SECURITY AND DEFENCE STRATEGY FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

2022 Edition
The Wider Mediterranean, an area of primary strategic interest for Italy, is a complex multidimensional geopolitical system and a cohesive link between different worlds. This area is at the centre of multiple dynamics that are very diverse and generally tend to be conflicting thus giving rise to long-lasting crises whose consequences affect Europe and, of course, Italy.

Because of its morphology, the Mediterranean, which we have always referred to as the “mare nostrum” (our sea), is the crossroads of three continents and is, now more than ever, an economic, commercial and social hub. It also represents the fastest, safest and most economical route to connect the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific, with the latter seeming far away but, as a matter of fact, being closer and closer.

The Mediterranean is also a complex area riven by deep rifts that give rise to geopolitical impulses fuelled by social, religious, security and climate issues that the pandemic has further accelerated and exacerbated.

Understanding the instability and the subsequent risks and threats posed to our security and our prosperity requires an analysis that extends beyond the geographical boundaries of the Mediterranean basin.

That is why Defence Ministry embraces the concept of the Wider Mediterranean in its broadest sense; that is, a multidimensional geopolitical space that comprises different countries, cultures, and societies interconnected by economic and security issues. It is a space characterised by local problems and crises whose consequences reverberate across the whole region.

The Wider Mediterranean comprises areas strictly adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, including the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf and the territories along the sub-Saharan belt stretching from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf of Guinea through the Sahel. It is no coincidence that these strategic areas are where our armed forces are deployed internationally and represent the focus of our cooperation plans.

This in-depth analysis is necessary given the wide nature and scope of the above-mentioned dynamics, whose causes and consequences take place along a time-space continuum. Such a situation was essentially unfathomable until a few decades ago.

Italy is part of this interconnection as it is heavily affected by the precariousness on its southern flank, where widespread instability provides a breeding ground for the rise of jihad-inspired terrorism, illegal trafficking and, more recently, hybrid threats from actors outside the region who are now deeply rooted in this context.

Moreover, migration from Africa and the Middle East reaches the Mediterranean through corridors controlled by criminal organisations often associated with and supporting terrorist groups. This happens as a direct consequence of the long-standing demographic imbalance exacerbated by the effects of climate change and combined with deep-rooted social and economic uncertainty.

The present situation in the Sahel and in the Horn of Africa is a clear example of this interpretation: these are the two corners at the base of a virtual triangle whose top is the southern shore of the Mediterranean.
The projection of influence by old and new actors is evidence of the unceasing ambition to acquire strategic depth in areas of direct interest to NATO and the EU, but also of the determination to access new resources. In this regard, the Mediterranean is again at the centre of the international scene.

The increasing military presence in this region is evidence of this. Initially concentrated in the maritime domain, this presence is expanding into other domains as well, paving the way for a worrying “territorialisation” of the Mediterranean.

In this complex and fraught context, the Italian Defence Ministry aims at:

- safeguarding strategic interests and national security;
- projecting stability to those theatres whose dynamics affect Europe;
- contributing to the security policy of the international organisations of reference, namely NATO, the EU, and the UN;
- contributing to strengthening the institutions of the countries where Italy operates by developing the capabilities that guarantee structural stability and sustainable development through specific cooperation plans.

In this regard, this document updates and adjusts the Defence Strategy for the Mediterranean and, at the same time, relaunches a wider military dimension as a key element of resilience and to strengthen Italy's role in the international scenario.

We do not aim to introduce new initiatives, but rather to refine and systematise the many activities already in place; our qualified participation in international missions and operations; our presence and surveillance activities; and the different forms of cooperation where Italy plays a major role.

The aim of this Strategy is therefore twofold:

- firstly, it addresses the implications related to “cooperative security” and “crisis management” in support of a more significant and mature role for Italy in achieving the stability of the area. We have to capitalise on our aptitude for “military diplomacy” and dialogue, and add a credible intervention capability. This adds to our ability to deliver education, training, and advice to the local security and armed forces, and the capacity of the national military industry to meet the requirements of our partners in terms of assets and equipment;
- secondly, it refers to the role and strategies of the Alliances. This Strategy aims, in fact, at a more sophisticated understanding of crises, centering the South within a comprehensive analysis that takes place in almost all domains. Moreover, it aims at encouraging a systematic approach as the basis for growing inter-ministerial cooperation.

This document provides politico-military policy guidelines (Security and Defence Strategy for the Mediterranean). An operational directive resulting therefrom will define instruments and resources to meet the goals set by the political leadership.

Rome,

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mediterranean Sea is part of the historical heritage of our country. It provides continued support to our national economy, thereby contributing to the wealth and prosperity of our businesses and citizens. It is estimated that 20% of the global maritime traffic passes through the Mediterranean. The Strait of Sicily, which is of high strategic importance to Italy, is the choke point of the most advantageous route connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Moreover, the underwater communication backbone cables connecting Europe to Asia and Africa run along its seabed.

In a context of globalisation in which local events and issues affect the regional dimension, and sometimes go beyond it, the Italian focus should not be limited to the Mediterranean basin, where migration, competition for resources, and transnational criminal activities generate serious concerns. Within Italy’s focus should be those countries and neighbouring geographical areas whose events – such as local conflicts and crises, international terrorism, effects on climate – can affect our country and the alliances it belongs to, i.e. the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union.

This strategic dimension, which escapes rigid geographical boundaries, is known as the “Wider Mediterranean”. It includes continental Europe, the Middle East and the northern and sub-Saharan belts of Africa. The generally hybrid potential threats to the Italian national interest originate from these strategic areas. That is why they need to be continuously monitored to prevent or solve potentially significant crises and to take timely action as required.

The Wider Mediterranean – which is also the focus of many leading global powers, other emerging actors, and transnational non-state actors with a strong geo-political voice – is therefore the main theatre for our armed forces. They operate in it to protect our national interest, and conduct various bilateral or multilateral cooperation activities stemming from parliamentary decisions. These activities also take place in the context of approved peace enforcing and stabilisation operations and missions in synergy with our Allies, partners and International organisations.

The Mediterranean region is the “Southern Flank” of the Atlantic Alliance and of the European Union, the two main national points of reference in the field of security and defence. It is therefore essential for our country that the Wider Mediterranean receive appropriate attention in the strategic guidelines these two international organisations have developed, i.e. the NATO’s New Strategic Concept and the EU’s “Strategic Compass”.

In the aforementioned scenario, the Defence and Security Strategy for the Mediterranean - 2022 Edition aims at defining the politico-military and macro-policy guidelines required to drive the implementing action of the higher authorities in technical and operational terms. The intended goal is to develop plans and guidance for the employment of the military forces – in the most appropriate and useful ways, forms and places – to support and safeguard the Italian national interest. Two dimensions characterise this goal, namely:

- a cooperative dimension made of military diplomacy and interaction with partner countries in the region, including within multilateral initiatives;
- an operational dimension entailing presence and deterrence within a typical multi-domain environment.
Given the complexity of this region and the resulting blurred distinction between the requirements of defence and security, the armed forces shall adopt a systemic approach that fosters cooperation with the other ministries and institutions that can help achieve the best possible security environment for our country, including through their involvement and support, as necessary.
1. ITALY AT THE CENTRE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SYSTEM

Geographically placed at the heart of the Mediterranean with a coastline of some 8,000 km, Italy has always been deeply connected with the sea for economic and security reasons. It is an important element of the country's historical heritage and supports the economy of our country and therefore the wealth and prosperity of our people through the so-called blue economy. It requires, however, continued attention and significant investments in terms of sustainable protection and development.

Despite representing only 1% of the world’s oceans, 20% of the world's maritime traffic occurs in the Mediterranean Sea. The Strait of Sicily is the crossroad of the most important maritime routes connecting the western and eastern oceanic areas. That is why it is a choke point of high strategic value.

The transformation economy requires raw and semi-finished materials to export "made in Italy" finished goods. Italy depends on maritime traffic and transport to a great degree. Although Covid-19 has reduced global maritime trade flows, the sea continues to be a key player in Italian trade. The €47.5 bn produced in 2020 by the blue economy have triggered an additional €89.4 bn for a total of €136.9 bn in production, or 8.6% of the entire national economy.

In 2020, Italy imported 66.4 bn cubic metres of gas and 50.5 bn tons of oil as against the 4.4 and 5.3 respectively originating from national land and offshore deposits, i.e. located in maritime waters under the jurisdiction of Italy. Almost all of Italy's fossil fuel needs are therefore met through imports. While a gradual transition toward renewable sources is envisaged, this situation calls for a reflection on the security and stability of the supplying countries, transit areas for gas and oil lines, as well as communication lines, including maritime lines in the first place. Oil and gas, in fact, are almost totally supplied by specialised ships (oil and gas tankers) from the Persian Gulf, the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Africa, the Western Mediterranean, and the Black Sea through the crucial waterways of Suez, Hormuz and Bab El Mandeb, the latter being a high-risk chokepoint and the epicentre of instability and conflicts.

Occurrences such as the grounding of the container ship Ever Given in the Suez Canal have clearly demonstrated the vulnerabilities and the consequent critical impact on the entire global supply chain and logistics.

Going forwards, the ecological transition process, which includes the production of green energy through the exploitation of the wind and currents or the production of hydrogen, will require establishing new offshore facilities and the conversion of those already in place. Lastly, the underwater communication backbones at the bottom of the Mediterranean connecting Europe to Asia and Africa have become increasingly important in the light of the present economic, financial and social structure.

The Wider Mediterranean, characterised as it is by continuous and major changes and long-standing crises, is where our main national interests lie. They must be pursued and defended within the Italian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), in the national waters closer to its outer limit and in the international waters closer to the outer edge of the territorial sea.

The proclamation of a national EEZ by Law 91/2021 confirms Italy’s determination to assert its sovereignty by exercising its rights and a fair and responsible use of sea resources.
In order to safeguard the Italian interest, we should take actions at several different levels; notably, Italy should:

- strengthen initiatives with countries in the region, particularly capacity building, through specific cooperation plans in synergy with the missions and international operations we contribute to;
- invest in regional multilateral initiatives with a focus on the Mediterranean region. The 5+5 Initiative in the central-western Mediterranean, the DECI – with its NATO implication being the Framework Nation Concept – and ADRION in the Western Balkans and the Ionian-Adriatic region, and the QUAD in the Eastern Mediterranean are concrete examples of effective models of development to follow;

Increase situational awareness and, consequently, the ability to prevent possible crises and act when needed, in reference to in-depth actions that require stronger operational and strategic intelligence, fully integrated components and the ability to project the military instrument where/when necessary (expeditionary capacity). In other words, we need to enhance the ability to impact upon multi-domain and complex environments. Threats and conflicts, in fact, are not limited to the traditional military domain alone. They also affect the space and cyber domains, occur in the energy and economic fields, involve communications and access to seaports, and imply the recognition of Exclusive Economic Zones that, sometimes, are in conflict with those of the neighbouring countries.
2. THE “WIDER MEDITERRANEAN”: A GEOPOLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The Wider Mediterranean is a multi-faceted, uncertain, unstable and constantly evolving geopolitical framework. It fuels the so-called ‘globalisation of local insecurities’ and impacts on the security of Italy and the Euro-Atlantic area. The resulting effects are reflected in the foreign and defence policies of Italy, the Atlantic Alliance, and the European Union.

The Central Mediterranean, in particular, is exposed to migration flows, the competition for access to resources, the erosion of the right of transit passage and exploitation (sea territorialisation), transnational criminal activities, terrorism and the consequences of local conflicts. That is why the Strait of Sicily represents the point of contact with countries that, despite being characterised by institutional uncertainties, are indispensable partners for dialogue and cooperation and complement Italy’s inclination to Atlanticism and European integration.

Taken as a whole, the Wider Mediterranean is characterised by instability, uncertainties and a complex dynamism due to the conflict in Libya, the tensions along the border between Morocco and Algeria, the political crisis in Tunisia, and the unresolved issue of territorial sovereignty over Western Sahara. In addition, the security situation in the Sahel is extremely critical and further worsened by the presence of Daesh. A lack of security affects the Gulf of Guinea, which the International Maritime Bureau defined as the global hot spot of piracy, and the Horn of Africa. Instability persists in Yemen with repercussions on the Bab El Mandeb Strait, together with the crisis in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, along the border with Eritrea. In the areas falling outside this virtual triangle, we should not forget the persistent fragility of the Balkans and Lebanon, the crises in Syria and along the Turkish-Syrian border, the instability in Iraq and the increased tensions in the area of the Persian Gulf, including via repeated attacks on merchant vessels and, more recently, on coastal countries.

There is a prevailing and ever more complex reality made of super powers that can project their influence on a global scale. There are "emerging" or "re-emerging” actors capable of affecting the international balance, as well as transnational non-state actors whose geopolitical weight in terms of magnitude and/or ability to take action is comparable or sometimes higher than that of actual states.

The disengagement of the United States from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and its repositioning to the ever more strategically important Indo-Pacific area has created a vacuum that has opened the way to old and new competitors who can jeopardise the interests and security of Italy.

The presence of Russia and China is increasingly evident. China, in particular, relentlessly pursues its effective penetration into the Mediterranean, similarly to what has already happened in Africa and the Middle East. This is particularly true for economy and commerce, i.e. the channels through which Beijing resolutely pursues its strategic objectives, with increasing military implications.

As regards Russia, the news confirms that Moscow poses real and insidious threats. After the downsizing of its role on the international scene in the decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has relaunched and markedly increased its influence in the Mediterranean, where it gained easy access especially thanks to its ties with the regime in Damascus. Thanks to a robust military presence in outposts of high strategic importance, i.e. a naval base and an air force base, the Russian forces are significantly and persistently present along the NATO’s southern flank. The position recently taken in Cyrenaica in support of General Haftar and the Libyan National Army (LNA) is a further development of the events in Syria.
This military presence goes hand in hand with Moscow’s industrial strategy in the field of armaments and results in an ever-increasing penetration into the region's markets.

After a period of territorial characterisation – which is largely reduced today – international terrorism continues to be a threat. It has been exacerbated by the consequences of the pandemic, particularly in the Sahel, where Jihadist movements find fertile ground for proliferation.

A number of contributing factors augment the pressure exerted by migration. They include the upsurge of religion-inspired terrorism in the sub-Saharan belt with the resulting instability in the Mediterranean and the effects of the pandemic and climate change. This situation, which influences relations between European allies and member countries, will be contained only by adopting a multidimensional approach with the countries of origin and transit and by managing borders.

Moreover, the security context is further exacerbated by hybrid warfare and the confrontation in the so-called “grey zone”. Both, in fact, bring competitive interactions to the brink of open conflict, while only occasionally crossing this threshold. This entanglement has changed and eroded the boundaries of traditional conflicts, leading to the convergence of domestic and international security, thereby making the line between defence and security increasingly blurred.

The scenario described so far is characterised by a persistent level of competition, or international tension, sometimes leading to the illegal appropriation of maritime territories and their resources. Today, less than 20% of the Mediterranean Sea is “free” from disputes and claims among the 21 coastal countries.

Against this background, Law 91/2021 on the Italian Exclusive Economic Zone aims at establishing zones where the Italian national jurisdiction applies to the blue economy and the regular course of maritime activities. The effects of climate change are a further element of destabilisation and general insecurity. In particular, the causal link between the shortage of water and food – together with its effect on the territories – and the increase in poverty and migration flows are among the major causes for increased tensions and insecurity in many countries. Moreover, the melting of the Arctic ice cap has opened the way for new scenarios in terms of alternative maritime lines of communication and access to strategic resources.
3. NATO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE “SOUTHERN FLANK”

The centrality and fragility of the Mediterranean region are significant elements of the NATO concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA), where the Area of Responsibility is divided into seven regions, including the Mediterranean, to maintain greater preparedness, when needed.

As for the Southern Flank in particular, i.e. the Mediterranean area, the Alliance has agreed to review its strategy and to develop a new dedicated plan shortly to better manage capabilities and initiatives.

**NATO has started working on a new Strategic Concept** that will replace the existing Concept, which dates back to 2010. In this context, Italy will do its best to give new impetus to the strengthening of the posture on the “Southern Flank” as part of a 360-degree vision.

The Southern Flank shall have to become a strategic priority also for the **European Union**. Most of the civilian missions and military operations are currently conducted between the Mediterranean and the African continent, in an area almost completely overlapping the “Wider Mediterranean”. This posture is also reflected in the **“Strategic Compass”**, the document on the EU’s future strategic orientation on the Common Security and Defence Policy in the years to come.

The priorities of the “Strategic Compass” include providing consistency to the EU’s security and defence initiatives and ensuring their complementarity with NATO.

The **European Union** and NATO are the major references as regards security and defence. Therefore, it is necessary that the Italian national vision be enhanced and promoted. The **EU**, in particular, is the natural dimension for Italy to exert its role. It is a strategic and irreversible choice for our country. At this time, which is in many ways historic, the EU is devoting increasing attention to security and defence and reaffirming that they are fundamental elements in the construction of a more political Union, which is indispensable to compete on the world’s stage. This is why it is crucial that Italy continues to contribute significantly to **strengthen the CSDP** in line with the EU’s aspiration to achieve greater **strategic autonomy** in terms of technology, industry, and capacity of action.

In particular, pursuing a more substantial **national strategic autonomy** is essential to achieving a higher degree of **EU strategic autonomy**. The two concepts are complementary and represent a contribution to the credibility of collective defence, so that proper **burden sharing** strengthens **cooperation between the European Union and NATO**. Keeping alive the focus on the Mediterranean region is undoubtedly one of the initiatives to promote and support within Europe. This will be made possible by developing a **Strategy for the Mediterranean Region** as part of the broader “Strategic Compass” and the future “NATO Strategic Concept”.

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**In order to prompt the international organisations of reference to pay greater attention to its area of preeminent national interest, Italy shall proactively contribute to the definition of the new strategic guidelines and strive to exert its constructive and qualified influence on these organisations.**
4. ITALY’S SECURITY AND DEFENCE STRATEGY FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

The “Wider Mediterranean” is the priority area within which Italy acts in pursuit of its national strategic interests.

These include Italy’s actions, projects, ambitions and objectives that directly or indirectly contribute to the prosperity and success of our economy: that is, that are deemed key to our system in terms of values, politics, economy, culture and the military. They include trade, availability of raw materials, energy supplies (infrastructure and pipelines included), digital highways, diplomatic, economic and industrial positioning, scientific research, and free navigation.

Given its geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic nature, the concept of “Wider Mediterranean” undergoes continuous changes and therefore has no rigid geographical definition. The Italian Defence Ministry considers the Wider Mediterranean to comprise the areas adjacent to the “Mediterranean Sea”, i.e., continental Europe, the Balkans and Black Sea, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf, and Africa, with its northern and sub-Saharan belts stretching from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf of Guinea and across the Sahel. These areas are strategic and, as such, they require continuous monitoring to ensure that prompt interventions occur whenever the Italian interests are jeopardised, or when a crisis arises that can negatively affect the aforementioned interests. Therefore, these areas are where our armed forces conduct their activities, which take place in various forms, such as cross-border power projection for stabilisation and peace enforcement missions and operations, as well as multilateral and bilateral cooperation activities.

These are key elements of the national defence and security policy, which take on strategic significance when conducted in conjunction with the protection of our priority interests. Such policies cannot be pursued in the absence of synergy with international organisations and cooperation with partner countries, so that we can ensure stability and increase common security by sharing costs, efforts and risks and therefore contain them.

The cooperative dimension must be also accompanied by the necessary will to protect our national interests even through purely national commitments established by parliamentary decisions.

Therefore, the contribution of the Defence Ministry to the security of the Wider Mediterranean has substantially two dimensions: cooperative and operational.

The Cooperative Dimension. The Italian Defence Ministry projects its power to the area of national interest through complex international cooperation activities based on structured cooperation plans. The latter meet firstly the requirements of partner countries and encompass a broad and salient range of areas from education to training and capability building assistance.

With this approach, the Italian armed forces have launched a large number of multilateral initiatives in this region that have achieved significant results in terms of confidence building and mutual trust. Following these positive experiences, Italy has also started important bilateral operations over the last few years to develop capability and institution building activities therein. The MIBIL in Lebanon, the MIASIT in Libya and the MISIN in Niger are examples of this. They are complemented by the qualified Italian participation in operations under the aegis of the UN, NATO and the EU. In this respect, the Italian component pursues the specific objectives of the missions, in addition to increasing trust bilaterally with the armed forces of the host countries.
Overall, these military diplomacy activities aim at supporting the industrial, economic and diplomatic positioning of our country. The contribution to security consists in the acquisition of autonomous capabilities by friendly countries. As they become increasingly capable to cope with their own security issues, they can contribute to the security of Italy and Europe.

**We need to increase the effectiveness of our cooperative activities while leveraging our geographic position and shared goals.**

The Operational Dimension. Italy’s participation in NATO and EU operations in the Wider Mediterranean is significant for the protection of Italian national interests. It may be backed by other national or coalition initiatives in specific countries and geographical areas. We need to ensure presence and surveillance and, therefore, deterrence while encouraging the countries we cooperate with to develop autonomous capabilities, particularly in the areas of immediate interest to Italy.

Great attention shall be paid to the choke points closest to our country and to the Strait of Sicily in particular. The Strait of Sicily is a choke point in maritime traffic, including maritime military traffic, between the eastern and western shores of the Mediterranean as well as the point of convergence of most of the north-south traffic, including illegal traffic.

Similar attention shall have to be paid to ensuring the contribution of the Defence Ministry to the protection of the national EEZ.

This is a typical multidimensional\(^1\) (as well as multi-domain\(^2\)) environment requiring a commitment of the national economic system supported/favoured by the entire Defence apparatus.

**Information superiority is the pre-requisite for gaining a decision-making advantage.**

From a military viewpoint, situational awareness of the areas of interest allows the military to intervene when/where necessary whenever ‘anomalies’ are detected. In doing so, the military can optimise and synchronise the available resources for systemic effectiveness.

The complexity of the Wider Mediterranean, the hybridisation of conflicts, the blurred separation between defence and security, and the evolutionary trend towards multi-domain confrontation require a systemic approach involving other ministries and institutions that can improve the overall security framework. In particular, the Ministry of Defence shall talk to and seek synergies with:

- the **Ministry of the Interior**, especially in the fight against terrorism and cyber threats, control of illegal immigration and related phenomena;
- the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**, for which the Ministry of Defence is a major enabler. The latter can provide support to diplomatic activities for the global industrial and economic positioning and for crisis management, with the possibility of providing intensity-scaled response, from the low to the high end of the spectrum;

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\(^1\) Situations that, in order to achieve the desired result, require the coordination and synchronisation of efforts (to include will, resources and capabilities) by multiple ministries and agencies at the national and multilateral levels.

\(^2\) Military operations more focused on available capabilities and the effects to attain rather than on bringing together one-dimensional assets, thus implying a synergic and integrated action to counter threats against collective defence and security present in all operational domains, whether traditional (land, sea, air) or transversal (cyberspace and extra-atmospheric space).
the Ministry of Sustainable Infrastructure and Mobility as regards the security aspects of the domestic transport network, navigation in waters under national jurisdiction and protection of human life at sea;
- the Ministry of Ecological Transition, for the security aspects of facilities for the exploration and use of geomining and energy resources as well as environmental protection;
- the Ministry of Economic Development to promote the competitiveness of defence and the defence industry, with special focus on high-technology programmes of great added value for our country;
- the National Cybersecurity Agency as regards national capabilities in the field of cyber-security;
- the Civil Protection Department as for the assistance Defence can provide to Civil Protection.

This systemic approach must be based on “networking” and requires that all institutional and non-institutional actors be willing to share information and awareness.

In this perspective, we should capitalise on what is already available at government level and proceed to achieving full operational capability for the "Inter-ministerial Integrated Maritime Surveillance Force" (Italian: Dispositivo Interministeriale Integrato di Sorveglianza Marittima, DIISM). The DIISM project was launched by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in 2007 to create an integrated maritime surveillance system capable of managing all data gathered at sea by naval units reporting to different ministries. This is possible through an Operations Centre (Control Room) located at the Italian Maritime Operations Centre (Italian: Centrale Operativa Marina Militare, COMM). So far, COMM has successfully dealt with specific cases and short interagency operations.

**While respecting the tasks and responsibilities of every stakeholder, the Ministry of Defence shall promote a systemic approach so that any organization/institution involved can exchange information and take conscious decisions that produce concrete effects and a unified action at sea by our country.**
5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

The Mediterranean together with what is known as the Wider Mediterranean are key elements in the security, social and economic dynamics that have a direct impact on Europe and Italy in particular.

Security in this region is fundamental for Italy. It requires that we play a leading role in our capacity as a medium regional power with a strong maritime vocation to safeguard our strategic interests and serving as a point of reference for the major allies within NATO and the EU. This calls for a truly joint, multi-domain, multi-dimensional approach to which the Defence Ministry must contribute by playing a proactive role in the contexts where it operates.

In order to fully implement this Security and Defence Strategy for the Mediterranean, the armed forces shall:

1. seek/encourage the international organisations they are part of to adopt an active posture towards their Southern Flank, which largely coincides with the Wider Mediterranean; the ongoing strategic review within NATO and the EU is an opportunity we should take advantage of;
2. strengthen and systematise cooperation and assistance, both bilaterally, multilaterally and within international operations with a view to capacity building in the relevant host countries;
3. strengthen and further develop the security architecture of the Wider Mediterranean through participation in ongoing missions/operations;
4. encourage a multi-domain approach, presence and a rapid reaction capability in those areas that are closest and of the greatest interest to Italy such as the Strait of Sicily, a forced point of passage that is vital for national security; more in general, contribute to the control and protection of the national EEZ;
5. develop Situational Awareness as the necessary condition to achieve decision-making superiority; in this respect, the Defence Ministry shall take any reasonable step to share and systemize information available in the different ministries and redistribute it, especially in the maritime domain, through fully implementing DIISM in order to attain a greater effectiveness of the “unified action of the State” at sea;
6. promote the technological development of the military, including through synergies with industry and research and innovation centres, so that the Defence Ministry may maintain significant capabilities and act as a driving force for the Italian defence sector.