Conte's visit to the White House, was probably too much for France's sense of *grandeur*;

⁷¹ Camera dei Deputati. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale. Servizio Studi.

⁷² Fasanotti, F. S., & Fishman, B. (2018, October 31). How France and Italy's Rivalry Is Hurting Libya. Foreign Policy.

⁷³ Ibid.

Paris had to take action.⁷⁴ Hence, a series of initiatives taken by the French in the Libyan arena aimed at reducing Italy's influence and leadership role in the territory, including the scheduling of a summit on Libya a week before the Italian government's new coalition was formed so they could not attend at a political level. Naturally, Paris' autonomous and unilateral initiatives were resented by the Italians, who did not refrain from expressing public polemical comments towards France: the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Roberto Fico, for instance, said in 2018: "France left us in this situation after going unilaterally into Libya and today we are on the brink of a new civil war";⁷⁵ or the LEGA leader Salvini declared: "I think someone is behind it (the situation in Libya). Someone who has waged a war that should not have been waged, who is calling elections without hearing the allies and local factions, someone who has gone to force, to export democracy, things that never work".⁷⁶

The contrast between France and Italy in Libya was surely the fruit of political strategies, but also, we would argue, the consequence of poor coordination and dialogue between the countries. Their respective interests in the region, in fact, are not necessarily divergent: if Paris' priority was to stabilize the South of the country to protect its interests in Sahel -a region characterized by increased transnational terrorist and smuggling activities in and across borders, but also by important flows of irregular migration directed toward Europe, and especially to Italy-⁷⁷ it is obviously in Italy's best interest to find synergies and work out a common strategy in the Region. This is all the more logical if we consider there are multinational operations already in place, especially in the framework of the EU (e.g., the 2011 Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel,⁷⁸ or the 2015 the Sahel Regional Action Plan⁷⁹).

1.3.4 Towards the Quirinal Treaty

⁷⁴ Martinet, G. & Romano, S. (2001). *Un'amicizia difficile. Conversazioni su due secoli di relazioni italo-francesi*. Firenze: Ponte delle Grazie.

⁷⁵ la Repubblica. (2018, September 3). Libia, Conte e Salvini: "No a interventi militari". Il ministro dell'Interno: "C'è dietro qualcuno". E attacca la Francia.

⁷⁶ Il Post. (2018, September 4). Perché Italia e Francia litigano sulla Libia.

⁷⁷ D'Amato, S. (2021). Patchwork of Counterterrorism: Analyzing European Types of Cooperation in Sahel. *International Studies Review*, 23, 1518–1540.

⁷⁸ European External Action Service. 2011. European Union External Action Service Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel.

⁷⁹ Council of the European Union. 2016. Council Conclusions on the Sahel, 3477th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Luxembourg.

The analysis of the disputes between France and Italy done through the lens offered by the IPSOS survey, but also the results of the survey themselves, point to the fact that a deep reflection on communication and dialogue is imperative. The profound knowledge deficit that emerged from the survey and the many breakdowns in the Franco-Italian relations discussed above cannot be considered separately, and certainly not be ignored: they show just how real and dangerous the proximity paradox. Only very recently we had the proof of how serious the consequences could be if action is not taken to strengthen bilateral relations and finally surmount the paradox: in 2019 the relationship deteriorated to the extent that French Ambassador in Rome Christian Masset was recalled to Paris. So, it is not just about exploiting the full potential of their relations but making sure that any such incident will not occur again.

A lot needs to be done. The 2022 IPSOS survey reveals that the hostile sentiments towards France are still strongly rooted in Italy, and that on French media and state narrative Italy is still very absent (remember the shockingly high percentage of French -always higher than that of Italians- who never heard of the Quirinal Treaty or who answered “I do not know” to questions regarding Franco-Italian relations). Nonetheless, the recently signed Quirinal Treaty is the proof that political representatives of France and Italy have grown aware that something serious needs to be done to consolidate bilateral relations, something that goes beyond the previous monothematic agreements, something that coordinates the Franco-Italian relations extensively, providing an institutional framework that, on the one hand, regulates all aspects of bilateral cooperation, and on the other hand, establishes mechanisms of dialogue and exchanges that could bridge the mutual knowledge gap, eradicate biased mistrust, deepen the relations, and ultimately overcome the proximity paradox. In fact, it is precisely the lack of institutionalized dialogue processes, capable of giving continuity to bilateral relations beyond exquisitely political fluctuations, that can be accounted for the asymmetry that has characterized the relationship between France and Italy over the last few decades.⁸⁰ The next chapter will deal with the Quirinal Treaty, firstly by providing an overview of the external and internal context that favored the Franco-Italian rapprochement, secondly by relating the long journey that led to the signature of the Treaty on 26 November 2021, and lastly by examining its content and objectives.

⁸⁰ Camera dei Deputati. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale. Servizio Studi.

2. THE QUIRINAL TREATY

2.1 A Favorable Context

On 26 November 2021, at the Quirinal Palace in Rome, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and French President Emmanuel Macron, in the presence of the Italian Head of State Sergio Mattarella, signed the Treaty between the French Republic and the Italian Republic for Enhanced Bilateral Cooperation. The previous chapter explained how the Quirinal Treaty could be seen as a political reaction to the many breakdowns that have defined the Franco-Italian relations in the past 20 years; as a political will, both from the French and the Italian side, to reset their relationship and in the name of mutual interest -but also in the name of the EU, but we will come back to this in the following chapter. One could argue, however, that the Quirinal Treaty would not have happened, had it not been for the favorable context that has emerged in the last few years: the ‘two sister nations’, in fact, have converged, prior to the signature of the Treaty, on a number of issues that only 5 years ago would have been thought unthinkable. Amongst these convergences, we may recall those on the stabilization of Libya, on the decade-long dispute over the extradition of former Red Brigades terrorists from France, and last but not least on the initiative for the issuing of European debt to fund the national recovery plans after the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸¹

2.1.1 *Convergence in the Mediterranean*

The Mediterranean, defined in the Treaty as France and Italy’s ‘common environment’,⁸² saw its power balances change in the last few years with a significant reshuffling of the alliances in favor of a Franco-Italian rapprochement. Starting with Libya, against all odds, after a decade of contrast in the Region, favorable external conditions pushed France and Italy to join forces in the Region. The Franco-Italian rapprochement was favored by Turkey’s aggressive maneuvers in Libya during the fall of 2020, which reshuffled regional alliances and compelled Italy, in particular, to change strategy.⁸³ As mentioned earlier in section 1.2.4, Rome initially sided with Turkey to support the GNA mainly for two reasons, namely to protect its own energy interests in the Region and to restore the rule of

⁸¹ Camera dei Deputati. (2021). *Il Trattato del Quirinale*. Servizio Studi.

⁸² *Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata*. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

⁸³ Tanchum, M. (2020, September 23). Turkish Military Maneuvering Pushed Italy and France to Join Forces in the Mediterranean. *Now What? Foreign Policy*.

law in Libya, as a way to contain the migration flow.⁸⁴ Now, Turkey's new outsized military presence in Libya and its growing influence in the region alarmed the Italians, who could not allow Turkey to become the regional security provider meaning that ENI's energy interests would be subject to Ankara's dictates.⁸⁵ Hence, Italy's change of strategy and acceptance of Macron's 'Pax Mediterranea' for a EU-coordinated action in the Region. The Franco-Italian rapprochement was also favored by a change of geopolitical balance in the Eastern Mediterranean, where since 2018 Turkey has become more aggressive. Italy has always been aligned against Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Eni is the leading company in the development of Cyprus's and Egypt's natural gas, however, since Eni discovered Egypt's massive Zohr natural gas field in 2015, Turkey initiated a series of aggressive maneuvers (the 2018 gunboat diplomacy off the shores of Cyprus) that compelled Italy to seek in France a regional ally.⁸⁶ In 2018, for instance, an Eni ship was blocked by the Turkish navy from reaching the area planned for exploration in Cypriot waters, with the result of Eni joining forces with the French energy giant Total in all its operations in the Region.⁸⁷ It is also worth mentioning that Eni and Total partnered in Algeria, where they established a consortium with Algeria's state oil company Sonatrach, gaining exclusive rights for offshore exploration in Algeria,⁸⁸ while, within the same timeframe, Total acquired new oil holdings in Libya with the Eni's blessing.⁸⁹ With Franco-Italian alignment both in Libya and Eastern Mediterranean, therefore, 'Pax Mediterranea' was secured.

2.1.2 Convergence on Red Brigades extradition

The Franco-Italian long-standing dispute over the extradition of former Red Brigades terrorists finally came to an end last year. The Red Brigades was an Italian far-left terrorist organization formed in 1970 and responsible for several acts of terror during the Years of Lead, including the abduction and murder of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro. Many members of the Red Brigades fled Italy after the left-wing groups fell dormant and took refuge in neighboring France before they could be imprisoned.⁹⁰ Following a 1980s policy known as the Mitterrand doctrine, named after

⁸⁴ Tanchum, M. (2020, September 23). Turkish Military Maneuvering Pushed Italy and France to Join Forces in the Mediterranean. Now What? *Foreign Policy*.

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ ANSA. (2018, February 23). ENI ship blocked off Cyprus leaves.

⁸⁸ ENI. (2018). *Eni and Total partner with Sonatrach for offshore exploration in Algeria*. Press Release.

⁸⁹ Ghaddar, A., & Lewis, A. (2018, March 2). Oil major Total expands in Libya, buys Marathon's Waha stake for \$450 million. *Reuters*.

⁹⁰ Euronews. (2021, April 29). Two former Italian left-wing terrorists surrender to French police.

former Socialist President Francois Mitterrand, French justice always denied the extradition of Italian far-left activists who had fled to France unless there was evidence that they had committed “crimes of blood”.⁹¹ Famous is the case of the Cesare Battisti, a former member of the Red Brigades, who was arrested in Milan in 1979 and sentenced for four murders, but in 1981 escaped from the Frosinone penitentiary. Following his escape, he took refuge in France, where he established himself as a writer and met his wife. He returned to France in 1990 after a stopover in Mexico and stayed there for more than a decade, benefiting from the 'Mitterrand doctrine'.⁹² Finally, in a much-needed act to address this soar dispute, in 2021 France agreed, after long negotiations, to arrest ten people convicted of particularly serious crimes dating back to the 1970s and 1980s.⁹³

2.1.3 Convergence on NextGenerationEu

The NextGenerationEu was conceived to repair the disastrous socio-economic damages caused by COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to create a stronger, greener, digital and resilient post pandemic Europe.⁹⁴ The negotiations that led to the approval of this unprecedentedly large measure package worth EUR 800 billion were not easy, to say the least, due to the opposition of the so-called frugal countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden), but since its approval, it has often been considered as an epochal milestone for the EU and its existence as one strong entity.⁹⁵ Now, the paternity of this revolutionary European common debt instrument is often attributed to a Franco-German initiative, when in fact it was a Franco-Italian one; of course the initiative would not have gotten very far if Germany had not gotten on board at an early stage, but the NextGenerationEu is undeniably the fruit of a Franco-Italian initiative, as it was stressed in March 2021 by the French and Italian Ministers for European Affairs, Clément Beaune and Vincenzo Amendola:⁹⁶ "Exactly one year ago, when Europe faced the first epidemic wave of Covid-19 with unprecedented socio-economic consequences, we proposed, on a Franco-Italian initiative, together with seven other European States to work on a common debt instrument." Another instance of Franco-Italian convergences that, together with the others mentioned above, prepared the ground for a more structured strategy of collaboration in the form of the Quirinal Treaty.

⁹¹ Euronews. (2021, May 5). Red Brigades: Ex-members of Italian left-wing terrorism group in court in France.

⁹² Biarella, L. (2019, November 20). Cesare Battisti: confermato l'ergastolo. *Altalex*.

⁹³ Euronews. (2021, May 5). Red Brigades: Ex-members of Italian left-wing terrorism group in court in France.

⁹⁴ EU Commission. (s.d.). Recovery plan for Europe.

⁹⁵ Money.it. (2020, December 11). Recovery Fund: cos'è e come funziona? La guida completa.

⁹⁶ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

2.2 A Bumpy Road towards the Signature

Despite the emergence of a favorable context the negotiations leading to the signature of the Quirinal Treaty proved to be rather difficult, with the process lasting no less than five years. In the following paragraphs we will retrace the main stages of the process.

2.2.1 Lyon summit in 2017

The idea of an enhanced bilateral cooperation treaty was first hinted at during the Franco-Italian summit in Lyon on 27 September 2017, when the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, and the then Italian Prime Minister, Paolo Gentiloni expressed the intention of creating a text that would finally crystalize relations between Italy and France in a 360-degree institutional framework. It should be noted that the Quirinal Treaty represents a milestone in Franco-Italian relations, as beforehand there were no structural and organic cooperation treaties between France and Italy; strikingly, despite the deep cultural, economic, social relations between the ‘two sister nations’, never had a text existed to provide an institutional and legislative framework to regulate Franco-Italian collaboration. Worth mentioning is that the Lyon summit also marked the end of the thorny issue of the dispute between Fincantieri and the Stx group, which was resolved with an agreement that the two countries described as very satisfactory for both (the Italian shipbuilder obtained 50% of Stx France plus 1% that the French state will lend to Fincantieri 12-year loan).⁹⁷ Back to the Quirinal Treaty, following the Lyon summit, the French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime minister Paolo Gentiloni signed in January 2018 the official mission letters entrusting six people - often referred to by the media as the "group of the wise" - with the drafting of the first version of the text: on the Italian side, Paola Severino, Franco Bassanini, Marco Piantini, and on the French side, Sylvie Goulard, Pascal Cagni and Gilles Pécout.⁹⁸ The reference point was the Franco-German Elysée Treaty -but also the more recent Aachen Treaty signed in 2019 by Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel-, which clearly was calibrated to the specificities of the Franco-Italian relations:⁹⁹ take, for instance, the space reserved for agricultural and agri-food issues, with a specific focus on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Fontanarosa, A., & Minella, M. (2017, September 27). Stx, Italia e Francia con il 50% a testa. Ma Fincantieri in maggioranza per dodici anni. *la Repubblica*.

⁹⁸ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

⁹⁹ Interview with Italian Diplomat Omar Appolloni (July 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Camera dei Deputati. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale. Servizio Studi.

2.2.2 Diplomatic crisis in 2018-2019

The work of the group of the wise, however, was interrupted by the emergence of a diplomatic crisis between France and Italy, following a number of episodes that occurred in 2018 and 2019, which seriously undermined the Franco-Italian relationship and whose salient moments were the Bardonecchia incident in March 2018 -when some French officials trespassed on Italian soil to carry out an inspection- and the recall to Paris of the French ambassador in Rome in February 2019, due to the support expressed by some representatives of the Italian government to the French yellow vest movement.

Starting with Bardonecchia, as foreshadowed in the previous chapter, French customs officers on duty on a Paris-Milan train disembarked at Bardonecchia station (the last Italian municipality on the border with France, in Alta Val Susa) to screen a suspected non-EU citizen. Although the action was part of the cross-border cooperation in the field of border police, the fact that the French officials did not request any authorization from their Italian counterparts or give any prior information sparked a controversy on the legitimacy of the behavior.¹⁰¹ French agents accompanied a migrant, as they had done on other occasions in the past. Only instead of unloading him in front of the station, they entered the NGO Rainbow4Africa's premises, forcing the refugee to take a urine test and intimidating a doctor, cultural mediators and Asgi volunteers.¹⁰² The raid by French agents on the Bardonecchia migrant center aroused outrage and anger from across the Italian political party spectrum (from PD to Lega, from M5s to Fratelli d'Italia): "The behaviour of the French agents in Bardonecchia was very serious. Italy should call Macron and remind him that no foreign agent can come here to assert his authority. We are a sovereign country not a province of France. They should take the urine samples in French toilets or report the need to our police forces" says MEP Daniele Viotti. And Lega Leader Matteo Salvini echoed: "French diplomats, not Russian one, should be expelled! [...] it is us that control our borders".¹⁰³ In short, the Bardonecchia incident took on the characteristics of an international incident, to the point that the French ambassador in Rome, Christian Masset, was summoned to the Farnesina to give explanations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Marconi, M. (2022). L'INTRECCIO DI VECCHIE E NUOVE FORME DI SOVRANITÀ NEI RAPPORTI. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*.

¹⁰² Nuti, V. (2018, March 31). Blitz francese a Bardonecchia, la Procura apre inchiesta per abuso e violenza privata. *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

¹⁰³ la Repubblica. (2018, March 31). Migranti, blitz a Bardonecchia. La Farnesina convoca l'ambasciatore e smentisce Parigi: "Regole violate, rapporti a rischio".

¹⁰⁴ la Repubblica . (2018, March 31). Migranti, blitz a Bardonecchia. La Farnesina convoca l'ambasciatore e smentisce Parigi: "Regole violate, rapporti a rischio".

Moving to the second and more serious episode, the support expressed by some representatives of the Italian government to the ‘yellow vest’ movement was the straw that broke the camel’s back, the incident that seemingly brought the Franco-Italian relationship to a point of no return. In January 2019, Deputy Prime Minister and political leader of the 5 Star Movement Luigi di Maio published a supportive post to the yellow vest, an anti-government movement initially born to protest against the fuel tax increase and later turned into violent demonstrations. Saying "Yellow vests, don't give up!", di Maio expressed support for the movement and criticized the policies of French President Emmanuel Macron. Echoing di Maio, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini published a post, saying: “support for the decent citizens protesting against a president who governs against his people but absolute, firm and total condemnation of all violence”. Such comments coming from representatives of the Italian government were not well received by the Élysée, which interpreted them as Italy’s interference in France's internal affairs. The French Ministry European Affairs, Nathalie Loiseau, bit back: 'France is careful not to lecture Italy. Let Salvini and Di Maio learn to clean up their own house'.¹⁰⁵ Italy crossed the line, according to Paris, when Luigi di Maio, accompanied by Alessandro Di Battista, flew to Paris in February 2019 to meet some of the leaders of the yellow vest movement, such as Cristophe Chalençon. "A new unacceptable provocation between neighboring countries and partners within the European Union"¹⁰⁶ was the comment of the Quai d'Orsay, which then on 7 February 2019 recalled to Paris its ambassador in Rome Christian Masset for consultations' following 'unprecedented attacks by the Italian government'.¹⁰⁷ It is an unprecedented case in the recent history of France and Italy: last time that a French ambassador left Italy was in World War II, when Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini declared war on France in 1940 and the then ambassador André François-Poncet was recalled to Paris.¹⁰⁸ A spokesperson of the Quai d'Orsay justified France’s decision saying that di Maio’s meeting with Cristophe Chalençon, cupped with a photo-opportunity, were an unacceptable provocation, showing disrespect towards “an allied and friendly people”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Il Post. (2019, January 8). Luigi Di Maio: «Gilet gialli, non mollate!».

¹⁰⁶ ANSA. (2019, February 7). Dura protesta di Parigi per l'incontro Di Maio-Gilet Gialli.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ France24. (2019, February 7). France recalls Italy ambassador after worst verbal onslaught 'since the war'

¹⁰⁹ ANSA. (2019, February 7). Dura protesta di Parigi per l'incontro Di Maio-Gilet Gialli.

2.2.3 *Rapprochement (Chambord 2019 and Naples 2020)*

Since the diplomatic incident, and especially from the moment Conte's second cabinet was formed in September 2019 with M5S and the Democratic Party, the Italian President Sergio Mattarella, and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron have attempted to favor a rapprochement between their countries, by engaging in a series of bilateral meetings, in Chambord first (May 2019) and then in Naples (February 2020).¹¹⁰ In Naples, in particular, Giuseppe Conte and Emmanuel Macron confirmed their willingness to sign a bilateral treaty¹¹¹ -this signature was envisaged to take place by the end of 2021 at the Quirinal Palace, the location being an unambiguous reference to the Élysée Treaty signed in Paris in 1963, a treaty of vital importance for the post-war Franco-German rapprochement.¹¹² The Quirinal Treaty, therefore, carries in its symbolic name the signatories' desire to usher in a new period of closeness and cooperation between France and Italy.

Before going into detail about the 2020 Naples summit, it is worth mentioning that Mattarella's visit to Paris on 2 May 2019 on the occasion of the 500th death anniversary of the renowned sixteenth century Italian painter and scientist Leonardo da Vinci at Chambord Castle, although not rich in content, was of crucial importance because it broke the ice that had frozen the Franco-Italian relations for the previous two years,¹¹³ essentially resetting relationship between the 'two sister nations' and preparing the ground for revitalizing their partnership. Now, the one in Naples was not a bilateral meeting like any other: it was in fact the 35th intergovernmental summit between France and Italy, a tradition dating back to 1982, when François Mitterand and Giovanni Spadolini reset the Franco-Italian relationship after the breakdown of the 1960s and 1970s, and thus inaugurating the traditional annual summits, which allow France and Italy to discuss international issues, sign bilateral sectoral agreements, and frame the difficulties of the moment within institutional frameworks.¹¹⁴ Coming back to the 35th summit, Giuseppe Conte and Emmanuel Macron met on 27 February 2020 at the Royal Palace in Naples and signed the so-called 'Pact of Naples'. Leaving frictions and misunderstandings behind as well as listing all sectors in which Paris and Rome wish to collaborate in the future, the Pact picks up the thread of the works for the Quirinal Treaty that were initiated in

¹¹⁰ Camera dei Deputati. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale. Servizio Studi.

¹¹¹ Pelosi, G. (27 February 2020). Italia-Francia, il patto di Napoli Conte-Macron rilancia il rapporto a 360°. *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

¹¹² Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

¹¹³ Pelosi, G. (3 July 2021). Italia-Francia: quasi pronto il Trattato del Quirinale. *EastWest*.

¹¹⁴<https://www.affarinternazionali.it/archivio-affarinternazionali/2020/02/nel-segno-della-tradizione-il-bilaterale-italia-francia/>

2018 by the group of the wise and then interrupted by the diplomatic crisis.¹¹⁵ The breadth of issues addressed in the pact is suggested by the fact that the summit was attended, in addition to Conte and Macro, by 11 Italian ministers and their French counterparts (Foreign, Interior, Justice, Defense, Economy, Transport, Environment, Culture, Education, Research, European Affairs). Besides the Pact of Naples between Conte and Macron, the 35th Franco-Italian summit gave birth to three more bilateral agreements:

1. one in the military shipbuilding sector
2. one for cooperation in Franco-Italian Concordia station in Antarctica
3. one between Cdp and BPI France in the financial sector

Considerable attention was drawn to the first one: this bilateral agreement military shipbuilding sector was signed by Italian Defense Minister Lorenzo Guerini and his French counterpart Florence Perly and enshrines the support by both countries to Naviris, the the joint venture created by the Naval Group and Fincantieri, a project initiated at the Lyon summit in 2017.¹¹⁶

More generally, we can identify three main areas of focus of the Pact of Naples: Libya, Migration and transnational mobility. Starting with Libya, France and Italy committed “to combat human trafficking, promote orderly migration management and fight terrorism”, as well as to ensure maritime security through an increased interoperability between their respective navies. They also agree on a peaceful solution to the Libyan conflict, led by the United Nations.¹¹⁷ As regards migration, the Pact stressed the need to allocate adequate resources in the next European budget for 2021-2027 for the implementation of a truly European migration policy based on solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility among all member states.¹¹⁸ Finally, for what concerns transnational mobility, Paris and Rome reaffirmed the importance of the completing the Lyon-Turin line with the crucial EU funds as well as their commitment to the use of environment-friendly mobility infrastructure.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Pelosi, G. (27 February 2020). Italia-Francia, il patto di Napoli Conte-Macron rilancia il rapporto a 360°. *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Voccia, E. (27 February 2020). Conte e Macron firmano il patto di Napoli: Mediterraneo, Africa e cantieri navali. *Il Mattino*.

¹¹⁸ Pelosi, G. (27 February 2020). Italia-Francia, il patto di Napoli Conte-Macron rilancia il rapporto a 360°. *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

¹¹⁹ Voccia, E. (27 February 2020). Conte e Macron firmano il patto di Napoli: Mediterraneo, Africa e cantieri navali. *Il Mattino*.

2.2.4 Presidential meeting at Élysée (February 2021)

On 13 February 2021, when Mario Draghi was appointed new Prime Minister, it was clear that the Franco-Italian rapprochement would not stop, and that Paris and Rome were entering a period of stronger partnership. Draghi's strong Europeanism and Atlanticism is very much in line with Macron's own beliefs and ambitions. On occasion of his speech at the Senate on 17 February 2021, Draghi declared that he wanted to better structure the relation between his country and France.¹²⁰ This sentiment was shared by Macron, who, during the Italian Republic President Sergio Mattarella's visit to the Élysée Palace on 5 July 2021, declared that "France welcomes a friend and a great personality", and confirmed his willingness "to go ahead with the bilateral treaty on enhanced cooperation, the Quirinal Treaty, which will consolidate our relationship".¹²¹ If there was any doubt, this presidential meeting at Élysée was the proof that the 'two sister nations' were once for all leaving behind all the frictions and misunderstandings of the previous years, and looking forward to a future of enhanced collaboration, in the name of "a unique bond based on shared values, common history", in the very words of Mattarella. The Italian Republic President also said that the Franco-Italian partnership will be centered on the European Union, which, as we shall see, is given a privileged space in the Quirinal Treaty. "Our partnership", he adds, "is essential in the EU and in the international community. The Union is the perspective of the new generations. The EU is a protagonist in the international community."¹²² Finally, the two Presidents confirmed that the Quirinal Treaty would be signed by the end of 2021.

2.2.5 Finally white smoke at the Quirinal Palace

After five years since the Lyon summit in 2017, France and Italy's ambition to sign a treaty for a strengthened bilateral cooperation finally materialized on 26 November 2021, when Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and French President Emmanuel Macron, in the presence of the Italian Head of State Sergio Mattarella, signed the Quirinal Treaty. Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi di Maio and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian were also present. We will not go in detail about the content and the objectives of the Treaty, as this will be the focus of the following sections, however it is important to highlight its ambitious and broad architecture, which encompasses and regulates all possible areas of cooperation between France and Italy. Its chapters range from foreign affairs, security and defense, to economic, industrial and digital cooperation; and again: migration

¹²⁰ La Repubblica. (17 February 2021). Governo, il testo integrale del discorso di Mario Draghi al Senato.

¹²¹ RaiNews. (5 July 2021). Mattarella all'Eliseo, Macron lo abbraccia: "Profonda amicizia Italia-Francia".

¹²² Ibid.

policies, justice and home affairs, education, space, social development, to culture and youth, cross-border cooperation.

*The treaty marks an historic moment in relations between our two countries.
France and Italy are further consolidating our diplomatic, commercial, political
and cultural ties.*

*Italy and France share much more than borders. History, art, economies and society
had been intertwined for a long time. The institutions we have the honor of representing
are based on the same republican values, on respect for human and civil rights and Europeanism.*

The words of Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and French President Emmanuel Macron,¹²³ respectively, reveal the enormous symbolic importance of a Treaty that is signed after a difficult diplomatic negotiation started in 2017, and after five years where, as we saw in the previous chapter, the relations between France and Italy have touched historic lows: from the strong reciprocal accusations on migration issues between French and Italian Ministers, the support expressed by some representatives of the Italian government to the yellow vest movement and the subsequent the recall to Paris of the French ambassador in Rome Christian Masset, to the unsuccessful acquisition of Chantiers de l'Atlantique by the Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri. The Quirinal Treaty represents, therefore, a unique opportunity to break with a complicated past 5 years and revitalize France and Italy's bilateral relationship.¹²⁴

¹²³ La Stampa. (5 July 2021). Italia e Francia firmano il trattato del Quirinale. Draghi: “Bisogna creare una vera Difesa comune europea”.

¹²⁴ Mazziotti, M. (2022). AFFARI ESTERI, SICUREZZA E DIFESA. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*.

2.3 Content and Objectives

Moving to the content of the Franco-Italian Treaty for Enhanced Cooperation, the text is 14 pages long and consists of a preamble and 12 articles. It is worth stressing that the scope of the articles is very broad, as it is normally the case for framework agreements. For this reason, attached to the Treaty, there is also a Roadmap (Programma di Lavoro), which details the projects and axes of cooperation that the two countries intend to implement in the following years in application of the principles laid down in the Treaty.¹²⁵ In the Preamble, we find, listed, all those traits that France and Italy consider inherent to their relationship; all those common elements that, we may say, constitute the foundation on which the Treaty is built. The preamble, thus, enshrines the Franco-Italian profound proximity, particularly based on:¹²⁶

- The deep friendship that unites the ‘two sister countries’, anchored in history and strengthened by continuous exchanges and dynamic cooperation in many areas: political, social, cultural, economic, industrial and commercial, mobility, defense, environment, research, digital, energy and cross-border cooperation.
- A common commitment to European unity and a shared desire to relaunch and deepen the European project.
- A special dedication to multilateralism and a rules-based international order and trade, but also to the protection of fundamental principles at global level: peace, security, freedom, equality, respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.
- A common commitment to sustainable development, protection of the environment and biodiversity, and protection of the Mediterranean and the Alpine Arc.
- The objective of strengthening bilateral cooperation on European issues and sectoral policies.

2.3.1 Foreign Affairs

In Article 1, which concerns Franco-Italian cooperation in foreign affairs, France and Italy undertake to develop synergies at the international, taking common positions, when possible, in international fora such as the UN or the EU (clause 1). This shall be done through the creation of stable consultation mechanisms, both at the political level (especially between respective ministers of Foreign Affairs) and at the level of senior officials (clause 2). The main arena where Paris and Rome could benefit

¹²⁵ Programma di Lavoro Italo-Francese. (2021, November 26). Trattato del Quirinale.

¹²⁶ Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

most from adopting more structured forms of cooperation is the Mediterranean, which the Treaty defines as their ‘common environment’. The article repeatedly emphasizes the fundamental relevance of this space for both countries, which undertake to promote and strengthen cooperation on all issues that impact on security, socio-economic development, peace and the protection of human rights in the Region, including countering the exploitation of irregular migration (clause 3). France and Italy also promote a fair and sustainable use of energy resources, aspiring to giving impetus to a common European approach in policies relating to North Africa and the Middle East. With regard more specifically to the African continent (clause 4), France and Italy are committed to strengthening the European Union's and individual Member States' relations with the continent, paying particular attention to North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. On the broader international scene (clause 5), France and Italy undertake to consult regularly and to foster the development of a common European approach towards the main allies and competitors on the international stage, with particular regard to the multilateral dimension of global governance. Finally, in the field of trade (Clause 6), Rome and Paris shall cooperate to push EU policy towards the goal of a fair and sustainable international trade system, while strengthening the industrial dimension and strategic autonomy in the Old Continent.

2.3.2 Security and Defense

Article 2 concerns security and defense: France and Italy undertake to promote cooperation and exchanges between their armed forces, as well as on defense equipment, while also developing synergies at the operational level in all scenarios of common strategic interests. The underlying objective here is strengthening European defense capabilities in order to consolidate the European pillar of NATO (clause 1). Cooperation is accomplished through institutionalized bilateral meetings in the area of defense, as well as regular consultations within the Italo-French Defense and Security Council, in which their respective sectoral ministers participate in addition to the heads of the two diplomacies (clause 2). The following clauses (3 and 4) enshrine France and Italy's strengthened cooperation between their respective defense industries, promoting structural alliances, also facilitating the implementation of joint projects at both bilateral and multilateral levels, aimed at setting up industrial alliances in specific military sectors. Amongst multilateral projects, particular attention is drawn to the ones within the framework of the European Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), with the support of the European Defense Fund. In the space sector, Italy and France will improve their cooperation, in particular the operational capabilities for security and defense purposes, promoting the development of a European strategic culture in this crucial sector of

the future (clause 5). Last but not least, France and Italy commit to strengthen existing exchanges of military personnel and related joint education and training activities, also facilitating the transit or stationing of the partner's armed forces on the respective territories (clause 6 and 7).

2.3.3 European Affairs

Second only to foreign affairs and defense, the Article on European affairs assumes significant importance within the Treaty, and we will come back to this in the next chapter. In Article 3, France and Italy are particularly committed to the development of European strategic autonomy and regularly consult each other at every level in order to agree on common positions before major European summits (clauses 1 and 2). On economic and fiscal matters, France and Italy will strengthen coordination in the main areas of economic policy, also promoting tax convergence mechanisms to counter all forms of aggressive competition, as well as formulating rules to face the challenges of digitization (clause 3). In the social field (clause 5) France and Italy will favor the transparency of the European decision-making process and the participation of citizens in it, with a view to an ever-greater democratization of the European institutions. Finally, on a more purely institutional level (clause 5) France and Italy, albeit within the framework provided by the current European Union Treaties, will favor a wider recourse to the qualified majority system for decision-making in the Council of the European Union, overcoming the cage of unanimity, at least in some matters.

2.3.4 Migration and Justice

Article 4 enshrines Franco-Italian cooperation between in the fields of migrations policies, justice as well as home affairs. It assumes particular relevance in light of the alarming report “The exacerbation of a crisis”¹²⁷ on the consequences of the spread of coronavirus on migrants in Ventimiglia, published by the British NGO Refugee Rescue Europe only three months before the signature of the Quirinal Treaty. Under Article 4 of the Treaty, France and Italy commit themselves to supporting a European migration and asylum policy and integration policies based on the principles of responsibility and solidarity between Member States. For this purpose, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior in

¹²⁷ Rejections at the French-Italian border recorded an average of one hundred daily expulsions in July 2020 and 95 in March 2021, and even in the most intense months of the health crisis, there was no respect for sanitary standards. ‘People are crammed in French police containers in Menton without any access to drinking water, without sanitation and without any respect for safety distances’, before receiving the infamous *refus d’entrée*. (Pirovano. A. (6 September 2021). Ventimiglia: migranti, i dimenticati della pandemia. *Osservatorio Diritti*.)

Rome and Paris set up an enhanced consultation mechanism with regular meetings on migration and asylum (clause 2). Cross-border cooperation between Italian and French law enforcement agencies will also be intensified, with the aim of creating a mixed operational unit capable of supporting law enforcement agencies in the management of major events and in their contribution to international police missions. To this end, a regular consultation forum is set up at the level of the Ministers of the Interior or the Directors-General of the respective Ministries, in matters of security. It is also envisaged to carry out technical assistance and training for the law enforcement agencies of third countries affected by the terrorist threat or the expansion of organized crime (clauses 3 and 4). As far as cooperation between their respective judicial administrations is concerned, France and Italy will work towards deepening it and facilitating the exchange of relevant information. To this end, a regular consultation forum between the respective Ministries of Justice will be set up, which will also be able to formulate shared approaches on European issues in the judiciary. A program of regular meetings between magistrates and legal practitioners is also envisaged, as well as exchanges of officials and magistrates and joint training activities (clauses 6 and 8). Clause 9 provides for joint Franco-Italian efforts in the fight against terrorist content online, incitement to hatred and radicalization.^[128] Regular meetings between the respective law enforcement agencies will take place in order to analyze issues of common interest and identify good practices in the application of police cooperation instruments. Exchanges of police officers and officials and joint training activities will also be promoted (clause 10).

2.3.5 Economic, industrial and digital cooperation

Article 5, together with Articles 6, 7 and 8, are of particular relevance for our thesis, given the strategic importance, for France and Italy, of the sectors they deal with. In fact, they identify, within the ecosystem of innovation, the areas that offer the greatest opportunities for the development of Franco-Italian bilateral action, from mobility, infrastructure and agri-food to space, microelectronics, cybersecurity, 5G and digital transition.¹²⁸

In Article 5, France and Italy commit to deepening cooperation between their respective economic operators, facilitating mutual investments and promoting joint projects for the development of start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises and large enterprises, with a view to common strategies on international markets and within the framework of a social Europe (clause 1). Clause 3

¹²⁸ IREFI (s.d.). Trattato del Quirinale: <https://irefi.eu/fr/trattato-del-quirinale-2-2>

points to the strengthening of European digital sovereignty and transition as a priority in Franco-Italian cooperation, especially in strategic areas such as new technologies, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, digitalization of payments and quantum computing. Also identified as priority is working towards better regulation at European and international level of the digital sector and cyberspace. Finally, while clause 4 foresees enhanced cooperation between the respective anti-fraud coordination services and between the respective tax administrations, clause 5 establishes a Consultation Forum between the competent ministries for economics, finance and economic development, to meet annually at ministerial level to ensure a permanent dialogue on macroeconomic and industrial policies.

2.3.6 Social, sustainable and inclusive development

In the wake of the Porto Social Summit of 7 May 2021, Italy and France reaffirm their willingness, under Article 6, to cooperate on strengthening the social dimension of the European Union and implementing the action plan on the European pillar of social rights. To this end, they undertake to organize an annual consultation for the exchange of good practices and the preparation of joint projects and positions (clause. 1). They also endeavor to support multilateral instruments on sustainable development, including the UN 2030 Agenda as well as the Paris Agreements on climate change. France and Italy also undertake to contribute to the achievement of European climate neutrality by 2050, and regularly consult each other on the most important multilateral climate dossiers. Under clauses 4 and 5 below, France and Italy will cooperate bilaterally and at European level to accelerate decarbonization in all sectors by developing renewable energies and promoting energy efficiency. To this end, a strategic dialogue on transport will be held alternately in France and Italy at the level of the competent ministers. Clauses 6 and 7 contain the commitment to work jointly to achieve global targets on biodiversity and to make the Mediterranean an ecologically sustainable sea - in this case with particular regard to the particularly vulnerable maritime area of the north-western Mediterranean. Clause 8 concerns the quintessentially Franco-Italian sector of agri-food and enshrines the commitment to join efforts at European level for the sustainability and transition of the sector, while guaranteeing the EU's food sovereignty also through measures to combat food waste. Finally, under paragraphs 9 and 10, cooperation is foreseen on their respective protected areas and land and sea parks, with regular consultations between the competent ministries of the two countries.

2.3.7 Cooperation in the space sector

As regards the space sector, discussed in Article 7, the objective that Paris and Rome set themselves is the making of the Europe of space, a key dimension of Europe's strategic autonomy and economic development. In particular, Bilateral cooperation will take place within the framework of the activities of the European Space Agency (clauses 1 and 2). As far satellites are concerned, the article enshrines support for the European institutional launchers Ariane and Vega, as well as for the European launch base in Kourou. Clause 3, finally, promotes industrial cooperation in the fields of exploration and Earth observation, telecommunications, and navigation by means of satellite equipment.

2.3.8 Education and Training, Research and Innovation

The sectors of education, training, research and innovation, contained in Article 8, are explicitly attributed a fundamental role in bilateral relations between France and Italy, and in the common European project. This stems from the fact that, as often emphasized in the previous chapters, the misunderstandings between the 'two sister nations' can often be traced back to a scarce knowledge of the respective countries; a cognitive gap that can be bridged through enhanced dialogue, exchanges and socialization, such as the European program Erasmus+ mentioned in clause 1, which fosters mobility between France and Italy in these areas acknowledged of article 8. Under clause 2, the mutual learning of the respective languages will be promoted, as well as their dissemination, through language promotion actions, with particular attention to the training and mobility of teachers and students who intend to dedicate themselves to teaching. The following two clauses 3 and 4 are devoted to education, and foresee biannual meetings between the ministries responsible for higher education, with the participation of key university stakeholders, who will also be involved in the participation of European universities in the project. Exchange programs of students and academic staff in every field will be fostered, as well as double degrees, joint degrees and co-doctorates. Finally, in clause 5, France and Italy affirm their willingness to cooperate to increase European Union's attractiveness in the field of research through an increase in the development of researcher mobility. Here too, a biannual inter-ministerial meeting is foreseen, which will gather university and other public and private players in the research and innovation sector.

2.3.9 Culture, youth and civil society

France and Italy undertake to promote the bond of their peoples and the common feeling of European belonging through exchanges within civil society and the mobility of young people, especially within

European programs, such the European Youth Strategy and the European Structured Dialogue. These initiatives will be coordinated within the Joint Commission provided for in the 1949 bilateral Franco-Italian Cultural Agreement. A Franco-Italian Youth Council will also be established and will operate alongside the aforementioned Joint Commission. Notably, A Franco-Italian volunteer program (Franco-Italian Civil Service) will also be set up, based on cooperation between the governmental agencies in charge of the respective national programs (clause 1). The following clauses enshrine cooperation between cultural institutions and artists of both countries through exchanges of experience, mobility of persons and training (clause 2), and support joint initiatives to protect and enhance tangible and intangible cultural heritage, both at European and international level (clause 3). Under clause 4, collaboration between Italy and France will expand to the areas of the cultural and creative industries, also accompanying the digital evolution of the sector: co-productions of cultural works, in particular cinematographic, audiovisual and scenic works, will be facilitated, as well as the possibility of their distribution through a common platform. Finally, the Joint Commission will concert synergies in the fields of design, architecture and fashion, for example through the participation in in major international events; and it will also promote the translation of literary works into the respective languages.

2.3.10 Cross-border cooperation

Article 10 concerns another typically Franco-Italian area of interest, namely cross-border cooperation, whose relevance should shine clearly in light of what was said in chapter one, in the sections above devoted to this theme. Under this Article, France and Italy undertake to support integration projects between the border communities of the two countries, in line with sustainable development and European cohesion. Particular attention will be paid to border cooperation in the field of health and rescue operations (clause 1). Moreover, the article places, as priority, the dialogue between the public administrations and parliaments of the two countries in the transposition of European law, as to avoid impairment of exchanges and contacts between border communities as a result of possible differences in the respective national laws (clause 2). Clause 4 specifies that a crucial element of cross-border cooperation will be the increasingly integrated development of a rail, road and maritime transport network, especially transalpine rail mobility due to environmental aspects. Finally, under clause 7, a Border Cooperation Committee chaired by the competent ministers of both countries will be established, gathering representatives of local authorities, border authorities, competent cooperation bodies, parliamentarians, and central administrations. The Committee, which will meet at least once

a year, will be responsible for proposing border cooperation projects in all areas of public policy, taking care of their contractual, legislative or regulatory aspects.

2.3.11 Organization

Article 11 outlines the institutional framework within which the new cooperation between Rome and Paris will play out. In particular, an annual intergovernmental summit will be organized to monitor the implementation of the Quirinal Treaty and examine priority issues of mutual interest. In parallel, if possible, the concertation meetings at ministerial level foreseen in the previous articles of the Treaty will also be held (clause 1). Clause 2 makes reference to the Roadmap that we mentioned above, namely the text that details the projects that France and Italy intend to implement in application of the principles laid down in the Treaty. This Roadmap will be periodically reviewed and, if necessary, adapted to new objectives set in agreement between the two countries. Clause 3 sets up at the level of the Secretaries General of the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs a Joint Strategic Committee - to be convened annually prior to the Intergovernmental Summit - responsible for the implementation of the Treaty and the roadmap. Finally, under clauses 4 and 5, exchanges of officials and joint training activities will be carried out between the public administrations of the two countries, as well as regular meetings and joint projects.

2.3.12 Final Provisions

Article 12 winds up the treaty with some final dispositions, providing that the Treaty shall be of indefinite duration, with the possibility of denouncing it from either part, and that any differences or disputes on the interpretation or application of the Treaty shall be settled amicably through direct negotiations between the two countries.

3. BEYOND THE TREATY

3.1 Overcoming the Proximity Paradox

3.1.1 Dialogue is key

Having examined in great detail the content of the Quirinal Treaty in the previous chapter, it is clear that the Treaty, with its wide-ranging scope encompassing all possible areas of Franco-Italian cooperation, reflects France and Italy's strong determination to reset their relationship and start on a clean slate within the framework of a new institutional text, especially after the last few years when the Franco-Italian relations have been rather volatile, to say the least.¹²⁹ As matter of fact, all those areas that have often provoked tension and misunderstandings between the two countries, from foreign policy and security to economic integration and migration policy, are covered and extensively discussed in the Treaty.

However, as mentioned more than once in the previous chapters, we believe that the Treaty goes beyond that; in other words, we believe that, far from being just a reset button that wipes out all past misunderstandings to allow a fresh start, the Treaty represents a unique -and we may go as far as to say unprecedented- opportunity to overcome the proximity paradox once for all. The reason why we believe so has already been hinted at earlier, when analyzing the eye-opening results of the survey on Franco-Italian reciprocal perceptions: not only did the survey prove that the proximity paradox is real, revealing the shockingly scarce mutual knowledge of the 'two sister nations', but it also implicitly pointed us to the paradox's antidote: dialogue. Dialogue, we believe, is the key word of the Treaty and, together with similar words belonging to the same semantic field, is abundantly present in the text. Just to give an idea, we have drawn a table showing the frequency of the words 'dialogue', 'exchange' and 'consultation' / 'to consult' both in the Treaty and in the Roadmap:

Figure 18: Frequency of words belonging to the dialogue semantic field in the Treaty

¹²⁹ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

<u>word</u> \ <u>text</u>	QUIRINAL TREATY	ROADMAP
<i>dialogue</i>	8 times	7 times
<i>exchange</i>	23 times	13 times
<i>consultation/ to consult</i>	18 times	9 times

Source: Data from Quirinal Treaty and Roadmap

Dialogue is the perfect antidote to the French and Italians' mutual mistrust; only through dialogue will they correct their distorted perception of reality, which makes 61% of the Italians and 44% of the French think that the relations between their respective companies are competitive or conflictual, when, in fact, as we have shown in the first chapter, France's and Italy's economies and industries are highly complementary and interdependent. After the 'non plus ultra' of the 2019 diplomatic incident, the 'cousins' seemed to have become aware of the urgency of empowering the two countries with new effective tools of dialogue and exchange, to bridge the cognitive gap, eradicate biased mistrust, and deepen their relations to extent that geographical proximity, cultural affinity and economic complementarity allow. These tools, or at least some of them, are contained in the Quirinal Treaty; in fact, besides the institutional framework regulating all aspects of bilateral cooperation, what the Treaty mainly does is establishing mechanisms of dialogue, exchanges, and socialization, which are capable of giving continuity to bilateral relations beyond exquisitely political fluctuations. The lack of such institutionalized structure of dialogue and interchange has been, over the decades, the cause of the asymmetry in the Franco-Italian relations, whose destiny was always at the mercy of the politicians of the day and of the historical circumstances.

3.1.2 The lesson of the Franco-German Elysée Treaty

In the Quirinal Treaty, thus, Paris and Rome not only intended to define objectives in the fields of common interest, but, more importantly, they also aimed to give concrete and effective content to the otherwise vague promises of cooperation. In this sense, the Quirinal Treaty can be defined as a programmatic treaty insofar as both the Treaty and the Roadmap contain specific provisions aimed at

concretely fostering dialogue and cooperation between the Parties and going beyond declarations of principle.¹³⁰ It is interesting to point out that the programmatic nature of the Quirinal Treaty is owed, to a great extent, to the Elysée Treaty between France and Germany (renewed in 2019 with the Aachen Treaty between Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel) -the very name of the Quirinal Treaty, named after Italy's presidential residence, makes reference to the Franco-German bilateral treaty. In the previous chapter, we mentioned that the reference to Elysée Treaty was a symbolic one: given that the Elysée Treaty signed in Paris in 1963 between Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer was a key moment in the Franco-German rapprochement,¹³¹ thus the Quirinal Treaty, making reference to it, symbolizes the dawn of a new period of closeness and cooperation between France and Italy. Here, however, we argue that the reference to the Elysée Treaty goes beyond mere symbolism.

From a more practical point of view, the Quirinal Treaty aims to reproduce that mechanism incorporated in the Franco-German treaty, which, in the post-war context, successfully mended a bilateral relationship that had been devastated by the war: the institutional apparatus created in 1963 and modernized in 2019 by Paris and Berlin not only succeeded in consolidating relations not only between governments, but also between the different layers of ministerial administrations, creating many transmission belts that allow the two countries - despite their different traditions and political trajectories - to better understand each other and build synergies. In fact, the success of the Franco-German treaty is due to the establishment of corollary mechanisms such as the automatic exchange of senior civil servants who during their careers carry out work for the other state, or the creation of ad hoc committees, or the formulation of a strict calendar of government meetings.¹³² Through the synthesis of procedures and ways of thinking, such arrangements have successfully created synergies and alignments between the decision-makers of both countries, thus consolidating what a Franco-German bloc that would become what is now known as the 'historical political and economic engine of Europe'¹³³, or the "keystone of European integration".¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Vargiu, G., & Piccinini, A. (2022). COOPERAZIONE E CONCORRENZA ECONOMICA TRA ITALIA E FRANCIA. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

¹³¹ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

¹³² Darnis, J.-P. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale può rilanciare l'Italia in Europa. LUISS School of Government.

¹³³ Recchia, A. (2022). AFFARI EUROPEI, POLITICHE MIGRATORIE, GIUSTIZIA E AFFARI INTERNI. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

¹³⁴ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

In line with the Franco-German model, the Quirinal Treaty foresees, for example, a permanent Council of senior civil servants of the Ministries of the Economy, a body that could be useful in situations involving companies in which the two countries have conflicting interest. Such permanent institutions enable France and Italy to talk to each other in advance, thus defusing potential clashes and avoiding misunderstandings and protectionist entrenchments, such as in the aforementioned case of the Stx-Fincantieri agreement,¹³⁵ or again in 2006, when the takeover bid of the Italian electricity company Enel to take over the Franco-Belgian energy company Suez was blocked by the French government, which interpreted the deal as a threat and took the opportunity to launch a merger between Suez and the French gas giant Gdf.¹³⁶

The same virtuous circle can be triggered in the several other fields present in the Treaty, such as defense and foreign policy. In the following sections, we shall look at the mechanisms foreseen by the Quirinal Treaty to structure and enhance franco-Italian cooperation in various fields. Given the economic focus of this thesis, we will start by looking at cooperation mechanisms set up by the Treaty in the economic realm; only after, will we touch upon other spheres, such as security and defense, or more general fora of dialogue and exchange.

3.1.3 Overcoming the proximity paradox: Economy

Article 5 of the Quirinal Treaty enshrines France and Italy's willingness to foster the integration and competitiveness of the respective economies, but also to strengthen the strategic autonomy of the European Union by cooperating in the following fields:¹³⁷

- Economic sector, by facilitating mutual investments and defining joint projects for start-ups and SMEs.

¹³⁵ Darnis, J.-P. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale può rilanciare l'Italia in Europa. LUISS School of Government.

¹³⁶ Darnis, J.-P. (2020). Una visione strategica delle relazioni franco-italiane: per un trattato bilaterale? . *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*.

¹³⁷ Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

- Industrial sector, by strengthening bilateral industrial collaborations and promoting joint initiatives also for SMEs, in particular in sectors essential for European strategic autonomy such as energy and digital transitions, new technologies, health, defense and transport.
- Digital sector, by cooperating in the area of new technologies, cyber security, cloud, artificial intelligence data sharing, connectivity, 5G-6G, digitalization of payments and quantum, and by working towards European regulation and international governance of the digital sector and cyberspace.

Now, given these objectives, the Treaty and the Roadmap, as foreshadowed above and in line with the Franco-German model, contain specific provisions aimed at concretely fostering dialogue and cooperation between France and Italy. Amongst such provisions, we highlight the following:¹³⁸

1. The establishment of a Consultation Forum between Ministers responsible for the Economy, Finance and Economic Development¹; the Forum, which is to meet once a year, will enable a permanent dialogue between the two governments on macroeconomic policies, on the one hand, and, on the other, on industrial policies, on the integration of the economic fabric of the two countries, on the European internal market and on industrial cooperation between the two countries.
2. The exchange of officials between the two countries and the participation on a quarterly basis in the respective Councils of Ministers, a measure that has already been put into practice with the participation of French Foreign Affairs Minister Le Drian in the Council of Ministers on 24 February.¹³⁹
3. The commitment to develop cooperation between CDP (La Cassa Depositi e Prestiti), the Caisse des Dépôts, BPI France and the other financial institutions with a mandate to promote economic and entrepreneurial activities. This cooperation will stimulate cross-border cooperation of small and medium-sized enterprises and innovative start-ups and support their international development. Examples of excellences in cooperation cited in the Roadmap are the Young Leaders program and the Franco-Italian Accelerator. Launched on 4 May 2021 by CDP and BPI France, the Young Leaders program has the objective of creating a network of

¹³⁸ Trattato del Quirinale e Programma di Lavoro.

¹³⁹ Thibault, H. (2022). COOPERAZIONE ECONOMICA E SVILUPPO SOCIALE. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

high-potential professionals who can help create and develop transalpine relations. The program is aimed at young professionals between 30 and 40 years old working in various sectors, interested in international relations and who want to strengthen ties between France and Italy. As regards the Franco-Italian Accelerator, the 18-month program was launched in 2021 by Bpi France, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, Elite-Groupe Euronext and Team France Export, and selected 20 small or medium-sized companies in the French industrial sector and 20 other Italian SMEs operating in the automotive, luxury craftsmanship, chemical, metallurgy, pharmaceutical and agri-food processing sectors, enabling them to increase business opportunities in both countries.¹⁴⁰

3.1.4 Overcoming the proximity paradox: Security and Defense

Security and Defense occupy an important space in the Quirinal Treaty, and naturally so, if we consider that the ‘two sister nations’ have often experienced divergences on matter of defense. Under Article 2 of the Roadmap of the Treaty and with the aim of strengthening European strategic autonomy, France and Italy undertake to enhance their operational coordination as well as their cooperation on capabilities and the defense industry, through the following initiatives:

1. The establishment of Franco-Italian Defense and Security Council, where the respective Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs will meet regularly in order to strengthen the bilateral dialogue on all issues of common interest, taking into account the evolution of the international and regional security environment. These consultations will prioritize the fight against terrorism, maritime security (Mediterranean, Gulf of Guinea, Indo-Pacific), arms control, cooperation at the operational and capabilities level, energy challenges, hybrid threats and disinformation. French and Italian forces have long been engaged in several joint security operations, especially in Africa. Both countries, for instance, participate in the naval missions *Atalanta* in the Horn of Africa, *Irini* in the Mediterranean Sea, *Emasoh* along the Strait of Hormuz, and they both deploy land forces in the Sahel, particularly in Niger and Mali.
2. Promoting cooperation between armed forces (army, navy, air force) through the exchange of military personnel, as well as of joint activities in the fields of security, defense, education and training. Military collaboration in Africa will allow the two countries to exert more

¹⁴⁰ Ambassade de France en Italie. La relation France-Italie. Available at: <https://it.ambafrance.org/-La-relation-France-Italie->

effective action and contribute more to the stabilization of the Sahel, a crucial issue in the fight against immigration. The Italian military, then, can benefit greatly from cooperation with French units, which have been present in the region for much longer than the infantrymen of Rome, and which have accumulated over the years a wealth of experience in operations in those territories. Military cooperation could, of course, also concern the naval dimension, where the conduct of more joint operations, both in the Gulf of Guinea and in the Mediterranean Sea, would bring even greater benefits both to the management of the Libyan challenge and the countering of Turkish actions, and to the fight against irregular immigration.¹⁴¹

3. Promoting cooperation between France's and Italy's respective defense and security industries, fostering structural alliances. The field of military shipbuilding is cited in the Roadmap of the Treaty as of particular relevance. Having overcome the frictions generated by the French intervention in the Fincantieri-Chantiers de l'Atlantique dossier, the Franco-Italian collaboration in the field of military shipbuilding is born again with the foundation of Naviris. This joint venture, created by Fincantieri and Naval Group, is an example of excellence of Franco-Italian collaboration in the defense sector, and has recently drawn quite a lot of attention to itself thanks to the European Patrol Corvette, a project launched within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) whose objective is to design and develop a new class of warship.

3.1.5 Overcoming the proximity paradox: Franco-Italian Dialogues for Europe

Less sector-oriented is the initiative of the Franco-Italian Dialogues for Europe launched in 2018 by Luiss Guido Carli and Sciences Po universities in collaboration with the thinktank The European House – Ambrosetti, with the patronage of the Italian Embassy to the French Republic and the French Embassy to the Italian Republic. The Dialogues, representing an extremely powerful tool for bilateral dialogue, as well as a hotbed of ideas and concrete proposals for the improvement of Franco-Italian relations, are cited, in the Roadmap, as best practice. Not long ago, the fifth edition of the Dialogues took place in with a series of events and roundtables the last of which occurred on 7 July 2022 in

¹⁴¹ Mazziotti, M. (2022). AFFARI ESTERI, SICUREZZA E DIFESA. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

Milan. The idea that animated the creators of the Dialogues was that of involving, for both France and Italy, representatives from business, politics, institutions, as well as leading economists and exponents from culture and the media and gathering them all around a table on a regular basis to discuss, exchange views, find common grounds, and ultimately deepen and strengthen bilateral relations.¹⁴² In other words, what the Dialogues do is creating a space where the French and the Italians can discuss, in a confidential and open manner, on priority issues for business and the economy, and more generally for the future of Europe and the younger generations, defining strategies and proposals to further strengthen the relationship between France and Italy.¹⁴³

Within the framework of the Dialogues, various events are organized, from networking events between the business communities of the two countries, to the presentation of position papers and other analyses. Specifically, the project of the Dialogues foresees the following activities:¹⁴⁴

- An exclusive event once a year
- Exchange meetings behind closed doors during the year
- Digital and/or physical events on topics of interest aimed at improving bilateral relations
- An Advisory Board consisting of researchers, business leaders and advisors from both countries. Its task is to identify relevant and innovative topics to be addressed, with the aim of strengthening political, economic, strategic and research ties between Italy and France
- A Scientific Committee composed of an equal number of Italian and French personalities from the institutional, academic, business and professional worlds. Its task is to elaborate the content lines of the Franco-Italian Dialogues
- A program of scholarships and research grants and the creation of an Franco-Italian chair with alternating seats in the two universities with the aim of developing research on the themes of the Dialogues.

The previous editions of the Dialogues tackled a wide spectrum of themes, ranging from Europe under the Covid-19 test, food and sustainability after the global health crisis, young people, education and the future in the Covid-19 context, to NextGenerationEU and the Green Deal, climate change and circular cities, cultural and artistic exchanges, and tools to boost economies. The 2022 edition's theme was 'For a stronger, more democratic, united and sovereign Europe'. The last forum, this year,

¹⁴² Interview with IREFI President Fabrizio Maria Romano (July 2022).

¹⁴³ The European House – Ambrosetti. I Dialoghi italo-francesi per l'Europa. Disponibile at: <https://eventi.ambrosetti.eu/dialoghiitalofrancesi2022/>

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

dedicated to the Franco-Italian industrial perspectives, took place on 7 July 2022 at Edison's headquarter in Milan, a venue that, being Edison part of the French multinational electric utility company *Électricité de France S.A. (EDF)*, symbolizes the intersection of French and Italian cultures, and is itself the proof of how “the synergies between our countries can work out and give rise to experiments of excellence”.¹⁴⁵ Vice Rector of Luiss Guido Carli and former Justice Minister Paola Severino, who was also a member of the group of the wise that drafted the Quirinal Treaty, started off the works of the Milan Forum by remembering the mission of the Dialogues, namely that of improving the French and Italians' mutual knowledge. She emphasized the importance of dialogue and communication to fight the proximity paradox and the cognitive deficit that comes with it. “We suffer from the paradox of proximity.”, she warned, “Sometimes we cannot explain ourselves, we cannot understand each other. [...] Distances of understanding often result in economic, financial and cultural distances, which generate negative political and financial consequences for our countries”. If we keep these words in mind and consider that Paola Severino was one of the drafters of the Quirinal Treaty, we can appreciate more fully the reasons why the Dialogues are cited in the Roadmap and why dialogue, exchange and socialization occupy such an important place in the Treaty, as powerful tools to surmount Franco-Italian misunderstandings and strengthen bilateral relations.

To conclude on the Dialogues, it is interesting to recall some of the tangible proposals that emerged from the Dialogues, and that earned them the special mention in the Treaty:¹⁴⁶

- Initiating an exchange of cultural goods with high impact and symbolic value, for example by exhibiting 'La Gioconda' and the works of Monet in Italy and the works of Caravaggio or Titian in France
- Staging an Italian-Opera-based program at the Opéra national de Paris and a French-produced ballet at La Scala in Milan, collaborating in the creation and production of unique and distinctive cultural products that are recognizable and exportable worldwide
- Organizing a football match between the best teams of the two countries (PSG, Inter, Milan, Lyon, ...), the proceeds of which would be used to support joint initiatives in the field of innovation, research, and youth entrepreneurship

¹⁴⁵ 5th edition of the 'Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l'Europe'. Available at: <https://youtu.be/JMm8HZRhDRU>

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

3.1.5 Overcoming the proximity paradox: Concluding remarks

Building on the previous sections, we argue that the Quirinal Treaty can most definitely be seen as a unique opportunity to overcome the proximity paradox between France and Italy. As showed above, what the Treaty does is providing the two countries with unprecedentedly powerful tools of dialogue and exchange, which, establishing an institutional framework for bilateral relation as well as new mechanisms of socialization, can help France and Italy to bridge their cognitive deficit, eradicate biased mistrust, and deepen their relations to extent that geographical proximity, cultural affinity and economic complementarity allow. Dialogue, we also argued, is the at the very center of the scheme of the drafters and underpins each one of the sector-oriented mechanisms set up by the Treaty, from economy to security and defense.

In the following section, we will zoom out to go beyond the Franco-Italian bilateral relations and analyze the Quirinal Treaty from a European perspective. We will first address those arguments criticizing the Treaty for being anti-European: some scholars claim that there should be no space for bilateral treaties within the European Union, as they weaken the Union as a whole and undermine the European integration. We will then argue exactly the opposite: in a period clouded by a more inward-looking Germany, a more disengaged United States, a more assertive Russia, a rising China, economic uncertainty, Brexit and a pandemic,¹⁴⁷ the strengthening of the relationship between Paris and Rome goes well beyond merely bilateral dynamics, to impact positively on the process of European integration.

¹⁴⁷ RFI. (2021, November 27). France and Italy sign cooperation pact as Merkel exit sets challenge for Europe. *Radio France Internationale*.

3.2 Towards European (Dis)Integration?

reiterating that their community of destinies is founded on the fundamental principles and objectives enshrined [...] the Treaty on European Union

recalling their historic and constantly reaffirmed commitment to European unity

sharing the objective of a democratic, united and sovereign Europe to respond to the global challenges faced by the Parties; reaffirming in this regard their common commitment to deepen the European project in line with their shared responsibility as founding countries, respecting the values of the Union and the principle of solidarity

recognizing the importance of preserving the Single Market and the four fundamental freedoms as cornerstones and inexhaustible engines of the path of European integration

believing that their bilateral partnerships and cooperation contribute mutually to the deepening of the European project itself and can serve as a source of inspiration for new policies at Union level

sharing the desire to intensify the existing links between them and the intense bilateral cooperation that has developed throughout history, particularly in the political, economic, social, educational, scientific and cultural fields and in strategic sectors for the future of the European Union

These citations from the Preamble of the Quirinal Treaty make abundantly clear that the European Union is the actual center of gravity of the Treaty. When we start reading the Treaty, we immediately discover that what we thought to be a mere bilateral treaty is, in fact, very much Europe-oriented. France and Italy's bilateral relations are interpreted from a European perspective, and all the Articles seem to gravitate around the ultimate objective of deepening the European project, consolidating European integration, and build a “*democratic, united and sovereign Europe*”.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, the Treaty intends to transcend bilateral dynamics and place itself as a pillar for European integration.

¹⁴⁸ Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

The Treaty's strong European core should not surprise us if we consider that the Treaty was signed by two staunchly Europeanists such as Emmanuel Macron and Mario Draghi. However, more than one scholar has expressed critical views on the Treaty, questioning the bona fide European spirit of the Treaty or simply the feasibility of the EU-related intended projects. The following paragraphs will try to summarize the main arguments of such critics, by grouping them in three areas: multi-speed Europe, strategic autonomy and political uncertainty.

3.2.1 Multi-speed Europe

Firstly, due to its bilateral nature, the Treaty could be understood as a sign of weakness of the European Union.¹⁴⁹ This is a common argument that falls within the wider criticism towards the so-called multi-speed Europe, also known as Europe à la carte, that is to say a variable geometry Europe. This phenomenon consists in European integration happening at different layers and pace across the continent depending on the specific interests or political-economic situation of each country, as opposed to a more top-down homogenous integration process;¹⁵⁰ it is often portrayed in a bad light for because it perpetuates the asymmetries between member states and provokes the emergence of separated blocs with increasingly different interests and levels of socioeconomic development. More specifically the main arguments against multi-speed Europe are the following:

- Multi-speed Europe may eventually lead to the disintegration of the EU itself, as multiple smaller coalitions will grow more and more distant from each other due to different interests. It is no news that the countries of Southern Europe, for instance, have vastly different interests compared to the Benelux countries when it comes to economic relations. Following this argument, such coalitions will formulate ad-hoc legislation for their specific jurisdictions, leading them to drift apart to the point that they will exit the EU.¹⁵¹
- The consequence of a multi-speed Europe would be a confusing bundle of overlapping jurisdictions, creating confusion over who decides over what when it comes to EU-politics.¹⁵²

The EU system of governance is already complex enough because of the high degree of

¹⁴⁹ Dessì, A., Nelli Feroci, F. (2021). Il governo Draghi e il nuovo protagonismo internazionale dell'Italia. Rapporto sulla politica estera italiana. *IAI*.

¹⁵⁰ Daniele, L. (2020). *Diritto Dell'Unione Europea*. Giuffrè.

¹⁵¹ Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union. (2014). Pros and Con Arguments for a Multi-Speed Europe. *AALEP*.

¹⁵² Ibid

institutionalization of the EU. If this is further complicated with different institutions and decision-making procedures for different groups of states, the result will likely be an intricate system which further confuses and alienates EU-citizens.

- Lastly, multi-speed Europe is often described as working against the much-needed formulation of a common European foreign policy. In this regard, bilateral treaties between member states can be interpreted as a way to bridge this gap, and this in turn, generates a vicious cycle, as variable geometry has been an incentive to ignore the thorny issue of a common European foreign policy. The result: shrinking political cohesion.

With this in mind, the bilateral treaty between France and Italy could be criticized as anti-European, for perpetuating the phenomenon of multi-speed Europe and harming European integration. Interestingly, the 2022 IPSOS survey showed both French and Italian citizens themselves have mixed feelings about how the Treaty will affect European integration (Figure 19). 17% of the Italians and 14% of the French think that a bilateral treaty between France and Italy represent exclusively a risk for European integration, while a staggering 40% (approx.) of both Italians and French consider the Treaty positively but with some risks for European integration.

Figure 19: Opinion on European integration as a result of the Quirinal Treaty



3.2.2 Strategic Autonomy

Secondly, many scholars have expressed skepticism regarding a possible Franco-Italian convergence on the topic of European strategic autonomy. The concept is strongly present in the Treaty: it features in four articles out of twelve (1, 3, 5, 7), and is defined as one of the main objectives of the Treaty: “The Parties act together for a democratic, united and sovereign Europe and for the development of European strategic autonomy.”¹⁵³ Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out that, despite European strategic autonomy being a common objective, France and Italy hold divergent views on what this concept actually means, and how, from a practical point of view, it would decline in terms of geopolitical strategy. Given growing international instability, Paris advocates the EU's transformation from an economic and regulatory power into a 'strategic power', meaning that it should be equally committed to the security dimension.¹⁵⁴ Such creed translated not only in Paris' enhanced support for the projects of the Common Security and Defense Policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy, but, above all, it translated in Macron's vigorous efforts to take the concept of 'European strategic autonomy' out of a purely economic perimeter to reorient it towards defense matters. European strategic autonomy, therefore, becomes to the eyes of Marcon a synonym for 'European sovereignty',¹⁵⁵ as hinted by this famous line from 2020 where he calls for “Europe to find the ways and means to decide for itself to rely on itself, not to depend on others, in all areas, technological [...] but also health and geopolitical, and to be able to collaborate with whomever it wants.”¹⁵⁶

Although Europeanism has always been at the center of its foreign policy, Italy has often interpreted it differently from the French version, emphasizing its multilateral qualities more than anything else. Hence, the concept of European strategic autonomy is declined by Rome into a version that is compatible with transatlantic relations. While the French position represents a quest for differentiation from the United States, Italy's, on the other hand, reflects the desire of a European greater contribution to international security, also in compliance with the American request for burden

¹⁵³ Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

¹⁵⁴ The Economist. (2019, November 7). Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead.

¹⁵⁵ G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano. (2022). ITALIA E FRANCIA IN UN CONTESTO INTERNAZIONALE COMPETITIVO. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

¹⁵⁶ Gressani, G., Malik, M., & Bloj, R. (2020, November 16). La dottrina Macron: una conversazione con il Presidente francese. *Il Grand Continent*.

sharing in NATO.¹⁵⁷ French governments, conversely, on several occasions since De Gaulle's presidency, have manifested their desire to show themselves autonomous vis-à-vis NATO, where Europe is politically and strategically subjected to the US.¹⁵⁸ "What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO," President Macron declared in an interview with *The Economist*, "Europe stands on the edge of a precipice and needs to start thinking of itself strategically as a geopolitical power; otherwise we will no longer be in control of our destiny."¹⁵⁹ Especially in the light of Americans' strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific and subsequent doubts on the credibility of their commitment to Article 5, NATO is often perceived as a no-longer-acceptable constraint on the recovery of 'European sovereignty'.¹⁶⁰ For Italy, conversely, Atlanticism and the relationship with the United States has historically represented a solid pillar of its foreign policy,¹⁶¹ as also confirmed by Prime Minister Mario Draghi in his inaugural speech at the Senate.¹⁶²

3.2.3 Political uncertainty on the horizon

Lastly, some scholars observe that a consideration on the current political circumstances in both France and Italy will shed, at least, some doubts over the future success of the Quirinal Treaty, and the accomplishment of all the intentions and objectives laid down in the text. Especially when it comes to the European Union, the doubts grow stronger. It is important to keep in mind that the reason why the final steps of the negotiations for Quirinal Treaty had such a smooth and swift pace was the the 'catalytic influence of Mr Draghi'.¹⁶³ Macron found in the staunchly pro-European, pro-American, and pro-NATO Italian prime minister the perfect partner to finalize the Quirinal Treaty.

¹⁵⁷ G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano. (2022). ITALIA E FRANCIA IN UN CONTESTO INTERNAZIONALE COMPETITIVO.

¹⁵⁸ Vagnini, A. (2022). ITALIA E FRANCIA NELLA NATO. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

¹⁵⁹ *The Economist*. (2019, November 7). Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead.

¹⁶⁰ G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano. (2022). ITALIA E FRANCIA IN UN CONTESTO INTERNAZIONALE COMPETITIVO.

¹⁶¹ Santoro, C.M. (1991). *La politica estera di una media potenza. L'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi*. Bologna: il Mulino.

¹⁶² Draghi, M. (2021). Dichiarazioni programmatiche. Available at <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/le-comunicazioni-del-presidente-draghi-al-senato/16225>

¹⁶³ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

The cordial relationship between Macron and Draghi, whose views align on European integration and strategic autonomy, undoubtedly accelerated the diplomatic process led to the treaty's signature.¹⁶⁴ "From now on, we are in full honeymoon between Paris and Rome," said historian Marc Lazar, professor at Sciences Po,¹⁶⁵ referring to the Franco-Italian rapprochement with the advent of Draghi. Nonetheless, threats are lurking around the corner: in the aftermath of France's Legislative elections in June 2022 -where Macron's Ensemble (Together) coalition lost its parliamentary majority-¹⁶⁶ and taking into account Draghi's imminent departure following the government crisis and the upcoming elections in September, the destiny of the Franco-Italian relations is far from being determined; it is rather clouded with uncertainty and threats.

As far as the European Union is concerned, in the absence of a strong convergence at the presidential level, the future scenario does not look rosy. Just to give an idea, we will now look at EU sentiment across the political party spectrum as well as the population in both France and Italy. For France the positions of the following parties will be considered: Les Verts/Europe Écologie Les Verts (VERTS/EELV); Rassemblement pour la République/Union pour un Mouvement Populaire/Les Républicains (RPR/UMP/LR); La République En Marche (LREM); Union pour la Démocratie Française/MoDem Mouvement Démocrate (UDF/MoDem); Parti Communiste Français (PCF); Parti Socialiste, PS; Front National/Rassemblement national (FN/RN). Figure 20 shows, in the upper panel, the position of the parties towards European integration, while, in the lower panel, the parties' percentage of votes obtained in the 2017 legislative elections. Attitudes towards European integration are quantified on a scale from 1 (strongly against) to 7 (strongly in favor).¹⁶⁷ As we can see in figure 20, the EU-sentiment across the whole French political spectrum has remained rather stable in the last decades.

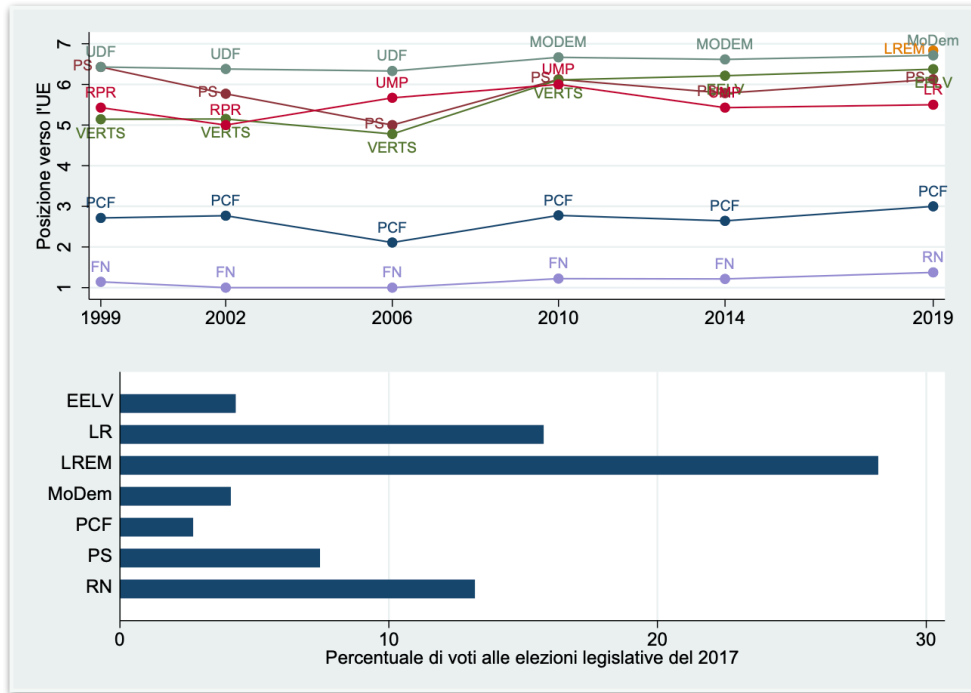
¹⁶⁴ Hall, B. (2021, March 2). Mario Draghi and Emmanuel Macron — the EU's new power couple? *Financial Times*.

¹⁶⁵ Amiel, S. (2021, November 26). Quirinale treaty: Will a new French-Italian pact shift the balance of power in Europe? *EuroNews*.

¹⁶⁶ Wheeldon, T. (2022, June 23). After losing the majority, can Macron strike a deal with opposition parties? *France24*.

¹⁶⁷ Regalia, M. (2022). L'OPINIONE PUBBLICA E I PARTITI ITALIANI E FRANCESI DAVANTI ALL'INTEGRAZIONE EUROPEA. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

Figure 20: Attitude towards European integration and percentage of votes in 2017 legislative elections, France

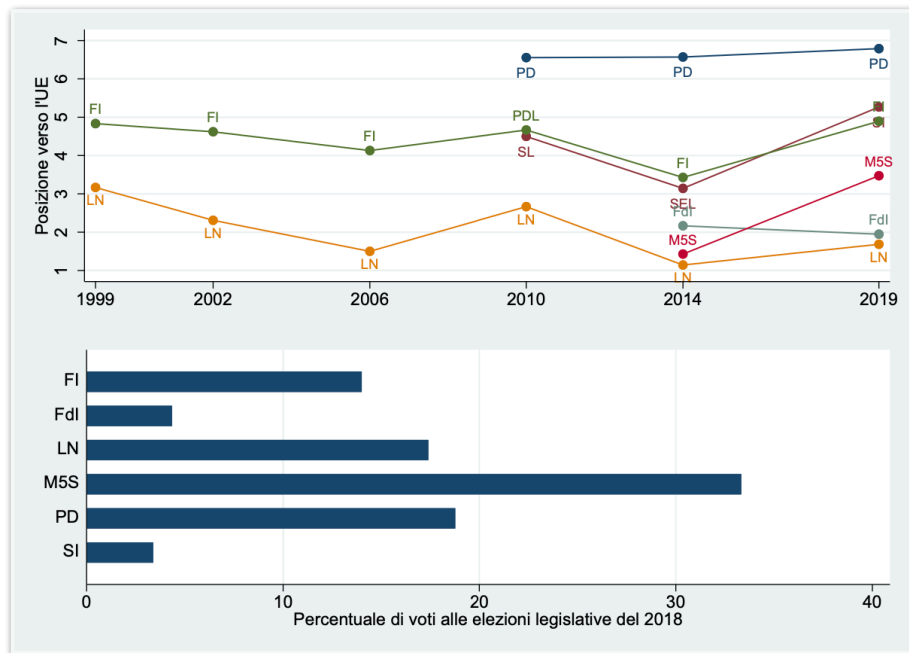


Source: Data from Chapel Hill Expert Survey

For Italy, we will instead look at the positions of Forza Italia/Popolo della Libertà (FI/PDL); Fratelli d'Italia (FdI); Lega Nord (LN); MoVimento Cinque Stelle (M5S); Partito Democratico (PD); Sinistra e Libertà/Sinistra Ecologia Libertà/Sinistra Italiana (SL/SEL/SI) (Figure 21). Unlike the French case, the positions of Italian parties towards European integration have been rather unstable over time. In general, the 2014 survey saw a general decline in support for the integration process following the economic and migratory crises of those years; in 2019, however, the indicators got back to the pre-crisis level.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Regalia, M. (2022). L'OPINIONE PUBBLICA E I PARTITI ITALIANI E FRANCESI DAVANTI ALL'INTEGRAZIONE EUROPEA. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

Figure 21: Attitude towards European integration and percentage of votes in the last legislative elections, Italy

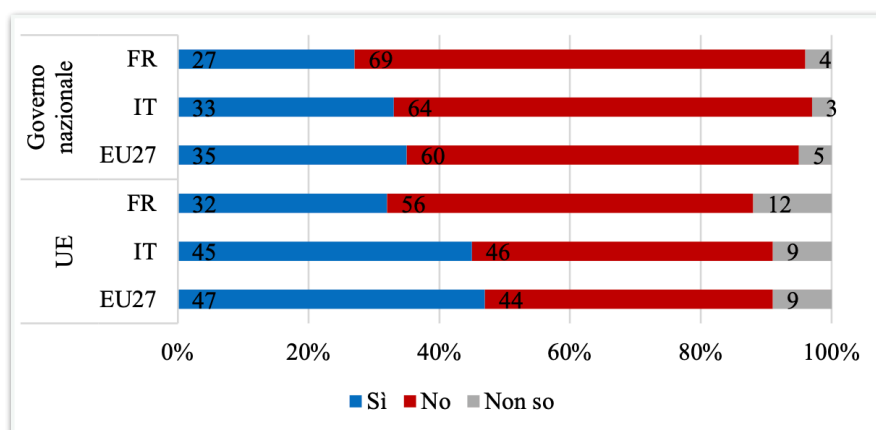


Source: Data from Chapel Hill Expert Survey

Now, what is relevant for us to note that in both France and Italy the situation appears extremely polarized, with the two main parties in both countries (Macron's La République En Marche and Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National for France; Partito Democratico and Fratelli d'Italia for Italy) taking diametrically opposed positions on European integration.¹⁶⁹ The most recent *Standard Eurobarometer survey* reveals that public opinion in France and Italy is equally polarized (Figure 22), with staggering 56% of the French and 46% of the Italians mistrusting the European institutions.

¹⁶⁹ Regalia, M. (2022). L'OPINIONE PUBBLICA E I PARTITI ITALIANI E FRANCESI DAVANTI ALL'INTEGRAZIONE EUROPEA. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

Figure 22: Trust towards the national government and the European Union, Italy-France-EU27



Source: Data from Standard Eurobarometer 96- Winter 2021-2022

All this considered, and adding on top of it that the Anti-European center-right coalition in Italy holds considerable advantage over the center-left coalition (45.8% to 33%)¹⁷⁰ on the eve of the 25 September elections, the future of the Europe-centered Quirinal Treaty is not looking rosy, to say the least: a new Italian executive that is not in line with the current one may well jeopardize the European project as well as resurface the too well known divergences.

¹⁷⁰ IPSOS. (2022, September 1). Sondaggi politici oggi.

3.3 For a democratic, united and sovereign Europe

Featuring 111 times in the Quirinal Treaty and 146 in the Roadmap, Europe is the undisputed protagonist of France and Italy's Treaty for Enhanced Bilateral Cooperation.

The Parties act together for a democratic, united and sovereign Europe and for the development of European strategic autonomy. They undertake to strengthen the institutions and to defend the founding values of the European project and the rule of law. They promote a transition of the European Union towards a resilient, inclusive and sustainable development model, within the framework of an open and dynamic economy, fully exploiting the potential of a resilient single market.

Clause 1 of Article 3 of the Treaty -an article entirely devoted to the European affairs- leaves no doubt on the centrality of the European project in the Quirinal Treaty or France and Italy's commitment to European integration. The arguments, listed in the previous section, moved by many observers on the alleged anti-European spirit of the Treaty or its inherent myopia for what concerns European policies, rest on weak grounds. The Quirinal Treaty, we will argue, is animated by a strong European spirit and many of its undertakings aim to implement the values and interests of the EU. The following paragraphs will attempt to explain why the Quirinal Treaty means a stronger Union, by looking at its impact on European integration, strategic autonomy and other quintessentially European issues such as the fiscal rules and migration policy.

3.3.1 Towards more integration: a bridge between the North and the South

The bilateral nature of the Quirinal Treaty, as we saw, could be interpreted as a sign of weakness of the European Union: an agreement between two countries that perpetuates the phenomenon of multi-speed Europe and furthers the exacerbation of the asymmetries between member states. In reality, deepening the bilateral ties between France and Italy will strengthen the EU and promote European integration. The Quirinal Treaty establishes a number of mechanisms meant to facilitate consultation between France and Italy on the definition of a common position within the EU and coordination on how to leverage that position in EU negotiations.¹⁷¹ While some scholars have denounced France and

¹⁷¹ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. IAI Commentaries (21|63).

Italy's attempt to shift European policymaking to an intergovernmental level, the aim, here, is instead to consolidate the positions of the two countries in view of the major EU negotiations so as to express as common a position as possible, thereby facilitating the communitarization of the various policies.¹⁷² We already have the proof that bilateral cooperation can work toward, not against, European integration: it suffices to look at the Franco-German alliance, which, consolidated and regulated by the aforementioned Elysée Treaty (renewed in 2019 with the Aachen Treaty between Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel), has affirmed itself over time as the keystone of European integration".¹⁷³ Likewise, France and Italy's enhanced coordination within the EU has the potential to play a similar role, especially because, if well-coordinated, France and Italy could represent a bridge between Northern and Southern Europe, by advocating the concerns, proposals and expectations of the EU southern member states, such as Spain and Greece. These countries often feel that their voice is not heard by EU institutions, and that they are often marginalized by the so-called frugal member states, the financially healthier countries in the north: Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Germany itself, the political engine of the EU, seems to pivot more eastwards than southwards.¹⁷⁴ In a European context marked by instability after Brexit and the political transition in Germany after the end of Angela Merkel's 16-year-long chancellorship, the new Franco-Italian power axis may alter the leadership dynamic within the EU, by filling the gap created by Merkel's departure and thus shifting the locus of influence in the EU southward and toward greater European integration.¹⁷⁵ Program Coordinator at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Paris, Mathilde Ciulla, claims that one of the positive outcomes of the Quirinal Treaty will be that the southern countries will be more listened to, especially "on economic concerns or on migration, [where] the French can help and bring that up to the frugal states".¹⁷⁶

In this regard, it is important to remember that the launch of NextGenerationEU, the European instrument designed to repair the disastrous socio-economic damages caused by COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to create a stronger, greener, digital and resilient post pandemic Europe, was not a Franco-German initiative, as it is often believed, but it was the fruit of the Franco-Italian

¹⁷² Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

¹⁷³ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

¹⁷⁴ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

¹⁷⁵ Krauss, M. (2021, November 24). The New Franco-Italian Alliance in Europe. *Project Syndicate*.

¹⁷⁶ Amiel, S. (2021, November 26). Quirinale treaty: Will a new French-Italian pact shift the balance of power in Europe? *Euronews*.

cooperation,¹⁷⁷ as explained by the French and Italian Ministers for European Affairs, Clément Beaune and Vincenzo Amendola: "Exactly one year ago, when Europe faced the first epidemic wave of Covid-19 with unprecedented socio-economic consequences, we proposed, on a Franco-Italian initiative, together with seven other European States to work on a common debt instrument."¹⁷⁸ German involvement came at a later stage, only after France and Italy reached a consensus and Paris reached out to Berlin to strike the deal within the EU; Having Berlin on board was crucial, given its close ties with the frugal countries that initially opposed the initiative, making the negotiations for the unprecedentedly large measure package worth EUR 800 billion long and complicated.¹⁷⁹ The Franco-Italian success of the NextGenerationEU is the clearest example of how the new Paris-Rome axis could yield more integration within the EU, by bridging the gap between the EU southern member states and the Northern frugal countries, and therefore rebalancing in Europe's power relations.

What the experience of the NextGenerationEU also teaches us is that Germany still plays a fundamental role in European equation. Mathilde Ciulla was careful to stress that the Quirinal Treaty was not against Berlin, which remains an important ally to both France and Italy; the new Franco-Italian axis is not to replace the Franco-German one. French President Macron also made this clear when, on the day of the signature of the Quirinal Treaty, he declared "Ms Merkel is still in office today", stressing that Paris is not looking for "alternative routes" to the French-German axis after Merkel's departure,¹⁸⁰ and has no intention to weaken its deep long-standing alliance with Berlin. For its part, Italy has all the reasons to auspicate a strengthening of its relationship with Germany, as this will further improve the European balance. To say it in the words of the Italian diplomat Giampiero Massolo, a bilateral treaty between Italy and Germany "would be beneficial for the whole EU, as German rigorist intransigence could be balanced by the Franco-Italian relationship (bearer of the southern states' demands), while France's geopolitical decisiveness would be compensated by Rome and Berlin's caution."¹⁸¹ It is important to note that the new political context Germany might bring

¹⁷⁷ Hall, B. (2021). Mario Draghi and Emmanuel Macron – the EU's new power couple? *Financial Times*.

¹⁷⁸ Beaune, C & Amendola, (25 March 2021). L'Italie et la France : ensemble pour une Europe plus puissante. *La Croix*.

¹⁷⁹ Ciulla, M. (2021, October 29). Enter the Dracron: Franco-Italian relations and European cohesion. *European Council on Foreign Relations*.

¹⁸⁰ Amiel, S. (2021, November 26). Quirinale treaty: Will a new French-Italian pact shift the balance of power in Europe? *EuroNews*.

¹⁸¹ Massolo, G. (2021). Italia-Francia: un messaggio per Bruxelles. *ISPI*.

Berlin, Paris and Rome closer than ever before: the new German coalition government, comprising the Social Democrats, the Greens, and the Free Democrats, could be more aligned with Franco-Italian views on European issues such as defense and fiscal and monetary union which, during Merkel's chancellorship, have always generated tension and disagreement. We could, thus, witness a considerable acceleration of European integration with "Frau Nein" being substituted by a possibly more accommodating "Herr Maybe", to say it in the words of Professor Krauss.¹⁸²

In light of this, France and Italy's bilateral treaty should not be seen as an attempt to intergovernmentalize the EU decision-making,¹⁸³ nor as extra layer of the EU complex policymaking process, nor as a threat to the Union's cohesion; all the opposite: first of all, bilateral intergovernmental coordination simply aims to strengthen France and Italy's position ahead of important negotiations within the EU, in order harmonize their position in the name of stronger integration; secondly a franco-Italian axis will help shift the political center of gravity southward, creating a bridge between the often divided Northern and Southern member states; lastly, if Managing Director of the Robert Schuman Foundation, Pascale Joannin, is right in saying that "the scope of the European geopolitical project will depend on the solidity of its pillars, of which the Franco-Italian axis is an absolute bearer",¹⁸⁴ an enhanced bilateral relationship between France and Italy will most definitely contribute to the European integration, by consolidating that "fabric of trust" between two member states,¹⁸⁵ which Alessandro Aresu, adviser to Mario Draghi, considers so fundamental for the European project. Without it, he claims, "resistance to integration will prevail and European markets will have no autonomous industrial government, they will be only one of the strategic arenas of the confrontation between the US and China."¹⁸⁶

3.3.2 Convergence on strategic autonomy

Besides European integration, the Quirinal Treaty sets France and Italy as standard-bearers for other quintessentially European objectives, from strategic autonomy to a reform of the Union's decision-

¹⁸² Krauss, M. (2021, November 24). The New Franco-Italian Alliance in Europe. *Project Syndicate*.

¹⁸³ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy-France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

¹⁸⁴ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

¹⁸⁵ Aresu, A. (12 January 2021). Pour une nouvelle intégration économique franco-italienne. *Le Grand Continent*.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

making, to migration-oriented foreign policy. France and Italy's "objectives", Prime Minister Mario Draghi declared during the post-treaty-signature press conference, "are those of the EU: the fight against climate change, the ecological transition done judiciously and quickly, the digital transition, the quest for European sovereignty".¹⁸⁷ Many scholars, however, have expressed skepticism on Franco-Italian convergences on such topics, especially strategic autonomy (see section 3.2.2). In the following paragraphs, we will show that Paris and Rome have, in fact, reached consensus on many European fronts, even on traditionally controversial issues, such as the interpretation of the concept of strategic autonomy.

Starting with strategic autonomy, Article 3 of the Quirinal Treaty highlights France and Italy's commitment to "the development of European strategic autonomy". This has been acknowledged as an official objective of the European Union since 2016, that is say since the publication of the *EU Global Strategy*.¹⁸⁸ Well, it cannot be denied that France and Italy have held traditionally contrasting views on the concept of European strategic autonomy, with the former aiming at reducing Europe's reliance on US security guarantees,¹⁸⁹ and the latter desiring greater European contribution to international security but always within transatlantic framework.¹⁹⁰ This, however, has changed, and the recent publication of the *EU Strategic Compass* proves it, by defining Europe's strategic autonomy as complementary to NATO and its other allies:¹⁹¹

This Strategic Compass will enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and its ability to work with partners to safeguard its values and interests. A stronger and more capable EU in security and defense will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defense for its members. These two go hand in hand.

¹⁸⁷ RaiNews. (2021, November 26). Trattato tra Italia e Francia: Draghi e Macron siglano l'intesa.

¹⁸⁸ European External Action Service. (Jun3 2016). EU Global strategy.

¹⁸⁹ Robinson, D. (8 November 2021). The EU Will Try to Work Out What 'Strategic Autonomy' Means. *The Economist*.

¹⁹⁰ Cristiani, D. (2 September 2021). Italy Positions Itself as the Driver of 'Transatlantically Sustainable' European Strategic Autonomy. *GMF Insights*.

¹⁹¹ European External Action Service. (2022). A Strategic compass for Security and Defense.

France's rapprochement to NATO, however, precedes the *Strategic Compass* and began with Chirac's ambition to 'Europeanise' the Alliance's decision-making structures, attributing to Paris the role of leadership. France's decision of rapprochement, which was formally completed in 2009 with Sarkozy, was clearly driven by the awareness of a changing international scenario that saw the US pivot towards the Indo Pacific and the opening of a power vacuum in Europe, also following Brexit.¹⁹² Today, after the end of Merkel's 16-year-long chancellorship, the context is even more favorable for France to take play a decisive role in Europe. Paris is still, as it has always been, a champion of the EU's greater autonomy in the geo-economic, industrial, space, digital and foreign and security sectors, fundamental to reduce vulnerability to external pressure¹⁹³, but the Strategic Compass and Italy's strong Atlanticism should help keep the French quest for EU strategic autonomy within the Transatlantic framework.¹⁹⁴ This position is also emphasized in the preamble of the Treaty, where Italy and France declare that that the EU and NATO are to act together as mutually reinforcing strategic partners:¹⁹⁵

reaffirming their will to strengthen European defence and the deterrence and defence posture of the Atlantic Alliance, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation being destined to act as mutually reinforcing strategic partners

Therefore, we can conclude that if the idea of a European strategic autonomy was too vague in the past, recent years have witnessed growing convergence at the EU institutional level towards a more precise definition of this concept,¹⁹⁶ which is embraced by both France and Italy and embedded in the very fabric of their relationship as construed in the Quirinal Treaty. President Macron himself, who in a 2019 interview with *The Economist* warned Europe that NATO was becoming brain dead,¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Vagnini, A. (2022). ITALIA E FRANCIA NELLA NATO. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

¹⁹³ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. IAI Commentaries (21|63).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Trattato tra La Repubblica Italiana e la Repubblica Francese per una Cooperazione Bilaterale Rafforzata. (2021, November 26). Rome, Italy.

¹⁹⁶ Recchia, A. (2022). AFFARI EUROPEI, POLITICHE MIGRATORIE, GIUSTIZIA E AFFARI INTERNI. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

¹⁹⁷ *The Economist*. (2019, November 7). Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead.

in the press conference that followed the signature of the Quirinal Treaty declared instead that France and Italy committed to build a "stronger common European defense contributing to NATO" and to enhance "cooperation in the fight against illegal migration and traffickers, to protect Europe's external borders".¹⁹⁸ Arguing for EU's ability to act independently as a military force while still maintaining its full commitment to NATO, Macron is perfectly in tune with Prime Minister Draghi, who in the same press conference declared: "Seeking European sovereignty means wanting to design our future as we Europeans want it, not having it designed by others. To be sovereign, Europe must be able to protect itself and defend its borders: a true European defense must be created. This Treaty helps this creation of a common defense that is complementary to NATO, not a substitute for it: a stronger Europe makes a stronger NATO. This is one of the first and most fundamental steps towards which this treaty is directed."¹⁹⁹ It is also worth mentioning that this new take on EU strategic autonomy, adopted by Macron and Draghi, has met the approval of Biden, who told Draghi in their October meeting that a strong European Union equipped with a unified military defense was in the best interests of the US, especially in a moment when the US is increasingly shifting its focus eastwards.²⁰⁰

3.3.3 "Our objectives are those of the EU"

"Our objectives are those of the EU", the words of Prime Minister Mario Draghi after signing the Quirinal Treaty. This goes beyond European integration and strategic autonomy to embrace other more specific areas that are included in the Treaty and that represent equally important objectives for the EU. Amongst the most relevant topics, we shall mention the reform of the EU's fiscal rules, the EU migration governance system, and the EU foreign policy in the African Continent. We will also show how these Franco-Italian objectives reflect the very ones laid out in EU official strategic documents such as the 2016 EU Global Strategy and the 2022 Strategic Compass.

Firstly, point 5.1 of the Treaty Roadmap enshrines France and Italy's will to reform the EU's fiscal rules, something that Mario Draghi defined "inevitable".²⁰¹ The Italian Prime Minister explained in a press conference that it has become imperative to revise the EU fiscal rules which have dominated Eurozone governance since the Maastricht Treaty: the global financial crisis had already

¹⁹⁸ RaiNews. (2021, November 26). Trattato tra Italia e Francia: Draghi e Macron siglano l'intesa.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Krauss, M. (2021, November 24). The New Franco-Italian Alliance in Europe. *Project Syndicate*.

²⁰¹ Financial Times. (26 November 2021). Draghi urges EU to confront 'inevitable' reform of fiscal rules.

revealed their weaknesses, and the astronomical economic and social cost of the pandemic and EU's future challenges (e.g., climate change, semiconductors, new technologies etc.) have made a reform of EU fiscal rules urgent and necessary.²⁰² Echoing Draghi, Macron called for a revision of the Eurozone governance system in favor of anti-cyclical fiscal measures.²⁰³ Under point 5.1 of the Treaty Roadmap, France and Italy commit to “promote the introduction of a permanent macroeconomic stabilization capacity of the eurozone”; for example allowing the European Commission to borrow money on the markets, one of the temporary provisions of the Next Generation EU (NGEU) fund, on a permanent basis.²⁰⁴

Secondly, significant space is devoted, in the Quirinal Treaty, to the controversial issue of migration, which especially over the last decade has brought about quite a lot of tension between the member states. The urgency and relevance of the migration question for the EU was already highlighted in the 2016 *EU Global Strategy*:

Together with countries of origin and transit, we will develop common and tailor-made approaches to migration featuring development, diplomacy, mobility, legal migration, border management, readmission and return. We will work with our international partners to ensure shared global responsibilities and solidarity

Building on the EU needs and ambitions, France and Italy undertake, under point 4.1 of the treaty Roadmap, to collaborate on creating an EU migration governance system that is capable of²⁰⁵ 1) achieving more effective control of external borders, a decrease in secondary movements and an effective solidarity mechanism in the management of migration flows; 2) reforming the Common European Asylum System and the implementation of a common European return policy; 3) promoting the adoption of a common European list of safe countries of origin for asylum seekers. On a more bilateral basis, Article 4.2 of the Quirinal Treaty foresees the establishment of an enhanced

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

²⁰⁴ Ghiglione, D. & White, S. (26 November 2021). Draghi Urges EU to Confront ‘Inevitable’ Reform of Fiscal Rules. *Financial Times*.

²⁰⁵ Programma di Lavoro Italo-Francese. (2021, November 26). Trattato del Quirinale

consultation mechanism whose tasks, laid out in point 4.1b of the Roadmap,²⁰⁶ will be, on the one hand, to strengthen coordination and trust between the respective police services at land borders and continue the exchange of information through the respective liaison officers, and on the other hand, to consolidate the joint brigade set up between the respective border police forces, with a view to the development of cross-border cooperation and the smooth operation of the common area of freedom of movement.

Thirdly, and partly related to the issue of migration, is the area of foreign policy in the African Continent. Over the last decade, Africa has acquired growing relevance for the EU, and this is reflected in important official European documents such as the recent *Strategic Compass*, where Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, indicated as one of the main strategic objectives for the EU:

Enhancing the security of our African partners remains one of the key priorities for us. We will engage with the full range of EU security and defense tools, in particular military and civilian missions and operations, peace and stabilization programs, assistance measures and financial support. This is even more important as we are witnessing a growing presence of our strategic competitors, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa. We will seek to establish security and defense dialogues and cooperation with African partners on these issues.

Sahel, as this quotation from the *Strategic Compass* shows, represents an area of special interest for the EU. As a Region plagued by increased transnational terrorist and smuggling activities in and across borders but also with important flows of irregular migration directed toward European shores,²⁰⁷ Sahel has drawn, over the last decade, increasing attention from the EU institutions. Notably, in April 2015, the EU launched the Sahel Regional Action Plan was adopted, setting four key priorities in the Sahelian region: 1) preventing and countering radicalization; 2) creating appropriate conditions for youth; 3) migration and mobility; 4) border management, tackling illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime.²⁰⁸ Now, given Rome's exposure to African irregular migration and France's security and economic concerns due to its historical ties with the Region, both

²⁰⁶ Programma di Lavoro Italo-Francese. (2021, November 26). Trattato del Quirinale.

²⁰⁷ D'Amato, S. (2021). Patchwork of Counterterrorism: Analyzing European Types of Cooperation in Sahel. *International Studies Review*, 23, 1518–1540.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

France and Italy have an interest in strengthening their presence in Sahel through a common strategy, especially in a moment when non-European competitors have reduced European influence in West Africa, with China becoming a major trading partner in the Region and Russia compelling Paris to withdraw its troops from Mali.²⁰⁹ In light of this, France and Italy espoused the *Strategic Compass*' objective to enhance European engagement in the region, by declaring in the Quirinal Treaty that:

The Parties shall take joint initiatives to promote democracy, sustainable development, stability and security on the African continent. Together, they undertake to strengthen the relations of the European Union and its Member States with this continent, with particular focus on North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa

Interestingly, France and Italy are already engaged in many types of cooperation in the Region. For instance, in the context of the project “Support for Justice, Security and Border Management”, sponsored by The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, Paris and Rome are exchanging practices and protocols in the fields of internal security and justice.²¹⁰ Here, the Italian military can benefit greatly from cooperation with French units, which have been present in the region for much longer than the infantrymen of Rome, and which have accumulated over the years a wealth of experience in operations in those territories.²¹¹

Fourthly, on Franco-Italian economic cooperation framed in the European context, it is important to point out that even economic cooperation, as it structured in the Quirinal Treaty, is oriented towards strengthening the Union as a whole and ultimately towards achieving European strategic autonomy. In particular, under clause 2 of article 5 of the Treaty, France and Italy commit to coordinate the investments in strategic sectors for European autonomy, such as cloud infrastructure, electric batteries, pharmaceuticals and healthcare materials, energy, and semi-conductors, as well as “to strengthen bilateral industrial collaborations and to promote joint initiatives”. The latter is particularly important because, as the French Ambassador in Rome Christian Masset argues, “as

²⁰⁹ Ventura, R. (2022). L'AFRICA OCCIDENTALE. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

²¹⁰ D'Amato, S. (2021). Patchwork of Counterterrorism: Analyzing European Types of Cooperation in Sahel. *International Studies Review*, 23, 1518–1540.

²¹¹ Mazziotti, M. (2022). AFFARI ESTERI, SICUREZZA E DIFESA. In G. Natalizia, L. Termine, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*.

European integration is accelerating, companies can also play a role in this process”.²¹² In other words, the transformation of national champions into EU champions is of enormous importance for reaching strategic autonomy. This, amongst others, was one of the takeaways of the fifth edition of the franco-Italian Dialogues for Europe, where large Franco-Italian companies and corporations participated in the spirit that European joint ventures are the right way to achieve European tech autonomy. Present at the forum and standard-bearers of such European fervor were representatives of important Franco-Italian joint ventures, such as Leonardo/Thales in the space sector, STMicroelectronics in semiconductors, and Generali in insurance.²¹³

Finally, as regards the concerns on political uncertainty threatening the future implementation of the Treaty, i.e. Italy’s looming general elections and the Draghi’s departure, well, what the Quirinal Treaty has been created for is precisely to preserve the Franco-Italian relations regardless of any political circumstances through the establishment of mechanisms of dialogue, exchanges, and socialization, which are capable of giving continuity to bilateral relations beyond political fluctuations. Obviously, we cannot predict the destiny of France and Italy’s relationship, but if we look at the trajectory of the Franco-German partnership following the post-war Elysée Treaty -which inspired the scheme adopted in the Quirinal Treaty- one can be optimistic.

3.3.4 Concluding remarks

We could further examine the Quirinal Treaty and list the remaining areas where France and Italy’s efforts and ambitions are aligned with the interests of the EU, however for the sake of brevity, we will go no further, in the belief that the previous paragraphs have provided sufficient arguments to prove that, despite existing reservations, the articles of the Quirinal Treaty do revolve around the values and interests of the EU to the extent that we can argue, together with Italian European Commissioner for the Economy Paolo Gentiloni, that the Treaty will “strengthen the entire European Union in a phase of historic transition.”

²¹² Zoppo, A. (2022, July 2). Campioni d’Europa. *Milano Finanza*.

²¹³ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The Quirinal Treaty comes at a time when the relations between France and Italy have touched historic lows. While acknowledging Paris and Rome's strong economic ties and long-standing partnership, chapter one also stressed the volatile nature that has characterized the Franco-Italian relations over the last decade, bringing to the fore all the ambiguities and problems hidden behind the strong economic indicators. We traced these misunderstands back to the so-called 'proximity paradox', namely the distorted perception that the French and the Italian hold about each other in spite of cultural and geographical proximity, or rather precisely because of it: proximity gives the illusion that reciprocal understanding is easy and immediate, almost natural, when, in fact, it is not. By analyzing the content and the objectives of the Quirinal Treaty in chapter two, we showed that this bilateral treaty can be read as a strong political will shared by both countries to reset the Franco-Italian relationship and start on a clean slate with a new institutional text that encompasses and regulates all areas of cooperation, from foreign policy to European affairs, from economic integration to security and defense, from migration policy to education and research. With its ambitious program that launches a wide number of exchange and dialogue initiatives, the Quirinal Treaty, thus, represents a unique opportunity for the 'two sister nations' to bridge the mutual cognitive gap, eradicate biased mistrust, and overcome, once for all, the proximity paradox, allowing Paris and Rome to deepen their relations to extent that geographical proximity, cultural affinity and economic complementarity allow. In the third chapter, we went as far as to argue that the Quirinal Treaty transcends the bilateral dimension to impact positively on the process of European integration, especially in a period clouded by a more inward-looking Germany, a more disengaged United States, a more assertive Russia, a rising China, economic uncertainty, Brexit and a pandemic. Despite some scholars' reservations about the *bona-fide* European spirit of the Treaty or simply the feasibility of its EU-related projects, we demonstrated that not only is France and Italy's bilateral cooperation compatible with the European project, but it will deepen it. The analysis of its articles, especially the third one which is entirely devoted to the European affairs, shows that the Quirinal Treaty is animated by a strong European spirit and many of its undertakings are in line with the values and interests of the EU, from building strategic autonomy and reforming fiscal rules to designing a common migration policy.

Surely, the actual impact of the treaty will depend on the commitment of both France and Italy to implement the principles and undertakings laid down in the treaty through concrete initiatives; however, our analysis leads us to believe that all the prerequisites, both in terms of legislative

regulations and political will, are there to make the treaty an effective instrument of dialogue and coordination that will greatly strengthen the Franco-Italian political-economic axis.²¹⁴ On a more practical result-oriented note, the Quirinal Treaty will not bring about a permanent strategic alignment between Paris and Rome, nor is this its ultimate objective. What the Treaty does is setting up regular institutional channels, which, through the exchange of officials, inter-ministerial forums and various joint training programs, will serve to prevent and manage possible disagreements between the two countries.²¹⁵ This pattern of regular institutional dialogue will guarantee the continuation of bilateral relations even if future Franco-Italian politicians will not be as enthusiast as Macron and Draghi about the Franco-Italian alliance. This is precisely the crucial novelty that the Treaty brings about: dialogue and coordination must nevertheless continue even if difficulties arise at the top institutional level.²¹⁶ Ultimately, “the Quirinal Treaty”, to say it in the words of the Research Coordinator at the Istituto Affari Internazionali Riccardo Alcaro, “is a sensible act of diplomacy that should inject stability into a deep and often unnecessarily troubled political relationship, expand economic and cultural ties and foster alignment over both countries’ foreign policies positions.”²¹⁷

Given the instability of the current geopolitical scenario and the entity of the tasks that the international community must confront, there is not anymore space for the unnecessary disputes and misunderstandings that have haunted in recent times two natural partners such as France and Italy; two countries, whose history of extremely rich and developed bilateral cooperation has witnessed an intense and rapid integration of value chains, from scientific and technological collaboration to the luxury sector, passing through space or banking, with considerable growth effects resulting from the complementary economic and social fabric, as well as cultural proximity.²¹⁸ Two so close partners cannot tolerate any more misunderstandings, and the governments of both countries are now aware

²¹⁴ Thibault, H. (2022). COOPERAZIONE ECONOMICA E SVILUPPO SOCIALE. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info

²¹⁵ Recchia, A. (2022). AFFARI EUROPEI, POLITICHE MIGRATORIE, GIUSTIZIA E AFFARI INTERNI. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.

²¹⁶ Ortona, L. (2022). CONCLUSIONI. In L. T. Gabriele Natalizia, A. Carteny, & E. T. Stefano, *Oltre il Trattato del Quirinale. Le relazioni italo-francesi alla prova dei mutamenti politico-strategici in Europa*. Geopolitica.info.

²¹⁷ Alcaro, R. (2021, December). Joint Brief: The Italy–France Treaty is an Example of Wise Diplomacy. *IAI Commentaries* (21|63).

²¹⁸ Darnis, J.-P. (2021). Il Trattato del Quirinale può rilanciare l’Italia in Europa. LUISS School of Government.

of that: if strong action is not taken, the proximity paradox and the political-economic damages that it carries with itself will not disappear. As we argued in the previous chapters, dialogue plays a paramount role in this fight: mistrust and frictions will only be surmounted through constant dialogue and efforts towards mutual understandings. Hence the ample space devoted to the ‘Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l’Europe’ in this thesis, as well as, obviously, the special mention to this Luiss-SciencesPo initiative in the Quirinal Treaty. The Franco-German Elysée Treaty shows just how powerful of a tool dialogue can be, if capillary weaved into the multi-layered institutional and civil relations between two countries: while for the Franco-German post-war rapprochement an enormous structuring effort was needed to bridge the seemingly insurmountable gap,²¹⁹ in the case of France and Italy ‘a dose of modesty’²²⁰ would be a good start to rebuild their relationship, by looking the seemingly akin cousins with different eyes -those of curiosity rather than prejudice-, and gradually reconstructing a common cognitive framework that allows reciprocal understanding and consideration.

In this vein, as a way to conclude, one ought to hope that more initiatives will be promoted along the lines of the ‘Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l’Europe’, as enshrined by the Quirinal Treaty itself: more initiatives that bring closer not only France’s and Italy’s ruling classes, but also their respective youth and the civil society. In this regard, we may recall the ‘Fondazione Nuovi Mecenati di Palazzo Farnese’, chaired by Ludovico Ortona, which supports, for example, young French artists who come to Italy for events and cultural programs in different artistic fields, from art exhibitions to theatre, cinema and music; but also the ‘Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l’Europe *junior*’, established in 2021 by President Carla Scalisi together with other fellow LUISS/SciencesPo students, under the supervision of LUISS Vice-President Paola Severino and Professor Marc Lazar and with the collaboration of the thinktank The European House – Ambrosetti. Inspired by the ‘Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l’Europe’, the student-run version foresees a range of activities which include masterclasses and simulations of negotiations under the supervision of representatives of France’s and Italy’s respective ministries, with the aim of empowering the youth of both countries with new instruments to make their voice heard at the institutional level.²²¹ In the wake of the Quirinal Treaty, one can expect such initiatives to become increasingly frequent and participated, in the hope that the

²¹⁹ Joannin, P. (2021, June 7). The Franco-Italian relationship on the eve of the Quirinal Treaty: between asymmetry and proximity. *European Issues* (599).

²²⁰ Darnis, J.-P. (2020). Una visione strategica delle relazioni franco-italiane: per un trattato bilaterale? *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*.

²²¹ Interview with Founder & President of Dialogue junior, Carla Scalisi (August 2022).

French and the Italians will cease to be what Anais Ginori, using a clever grammatical metaphor, calls “Faux Amis”,²²² and will build a partnership worth their historical, cultural and economic bond.

²²² “Faux amis, quei termini che assomigliano a qualcosa e che invece significano tutt’altro. un eterno difetto di traduzione che diventa parabola della millenaria relazione fra italia e france” from Ginori, A. (2012). *Falsi Amici: Italia-Francia: relazioni pericolose*. Fandango Libri.

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Executive Summary

Building on Italy and France's 'profound friendship', 'historic commitment [...] to European unity' and 'common interest in the Mediterranean', Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and French President Emmanuel Macron, in the presence of the Italian Head of State Sergio Mattarella, signed, on 26 November 2021, the Treaty between the French Republic and the Italian Republic for a Strengthened Bilateral Cooperation. Dubbed the Quirinal Treaty after the sumptuous residential palace of the Italian president of the Republic where the signing ceremony was held, this bilateral agreement between the Italian Republic and the French Republic comes at a time when the relations between France and Italy have touched historic lows. Suffice it to think of the exchange of strong accusations on migration issues between French and Italian Ministers, or the support expressed by some representatives of the Italian government to the yellow vest movement in France, which then led to the diplomatic crisis of 2019 culminating with the recall to Paris of the French ambassador in Rome Christian Masset on 7 February 2019, an unprecedentedly dramatic case in the recent history of France and Italy. To find earlier such cases, one must wind back the clock at the least to World War II, when Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini declared war on France in 1940.

It is quite odd, one may observe, that the relations between two countries that are often referred to as 'cousins' or 'sister nations' are oftentimes so uneasy. This phenomenon is perfectly encapsulated in what the President of the *Institut pour les Relations Economiques France-Italie* (IREFI), Fabrizio Maria Romano, calls "paradosso della prossimità" (proximity paradox). According to Romano's own definition, the proximity paradox is a concept that explains how two countries, such as France and Italy, are so close that they cannot really see and understand what the other is like. In the realm of trade and business, this paradox can be a particularly dangerous trap: the entrepreneur, blinded by the alleged cultural proximity, underestimates the risks that are always involved in the negotiation, often with great losses: take, for instance, the unsuccessful acquisition of Chantiers de l'Atlantique by the Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri. Proximity, therefore, gives the illusion that reciprocal understanding is easy and immediate, almost natural. The relationship is left untouched, what is done spontaneously seems sufficient. It is true that French and Italian cultures are similar in many ways, but as the Italian analyst Riccardo Perna rightly warns, "we are far from knowing each other as we should, in order to be able to work together without the misunderstandings and disagreements that different cultures generate". Given France and Italy's recent troubled history, the Quirinal Treaty represents, therefore, a unique opportunity for the 'two sister nations' to reset their relationship and start on a clean slate with a new institutional text that encompasses and regulates all areas of cooperation, from foreign

policy to European affairs, from economic integration to security and defense, from migration policy to education and research. This thesis argues that, with its ambitious program that launches a wide number of exchange and dialogue initiatives, the Quirinal Treaty, seems to have the potential to bridge France and Italy's cognitive gap, eradicate biased mistrust, and overcome, once for all, the proximity paradox, allowing Paris and Rome to deepen their bilateral relations to the extent that geographical proximity, cultural affinity and economic complementarity allow.

The first chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the Franco-Italian relations and attempt to illustrate all their nuances, detailing Paris and Rome's strong economic ties, but also bringing to the fore all the ambiguities and problems hidden behind the strong economic indicators. Here the concept of proximity paradox is introduced to help us understand the ambiguous nature of Franco-Italian relations, as well as the reasons why a structured bilateral treaty such as the Quirinal Treaty was needed. Relevant data is reported to show the high degree of complementarity and interdependence of the economies of France and Italy: what emerges, in particular, is a consolidated common industrial backbone, based a capillary network of bi-national companies (around 4,000), including SMEs, innovative companies and start-ups, on large-scale merger operations (e.g. Stellantis and EssilorLuxottica), but also industrial collaborations in key sectors such as electronic components (e.g. STMicroelectronics), military shipbuilding (e.g. between Fincantieri and NavalGroup), and the aerospace sector (e.g. between Avio and ArianeGroup and/or between Leonardo and Thales). Nevertheless, not everything is as rosy as economic indicators may suggest. Success stories of industrial cooperation are accompanied, for example, by frictions and resistance to integration driven by considerations of national interest, especially in sectors that are considered particularly strategic - we may recall the French government's veto on Fincantieri's bid to purchase the STX shipyards. Moreover, by looking at investment indicators, the business relationship between Italy and France seems to be unbalanced. The gap between French FDI in Italy and Italian FDI in France is increasing even though Italian investments in France are at an all-time high; the asymmetry is also marked in M&A transactions, where in 2019-2021 France registered 118 operations valued EUR 13,3 billion, while Italy closed the year with only 47 operations, for EUR 3,3 billion. Besides economic integration, there are several other issues that provoked frictions and tension between France and Italy, ranging from sovereignty disputes and managing irregular migrants at the French-Italian border, to supporting different war factions in Libya. Amongst these issues, we may recall the historic dispute over the Mont Blanc, the controversies over the determination of the maritime boundaries and the respective fishing rights in the maritime zone off Liguria and North of Sardinia, as well as the well-known Bardonecchia incident, when some French officials crossed the Franco-Italian border to

carry out an inspection, or the Claviere episode, with French local police dropping off two migrants in the woods of the Italian village. All such issues have generated over the years incalculable economic losses and political breakdowns, and can be ultimately traced back to the proximity paradox, namely to France and Italy's reciprocal mistrust, prejudice, lack of mutual knowledge. French and Italians' distorted perception of reality, especially when it comes to their bilateral relations, emerges with striking clarity from the survey "What do the French and the Italians know and think about each other?", sponsored by EDISON and conducted by multinational market research and consulting firm IPSOS, under the leadership of Professor Marc Lazar. Its results were first revealed on 7 July 2022 during the fifth edition of the Franco-Italian Dialogues for Europe, an initiative launched in 2018 by Luiss Guido Carli and Sciences Po universities in collaboration with The European House – Ambrosetti. The interviewed population was confronted with questions regarding macroeconomic phenomena, Franco-Italian commercial relations, and the Quirinal Treaty, with the objective to measure French and Italians' knowledge of the respective countries but also their own, as well as to dispel a number of clichés and stereotypes. Vice-President of LUISS Guido Carli Paola Severino, commenting the results of the survey during the 'Dialogues', said that the Italians and the French are above all united by errors of perception and a significant knowledge deficit about the business reality and economic structure of their countries. Looking at the survey's results, we often see that reality deviates from how the Italians imagine it in relation to the French and the French in relation to the Italians. An erroneous perception of reality in this case may have serious repercussions on the bilateral relations and lead to frictions and incidents such as those that we mentioned above, from territorial disputes to economic losses. As Paola Severino declared, "distances of understanding often result in economic, financial and cultural distances, which generate negative political and financial consequences for our countries".

For instance, Italy's sentiment of hostility towards France over the strong acquisition operations carried out by big French companies stems from a scarce knowledge of the reciprocal economic trajectories over time: throughout the 1990s, Italy, committed to reducing its very large public debt, proceeded massively with a series of privatizations, while France tried to resist European regulations for the liberalization of markets and services as much as possible, aiming to maintain its 'national champions' in various sectors, with the survival of a dirigiste model of economic policy. Having said that the number of partnerships and cross-investments (Italian ones in France, French ones in Italy as well as joint ventures between the two countries) is quite striking and goes against widespread Italian sentiment that the 'French come to Italy to do their shopping', namely industrial acquisitions being mainly a unilateral phenomenon that favors France. According to data collected

for 'L'Economia' of the *Corriere della Sera* by KPMG, the acquisitions of Italian companies by French companies since the 2000s have been 344 for a transaction value of EUR 47.3 billion; conversely, the acquisitions of French companies by companies with an 'Italian' majority shareholding have been 177 for a value of EUR 37.8 billion (not much lower!). In this light, Paris' decision to nationalize the STX France shipyard to prevent an Italian firm taking majority control, thus "protect[ing] the country's strategic interests", was hardly comprehensible, especially if we consider that it was a South Korean company that, prior to its collapse, held a two-thirds stake in STX France. Another example of Franco-Italian frictions as a result of poor coordination and dialogue is the contrast between France and Italy in Libya. Their respective interests in the region, in fact, were not necessarily divergent: if Paris' priority was to stabilize the South of the country to protect its interests in Sahel -a region characterized by increased transnational terrorist and smuggling activities in and across borders, but also by important flows of irregular migration directed toward Europe, and especially to Italy- it was obviously in Italy's best interest to find synergies and work out a common strategy in the Region. In spite of this, Macron, who considered and still considers himself the standard bearer for the EU, saw Italy's major role in the Libyan arena as a threat to his political vision, and thus launched a series of initiatives aimed at reducing Italy's influence and leadership role in the Region, including the scheduling of a summit on Libya a week before the Italian government's new coalition was formed so they could not attend at a political level. Myopic political and nationalist considerations, once again, prevented France and Italy countries from finding synergies in a field where their interests could converge.

Chapter two analyzes the content and the objectives of the Quirinal Treaty, with the aim of showing that this bilateral treaty can be read as a strong political will, shared by both France and Italy, to reset their relationship and start on a clean slate with a new institutional text that encompasses and regulates all areas of cooperation, from foreign policy to European affairs, from economic integration to security and defense, from migration policy to education and research. After sketching the favorable external context for a Franco-Italian rapprochement (i.e., the convergences in the Mediterranean, on Red Brigades extradition and on NextGenerationEu), and relating the difficult journey that brought the Quirinal Treaty to life (from the 2017 Lyon summit to the signature of the Treaty in 2021, passing through the presidential meeting at Chambord in 2019 and the 2020 Naples summit), the Articles of the Quirinal Treaty are examined in detail. The scope of the articles is very broad, as it is normally the case for framework agreements. For this reason, attached to the Treaty, there is also a Roadmap (Programma di Lavoro), which details the projects and axes of cooperation that the two countries intend to implement in the following years in application of the principles laid

down in the Treaty. Dialogue is arguably the engine at the heart of the drafters' scheme and underpins each one of the sector-oriented mechanisms set up by the Treaty, from economy to security and defense. In practice, what the Treaty does is providing France and Italy with unprecedentedly powerful tools of dialogue and exchange, which, establishing an institutional framework for bilateral relations as well as new mechanisms of socialization, could really be a gamechanger for Franco-Italian relations, putting an end to the proximity paradox.

In this vein, the Quirinal Treaty aims to reproduce that mechanism incorporated in the Franco-German Elysée Treaty (renewed in 2019 with the Aachen Treaty between Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel), which, in the post-war context, successfully mended a bilateral relationship that had been devastated by the war. The very name of the Quirinal Treaty, named after Italy's presidential residence, makes reference to the Franco-German bilateral treaty, thus symbolizing the dawn of a new period of closeness and cooperation between France and Italy, and, most importantly, incorporating a similar mechanism of institutional dialogue and socialization. In line with the Franco-German model, the Quirinal Treaty foresees, for example, the establishment of a Consultation Forum between Ministers responsible for the Economy, Finance and Economic Development¹; the Forum, which is to meet once a year, will enable a permanent dialogue between the two governments on macroeconomic policies, on the one hand, and, on the other, on industrial policies, on the integration of the economic fabric of the two countries, on the European internal market and on industrial cooperation between the two countries. Such body could be useful in situations involving companies in which the two countries have conflicting interest. The same mechanism is applied, in the Treaty, to other areas such as foreign policy or defense, where, for instance, France and Italy undertake to establish a Franco-Italian Defense and Security Council, where the respective Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs will meet regularly in order to strengthen the bilateral dialogue on all issues of common interest, taking into account the evolution of the international and regional security environment. Cooperation between France's and Italy's respective defense and security industries is also foreseen with the aim of fostering structural alliances, as well as the cooperation between armed forces (army, navy, air force) through the exchange of military personnel or the launch of joint activities in the fields of security, defense, education and training. Such permanent institutions will enable France and Italy to talk to each other in advance, thus defusing potential clashes and avoiding misunderstandings and protectionist entrenchments, such as in the aforementioned case of the Stx-Fincantieri agreement, or again in 2006, when the takeover bid of the Italian electricity company Enel to take over the Franco-Belgian energy company Suez was blocked by the French government,

which interpreted the deal as a threat and took the opportunity to launch a merger between Suez and the French gas giant Gdf5.

The third chapter shows that, besides being a gamechanger for Franco-Italian relations, the Quirinal Treaty arguably transcends the bilateral dimension: in a period clouded by a more inward-looking Germany, a more disengaged United States, a more assertive Russia, a rising China, economic uncertainty, Brexit and a pandemic, the strengthening of the relationship between Paris and Rome goes beyond merely bilateral dynamics to impact positively on the process of European integration. Some scholars expressed skepticism about the *bona-fide* European spirit of the Treaty or simply the feasibility of its EU-related projects. The main argument is that, due to its bilateral nature, the Treaty could be understood as a sign of weakness of the European Union. This is a common argument that falls within the wider criticism towards the so-called multi-speed Europe, also known as Europe à la carte, that is to say a variable geometry Europe. This phenomenon consists in European integration happening at different layers and pace across the continent depending on the specific interests or political-economic situation of each country, as opposed to a more top-down homogenous integration process; it is often portrayed in a bad light for three main reasons: 1) multi-speed Europe may eventually lead to the disintegration of the EU itself, as multiple smaller coalitions will grow more and more distant from each other due to different interests (it is no news that the countries of Southern Europe, for instance, have vastly different interests compared to the Benelux countries when it comes to economic relations); 2) the consequence of a multi-speed Europe would be a confusing bundle of overlapping jurisdictions, creating confusion over who decides over what when it comes to EU-politics. 3) lastly, multi-speed Europe is often described as working against the much-needed formulation of a common European foreign policy. Under these arguments, therefore, the bilateral treaty between France and Italy appears to be anti-European, for perpetuating the phenomenon of multi-speed Europe and harming European integration. Other arguments questioning the feasibility of its EU-related projects concern France and Italy's divergence on fundamental European issues such as strategic autonomy, or the uncertainty of Franco-Italian relations in light of Draghi's imminent departure following the government crisis and the upcoming Italian elections in September.

Having considered all these arguments, we argue, instead, that not only is France and Italy's bilateral cooperation compatible with the European project, but it will deepen it. The analysis of the Articles of the Quirinal Treaty, especially the third one which is entirely devoted to the European affairs, shows that the European Union is the real center of gravity of the Treaty: France and Italy's

bilateral relations are interpreted from a European perspective, and many of the Treaty's undertakings are in line with the values and interests of the EU, from building strategic autonomy and reforming fiscal rules to designing a common migration policy. Deepening the bilateral ties between France and Italy, unlike what the above multi-speed EU arguments claim, will strengthen the EU and promote European integration. The Quirinal Treaty establishes a number of mechanisms meant to facilitate consultation between France and Italy on the definition of a common position within the EU and coordination on how to leverage that position in EU negotiations. The aim here is not to shift European policymaking to an intergovernmental level, but rather to consolidate the positions of the two countries in view of the major EU negotiations so as to express as common a position as possible, thereby facilitating the communitarization of the various policies. We already have the proof that bilateral cooperation can work toward, not against, European integration: it suffices to look at the Franco-German alliance, which has affirmed itself over time as the keystone of European integration". Likewise, France and Italy's enhanced coordination within the EU has the potential to play a similar role, especially because, if well-coordinated, France and Italy could represent a bridge between Northern and Southern Europe, by advocating the concerns, proposals and expectations of the EU southern member states, such as Spain and Greece. These countries often feel that their voice is not heard by EU institutions, and that they are often marginalized by the so-called frugal member states, the financially healthier countries in the north: Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Germany itself, the political engine of the EU, seems to pivot more eastwards than southwards. In a European context marked by instability after Brexit and the political transition in Germany after the end of Angela Merkel's 16-year-long chancellorship, the new Franco-Italian power axis may alter the leadership dynamic within the EU, by filling the gap created by Merkel's departure and thus shifting the locus of influence in the EU southward and toward greater European integration. Only very recently we had a clear example of how the new Paris-Rome axis could yield more integration within the EU, by bridging the gap between the EU southern member states and the Northern frugal countries: the launch of NextGenerationEU, the European instrument designed to repair the disastrous socio-economic damages caused by COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to create a stronger, greener, digital and resilient post pandemic Europe, was not a Franco-German initiative, as it is often believed, but it was the fruit of the Franco-Italian cooperation. German involvement came at a later stage, only after France and Italy reached a consensus and Paris reached out to Berlin to strike the deal within the EU. As for the other arguments against the feasibility of the Treaty's EU-related projects, it cannot be denied, for instance, that France and Italy have held traditionally contrasting views on the concept of European strategic autonomy, with the former aiming at reducing Europe's reliance on US security guarantees, and the latter desiring greater European contribution to

international security but always within transatlantic framework. This, however, has changed, and the recent publication of the EU Strategic Compass proves it, by defining Europe's strategic autonomy as complementary to NATO and its other allies; this new concept that is embraced by both France and Italy, and is embedded in the very fabric of their relationship as construed in the Quirinal Treaty. President Macron himself, who in a 2019 interview with *The Economist* warned Europe that NATO was becoming brain dead, in the press conference that followed the signature of the Quirinal Treaty declared instead that France and Italy committed to build a "stronger common European defense contributing to NATO" and to enhance "cooperation in the fight against illegal migration and traffickers, to protect Europe's external borders". Echoing Macron, Draghi declared: "To be sovereign, Europe must be able to protect itself and defend its borders: a true European defense must be created. This Treaty helps this creation of a common defense that is complementary to NATO, not a substitute for it: a stronger Europe makes a stronger NATO. This is one of the first and most fundamental steps towards which this treaty is directed." Finally, as regards the concerns on political uncertainty threatening the future implementation of the Treaty linked to Italy's looming general elections and the Draghi's departure, well, what the Quirinal Treaty has been created for is precisely to preserve the Franco-Italian relations regardless of any political circumstances through the establishment of mechanisms of dialogue, exchanges, and socialization. In short, the Articles of the Treaty seem to gravitate around the ultimate objective of deepening the European project, consolidating European integration, and building a "*democratic, united and sovereign Europe*".

The actual impact of the Treaty will depend on the commitment of both France and Italy to implement the principles and undertakings laid down in the treaty through concrete initiatives; surely, the Quirinal Treaty is unlikely to bring about a permanent strategic alignment between Paris and Rome, nor is this its ultimate objective. What the Treaty does is setting up regular institutional channels, which, through the exchange of officials, inter-ministerial fora and various joint training programs, will serve to prevent and manage possible disagreements between the two countries. This pattern of regular institutional dialogue will guarantee the continuation of bilateral relations even if future Franco-Italian politicians will not be as enthusiast as Macron and Draghi about the Franco-Italian alliance. This is precisely the crucial novelty that the Treaty brings about: dialogue and coordination must nevertheless continue even if difficulties arise at the top institutional level. Ultimately, "the Quirinal Treaty", to say it in the words of the Research Coordinator at the Istituto Affari Internazionali Riccardo Alcaro, "is a sensible act of diplomacy that should inject stability into

a deep and often unnecessarily troubled political relationship, expand economic and cultural ties and foster alignment over both countries' foreign policies positions.”

Given the instability of the current geopolitical scenario and the entity of the tasks that the international community must confront, there is not anymore space for the unnecessary disputes and misunderstandings that have haunted two natural partners such as France and Italy in recent times; two countries, whose history of extremely rich and developed bilateral cooperation has witnessed an intense and rapid integration of value chains, from scientific and technological collaboration to the luxury sector, passing through space or banking, with considerable growth effects resulting from the complementary economic and social fabric, as well as cultural proximity. Two so close partners cannot tolerate any more misunderstandings, and their respective governments are now aware of that: if strong action is not taken, the proximity paradox and the political-economic damages that it carries with itself will not disappear. Dialogue plays a paramount role in this fight: mistrust and frictions will only be surmounted through constant dialogue and efforts towards mutual understanding. The Franco-German Elysée Treaty shows just how powerful of a tool dialogue can be, if capillary weaved into the multi-layered institutional and civil relations between two countries; but while for the Franco-German post-war rapprochement an enormous structuring effort was needed to bridge the seemingly insurmountable gap, in the case of France and Italy ‘a dose of modesty’ would be a good start to rebuild their relationship, by looking at the seemingly akin cousins with different eyes -those of curiosity rather than prejudice-, and gradually reconstructing a common cognitive framework that allows reciprocal understanding and consideration. In the wake of the Quirinal Treaty, one can expect dialogue and socialization initiatives, such as the Luiss-SciencePo ‘Dialogues Franco-Italiens pour l’Europe’ (notably mentioned as *best practice* in the Treaty), to become increasingly frequent and participated, in the hope that the French and the Italians will cease to be what Anais Ginori, using a clever grammatical metaphor, calls “Faux Amis”, and will build a partnership worth their historical, cultural and economic bond.