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Italy and Türkiye: A Strategic Partnership for Europe's Future

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Italy and Türkiye maintain a robust and evolving partnership, grounded in strong political dialogue and substantial economic engagement. Bilateral trade now exceeds \$32 billion, and Italian direct investments in Türkiye have surpassed \$5 billion. In light of today's shifting geopolitical and economic landscape, this relationship holds considerable potential for further development, not only to the mutual benefit of both nations but also for the broader European context.

One of the most pressing areas for cooperation is the modernization of the EU-Türkiye Customs Union. The existing framework is outdated and does not reflect current economic realities. Expanding its scope to encompass services, agricultural goods, and digital trade would significantly enhance EU-Türkiye economic integration. However, political impediments continue to obstruct progress. Addressing these challenges is essential. In parallel, advancing visa liberalization for Turkish business professionals would facilitate deeper commercial engagement.

Italy stands as Türkiye's leading European trade partner in the MENA region, with over 1,500 Italian enterprises operating within Turkish territory. This level of industrial collaboration, particularly in advanced manufacturing and technological sectors, presents significant room for expansion. Infrastructure represents another promising avenue: Türkiye is making major investments in modernizing its railway networks, and Italy, with its recognized expertise in this field, is well-positioned to contribute to the integration of Turkish and European transport systems.

There is also a clear opportunity to align Italian branding strength with Türkiye's growing industrial capabilities. While Italian goods benefit from global prestige, Türkiye is still developing its international brand in high-value sectors. Targeted cooperation could elevate the profile of "Made in Türkiye" products, while enabling Italian firms to expand their presence in strategic industries such as aerospace, defense, and energy. The existing partnership between Leonardo and Baykar serves as a successful example of such synergy in the defense sector. Deepening this collaboration would strengthen regional security and reinforce NATO's southern flank.

Energy security is also a key concern. Türkiye's recent natural gas discoveries in the Black Sea offer the potential to diversify Europe's energy sources and reduce dependency on Russian supplies. Italy and Türkiye, by enhancing cooperation in this domain, can make a valuable contribution to Europe's long-term energy resilience.

In the realm of education and innovation, strengthening partnerships between universities and research institutions can foster knowledge exchange and support Türkiye's alignment with EU standards in science and technology. Culturally and geopolitically, both countries play pivotal roles in the Mediterranean and Africa. Greater coordination in addressing common challenges such as trade, security, and migration would yield shared benefits.

Türkiye offers a skilled, cost-effective workforce and a dynamic, youthful population—half of its citizens are under the age of 30—creating favorable conditions for high-tech investment and entrepreneurial collaboration.

Moreover, Central Asia emerges as a region of strategic importance. With cultural and linguistic ties to many countries in the area, Türkiye could serve as a natural conduit for Italian and European investments in energy and infrastructure, thereby expanding their reach into a resource-rich but infrastructure-poor region.

In conclusion, the Italy-Türkiye partnership offers significant potential across a broad spectrum of strategic sectors. Strengthening this bilateral relationship would not only enhance national interests but also contribute to the stability, sustainability, and prosperity of Europe as a whole.