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6th German Italian Young Leaders Dialogue Spinelli Forum 2026

Call for Applications

Application Deadline: 1 March 2026

The *German Italian Young Leaders Dialogue – Spinelli Forum* is a joint initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in partnership with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP).

It offers a future generation of Italian and German leaders in the fields of politics, business, academia, civil society, media, and culture the opportunity to discuss the challenges faced by the German-Italian partnership as it shapes the future of the European Union (EU).

We are looking for young Italian and German candidates who would like to take part in the sixth edition of this dialogue format, which will consist of a **virtual kick-off event** (scheduled in the afternoon of 20 March 2026), **two online workshops** (scheduled in the afternoon of 27 March and 17 April 2026) and a **final in-person three-day conference** which will take place in **Milan** on **4-6 May 2026**, in synergy with the “[NEXT – Empowering Future Leaders](#)” initiative, promoted by ISPI, Bocconi University and the OECD.

Participants will have the unique opportunity to discuss relevant issues concerning the future of the EU and relations between the two countries in a stimulating environment, as well as to become members of a lasting network of German and Italian young leaders. Furthermore, as part of the in-person conference, the selected Spinelli Forum participants will have the chance to attend the plenary sessions of the NEXT Milan Forum to be held at Bocconi University on 4 and 5 May, which will be part of the Spinelli Forum 2026 process.

Following the final conference, participants will have the chance to discuss their policy recommendations with Italian and German policy makers during two virtual strategy sessions (scheduled for May/June 2026).

Thematic Focus

The EU and its member states face an increasing number of challenges that require close cooperation at the European level, as shown by Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and its consequences for Europe and the world.

These challenges include fulfilling and preserving the promise of prosperity to the benefit of all European citizens, securing the global competitiveness of European economies, successfully transforming European economies to ensure energy resilience and adapt to the digital revolution, and enhancing European defence and security in the context of increasing geopolitical competition. As close partners and founding members of the EU, both Germany and Italy are key to advancing European cooperation to meet them.

In four working groups, participants will discuss important aspects of the EU’s internal and external capacity to act from a German and Italian perspective. They will discuss differences in perception in order to reach a better understanding of the respective position and to identify synergies and priorities. Finally, they will develop policy proposals for joint European action.

These four working groups are:

I. EU's Defence and Security

The European Union is confronted with its most challenging security environment since its foundation. As Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine enters its fifth year and uncertainty in transatlantic relations grows, the EU faces increasing pressure to strengthen its capacity for autonomous action in defence and security. Recent reform initiatives and new instruments – including the SAFE instrument and the formation of “coalitions of the willing” – are reshaping the future of the Common Security and Defence Policy.

[The European defence readiness roadmap](#), presented by the European Commission in October 2025, sets out concrete objectives to enhance member states' defence resilience, notably through capability coalitions aimed at coordinating investments in priority areas. At the same time, it highlights persistent structural weaknesses, such as fragmentation, limited joint procurement, and continued dependence on non-EU suppliers.

This working group will examine current EU defence policy instruments and discuss how Germany and Italy, individually and in cooperation, can contribute strategically to strengthening EU defence capabilities including the tech sector and advancing European strategic autonomy.

II. EU's Trade and Economic Growth

Europe's trade policy stands at a critical turning point. Donald Trump's return to the White House has revived global trade wars, undermining the multilateral trading system, and hasn't spared European partners. At the same time, China's growing industrial overcapacity and lacklustre domestic demand are overheating its exports, intensifying competitive pressures on EU manufacturing. In response, the European Union is trying to reposition itself as the new guardian of the rules-based trading system, expanding its network of free trade agreements (FTAs) with partners such as Mercosur and India, while at the same time deploying new defensive and industrial tools. However, this strategy is fraught with risks and contested within the EU itself. Some remain strongly committed to open trade and export-led growth, while others believe that in order to ensure the necessary internal support for market openness, it is important to safeguard the sectors which are most vulnerable to the adverse impact of free trade as well as to build a positive narrative. At the same time, the EU's 'Better Regulation' guidelines, which also present an important principle in the German-Italian Action Plan, aim at making regulations more efficient, simple and transparent, in order to enable the EU's competitiveness.

This working group will explore how to preserve coherence and strategic direction to EU trade policy in an era of geopolitical competition and economic fragmentation. Drawing on the EU's new trade and economic security agenda and on the evolving FTA strategy, it will examine how Germany and Italy can better align their approaches in order to: (i) reconcile the benefits of openness with the need to protect key sectors and supply chains in a fragmenting world; (ii) rebuild trust and coordination among EU member states so that Europe can negotiate and act as a unified trade power; (iii) ensure that trade policy contributes to sustainable growth and political stability, while assuaging the risks that it deepens intra-EU divisions.

III. EU's Energy Resilience

European energy security is increasingly shaped by infrastructural resilience and secure access to critical raw materials, essential for clean technologies and decarbonization. While short-term



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responses have been crucial to ensure resilience – such as initiatives jointly taken after the Russian invasion of Ukraine to diversify natural gas supply –, in the mid-long term, the EU needs to act in order to ensure its strategic autonomy and the stability of prices in these new energy domains. This will also require an EU energy system that is fully interconnected. This workshop brings together young Italian and German professionals to develop concrete policy proposals on how the two countries can strengthen EU supply chains, enhance energy grids, and reduce critical dependencies. Building on their complementary industrial ecosystems and energy leadership, participants will actively formulate joint recommendations and proposals for a competitive, secure, and sustainable energy transition at both the national and EU levels.

IV. EU's Challenges in Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the cybersecurity landscape, amplifying threats such as AI-enhanced phishing, deepfakes, and automated social engineering that directly target individuals, their identities, and their rights. Against the broader backdrop of Europe's debates on digital sovereignty and global AI governance, this working group examines how European AI and cybersecurity frameworks can strengthen the protection of privacy, identity, and trust while fostering technological progress and innovation.

Focusing on AI security-by-design, robustness requirements, and accountability across the AI value chain, the discussion explores how the coordinated implementation of the AI Act, NIS2, and the Cyber Resilience Act can address AI-enabled cyber threats that increasingly operate at the individual level. Central questions include how the EU can best balance the protection of personal data with technological development, and what concrete obligations should be imposed on AI developers and platforms to prevent and mitigate AI-driven cyber abuse. To what extent should security-by-design and robustness requirements be understood not merely as technical standards, but as safeguards of fundamental rights?

The discussion focuses on how Italy and Germany can drive a more consistent application of these frameworks, and how the EU can leverage its internal market not only as a regulatory mechanism but as a strategic instrument to shape international developments and promote human-centric approaches to AI security and governance.

Target Group

German and Italian young leaders and high potentials from the fields of politics, business, academia, civil society, the social sector, media, and culture with a strong interest in European cooperation.

Requirements

- Aged between **25 and 35 years**, applications of strong candidates aged between 25 and 30 years will be given preference.
- **First university degree** (BA or MA) or equivalent vocational qualification.
- Strong interest/expertise in European cooperation, particularly in the fields of defence and security policy, economics, artificial intelligence or climate and energy policy (see the selection criteria for details).
- Excellent command of **English**.



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How to Apply

Applications will only be accepted via the [application platform](#) and should include the following information:

1. A completed [application form](#).
2. A CV (max. 2 pages, including information on the applicant's education and relevant work experience).
3. A short video (3 minutes max.) to introduce the candidate and his/her motivation to take part in the *German-Italian Young Leaders Dialogue – Spinelli Forum*.
4. A short text (max 2.500 characters) outlining what the EU should prioritize and how the candidate's country could contribute to this end in the field of his/her most preferred working group:
 - *EU's Defence and Security*
 - *EU's Trade and Economic Growth*
 - *EU's Energy Resilience*
 - *EU's Challenges in Artificial Intelligence*

N.B.

Participation in the whole Spinelli Forum process – including the three preliminary online workshops and the in-person conference in Milan (4-6 May 2026), as well as attendance at the Plenary Sessions of the NEXT Milan Forum – **is compulsory**. Please check your schedule before submitting your application.

The organisers will cover travel expenses and accommodation.

Should a participant be unable to attend the conference at the last moment for health or professional reasons, this must be presented to the organisers with a written justification (e.g. medical certificate).

Application Deadline

1 March 2026 (23:59 CET)

Contacts

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Disclaimer

The selection of candidates is carried out at the sole discretion of the Steering Committee consisting of representatives of all partner organizations.

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