

Renewal of Leonardo S.p.A. - Politecnico di Milano agreements

DOES THE MONEY FROM LEONARDO S.P.A. REALLY REACH THE STUDENTS?

BUT ABOVE ALL, CAN POLIMI SURVIVE WITHOUT IT?

READ THE DOSSIER

 **LEONARDO**



CALL TO ACTION

If you, too, believe it is unacceptable for our university to continue to be complicit in numerous human rights violations, make your voice heard by [signing here](#).

We want Politecnico's leadership to take a clear stand by ending its collaboration with Leonardo S.p.A..



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Introduction

Leonardo S.p.A. is the largest defense contractor in Italy and one of the most significant in Europe. It has been repeatedly accused of actively collaborating in human rights violations, from the massacres in Sudan and Yemen to the genocide in Gaza, continuing to profit although the technology and services it sells are clearly being used in violation of the principles of international law.

Despite this, Politecnico di Milano continues to collaborate with Leonardo S.p.A..

Politecnico provides commissioned training and technical research to Leonardo S.p.A.. The relationship between the university and the company is governed by a Framework Agreement (also known as a Framework Contract) that regulates the procedures by which individual departments of Politecnico must sign specific and operational contracts with the company. Politecnico will soon decide whether to renew this Framework Agreement for the next five years. At such a critical juncture, this document aims to inform the public about the extent and nature of the funding that Politecnico receives from Leonardo S.p.A..

Only 0.4% of Politecnico's funds come from Leonardo S.p.A., mostly benefiting faculty and researchers, with no real benefit for students. Furthermore, Leonardo S.p.A. claims intellectual property rights over the research and patents developed by Politecnico, imposing confidentiality restrictions and preventing a public university from using this knowledge in other sectors.

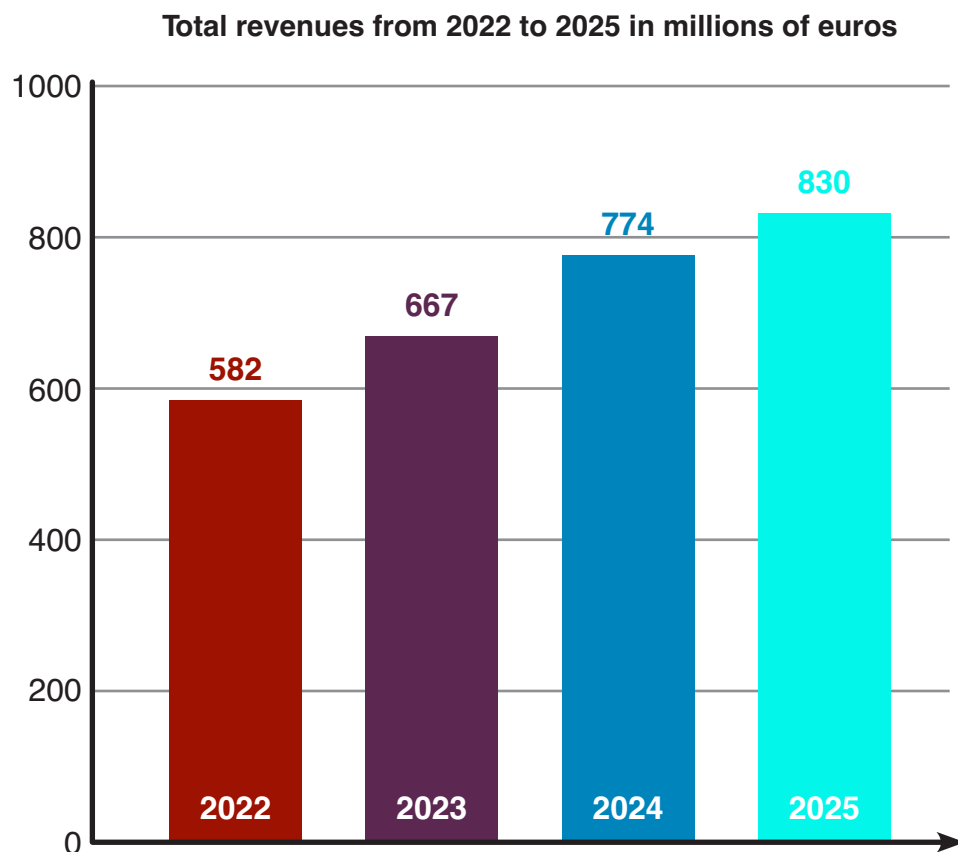
The document also contains previously unpublished data on the research that Politecnico is conducting for Leonardo S.p.A..



Does Politecnico rely on funds from Leonardo S.p.A.?

Politecnico has total annual revenues of hundreds of millions of euros, an amount that continues to grow^[28].

In recent years, these funds have ensured that all operating expenses (including scholarships and investments in new campuses) have been covered and that the budget has closed with a surplus of tens of millions of euros (€30 million in both 2024 and 2025).



Leonardo S.p.A. fundings for Politecnico

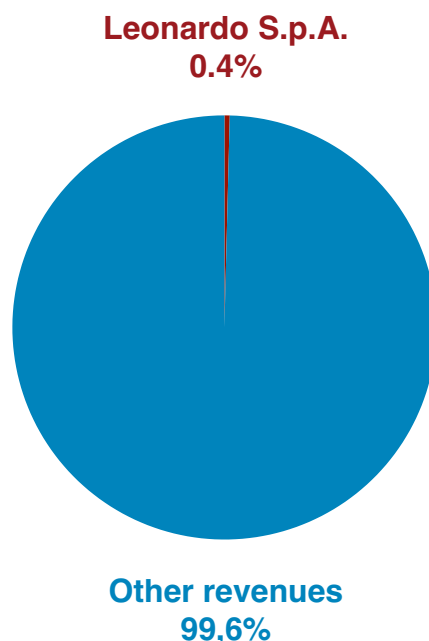
During the 2022–2024 period, Politecnico received total revenue of €2.023 billion. Of this amount, €6 million was provided to the University by Leonardo S.p.A. through research contracts and PhD fellowships^[31].

Leonardo S.p.A. currently also funds four Girls@Polimi scholarships per year, each worth €24,000, resulting in a total investment of approximately €300,000 over three years^[18].

Politecnico has received a total of €3.8 million in corporate donations from 2020 through 2024^[20], but for simplicity's sake, we will assume that this amount is entirely attributable to Leonardo S.p.A. and can be evenly divided over the five years.

Taking into account research contracts, doctoral grants, and donations, Leonardo S.p.A.'s contribution amounts to €8.58 million.

$$\frac{\text{Leonardo S.p.A.'s contribution}}{\text{Politecnico total revenue}} = \frac{8.58 \text{ mln}}{2032 \text{ mln}} = 0.0042 \approx 0.4\%$$



Even assuming that Leonardo S.p.A. was the only company to make a donation to Politecnico, the company's contribution would have amounted to no more than 0.4% of the university's revenue.

The budget surplus for 2024 alone would have been sufficient to cover more than three times Leonardo S.p.A.'s total contribution over the three-year period.



Who benefits from this money?

Not the students!

According to what was reported to the student representatives, typically 95% of the value of a research contract goes to the departments and their respective faculty members, while only the remaining 5% goes to the university's coffers and is then redistributed to all constituents (students, faculty, researchers, and administrative staff).

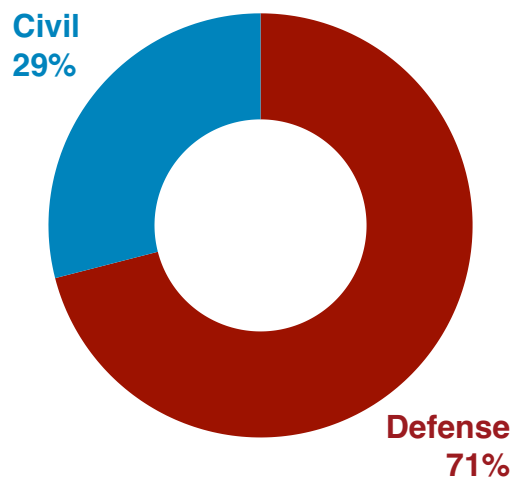
The exception is those who decide to conduct research for Leonardo S.p.A. and, if lucky, become recipients of a scholarship (18 PhDs between 2023 and 2025^[31]) or find an opportunity for their thesis. Students therefore derive no benefit from the collaboration between the university and the company.

Can the research funded by Leonardo S.p.A. be used for social development?

Leonardo S.p.A. has secured exclusive ownership of the research results. This means that the technology and knowledge developed by Politecnico cannot be exploited in any way outside the company without its explicit permission^[31]. The university administration has argued that the research conducted for Leonardo S.p.A. is dual-use, meaning it is intended to benefit both military and civilian applications.

However, in 2025, 71% of Leonardo S.p.A.'s economic activity was military in nature^[5], it is therefore reasonable to assume that the research sold by the university to the company is used primarily in the military sector.

Earnings from defense / civil



Why haven't I heard about this before?

Politecnico refuses to provide information on its ties to Leonardo S.p.A..

- The press was denied access to the contracts, despite having requested them through a general public access request^[31, 32].
- Student representatives were asked to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) before being allowed to view the contracts with the company, preventing them from disclosing any information without facing penalties. The data viewed by the representatives, however, remains vague and unspecific.
- The university administration refused to discuss the motions on the subject submitted by the departments of Physics, Urban Planning, and Chemistry, covering everything up and violating the proper democratic functioning of the university.
- As early as July 2025, the Academic Senate had refused to adequately discuss the requests put forward by 450 faculty members, researchers, and members of the administrative staff.
- This is not merely a matter of the university attempting to safeguard its image: Leonardo S.p.A. has imposed absolute confidentiality on everything concerning it in its contracts^[31].

Leonardo S.p.A. and human rights violations*

a-Yemen

The electronics division of Leonardo S.p.A. has long been supplying military equipment and services to the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the war in Yemen. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the coalition is responsible for at least 10,000 civilian casualties, including deaths and injuries, and for knowingly and systematically preventing the distribution of and access to basic necessities.

In this context, Leonardo S.p.A. and other defense companies are actively working to undermine legitimate human rights protections through lobbying activities.

For the record, it is worth noting that in 2019, the then-CEO of Leonardo S.p.A. Alessandro Profumo, publicly criticized Germany's decision to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia following the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Amnesty International also condemns Leonardo S.p.A.'s unsatisfactory responses to allegations that it supports the massacre in Yemen^[2].



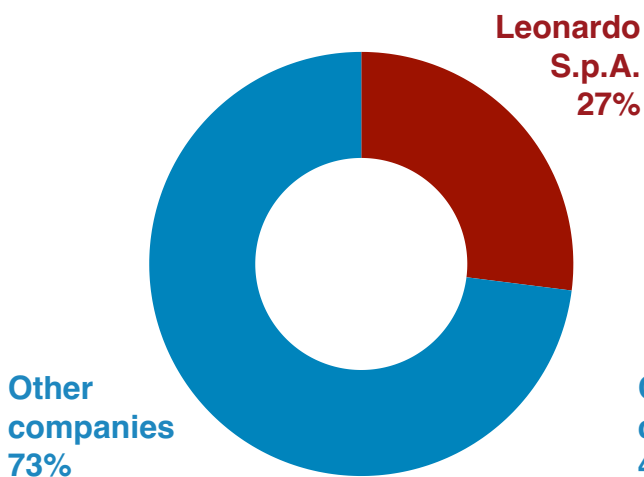
b-Sudan and the United Arab Emirates

In Sudan, the civil war that has been raging since 2023 has claimed 150,000 lives and displaced more than ten million people. Eyewitness accounts and expert analyses report summary executions, mass graves, and widespread sexual violence. In Darfur, the western region of Sudan, there is evidence suggesting the commission of genocide. The violence is primarily attributed to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a powerful paramilitary group whose main backer is the UAE^[1, 4, 9, 11, 22].

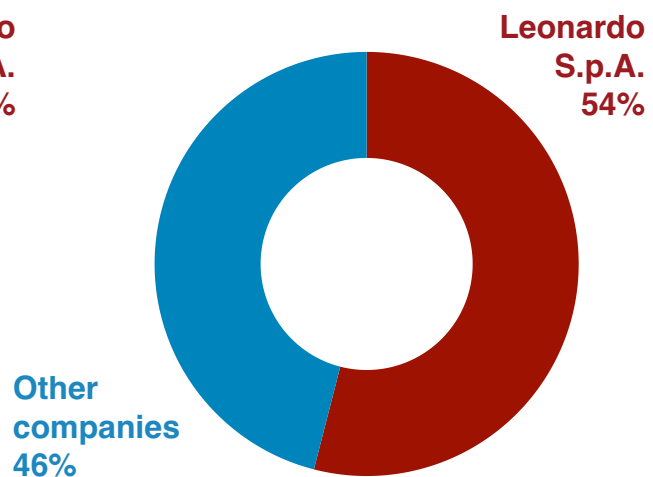
The European Union has imposed an arms embargo on Sudan, but no measures have been taken against the UAE despite its evident crucial role in enabling the RSF to continue their violence (as evidenced by the discovery of European weapons in their possession, almost certainly having arrived in Sudan via the UAE)^[3, 7, 21, 29, 30].

In 2024, Italy supplied €294 million in arms to the EU and another €52.9 million the following year. This was made possible with the help of Leonardo S.p.A., which accounted for 27% of total Italian arms exports in 2024 and 54% in 2025^[29, 30].

Italian military export in 2024



Italian military export in 2025



It is difficult to determine exactly what materials Leonardo S.p.A. has supplied to the UAE, but the relationship between the two is clearly very close: Leonardo S.p.A. recently announced a joint venture with the EDGE Group, the UAE's leading defense company, and on its digital platforms celebrates an ongoing collaboration with the UAE that began fifty years ago. The same page mentions the construction of warships and helicopters, as well as training aircraft and telecommunications equipment^[14, 33].



c-Palestine

Leonardo S.p.A. has a long history of collaboration with the State of Israel. Even before the events of 7 October 2023, when the highest UN bodies had already declared the occupation of the Palestinian territories illegal^[7], Leonardo S.p.A. supplied part of the military technology that allowed the Israeli state to impose its supremacy. This military capability made possible the occupation of Gaza, which later became a real genocide. After the start of the Israeli offensive in the Strip, all the collaborations already started were continued, although no new ones were signed.^[23]

In late 2025, several organizations, including Arci and Pax Christi, filed a lawsuit with the Civil Court of Rome seeking a ruling that the contracts entered into by Leonardo S.p.A. with the State of Israel were unconstitutional and unlawful under the provisions of the Constitution and international law^[23].

Leonardo S.p.A. is one of the main non-U.S. partners in the consortium that manufactures the F-35: using these and the F-16, Israeli fighter-bombers have dropped over 85,000 tons of bombs on the Gaza Strip^[26, 27]. RADA Electronic, a subsidiary of Leonardo S.p.A., is among the main companies through which:

Israel has evolved Caterpillar's D9 bulldozer into automated, remote-commanded core weaponry of the military, deployed in almost every military activity since 2000, clearing incursion lines, "neutralizing" the territory and killing Palestinians. Since October 2023, Caterpillar equipment has been documented as being used to carry out mass demolitions – including of homes, mosques and life-sustaining infrastructure – raid hospitals and burying alive wounded Palestinians^[26].

Leonardo S.p.A. owns 25% of MBDA's shares^[34].
According to an investigation by The Guardian^[16]:

MBDA, Europe's largest missile manufacturer, is selling key components for bombs that have been shipped by the thousands to Israel and used in numerous airstrikes, in which, according to research, Palestinian children and other civilians have been killed [...] Many of the attacks took place at night, without warning, on school buildings and tent camps where displaced families had taken refuge.

Leonardo S.p.A. also supplies turrets to arm ships, airplanes, and training helicopters^[17, 25].

Leonardo S.p.A. has also entered into agreements with Elbit Systems, a major Israeli defense contractor, for the development of new torpedo-launching capabilities from naval vessels and for the advanced training of military helicopter pilots^[12].



What kind of research is Politecnico conducting for Leonardo S.p.A.?

The university's research projects with Leonardo S.p.A. are not public (see below). However, some student representatives have managed to review these documents.

Among the various topics Politecnico is working on are:

- Drones: Politecnico participates with Leonardo S.p.A. in a “Drone and Advanced Air Mobility Observatory,” as well as in the development of ground control systems for aircraft, collaborating on a technology that is now essential in all war scenarios^[13].
- Helicopters: Politecnico helps develop and industrialize algorithms for the AW-119 and AW-139 helicopters, used in both civilian and military contexts. The AW-119Kx model is a training aircraft for the Israeli army, while the AW-139 is sold to the UAE, a country involved in the genocide in Darfur^[22, 25, 33]. Both models also exist in military versions, the AW-119M and AW-139M^[15]. It is likely that adapting components from the civilian to the military version of the model would be straightforward. Most of the university's projects involving helicopters, however, cannot be limited to a specific model. Given that Leonardo S.p.A. operates primarily in the defense sector, it is reasonable to expect that the research findings will be used to develop Leonardo S.p.A.'s wide range of combat helicopters, almost all of which are AW-type models^[15].
- Armored vehicles: Politecnico has developed a mathematical model to ensure protection up to STANAG 4549 Level 6. STANAG 4549 is a NATO standard for vehicle armor concerning protection against bullets, artillery, and explosives. It is divided into resistance levels, with Level 6 being the highest^[35].
- Aircraft and missiles: the university conducts countless research activities on avionics, flight dynamics, materials, algorithms, and structures on behalf of Leonardo S.p.A.. As with helicopters, this knowledge will almost certainly be used to improve fighter jets built by or with Leonardo S.p.A. (including the infamous F-35 used to bomb Gaza) or to optimize MBDA missiles^[16, 26].



Why do these agreements between Politecnico and Leonardo S.p.A. exist?

The agreements with Leonardo S.p.A. do not benefit Politecnico. The university is forced to cede the intellectual property of all research, to keep the agreements secret (thus betraying its own values of transparency), and to collaborate on projects that involve egregious human rights violations; all in exchange for negligible revenue.

The Rector protects the position of professors who support these agreements, whether they are paid by the company or advocates of armed deterrence. However, the opinion of this minority is not sufficient to justify the administration's inclination to renew the agreements.

So why do these contracts exist?

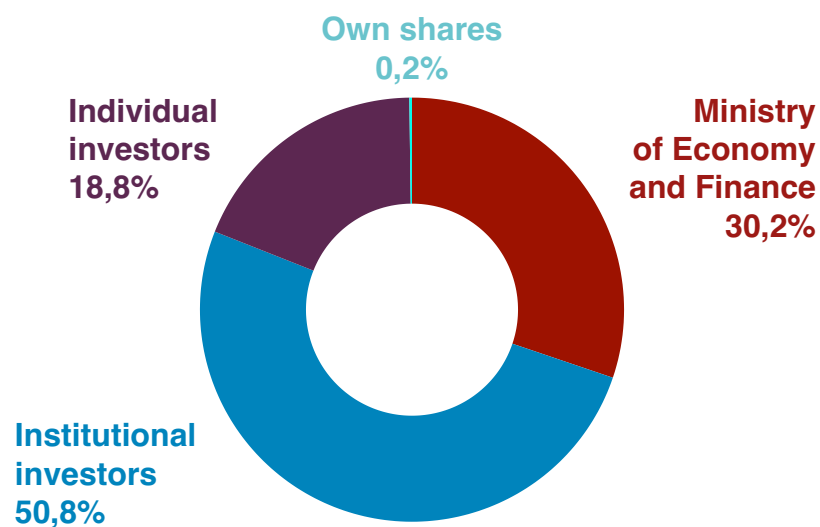
Student representatives were given the following responses:

- Freedom of research - Renewing the agreements with Leonardo S.p.A. would be essential to ensure that interested researchers can continue their research. This is, of course, a mere pretext. It is inconceivable that freedom of research, however fundamental a principle it may be, should become a pretext for violating the right to life and human dignity. This response, in addition to being morally unacceptable, is also inconsistent in practical terms, as researchers and faculty members could work for Leonardo S.p.A. even without the renewal of the agreement. The Framework Agreement establishes a partnership between our University and the company that facilitates professional collaborations, streamlining bureaucracy and making communication more direct. Failure to renew the agreement would result in the closure of the preferential employment pathway and would not directly encourage faculty members to collaborate with the company. This would allow for adjustments to the contracts of individual departments.



- Leonardo S.p.A. is a company controlled by the Italian government. The Ministry of Economy and Finance holds 30% of Leonardo S.p.A.'s shares, ensuring control for the current government^[5]. The decision by Politecnico's leadership not to openly oppose the government for fear of retaliation is understandable. At the same time, it is worth remembering that university autonomy is a right enshrined in the Italian Constitution, and Politecnico, as one of Italy's most prestigious and financially prosperous universities, should set an example and act in the name of the values of integrity and respect that it so strongly professes^[10, 19, 24].

Leonardo S.p.A.'s shareholding



Do you want to know more?
Contact us!



[studenti.indipendenti.polimi](https://www.instagram.com/studenti.indipendenti.polimi)



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