

The power of friendship

Italian Prime Minister, Mr. Paolo Gentiloric looks at the relationship between Italy and Ghana on the eve of his visit to the country.

MY first visit to Ghana provides me with a unique opportunity to highlight the strong political and economic tie existing between our two countries, which dates back to Ghana's pre-independence era. There is so much that brings our countries together: our history, our peoples, our economies, our values.

Over the years, Italian entrepreneurs have extensively contributed to the country's development, by building roads, hospitals, and major infrastructure. Many of them remained so fascinated by this wonderful land that they decided to establish themselves here – which explains why Italian family names are easy to spot in Accra today.

Italy's role in supporting Ghana's development has been particularly relevant in the energy field. Indeed, in the early 1960s, Italy's Impregilo built the Akosombo hydroelectric dam, one of the country's main sources of electricity even today. In the same way, AGIP set up Ghana's first refinery in Tema. Today, ENI is becoming a major player in the Ghanaian energy industry. In fact, last May – that is, three months ahead of schedule – oil production began at Offshore Cape Three Points. The project

is already benefiting Ghana in terms of enhanced GDP growth, employment, tax revenues, royalties, and returns deriving from the 20 per cent share the government owns in the venture.

Combined with investment in renewable energies in the three northern regions of Ghana, such a project will be a game changer for Ghana's energy industry and make *dumsor* a fading memory.

Private sector development facility

Italy's contributions to Ghana's development however, extend far beyond the energy sector. We have helped the country move from aid to trade thanks to our private sector development facility (GPSDF), which has

enhanced the productive capacity of Ghana's small and medium enterprises through affordable and quality machinery. It has helped in creating jobs and adding value to raw materials, such as cocoa. Our economies are becoming

more and more interdependent and we look forward to working together on new projects and opportunities.

Our people-to-people relationship is also very important. Italy hosts the largest Ghanaian community in continental Europe (60,000 permanent residents), who are an incredible resource to our country as active participants to our cultural and productive life.

Likewise, Italy and Ghana share a deep passion for soccer. We have the highest number of Ghanaian soccer

players outside Ghana. Culture also plays a critical role in our partnership.

Scholarships

Many Ghanaian students benefit from Italian scholarships and thus have the opportunity to study in our prestigious universities. We also take pride in the Italian Ethnological Mission to Ghana, which has been studying the Nzema culture since 1954.

Italy and Ghana enjoy a strong partnership also at the international level. This year, in particular, we celebrate 60 years of our diplomatic relations. To us, Ghana is an example of democracy, stability, respect for human rights and peaceful alternation of governments for the entire African continent. On the 60th anniversary of both Ghana's independence and the foundation of the European Community, we look favourably at the integration process within ECOWAS, at the efforts towards creating a single currency, and at the coming into being of a Continental Free Trade Area.

We are both committed to fighting against terrorism, intolerance, and human trafficking. Likewise, we both have been supporting the United Nations mission in Lebanon since 2006. During my stay in Accra, I will visit the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre which provides globally-recognised capacity for international actors on African peace and security.

I have been invited to plant a tree there, a powerful symbol of hope in the future. The future holds many promises

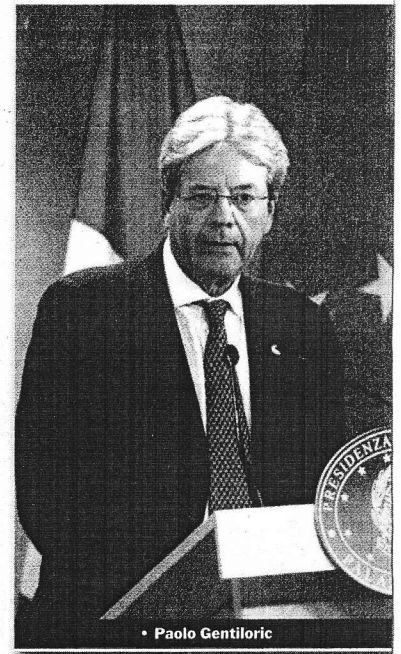
for Africa as well as for Ghana. While there are still many challenges ahead, we can see a positive momentum through reduced geopolitical risks, prolonged stability, economic growth, expanding trade, enhanced welfare, human development, and better living conditions across the continent.

After my stay in Ghana, I will move to Abidjan to join the 5th EU-African Union Summit, which will be entirely dedicated to the role of the youth. This is an extremely relevant theme, not only because of demographics (60 per cent of the African population is under 25), but also because of the new approach to the EU-Africa relationship adopted over the recent past, which has brought our countries closer. Italy has been actively promoting such a renewed European approach towards Africa. In fact, we firmly believe that our relationship cannot be solely related to migration management, but has instead to be based on enhancing education, job creation, investments, sustainable energy policies, and other active productive actions.

Italy is one of the top investors in Africa; this proves our determination to contribute to developing African economies, to encouraging skills learning, and to providing the young generations with new opportunities. These can only be achieved via a global and holistic approach for sustainable development, namely in the spirit of the Compact approach that we have successfully promoted at the EU level.

Italy has always acted as a bridge between Europe and its southern neighbours, the Middle East and Africa, between the Old Continent and the Young Continent.

We stand ready to work with Africa to write a new page in the continent's history. One that tells of equal partners fighting against global challenges; one of hope, opportunities, resilience, and innovation.



• Paolo Gentiloric

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