**Title**

Recasting the national interest in Europe.  
Institutions, politics and policies for the defense of critical infrastructures and supply chains.

**Brief description of the proposal**

‘Sovereignty’ is once again a crucial feature in both the academic and public debate, due to the crisis of the liberal international orders, but also – and increasingly – as a response to challenges coming from economic and technological domains, which are reshaping the way governments perceive international security threats and adjust related policies.

In this context, the present project focuses on the politics and policy of the national interest in contemporary Europe. More specifically, our aim is to investigate the how international threats to the security of national assets are framed by policymakers and embodied into regulative responses in the domain of critical infrastructure and supply chains (CISC).

**Project overview**

The governance of Critical Infrastructures and Supply Chains (CISC) is the subject matter of this project. Critical Infrastructures can be defined as those assets and systems that, if disrupted, would threaten national security, economy, public health and safety, and way of life (McNally, Lee, Yavagal, & Xiang, 2007; The Council of the European Union, 2008). In the aftermath of Covid-19, policymakers have also started to frame global supply chains as ‘critical’, to highlight the necessity to cope with security issues along the international organization of production (Department of Defense 2022). The idea of NI in CISC will be investigated with the analytical lenses of the social sciences, and specifically political science. The project is organized into three research Milestones, each adopts a distinct analytical prism through which the NI can be interpreted: a) Institution, b) Politics and, c) Policy. Hence, Milestone 1 looks at the national regulations of CISC, and how they have changed over the last two decades; Milestone 2 focuses on the preferences of governments toward two policy areas in CISC; Milestone 3 aims at uncovering mechanisms and contextual features which are relevant for the design of sustainable and feasible national strategies for Artificial Intelligence (AI).

**Activities to be carried out by UNIBO research unit**

Milestone 2 – The politics of the NI: the case of Energy security and AI.  
The two activities of this Milestone will be carried out by two different teams, but since they are rigidly symmetrical, and part of a unique research design aimed at unified deliverables, they will be discussed together.

This activity focuses on the policies in the field of Artificial Intelligence and how national governments aim to underpin various national strategic goals with AI (Straub et al. 2022; EU Commission - AI Watch 2019, 2021, 2022). National strategies and policies on Artificial Intelligence are supposed to ensure a sustainable, innovation-led transformation of the economy while mitigating the inherent national security risks. Therefore, the examines the national strategies of four major economies, namely France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The project aims to apply text analysis to grasp the choice of words of several national as well as EU-level policy documents. In particular, structural topic modeling (STM) will allow to empirically assess the correlation between the policies’ diction and other variables on the domestic political economy. To complement the findings with qualitative insights, a longitudinal and cross-sectional content and discourse analysis of national strategy documents addressing the development and diffusion of Artificial Intelligence is also conducted. The longitudinal analysis serves to uncover any abrupt or gradual changes in the policymakers’ language following major societal shake-ups such as the financial crisis, Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and so on.

Milestone 3 – Designing policies for the NI in Italy: the role of public opinion and experts.

The project aims at uncovering the main mechanisms accounting for the public’s attitudes toward the regulation of CISC. To do that, a survey is conceived as the best way to study people’s attitudes toward the topic. As far as the aim is not only descriptive but also explanatory, the inquiry will be designed as a “survey-experiment”, a method that is increasingly used to assess policy implication in security issues (Friedman et al 2017; Shandler 2021). A representative sample of the Italian population will be divided into a control group and several experimental groups, as much as the conditions which will be tested, of the same size and characteristics. Each experimental group will be treated with information cues of partisan and non-partisan actors (for instance party leaders of the main forces and academics) arguing about the impact of FDI on economic development and security respectively. This design allows to test alternative hypothesis existing in the social science debate about the factor influencing the formation of preferences among the public.