

Italy and France sign the pact of Naples

The 35th Italian French summit was celebrated in Naples two years after the last Lyon conference. Bilateral summits between Italy and France date back to the dawn of united Europe and have become a regular feature since the times of Mitterrand and Spadolini, as well as a tangible sign of the solidity of relations that Italy maintains with its beyond the Alps neighbor. The last meeting took place in September 2017, when the Italian prime minister was Paolo Gentiloni and Emmanuel Macron had been elected president of the French Republic for just five months. Since then the two nations have experienced three years of fluctuating relationships and had never met again for a bilateral meeting. As a result of several disagreements on many strategic dossiers (starting with military ship-building, Libya and migrants), as well as for the establishment of the M5S-League government, that identified Macron's France as one of its principal opponents in Europe. Until last year's diplomatic crisis, triggered by the careless initiative on the French soil by then M5S political leader Di Maio which led to the angry transalpine reaction and the withdrawal of the French ambassador from Rome. For this reason, the Naples summit was hailed as the revival summit. In addition to the Elysée tenant, eleven French ministers landed in the Neapolitan city to meet their Italian counterparts, in spite of the coronavirus psychosis that is impacting negatively on Italy's relations with the rest of the world. If Paris is looking for an ally in Europe to play on Germany and acquire power after Brexit, the Italian government feels the need to get

out of the isolation in which the previous administration had forced the country. The partnership sealed by the Pact of Naples vows to relaunch bilateral relations in the fields of defense, scientific research, industrial cooperation, transports and management of migratory flows. As well as coordinating the vote of the two countries in Brussels, when it will be necessary to break the pro-austerity front embodied by the Nordic and Eastern European partners, or to influence the discussions on the next European budget and to take shelter from the implications of the ESM bailout fund reform. For Italy the opportunities are numerous and for example lie in the possibility of ensuring a joint enforcement of the Mediterranean's status quo – especially in its eastern and Levantine sectors, that are increasingly exposed to the initiatives of competing powers and in which Rome has to protect relevant diplomatic, commercial and energy interests. Risks are substantial as well. Indeed, France sits among the heavyweights of the global arena and always behave like a country that clearly knows its interests. For this reason, any attempt to cultivate the bilateral relationship with Paris as if it were a “peer” relationship runs the risk of exposing ourselves to crushing disappointments, considering Italy's persistent difficulties in developing an authentic self-awareness. On Libya, for example, the Naples summit made it clear that divergences remain deep beyond frozen smiles, and that president Macron has no intention of applying its principles of European solidarity also to regions located south of the Mediterranean.