

Algeria and energy security diplomacy in the Mediterranean: between stability and change

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Abstract:

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Algeria has realized the great importance of the Mediterranean Circle for its national security as an independent circle from the Maghreb and Africa with different natures of interactions and threats, the position of this circle has become central to the Algerian security strategy, it is a behavior that more devoted in the emergence of a set of geo-security factors, as well as some threats (confidence-building measures with Northern shore Countries, terrorism, immigration..), over time, that led to the formation of Algerian interest in the Mediterranean.

Algeria's engagement in the various structures of security and cooperation for Mediterranean space, proposed for the Northern shore actor initiatives (States and institutions), reflects its growing interest in this space. Especially in the era of reshaping the map of geopolitical alliances following the turmoil in the international system, where Algeria is going through a stage of adaptation and consolidation of its foreign policy doctrine to reposition its strategic position in the Mediterranean dimension based on energy security diplomacy, Algeria is Europe's first African natural gas exporter and the seventh largest exporter in the world.

Keywords: Algeria; Mediterranean circle; Energy security; Natural gas.

INTRODUCTION

Energy resources have great importance in shaping the geopolitical landscape as a source of regional crises and wars, unimaginable the continued well-being of major powers without guaranteeing access to different energy resources, and with the increasing depletion of traditional oil and gas fields - as depleted resources -, Global demand continues to rise versus growing competition over resource-rich areas (South et al., most important Southern Mediterranean).

With the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of economic globalization, nation-states have become increasingly interdependent in the energy sector through international cooperation and coordination due to the close relationship between energy security and sustainable development, the economy and the national and military security of States, this was demonstrated by the oil price shock of 1973. Therefore, the importance of energy diplomacy has arisen to regulate relations and reduce the risk of conflict between productive and exporting countries and importing countries.

In this regard, Algeria stands out as one of the world's countries in terms of natural and shale gas reserves, Representative of the most important regions that enhance energy security for Europe, especially with the latter's intention to diversify energy sources and reduce reliance on Russian gas and oil after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and escalate them into the 2021 war. As a result, Algeria seeking its strategic repositioning in its Mediterranean dimension by relying on "gas diplomacy" to achieve its economic and political interests.

What leads us to the following problems: To what extent can Algeria employ energy security diplomacy to achieve its strategic economic and political positioning in the Mediterranean region?

We assume that Algeria's use of gas diplomacy with the countries of the Mediterranean region enables it to achieve its economic and political interests, given that increased energy consumption by countries raises the level of Algeria's strategic positioning.

First, this study aims to present several concepts relating to energy, energy security, and energy diplomacy, given the importance of energy resources and their linkage to national security and States' economic development, turning to the situation of Algeria as one of the world's most important energy producing and energy-exporting countries, and how in the current international situation. It seeks to employ gas diplomacy in its Mediterranean circle for its political and economic interests.

I. Conceptual approach: energy, energy security, and energy diplomacy

1. Definition of Energy:

Energy has always been one of the most crucial resources supporting human societies' advancement, development, and prosperity. From the discovery of fire and the agricultural revolution to the industrial revolution and the dominance of fossil fuels, people have continuously sought to improve their well-being by relying on how energy is produced, shared, or utilized¹.

In general, the topic of energy holds immense importance within the activities of development's economic, political, social, and environmental axes. It becomes one of the fundamental aspects of human and cultural advancement. Various definitions have been presented, such as the capacity of a particular system to perform work or action externally². It is an expression of the relationship to the work that we do. Energy is a factor of production, ensuring its consumption fuels the vital economic activities in society, such as industrial and transportation sectors, among others, on one hand. Moreover, it is an independent economic activity subject to the methods of economic study and analysis, on the other hand³.

The beginning of human energy usage was marked by the discovery of fire through friction. Subsequently, its utilization progressed after the discovery of copper and bronze, which were smelted using wood. Later, the process of harnessing water energy advanced, followed by coal, which started in the Middle Ages. Then, oil was discovered and used as an energy

source, first in Philadelphia in 1865, then in Baku in 1890, and later in Grozny in 1900. However, the widespread use of oil as a primary energy source only began in the second quarter of the twentieth century⁴.

Energy sources can be divided into two main categories:

- ✓ **Traditional or Depletable Energy Sources:** These are extracts from the Earth and include resources such as coal, petroleum, oil, and nuclear materials. They are the most commonly used forms of energy in the modern era. They are called "depletable" because they are available in limited quantities, and their availability is exhausted through extraction and use⁵.
- ✓ **Modern or Renewable Energy Sources:** These sources include wind, water, solar energy, geothermal energy, and more. They are considered modern because they are renewable at a relatively fast rate and can be continuously consumed and replenished. In the early 21st century, these sources gained popularity due to their environmental friendliness and contribution to diversifying national economies⁶.

2. Energy Security:

After the Cold War, countries began to rely more on their economic capabilities than their military strength. This shift led to a significant increase in the importance of economic security amidst new international dynamics. Since energy is a component of economic security, international relations theories have primarily focused on energy security, given its direct connection to national security⁷.

In its traditional context, energy security emphasizes ensuring a continuous supply at affordable prices without interruption. However, this definition overlooks various aspects resulting from developments in the international environment. Consequently, there has been a need to reformulate and adapt the concept to address international changes⁸; Broadened concepts of energy security have been introduced, such as:

- ✓ **Definition by the International Energy Agency (IEA):** Formed in the 1970s to coordinate a collective response to oil supply disruptions, the IEA defines energy security as the "uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price for all"⁹.
- ✓ **Andrews and Others:** Energy security means "ensuring sufficient and reliable energy supplies at reasonable prices in ways that do not jeopardize primary national values and objectives"¹⁰.
- ✓ **Badea AC and Others:** Energy security provides available, low-cost, reliable, efficient, and environmentally benign energy services equitably to end-users"¹¹.
- ✓ **The European Commission:** Energy security is seen as "the ability to ensure future energy needs through local sources, operate under acceptable economic conditions, maintain them as strategic reserves, and achieve this through stable and easily accessible external sources while increasing strategic reserves"¹².

From the definitions provided and the context discussed, we can extract several key vital points regarding energy security:

For countries that are energy importers:

- ✓ Traditional energy security primarily focuses on security threats from sudden disruptions, volatility in energy prices, and manipulation of existing energy supply agreements.
- ✓ There is a difference in the definition of energy security between the perspective of energy-importing and energy-consuming countries and the perspective of energy-exporting countries.
- ✓ Energy security for importing countries can be seen at three levels: First, it means ensuring sufficient energy supplies to maintain national production during wartime. Second, in a broader sense, it involves guaranteeing adequate energy supplies to ensure the national economy operates at normal levels. Third, it also means that energy supplies are sufficient to keep the country's economy standing in a politically acceptable manner¹³.

For countries that are energy exporters:

- ✓ Energy security is, first and foremost, about preserving national sovereignty over natural resources without foreign military invasion to prevent external control and interference that would hinder resource development.
- ✓ Secondly, it involves securing needs, which means having the capacity to access external markets.
- ✓ Thirdly, it entails ensuring financial security for energy export revenues¹⁴.

These perspectives reflect the complex nature of energy security, which varies depending on whether a country is an energy importer or exporter. Energy security encompasses the assurance of reliable energy supplies and broader economic and political considerations.

Although the abovementioned definitions are not comprehensive, they all illustrate the significance of energy security and its multi-dimensional nature, explaining why many countries consider it a political priority. In the short term, energy security concerns focus on the energy system's ability to respond rapidly to sudden changes in supply and demand. In the long term, energy security concerns relate to timely investments in energy supplies that align with economic developments and environmental needs¹⁵. At both the multilateral and global levels, energy security has continued to garner increased attention, as evidenced by the United Nations' seventh Sustainable Development Goal, which requires countries to ensure universal access to modern, reliable, and sustainable energy at affordable costs for all.

3. Energy Diplomacy:

Geopolitical conflicts and the interplay between security concerns and development goals have consistently attracted attention in studies on energy cooperation. Often, oil and natural gas trade impacts diplomatic and security relations between producing, consuming, and even transit countries. If a decrease in oil and gas trade is forced on a consuming nation, the producing country has to seek new markets elsewhere. It opens the door for another consuming country to increase its trade with the producing nation, gaining influence as oil and natural gas imports rise. All of these

processes fall under the "Energy Diplomacy" strategy, a term first coined in the 19th century by American and British petroleum companies and later evolved after the formation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)¹⁶.

In this context, the emerging literature on Energy Diplomacy holds particular significance. However, the term needs more apparent conceptual foundations, as studies have predominantly focused on empirical data to provide a realistic insight into the energy's political geography. Among the definitions proposed for energy diplomacy are those foreign relations aiming to ensure energy security for a country while enhancing business opportunities in the energy sector¹⁷. One of the most essential foreign policy tools to support a country's energy interests is diplomacy, which can be bilateral or multilateral.

Energy diplomacy involves a set of tools used by international actors to mitigate potential risks within the energy market on the one hand and address the dimensions of risks affecting energy security on the other. These tools naturally vary for both importing and exporting countries. For energy-importing countries, diplomacy means ensuring a continuous energy flow at reasonable prices. Importing nations also focus on maintaining a diverse range of energy resources. This diversity helps mitigate risks associated with over-reliance on a single energy source and ensures a stable energy supply in the face of market fluctuations or geopolitical tensions¹⁸.

Conversely, energy-exporting countries concentrate on developing reserves, investing in new sources, and maximizing revenue from energy exports. Diplomatic efforts for these nations often revolve around securing stable markets, negotiating favorable trade agreements, and attracting foreign investments to develop their energy sectors further. This strategic approach allows energy-exporting countries to capitalize on their valuable resources and strengthen their positions in the global energy market.

Energy diplomacy helps governments carefully navigate their policies through negotiations, reducing the likelihood of open conflicts or other risks. It does not mean that energy diplomacy lacks power and robust tools; it provides opportunities for international and non-state actors to utilize

hard power by decision-makers. In the case of petroleum-exporting countries, they seek to employ their energy resources to achieve their foreign policy goals, either directly or indirectly. However, the form and extent of this utilization vary from one country to another, and even within the same country, it can differ at different times and places¹⁹.

II. Algerian energy policies within the Mediterranean circle: towards the search for strategic positioning

Since the early 1990s, Algeria has recognized the significant importance of the Mediterranean region for its national security as an independent circle (distinct from the Maghreb and African circles) with distinct interactions and threats. The position of this region has become central to Algerian security strategy. This approach has been further solidified due to various geo-security factors and threats, such as confidence-building measures, terrorism, migration, and more. Over time, these factors have contributed to the crystallization of Algeria's interest in the Mediterranean Circle²⁰.

Moreover, Algeria's engagement in various security frameworks and cooperation initiatives within the Mediterranean geopolitical space reflects its growing interest in this region²¹. This interest has been particularly heightened amid the reshaping of geopolitical alliances following disruptions in the international system. Algeria is undergoing a phase of adaptation and solidifying its foreign policy doctrine to reposition itself strategically in the Mediterranean context. The country is relying on "Energy Diplomacy" as a critical component of this strategy, considering it is Africa's top natural gas supplier to Europe and the seventh-largest supplier globally. This emphasis on energy diplomacy underscores Algeria's efforts to leverage its significant energy resources to strengthen its strategic positioning in the Mediterranean region.

After the end of bipolarity and the outbreak of the security crisis in Algeria, the geopolitical solid link between the security environment in Algeria and the security environment in the Mediterranean region became evident. One of the factors that reinforced this link was the significant influx of migrants towards southern Western European countries due to the

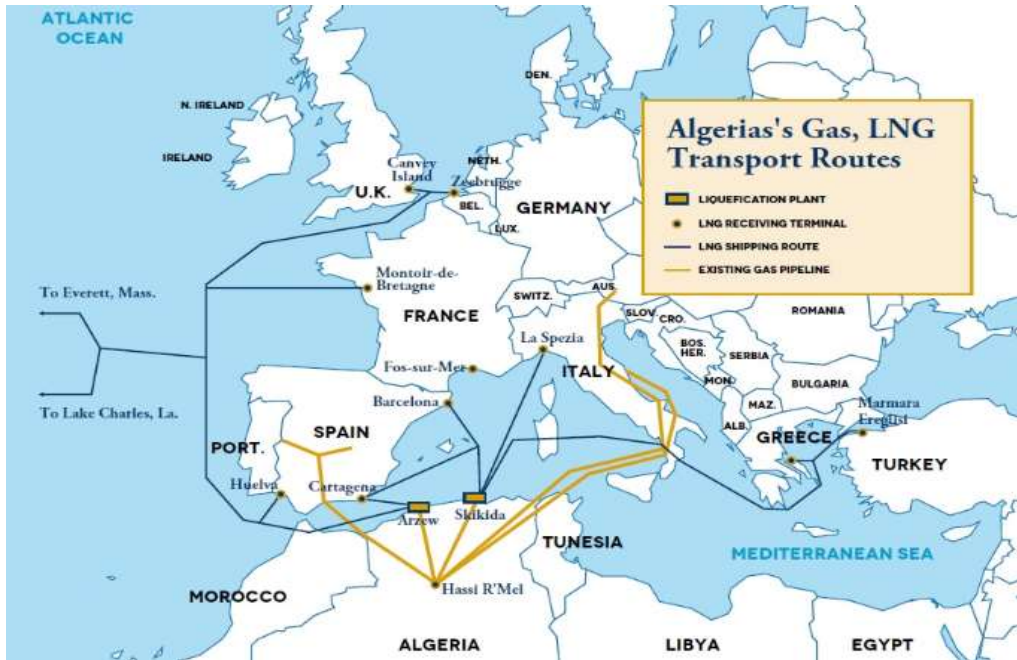
security crisis in Algeria. This migrant flow impacted Algeria's energy supplies to Europe²², raising European awareness of the close connection between security on both shores of the Mediterranean and Algeria's substantial geopolitical influence in this Mediterranean region.

As a result, the European Union included Algeria in all the security initiatives launched towards their southern neighborhood. Algeria has not been exempted from any framework since the European Union started its security dialogue policy with the countries of the southern shore in 1990.²³ For Algeria, these initiatives provided an opportunity to alleviate its isolation. However, they also heightened their concerns about foreign intervention from the Mediterranean region, especially given the increasing strategic Euro-Atlantic presence in the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, the Mediterranean initiatives, which treat the Mediterranean as a geopolitical space, have placed Algeria within broader spaces and relationships with geopolitical and security actors, both state and non-state, Mediterranean and extra-Mediterranean. It increases the Mediterranean region's strategic importance for Algeria and its security. It is especially significant considering that the Mediterranean is almost the only route through which Algeria's trade exchanges with the outside world have taken place since independence, whether in terms of imports (food and manufactured goods) or exports (petroleum and natural gas)²⁴. Regarding energy exports, Algeria is the second-largest producer in the world of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and the third source for both²⁵.

Algeria imports approximately 11% of the European Union (after Russia and Norway). It is connected to Europe through three pipelines, as illustrated in Figure (1): The Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline (MEG) closed in November 2021 due to tensions between Algeria and Morocco, with a 13.5 billion cubic meters capacity. Additionally, there are the MedGaz and TransMed pipelines. The latter exports an average of 22 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, although its capacity is 32 billion cubic meters. MedGaz, on the other hand, had its capacity expanded from 8 billion cubic meters to 10.5 billion by the end of 2021²⁶.

Figure (1): Algeria's Gas, LNG Transport Routes



Source; <https://www.algerianembassy.org/economy/oil-and-gaz-energy.html>

Furthermore, Algeria exports some gas to Europe through its facilities for liquefied natural gas (LNG), which must be fully utilized. Out of a capacity of 34.7 billion cubic meters, 15.6 billion cubic meters were exported in 2021 (utilization rate of 45%). Therefore, the remaining capacity of liquefied natural gas is 19.1 billion cubic meters. It can be added to the remaining 10 billion cubic meters from the TransMed pipeline, resulting in a total capacity of 29.1 billion cubic meters²⁷.

In conjunction with the European Union's efforts to diversify energy sources and move away from Russian gas due to successive crises (Crimea 2014, Ukraine 2021, Russia cutting off gas to Europe due to the escalation of the Ukrainian war in 2022), Algeria emerged as a "savior" for the European continent. It ranks 11th globally regarding proven natural gas reserves and is the third-ranked country in shale gas reserves, following China and Argentina. That positions Algeria as a significant player in

helping Europe secure alternative gas sources amid geopolitical uncertainties²⁸.

After the war outbreak in Ukraine, Germany started to think urgently about gas diversification. Germany's Vice Chancellor and Minister of Economics and Climate Action, Habeck, has announced a visit to Algeria in the spring of 2023, seeking new non-Russian energy sources. In August 2022, Chancellor Scholz supported the construction of the Iberian pipeline by 2025. Namely, he suggested getting gas to flow from Algeria to central and northern Europe via the Iberian Peninsula. It means the revitalization of a project that began in 2003 but was never completed; in previous years, it failed due to the high costs involved. The project should include Algeria, Spain, Portugal, France, and the European Commission²⁹.

All of this illustrates the progressive approach of the European Union towards Algeria, built on two levels. Firstly, at a strategic level, it involves constructing a standard policy aimed at dispelling concerns related to security issues (terrorism, migration, and borders). Secondly, at an energy level, it aims to secure the supply of reasonably priced oil and gas while encouraging the presence of foreign companies to maximize the utilization of renewable energies, especially solar electricity. It requires significant investments from the private sector, putting substantial pressure on Algeria to ensure an attractive investment environment.

III. Consistent and changing in Algeria's gas diplomacy towards the European Union: promoting energy diplomacy

Understanding Algerian security diplomacy in its public sphere becomes more accessible by grasping a network of intertwined geopolitical indicators. This challenge intensifies when the localization of this diplomacy within the framework of Algeria's foreign policy management is not clearly defined. The country's foreign policy relies on a set of constitutional and legal constants that determine the fundamental tasks of the Algerian security apparatus, primarily focused on protecting and preserving the state's sovereignty and borders. These constants have played a significant role in interpreting Algerian diplomatic behavior throughout Algeria's political history³⁰.

In an era of reshaping geopolitical alliances, following disruptions in the international system caused by various factors (cross-national threats, the COVID-19 pandemic, competition between China and the United States, the war between Russia and Ukraine), the diplomatic dynamics initiated by Algeria since the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic reveal several dimensions. These include economic diplomacy, diplomatic rapprochement, parliamentary diplomacy, preventive diplomacy, and multilateral diplomacy. Algeria expresses its desire to reposition itself internationally as a critical regional partner. It reaffirms its affiliations and defines its strategic interests within the Mediterranean context³¹.

Due to the war in Ukraine, which erupted last year when Russian President Vladimir Putin entered Ukrainian territory on February 24, 2021, and his pressure on European countries by cutting energy supplies through Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, European countries sought to liberate themselves from reliance on Russian gas by turning to other sources, primarily in the Mediterranean region, with Algeria at the forefront. Algeria is considered Africa's primary source of natural gas for Europe through a strategically dispersed network of pipelines along its coasts, which increases its importance for Spain and Italy; with the growing energy needs in Europe for gas and oil, Algeria is expected to offer political and economic concessions to the countries it supplies with these resources³².

All these developments have prompted Algeria to capitalize on the crisis after years of instability, including the decline in oil prices in 2014, the protest movement in 2019, and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021. Algeria aims to achieve this by enhancing its diplomacy in the energy sector³³, with the economic goal of replenishing state reserves and rallying European countries to support its political stance regarding Morocco and Western Sahara. This strategic move aligns with Algeria's efforts to adapt and solidify its foreign policy doctrine to reposition itself strategically on the international stage.

The beginnings of this became evident in the case of Italy and Algeria. Just four days into the start of the war in Ukraine, the Italians proactively

sought to strengthen ties with Algeria. Italian Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio visited Algeria with the CEO of the Italian energy company ENI to meet with his Algerian counterparts, Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra and Energy Minister Mohamed Arkab. The primary discussion topics included the global energy crisis, focusing on the energy agreement and the Italian-Algerian strategic partnership. This visit marked the establishment of the Algeria-Rome axis and the formation of strong partnerships between the two countries³⁴.

What is happening between Rome and Algeria today is called "gas diplomacy." Following the visit of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to Rome in May 2022, Algerian authorities announced their decision to increase the export of natural gas to Italy by an additional four billion cubic meters, reaching up to six billion by the end of 2022³⁵. Meanwhile, Spanish authorities perceived a significant opportunism in Italy's approach, exploiting the strained relations between Algeria and Madrid. Against tensions with Morocco, Algeria closed one of the pipelines transporting gas to the Iberian Peninsula in November 2021.

As trade relations are integral to diplomatic ties, Algeria resorted to diplomatic measures with Spain due to Spain's shift in its position on the Western Sahara issue to support Morocco. Algeria suspended the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation, signed in 2002 between the two countries, announcing this decision after a meeting of the Algerian High-Security Council chaired by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. Subsequently, Algeria recalled its ambassador to Spain and announced that the national oil company, Sonatrach, would raise the prices of gas supplied to Spain. All these actions followed the closure of the pipeline by Algeria on November 1 and the non-renewal of the transit contract between Algeria and Morocco after weeks of strained relations between the two countries.

In the same context, the Spanish online newspaper "El Heraldo" revealed the economic losses incurred by Madrid due to the diplomatic crisis with Algeria over two months. According to figures from the Spanish Ministry of Commerce, exports to Algeria decreased by 71% in June and 81% in July compared to the same periods in the previous year, 2021. This

decline followed the ban on Spanish products entering Algeria after the decision to suspend the Friendship Treaty. Spanish industrialists urged Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to find a solution to the crisis with Algeria, and they called on the Spanish government to address what they referred to as the Algerian blockade, which the Spanish government struggled to handle effectively³⁶.

In response to the crisis between Algeria and Spain, the European Union issued a joint statement in which the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and the Vice President of the European Commission, along with the EU Commissioner for Trade, Valdis Dombrovskis, described Algeria's decision to suspend a political treaty with a European partner as highly worrying³⁷. The Algerian mission to the European Union then issued a press release expressing its displeasure with the haste of the European Commission's response without proper consultation with the Algerian government. The statement emphasized that this measure does not directly or indirectly impact Algeria's commitments outlined in the Partnership Agreement between Algeria and the European Union³⁸.

Algeria also affirmed that gas supplies to Spain will not be affected by the recent decisions. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune stated that Algeria will continue to fulfill all its commitments made in this context, and the relevant commercial companies must uphold their contractual obligations³⁹. Algeria continues to supply Spain with gas through liquefied natural gas carriers and the Medgaz pipeline, connecting Beni Saf in western Algeria to Almería in southern Spain.

Yes, it is true that amid the reassessment of relationships in the Mediterranean region, Algeria sought to leverage global markets as a significant partner for the European Union and a key player in achieving regional stability. However, Algeria was careful not to strain its historical alliance with Russia. In April 2022, Algeria voted against excluding Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council, a move welcomed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during his visit to Algeria in May 2022⁴⁰.

The Algerian sector has been experiencing a revival since 2020, especially after the parliament approved new legislation redefining the sector's legal framework. This move provided more flexibility to attract additional foreign investments. The signing of a significant oil and gas contract between the Algerian company Sonatrach and the Italian company Eni, the French Total, and the American Occidental Petroleum is a prominent aspect of this resurgence.

Additionally, Algeria has progressed with the Nigal pipeline project, a gas pipeline stretching across the desert from Nigeria to Algeria. This project could provide up to 30 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe annually, further solidifying Algeria's position as a significant energy supplier and contributing to attracting foreign investments⁴¹.

In light of this, the Algerian political leadership intends to leverage its natural resources to support its foreign policy, which has experienced setbacks in recent years during the presidency of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. By reducing Europe's reliance on Russian gas and shifting towards the South Mediterranean, Algeria sees an opportunity to reclaim its pivotal role in the region. This shift allows President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to choose strategic partners on the international stage that align with national interests.

These indications have become particularly evident in recent months, marked by the Algerian-Italian rapprochement, the expressed intent to join the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and the hosting of the Arab Summit in Algeria.

CONCLUSION :

Throughout history, the Algerian region has been a bet for the European Mediterranean actors because of its importance in energy supplies and the impact of security conditions, allowing Algeria to exploit these data to play a pivotal role in its Mediterranean dimension. From the above, we have reached the following conclusions:

- Energy is the key driver of the various productive economic sectors that create wealth because of its importance to national security and economic development.

- Energy security is achieved for consumer countries by providing sufficient quantities and appropriate prices securely and continuously. For exporting countries, energy security is linked to discovering new energy sources to ensure continued export while using technology to reduce the cost of exploration and production.
- Given the importance of energy for States, a new strategy for obtaining such resources without recourse to conflict has emerged, namely energy diplomacy, where importing States use this strategy to access continuous energy flow and appropriate prices from a variety of sources energy exporters depend on diplomatic means to achieve their national interests.
- Algeria's interest as the major exporter of petroleum and gas in the Mediterranean circle from the beginning of the 1990s to the present has been initiated by several variables (security and economic) that have dedicated their presence in the region. In particular, the European Union has become careful that energy supplies will not be affected by its growing crises with Russia after the Ukrainian war.
- International conditions (turmoil in the international system, Chinese ascent, the aftermath of the war in Ukraine) and the European Union in particular, Algeria's strategic repositioning in its Mediterranean circle has provided an opportunity to draw on its natural resources and employ it in the diplomatic framework to achieve both its economic and political interests.
- Algeria appears to be on track to exploit its energy security capabilities and capabilities and to employ them to achieve its foreign policy objectives, Especially as global competition for energy grows in the context of the Russian-European crisis, offering President Tebboune's administration an opportunity to regain Algeria's status as a pivotal State in the future Mediterranean.

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