The Risks of growing Populism and the European elections:

Opposition in the EU and opposition to the EU: Soft and hard Euroscepticism in Italy in the time of austerity

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Opposition in the EU and opposition to the EU: soft and hard Euroscepticism in Italy in the time of austerity

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In the context of the approaching European Parliament's elections, this report investigates the extent to which the economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures have contributed to the emergence of a Eurosceptic discourse within a traditionally pro-European polity like Italy. Developing upon previous literature on political opposition and the EU, the main argument is that whilst the crisis has contributed to a substantive Europeanization of the Italian debate, it did so mainly in terms of logics of emergency and technocracy. As a result, very little space was left for the organization of political opposition in the EU, whereas a growing tendency emerged towards hard Euroscepticism and opposition to the EU among parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties and street-based movements. By looking at the actors leading political contestation of the EU, and by identifying the type of arguments that define contemporary opposition to the EU, we develop an extensive assessment of contemporary forms of Euroscepticism in Italy.

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Introduction

In most European countries Euroscepticism started developing in the aftermaths of the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 (Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994), when political entrepreneurs began to mobilize opposition on some of the main issues characterizing the treaty: limits to national sovereignty, burdens on national redistributive policies, and fears of loss of national identity. For more than 20 years, Italy has been regarded as a notable exception. Not only it preserved its traditionally pro-European public opinion, but it also displayed a remarkably euro-enthusiast party system, which lasted until the late 2000s. In more recent times, however, many authors have noticed an increasing disillusionment with the European Union (EU) across the Italian public (Comelli, 2011; Dehousse, 2013).

On the one hand, the unfolding of the Eurozone crisis made European issues central to political debates, as their relevance grew impressively for citizens and politicians alike. On the other, the austerity policies which have been implemented to tackle Italy's economic distress seem to have fuelled anti-European resentment in the political debate and public opinion. As a result, if in 2009 Italy approached the European Parliament's (EP) electoral campaign on the basis of a strictly national agenda but counting on a renowned public commitment to EU integration, the eve of the 2014 elections turned the situation around: the public debate is characterized by an unprecedented degree of Europeanization, whilst public support for the EU reaches an historical low.

Following Peter Mair's prediction concerning the development of European party systems (2007), it can be said that the political decisions taken to tackle the crisis boosted the process of integration of the Italian party system, making national and EU policy-making arenas *de facto* inseparable and not distinguishable from one another. Yet, this process has also reduced substantially the stakes of political competition and opposition, as European integration inevitably limits the available policy space and instruments, delegating decision-making to EU-level regulatory agencies. When this is the case, in line with Mair's classical analysis, parties would not have incentives to organize a useless opposition *in the EU polity* and would rather mobilize opposition *to the EU polity*.

It is our opinion that the progressive Europeanization of the Italian public debate combined with the persisting absence of the space for political opposition – as is the case when politics is led by emergency and technocratic reasoning – are likely to provide breeding grounds for populism and Euroscepticism in Italy. In the context of the upcoming EP elections of May 2014, this paper analyses the multiple forms of contemporary Euroscepticism in Italy. Starting from the definition of Euroscepticism suggested by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008), who distinguish between *hard* (or

principled) opposition and soft (or contingent) opposition, we shall propose an empirical and theoretical understanding of Italian political opposition to Europe in times of crisis.³

The sources used for the empirical assessment of partisan public discourse on the EU are, above all, electoral programmes, manifestos, speeches, and press-releases from members of political parties; in addition, we also analysed Italian media coverage of electoral campaigning; when available, we also performed semi-structured interviews with party members. On this basis, we investigate the extent to which the economic and financial crisis facilitated the emergence of a Eurosceptic discourse within a traditionally pro-European polity. By identifying the type of arguments that define opposition to the EU in the times of austerity and by evaluating the extent to which Eurosceptic populism remains confined to street-movements or permeates the discourse of mainstream parties, we shall develop an extensive assessment of contemporary opposition to Europe in Italy.

The essay is structured as follows. First, we shall describe the development of EU disillusionment across the Italian public opinion, investigating the origins of the phenomenon and its political and ideological connotations. To this goal, we present longitudinal data on the attitudes of Italians towards European integration over time, discussing its specific meaning within the broader European context and with respect to the Italian party system in particular. Subsequently, we focus our attention on the actors that most frequently mobilize anti-European resentment in Italian public debates, discussing in detail the way in which they portray the EU and take position with respect to its most relevant aspects. Hence, the following sections cover the different case-studies, focusing first on parliamentary actors (*Forza Italia, Lega Nord* and *Movimento 5 Stelle*) and then on extraparliamentary movements and parties (*Forza Nuova, CasaPound* and *Movimento dei Forconi*). Finally, we discuss the theoretical connotations of contemporary Euroscepticism in Italy, as well as its implications and potential challenges to the functioning of Italian democracy in the years to come.

Italy and the EU: the end of the honey moon?

This section discusses the state of the art of attitudes towards the European Union in Italy, outlining the main changes that took place over the past years and the more recent developments in terms of

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³ The debate around the pertinence of this definition goes beyond the aim of this contribution. Yet, this definition has been widely used by scholars researching in this field, even if it has also been criticized. For an overview of these critics, see: Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008.

support for European integration. In this sense, we shall first have a look at the broader picture at the EU level, and then discuss the specificities of the Italian context.

The difficulties that the EU is experiencing since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis have in fact contributed significantly to widening the level of distrust of European citizens towards communitarian institutions. Although the process of progressive loss of popular support for the EU is ongoing since more than 20 years, its pace has changed radically since 2008, all over the continent. Data from the Eurobarometer surveys shows that, across the last two decades, this trend is incontrovertible: until the beginning of the Eurozone crisis, about half of the European population trusted EU institutions, whereas distrust was expressed by less than one third of the Europeans; since the end of 2008, instead, the ratio has gradually reversed, with levels of trust fluctuating between 35% and 40%, and distrust reaching above 45% (Fig.1).

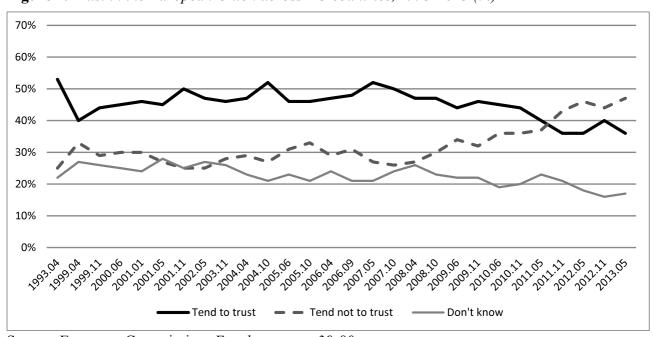


Figure 1. Trust in the European Union across EU countries, 1993-2013 (%)

Source: European Commission, Eurobarometer 39-80

In a similar fashion, the last decade marked a major change in the public attitudes towards the European Union in Italy. Traditionally, in fact, Italy has been amongst the major Euro-enthusiastic countries, both in terms of popular and government support for European integration. Many authors have underlined the peculiarities of Italians' "permissive consensus", often connecting it to a generalized distrust of national political institutions, which made Italian citizens perceive European integration as an alternative to the long-lasting problems of the domestic political élites (Ferrera, 2003; Dehousse, 2013). As a result, over the 1990s and 2000s, levels of trust for the EU in Italy

reached consistently above 60%, whereas distrust characterized only a marginal portion of the Italian population (Fig.2).

While the positive feelings of the Italian public opinion towards the EU lasted until 2009, the following years mark a sharp decline in support for the EU. Contrary to the previous decades, with the deepening of the economic crisis, the levels of trust in the EU in Italy turned below the EU average. Moreover, the downward turn in trust for the EU is far more pronounced in Italy than throughout the other EU countries, since the percentage of Italian respondents trusting the EU dropped by almost 20% between 2010 and 2012. Conversely, the share of Italians holding negative opinions over the EU grew sharply, in line with the European trend.

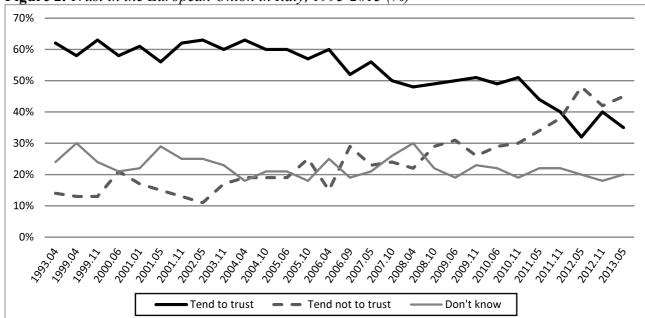


Figure 2. Trust in the European Union in Italy, 1993-2013 (%)

Source: European Commission, Eurobarometer 39-80

Several items included in the latest Eurobarometer poll (eb80) can prove useful to understand the Italian public opinion vis-à-vis the European Union and the related decline in popular support for the EU. In particular, the Italians became in recent times increasingly pessimistic about the benefits of being part of the EU. Between autumn 2012 (eb78) and autumn 2013 (eb80), the amount of people thinking that Italy would be better off outside the EU increased by 4%, reaching 33%. Conversely, the share of people believing that Italy's future would be worse without the EU shrank by 6% points, rating sensibly below the EU average (56%).

Similarly, public opinion concerning the protection of Italy's interests by the EU dropped sensibly, increasing the gap between Italy and the EU average. In late 2013 more than 70% of the Italian respondents felt that their interests were not sufficiently protected by the EU, whereas only 24%

considered that the EU took them sufficiently into account (EU average 53% and 40%, respectively). Compared to data from before the outbreak of the crisis in Italy, the change is remarkable: in late 2010 (eb74), those agreeing that Italian interests were sufficiently protected by the EU were 40%, whereas those disagreeing were 43% of the respondents, pretty much in line with the EU average.

At the same time, however, the results of the latest Eurobarometer survey show that Italians continue to believe in the EU as the most effective actor to tackle the crisis (22%). Still, the overtime trend shows a conspicuous decline, as in autumn 2011 (eb76) similar statements were supported by more than 27% of the interviewees. Likewise, although an overwhelming majority agrees that further cooperation at the EU level is needed to tackle the economic and financial crisis (82%), Italy's score in autumn 2013 is the second lowest in Europe after the traditionally Eurosceptic Austrian public opinion, and in sharp decline compared to the previous Eurobarometer round (-5%). Moreover, the amount of people believing that coordination is not the best strategy to tackle the crisis is considerably high in Italy (13%), on the rise (+2%) and twice the EU average (6%).

The transformation of the Italian public opinion from largely Euro-enthusiastic to increasingly critical towards the EU undoubtedly represents an important electoral capital for political entrepreneurs aiming to capitalize on Euroscepticism. If, over the 1990s and early 2000s, the widespread support for the EU of the Italian public was largely mirrored by the Italian mainstream political parties (Quaglia, 2008), today's developments shall also be interpreted in the light of citizens' electoral preferences. The next section shall focus in detail on these aspects, providing an overview of party-based Euroscepticism in Italy.

Understanding opposition to the EU in the Italian party system

The longitudinal and comparative study of party-based Euroscepticism has generated a vivid academic debate concerning party positions over European issues (see for an overview Marks and Steenbergen 2004) and the analysis of the party leaders' and members' attitudes towards the EU (see for an overview Marks *et al.* 2006). In this regard, one of the main findings has been that centre-left parties tend to support the EU consistently more than their centre-right counterparts, across Western European political systems (Marks et al. 1999; Ladrech 2000; Tsebelis and Garret 2000; Hix *et al.* 2007; Conti and Manca 2008). Other authors have claimed that Euroscepticism characterizes mainly those parties located at the extremes of the political spectrum, whereas mainstream parties are generally not involved in Euroscepticism, if not for some minor internal

political trends (Hooghe *et al.*, 2004; Sitter and Batory 2008; Szcerbiack and Taggart 2008). In line with this reasoning, Hix and Lord (1999) argue that the most Eurosceptic parties are those permanently excluded from the responsibility of government.

Recent analyses on party's and citizens' attitudes towards the EU in Italy support some but not all of these arguments. Previous contributions have shown that the Italian centre-left is far more euroenthusiast than any other actor in the party system, which is generally in line with the trend in the rest of Western Europe (Dehousse 2013). Moreover, this appears to be the case in particular when the centre-left is charged with government responsibilities (Conti and De Giorgi 2011). Similarly, a study from *Demos and Pi* (2013) shows that trust in the EU is largest among electorates of the Left of the Italian political spectrum, whereas it does not support the idea of a link between incumbency and support for the EU.

Among euro-enthusiast citizens, in fact, we find voters of the mainstream left party which supported the Monti government and the subsequent "stability" government led by Enrico Letta: 54% of the voters of *Partito Democratico* (PD). At the same time, however, we find also 48% of the voters of *Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà* (SEL), which opposed both the abovementioned executives. Similarly, if one could expect that the electorates of *Lega Nord* (LN) are sensibly more Eurosceptic (only 23% trusting the EU), the results are more surprising with respect to the voters of the mainstream *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL): despite the party's support for the technocratic government, only 26% of its electorate declares to trust the EU. In between the two polls, we can find the electorates of *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S, 34%) and of the centrist parties (UDC, 39%). In this sense, the *Demos* poll illustrates that public opinion on the EU in Italy has followed a clear partisan division, regardless of government responsibilities (Diamanti, 2012).

Moreover, if leftist voters generally disagree that Italy would be better off without the EU (from 60-70%), the rest of the electorate is more divided: less than half of the supporters of all other party families disagree with the statement, whereas 27% of the voters of PDL and 35% of LN agree that Italy would be actually better off outside the EU, and so does one fourth of the electorate of M5S. A more recent study of the opinion of Italians on the Euro (www.scenaripolitici.com) also confirms a widening left-right divide, with Centre-Left and Centrist voters overwhelmingly supporting the common currency (90% and 83%, respectively), and Centre-Right voters strongly approving the hypothesis of a re-introduction of the Italian national currency (77%), together with the supporters of M5S (74%).

In addition to that, extra-parliamentary groups from the radical right have recently tried to capitalize on the growing popular discontent towards the EU, politicizing European affairs and voicing Euroscepticism in street-movements and protests. Although often related to electorally irrelevant actors, these showcase political events have attracted a variety of different groups and movements from the Italian radical right and neo-Fascist milieu, and managed to achieve wide media coverage at both local and national level. Unlike most institutional parties, extra-parliamentary groups do not hide their opposition to the EU and explicitly claim national autonomy from Brussels as a response to the imposition of the stability pacts.

If distrust in European institutions takes an increasingly partisan connotation, than it makes sense to observe the type of European discourse that is pushed forward by different political actors in order to fuel anti-European resentment. In her study of the first Berlusconi governments, Quaglia (2008) had already observed the emergence of a Eurosceptic discourse in Italian centre-right coalitions. Still, she concluded that the shift from "soft" to "hard" Euroscepticism was taking place within a fundamentally pro-EU setting, with little chances to break down the consensus. Similarly, Comelli (2011) argues that although a bipartisan consensus exists on devolving more competences to Brussels, left-right differences characterize Italy's view of Europe, with the right increasingly oriented towards over-emphasizing Italian economic and national interests vis-à-vis communitarian ones (Darnis, 2009; Quaglia, 2012). Yet, he also argues that these differences are not so evident in terms of concrete policies, and pertain mostly to the anti-EU rhetoric of the centre-right coalitions.

It remains to be seen how the phenomena outlined in these studies came to terms with the new circumstances brought forward by the economic crisis. As recently suggested by Renaud Dehousse (2013), in fact, Europeanization of national political debates is on the rise in Italy as well as in most Southern European countries, with important consequences for the functioning of EU's political system. After introducing our conceptualization of Euroscepticism, the following section analyses how the European affairs are discussed, on the eve of the 2014 EP elections, by the main actors of Italian opposition to the EU.

Varieties of Euroscepticism in Italy: towards the 2014 EP elections

As was previously introduced, we follow the definition strategy of the concept of Euroscepticism developed by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008), who differentiate between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of Euroscepticism. Hard opposition to the EU, emerging when "there is a principled opposition to the EU and European Integration" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008, p.7), characterizes parties claiming withdrawal from membership and supporting policies equivalent to a complete opposition to the contemporary project of European integration. Conversely, soft opposition connotes political parties whose concerns on specific policy areas are characterized by "a sense that 'national interest' is

currently at odds with the EU trajectory" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008, p.8), which leads them to express a qualified opposition to the EU.

This conceptualization provides not only important advantages in terms of cross-context and over-time comparability, but it also provides a first insight of the patterns of differentiation existing between Europhiles and Eurosceptics and within the milieu of the Eurosceptics. If Europhiles constitute a separate category since they consider the EU a good in itself, the implicit distinction between the 'hard' and 'soft' families has to do with the way in which they assess European issues: hard Eurosceptics oppose it because of pre-existing sets of ideas or issues (be that supranationalism, neoliberalism, technocracy and bureaucracy etc.), whereas soft Eurosceptics challenge it because it is at stake with interests and issues that they support.

In his recent account based on the campaign for the 2013 national elections, Dehousse claims that there is no form of radical Euroscepticism in Italy (2013). Rather, he singles out a generalized "negative character" of the Europeanization process in Italy, characterized by the combination of pro-European credentials and critiques of the current orientation of EU policies. Within the field of opposition, however, he admits the presence of a variety of shades, ranging from disagreement with austerity policies, to open targeting of other European leaders.

Although accurate, however, Dehousse's work represents only a snapshot on Italian Euroscepticism, and is as such unable to account for the parallel developments of Europeanization and increasing opposition to the EU. In what follow, we shall look at these two developments in perspective, in order to see whether – over the past years – moderate opposition to the EU has led to the emergence of hard forms of Euroscepticism. To this goal, we first focus on the political discourse and preferences of the main Eurosceptic actors within the Italian parliamentary arena (*Forza Italia, Lega Nord* and *Movimento 5 Stelle*), and then on the emerging extra-parliamentary movements and parties (*Forza Nuova, CasaPound* and *Movimento dei Forconi*).

The mainstream right and the EU: from Forza Italia to Forza Italia

As is well known, Berlusconi's party *Forza Italia* (FI), and coalition-parties *Casa delle Libertà* (CDL) and *Popolo Della Libertà* (PDL) have dominated the Italian political scene since the early 1990s.⁴ Although assessing the role played by the EU in their platforms and discourse is far from straightforward, there is a wide consensus suggesting that the relationship between Italy and the EU

⁴ For a complete overview of Berlusconi's parties, see D. McDonnell (2013), From Forza Italia to the Popolo Della Libertà, *Political Studies Association*, Vol. 61, 217-233.

has deteriorated over the time of the four Berlusconi governments which ruled Italy between 1994 and 2011 (Quaglia, Radaelli 2007; Dehousse 2013).⁵ Hence, in this section we shall overview the role of the EU in the electoral campaigns of Berlusconi's parties, as well as in the policy decisions of his governments, across the last twenty years of Italian politics.

This first phase of the relations between Berlusconi and the EU (1994-2001) is characterized by minimal attention to EU affairs, with sporadic and occasional conflicts over specific issues. Berlusconi's first electoral campaign in 1994, in fact, dealt only marginally with EU issues, generally focusing on the role of Italy in international affairs. The frame made generic reference to Italy's leadership "in Europe and in the world" and to the need "to overcome the great technological and productive challenges offered by Europe and by the modern world". In the electoral manifesto, some mild criticisms towards EU's policies emerged with respect to the Common Agricultural Policy: "Italy suffers limitations for agricultural production and forced to massive food imports". Similarly, the manifesto mentions the Maastricht Treaty and the democratic deficit of the EU, which the party proposes to overcome. Despite the little attention provided to European affairs, the EU is generally considered as an opportunity; hence the spirit is that of "improving Italy's position in Europe" and "make the Union work better".

Differently, conflict with the EU emerged once Berlusconi got to government for the first time, when Antonio Martino - chief economist of *Forza Italia* and then Minister of Foreign affairs – explicitly questioned the process of monetary unification, criticizing the Euro convergence criteria (Quaglia 2008).⁸ Without fully backing his minister, Berlusconi also mentioned the possibility of renegotiating the Treaty of The European Union (TEU), in order for Italy to join the Monetary Union even if it did not yet fulfil the convergence criteria. Similarly, between 1996 and 1998 Berlusconi (then leader of the main opposition party) openly criticized the measures taken by the government in order to reduce Italy's budget deficit (Quaglia 2008, p. 64).

The second phase of the relationship between the Italian mainstream right and the EU (2001-2008) is characterized by policy indifference combined with enhanced political tensions, which however never reached the level of open opposition to the EU. The 2001 electoral platform of Berlusconi's party, as well as the centre-right coalition agenda and the government policies, indeed, deal with the

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⁵ 1994-1995; 2001-2005; 2005-2006; 2008-2011. For a very accurate overview of the relationships between the EU and the policies approved by Berlusconi's governments until 2007 see Quaglia and Radaelli (2007), Italian politics and the European Union: A tale of two research designs, *West European Politics*, 30:4, 924-943.

⁶ See "Per il mio Paese" 26/01/1994, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tox3VODZfs4 consulted 07/01/2013.

⁷ See Forza Italia, Electoral Program for 1994.

⁸ See *Sole 24 Ore*, 17/12/1994.

EU in minimal terms. As Quaglia and Radaelli correctly put it, "there was no Europe on the radar of Italian politicians" (2007; 932). Political tensions, however, emerged when Romano Prodi – the former leader of the centre-left coalition – was nominated President of the European Commission (1999-2004). The logics of domestic political competition led to an increased distrust between the Italian centre-right and Brussels, since the Prodi Commission was perceived to be politically supportive of Italy's opposition parties.

Italy and other member states,¹⁰ whereas a vivid debate opposed Berlusconi's ministers and the Commission when the government adopted tougher immigration measures avoiding any substantive reference to the EU immigration framework (see Colombo and Sciortino 2008). Similarly, several tensions sparked with European institutions: the European Parliament criticized the Italian law on the freedom of trade in television media (Harcourt and Weatherill 2006) and rejected the Italian nomination of Rocco Buttiglione – an ally of Berlusconi's government – as Justice Commissioner.¹¹ As a form of retaliation, the Italian government decided not to participate in the pan-European programme to build the airbus A400M military transport aircraft, a central element in EU's defence ambitions.

In addition to that, the Commission sanctioned the government's attempts to exceed the ceiling on fiscal policy set by Community pacts (Quaglia and Radaelli 2007). As a result, more critical positions on Europe emerged with the 2006 Italian elections, when Berlusconi's coalition was defeated. The EU monetary policies are criticized for the burdens they put on Italy's competitiveness and more broadly for the costs of the passage to the Euro currency. Still, the agenda remained fully pro-European, and commitment to Europe and its constraints to budget and legislation were never put into question during the campaigning.

With the subsequent elections, in 2008, the relationship between Berlusconi's parties and the EU started to change in a radical way, entering a third phase (2008-2014) characterized by increasing levels of scepticism towards EU institutions and policies. Despite the overall positive attitude on EU affairs, in fact, the 2008 electoral platform of PDL restored the concept of Italian-specific

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⁹ The Contratto con gli Italiani is available at http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/documenti/contratto.pdf, whereas the *Documento Programmatico di Governo* can be found at http://www.senato.it. Consulted 06/01/2014.

¹⁰ See "Berlusconi in EU Nazi slur" available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3037386.stm consulted 09/01/2014.

See "EU Panel Opposes Justice Nominee" available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3734572.stm consulted 09/01/2014.

interests on a number of policy areas, calling for more resolute pressure on the EU in terms of immigration control and support for Made-in-Italy products.¹²

Moreover, tensions between EU institutions and the Berlusconi government emerged with increasing frequency and on numerous subject areas. In April 2011, a controversy on FIAT industrial strategy involved the EU Commissioner Gunther and the Italian ministers of Economics (Tremonti) and Foreign Affairs (Frattini), both belonging to Berlusconi's coalition. Three months later, the Council of Europe accused the Italian government of violating the human rights with respect to the dismantlement of Roma camps. In November, several members of the government accused the European Court of Justice of "attacking the identity of the country" for its ruling on the presence of crucifixes within Italian schools and classrooms.

Hence, when the financial crisis first hit Italy in late 2009 (the first anti-crisis decree is approved in August), the field was already set for a full clash between PDL and the EU. In January 2010 Berlusconi made a public statement claiming that the promised tax reduction cannot be achieved due to the crisis, whereas his ministers started an aggressive polemic with EU institutions. In the aftermaths of the Arab Spring, the Minister of Foreign Affairs provocatively asked the EU to give money to Tunisian refugees to leave Italy. With respect to the crisis, the Minister of Economy Tremonti declared that Europe "is like the Titanic: no one will be saved, not even the first class", whereas Berlusconi himself declared – and subsequently rectified – that "the Euro did not convince anyone".¹³

It is only in autumn 2011, however, when the Italian sovereign debt rating was downgraded by Standard & Poor's and Moody's, that the crisis officially entered public debates. On the one hand, reality overcame Berlusconi's hypocritical denial of the crisis (only two weeks before the downgrade, Prime Minister Berlusconi insisted that Italy was in rude financial health, pointing to full restaurants as proof of economic strength)¹⁴. On the other, the downgrade created the feeling of urgency that was needed in order to substitute Berlusconi's cabinet with a new government. In public and media discourse a new government composed of 'highly respected international figures' was necessary to 'restore national credibility' and to push through the 'painful austerity measures' required by international markets and the European Union.¹⁵

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The document is available at http://www.elezioni-italia.it/elezioni-2008/programma-pdl-2008.asp, consulted 08/01/2013.

¹³ http://www.ilsole24ore.com, 28/10/2011 "Berlusconi: riforme la prossima settimana", consulted 08/01/2013.

http://www.lastampa.it/2011/11/05/italia/politica/berlusconi-crisi-da-noi-ma-se-i-ristoranti-sono-pieni-nDGdFNhvbgwZt7tBu2vAYM/pagina.html, consulted 11/01/2014.

¹⁵ See http://www.corriere.it/politica/11_novembre_12/monti-palazzo-giustiniani_044bdea8-0d0c-11e1-a42a-1562b6741916.shtml, consulted 11/01/2014.

In a whirlwind of scandalous events,¹⁶ on 12 November 2012 Berlusconi resigned as head of government, and Mario Monti formed a new technocratic government with the support of all parties in the Parliament, including Berlusconi's one, except the *Lega Nord*. The position of PDL among the majority supporting the government initially led Berlusconi to portray his withdrawal as an unavoidable "act of responsibility" towards Italy and the EU, consequent to dramatic economic and financial conjunctures. This rhetoric, however, developed over time towards depicting Berlusconi's removal as a *takeover* organized by the EU technocracy in alliance with international financial organizations.¹⁸

The ambivalence characterizing Berlusconi's rhetoric, however, was also the driving logic of PDL's parliamentary practices, as the party voted in favour of the *stability-pact* proposed by Monti whilst at the same time Berlusconi declared to the news his "deep scepticism" towards the economic measures adopted by the government.¹⁹ In other words, the PDL tried for several months to combine a silent practice of responsibility *within* the parliament with a loud rhetoric of contestation *outside* the institutions. This strategy lasted until the party decided to withdraw its support to the government, which led to the election campaign of 2013. In that occasion, the rationale for the choice to withdraw the support did not point at the government's policies *per se*, but rather at the sustainability of the EU agenda on the crisis.²⁰

In June 2012, Berlusconi declared that Italians should ask "vigorously" the European Central Bank to start printing money, or alternatively to let member states print their own. ²¹ The members of PDL split between supporters of Berlusconi – which endorsed strong anti-austerity position and openly opposed the government – and a more moderate fringe which instead supported the idea of large coalitions as a way out of the crisis. Despite these internal tensions, PDL compactly withdrew its endorsement to Monti's cabinet after the approval of the annual budget. From then on, the anti-EU strategic dimension fully overcame the responsibility one, and several members of the PDL, including Berlusconi, turned to explicitly Eurosceptic arguments in their campaigning.

In particular, anti-EU arguments took an increasingly anti-German tone (Dehousse 2013), as a

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¹⁶ The origins of Berlusconi's fault are multiple and not only related to the Eurocrisis and sexual scandals. See for a chronology Chiaramonte and D'alimonte 2012; and Bosco and McDonnell 2012.

¹⁷ See http://www.ilsussidiario.net/News/Politica/2011/11/13/BERLUSCONI-II-video-messaggio-le-mie-dimissioni-ungesto-responsabile-e-generoso/221823/, consulted 11/01/2014.

¹⁸ See http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/berlusconi-rilancia-i-club-forza-italia-974255.html, consulted 12/01/2014.

¹⁹ See http://www.corriere.it/politica/11_dicembre_15/manovra-fiducia_1028405e-26e3-11e1-853d-c141a33e4620.shtml, consulted 11/01/2014.

http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2012/maggio/09/Berlusconi_non_piu_ipotizzabile_appoggio_co_8_120509004.shtml, consulted 12/01/2014.

²¹ See http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/articoli/1048007/berlusconi-la-mia-pazza-idea-per-la-crisi-la-bce-o-bankitalia-stampino-leuro.shtml, consulted 12/01/2014.

consequence of rumours circulated by the Wall Street Journal claiming the involvement of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the removal of Berlusconi from cabinet.²² Two months before the elections Berlusconi affirmed that "the spread is a scam, and Monti's policies are Germanocentric", ²³ whereas the PDL ran the elections voicing opposition to fiscal austerity policies "imposed by a Germanocentric Europe" and to technocratic governments defined as the true disease of Italy. 24

Although the PDL platform for the elections of 2013 does not indulge too much on EU affairs, it also marks a major change in the party's understanding of the EU, as it is proposed to support "more the Europe of the people, and less the Euro-bureaucracy" (p.9). The idea of a "Europe of the people" reflects the federalist idea of a community made of "macro-regions" proposed – among others – by Lega Nord.²⁵ In a nutshell, the programme of PDL also mentions the direct election of the Commission's President, and it proposes to stop fiscal austerity measures, to strengthen the competences of the European Central Bank, and to fight to protect Italian's agricultural interest within the CAP framework.

Beyond the pledges in the party manifesto, there is little doubt that the EU played a major role in the campaign of the Italian centre right, which openly criticized Brussels for not having prevented the crisis of the Euro and for imposing technocratic governments over insolvent member states. In addition to strictly political reasons, however, it is our opinion that the Eurosceptic mood characterizing Berlusconi's campaign has to do with the difficult relationship between PDL and the European People's Party (EPP), before and after the 2013 campaign.

Since the establishment of the Monti government, in fact, the PDL had been increasingly frustrated by the open endorsement provided by the EPP to the new cabinet, which was considered alternative to the centre right in the Italian arena, yet supported by the same European parliament group. Such frustration turned into open opposition on the eve of the 2013 elections, when the EPP leaders welcomed the candidacy of Monti as Prime Minister, defining him "more reliable" than Berlusconi. ²⁶ De facto, the EPP attempted to delegitimize PDL, claiming that more moderate parties and figures were needed in order to avoid "the spread of anti- EU populism" in Italy.²⁷ As the tone

http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/berlusconi lo spread un imbroglio merkel sostengo monti/notizie/2 37285.shtml, consulted 12/01/2014.

The document is available at http://www.pdl.it/programma-elezioni-politiche-2013/, consulted 12/01/2014.

See

²²See http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB100014240529702033911045771244800464635761, consulted 13/01/2014.

²⁵ The document is available at http://www.leganord.org/index.php/elezioni, consulted 28/12/2013.

²⁶ See http://www.corriere.it/esteri/12 dicembre 12/berlusconi-ritorno-editoriale-new-york-times dfe1434e-4443-11e2-a26e-c89e7517e938.shtml, consulted 12/01/2014.

²⁷ See http://www.europressresearch.eu/html/commenti.php?id=172&lang=ENG, consulted 12/01/2014.

of Berlusconi's Euroscepticism rose, several members of EPP took explicit positions against him and the PDL. Berlusconi's violent reaction ("I will not let the EPP judge me")²⁸ led to the withdrawal from PDL of several Italian MEPs, including the head of the party's group in Brussels.

The unintended consequence of the Europeanization of the party politics in the centre right was to set free the electoral campaign of PDL from any duty of responsibility at the community level, or coherence with the rest of its European allies. From that moment onwards, in fact, the campaign of the centre right was characterized by unprecedented attacks to German interference in Italian internal affairs. In particular, Angela Merkel was repeatedly accused not only to be the main responsible of austerity policies, but also as the symbol of a lack of representation and legitimacy within EU institutions. In this framework, Berlusconi explicitly accused Monti to have turned Italy into "a German colony" by implementing Merkel's austerity measures.²⁹ The future of Italy in the EU envisaged by PDL can only be defined as "hard" Eurosceptic, since it proposed either to "defeat Germany" within the EU, or to leave the Euro.³⁰

In line with Dehousse (2013), hence, the origins of PDL's Euroscepticism have to do with a negative politicization of the EU resulting from two main reasons: the political interest to capitalize on the social consequences of austerity measures, and a genuine (yet not necessarily EU-related) opposition to the experience of the technocratic government. Concerning the first element, the strategy of the centre right had been that of criticizing austerity even when the party was supporting the government introducing the measures. Concerning the latter one, the critique must not be understood as an opposition to technocracy *per se* (Italy already experienced similar governments, which did not attract this type of criticisms). Opposition to the technocratic government, instead, also meant contesting the emerging, alternative political elite within the Italian centre-right. This is why the supranational endorsement of Monti by the EPP exacerbated PDL's Euroscepticism and transformed Germany into its main political target.

In general, the overview on the relationship between Berlusconi's parties and the EU shows that Euroscepticism within the Italian centre right has never been inborn within the parties' ideologies or policy preferences. On the very contrary, it appears to be a frequent habit yet a conjunction-related one, i.e. associated to circumstances perceived as convenient by the party leader. On the one hand, its high volatility makes it difficult to categorize it as "soft" or "hard" Euroscepticism, also because

²⁸ See http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2012/12/11/ira-di-silvio-berlusconi-con-merkel-e-ppe_n_2278853.html, consulted 12/01/2014

²⁹ See http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/berlusconi-risponde-germania-sembra-siamo-colonia-886198.html, consulted 12/01/2014.

³⁰ See http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2013/02/01/news/berlusconi e il programma europeo del pdl superare la politica di sola austerit-51703814/, the original video is available at http://it.notizie.yahoo.com/video/berlusconi-spuntarla-con-berlino-o-134400036.html consulted 12/01/2014.

for long periods the Italian centre-right has been simply not interested in EU affairs. On the other, it must be recalled that opposition to the EU has characterized a vast part of Berlusconi's political trajectory in terms of public discourse and propaganda, yet in terms of policy making and implementation his parties have been characterized – excluding some exceptions – by overwhelmingly pro-EU records.

As a result, it is still unsure whether Berlusconi's new party *Nuova Forza Italia* will be affiliated to the EPP for the forthcoming EU Parliament elections. Although lengthily debated, the issue has not been solved so far. The further split within the Italian centre right does not facilitate the project of a common group, especially since the newly born *Nuovo Centro Destra* has been supporting the large-coalition government of Enrico Letta, and can count on a clear record *vis-à-vis* the EU, whereas Berlusconi's *Nuova Forza Italia* has sheltered the vast majority of former PDL Eurosceptics. In addition to that, negotiations are stalled since the former Italian Prime Minister cannot join EPP's meetings due to judiciary restrictions on his international movements.³¹ A final decision by the EPP is awaited by the end of January: at this stage it is difficult to predict if the latest opinion polls will convince the European centre right to forgive Berlusconi's Eurosceptic strays, or whether instead he will choose to join the chairs of more radical Euro-groups in the EP.

The regionalist populism of Lega Nord

The *Lega Nord* (LN), formally founded in 1991 by the fusion of several movements from Northern Italy, has become over the past two decades one of the most successful regionalist parties in Western Europe. Rather than a temporary protest movement, LN is today the oldest group in the Italian parliament, a recognized actor contributing to the demise of the First Republic (Bartlett, Birdwell and McDonnell, 2012) and a regular member of Centre-Right coalitions of the Second Repulic during Berlusconi's governments between 1994 and 2011 (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005; 2010). Although the party's character is often contested in scholarly literature,³² the most appropriate definition for the purposes of this study seems to be that of "regionalist populism" (Biorcio, 1991; McDonnell, 2006). This definition underlines the main political activity of the party since its foundation, i.e. the campaigning for the autonomy of Northern Italy, although LN's demands in this respect have been subject to severe fluctuations, ranging from campaigns for

³¹ See http://www.huffingtonpost.it/salvatore-curreri/porte-chiuse-a-berlusconi-anche-in-europa_b_4377723.html, consulted 12/01/2014.

³² For a discussion on the "populist" and "radical right" nature of Lega Nord, see: R Biorcio, *La Padania Promessa*, Milan: il Saggiatore, 1997; M Tarchi, *L'Italia populista: dal qualunquismo ai girotondi*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003; Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. D McDonnell, 'A weekend in Padania: regionalist populism and the Lega Nord', *Politics* 26, no 2, 2006.

Padania's independence to law proposals on federalism and devolution.

Similarly contested has been the definition of LN as a Eurosceptic movement and party. Indeed, until the late 1990s LN was characterized by a substantially pro-European political platform, since at the time the EU arena was perceived as providing greater opportunities to promote its regionalist goals. At the rhetorical level, moreover, LN claimed that the North was the only 'economically Europeanized' area of the country, and the main factor for the acceptance of Italy within the Monetary Union. On these grounds, LN denounced Northern Italy's unwillingness to pay for the deficiencies of the rest of the country.

After 1998, however, LN's position on the EU has changed radically, openly endorsing a Eurosceptic narrative. Although the party has long self-defined as the harshest opponent of community policies and integration, many authors have noticed that its position has been repeatedly nuanced. In the first place, LN does not claim to be 'against Europe *per se*', but against the allegedly undemocratic nature of the 'continental super-state'.³³ In addition, LN has voted in Parliament both the Nice and Lisbon treaties, under the pressure of its allies. In this sense, LN displays a "Gianus face" *vis-à-vis* European integration, endorsing Euroscepticism under favourable conditions, but being open to compromise in times of low salience and popular resentment over EU affairs (Bartlett, Birdwell and McDonnell, 2012).

This being said, these are propitious times for LN's Euroscepticism. With the end of Berlusconi's government in 2011 and the construction of the grand coalition supporting the technocratic government of Mario Monti, LN became the main opposition party in the Italian parliament. Inevitably, the position of LN was initially schizophrenic: the leader Roberto Maroni simultaneously denounced the "financial powers that destroyed the life of families, companies and public accounts", it claimed "fierce opposition" to the "technocrat" Mario Monti, but promised the approval of LN on the stability law and the other measures imposed by the ECB.³⁴

From that moment onwards, LN's Eurosceptic stances grew progressively. In the 2013 Political elections, the programme of Lega tackled several EU issues, proposing the development of a "Europe of the peoples", based on a number of macro-regions (Dehousse, 2013). At the same time, the electoral campaign strongly focused on attacking the policies of austerity, with the proposal of a national referendum to decide whether to stay in, or withdraw from, the Eurozone.³⁵ All of this, however, was framed without officially self-defining as "anti-EU". On the contrary, the main frames that were used by LN referred to a *different* Europe, based on democratic values rather than

³³ Lega Nord, *Proposte e Obiettivi*.

³⁴ La Repubblica, 11/11/2011.

³⁵ La Stampa, 09/09/2012.

technocratic ones: "we ask that the peoples of Europe are allowed to express their opinion on the Euro and on the future of Europe. We believe in a different Europe, alternative to the one envisaged by Monti and the ECB". Similarly, several proposals in LN's electoral programme suggested integration-oriented reforms of the EU political system: the development of Euro-bonds and project-bonds; the direct election of the President of the European Commission; enhancement of the powers of the European Parliament; and a vague reference to the acceleration of the political, economic, baking and fiscal unions.³⁷

After the unsatisfactory results of the 2013 elections, when LN lost over 1.5 million votes obtaining only 4.1% of the votes (in 2008 it reached above 8%; Corbetta, 2010; Maggini, 2013), the push towards Euroscepticism grew even stronger, mainly in the rush to compete with the new challengers from the *Movimento 5 Stelle*. As a result, under the leadership of the MEP Matteo Salvini, LN has launched a number of anti-EU campaigns, including the *No-Euro Day* on 23 November 2013. The European Union is openly defined a "dictatorship" and the party started proposals for the reform of "all EU treaties" including Maastricht and Schengen.³⁸

LN's electoral campaign for the 2014 EP elections, hence, is strongly grounded on a complete opposition to the Euro. The currency is defined as "a crime against humanity", on which grounds the "EU-criminals, thieves and murderer bureaucrats" have justified "coups d'état" and "genocides of families and entrepreneurs" across the continent. ³⁹ Behind opposition to the Euro, as can be seen, lays a more broad critique of the EU political system as a whole. Under the new leadership, the party has restored the rhetoric asking for territorial, monetary and budgetary sovereignty, and suggesting that LN shall undertake the project of "dismantling Brussels". ⁴⁰

In addition to that, the party has undertaken close talks with the *Front National* of Marine Le Pen and the Dutch PVV, and it is likely that it will join the recently-formed Eurosceptic coalition *European Alliance for Freedom*, under a common platform calling for national and regional freedom in opposition to EU supranational controls. During the federal congress of LN, the leader of PVV (who had been invited there together with other representatives of Eurosceptic parties from around Europe) openly spoke of independence from the EU, being acclaimed by LN militants with chants and applauses. Similarly, the leaders of the party claim a "Europe of the peoples and not of bankers" and claim to defend the interests of the lower classes damaged by the social and economic

³⁶ La Stampa, 09/09/2012.

³⁷ Programme of Lega Nord, available at: www.leganordmariano.com/images/PDF/ProgrammaPolitiche2013.pdf (consulted on: 07/01/ 2014).

³⁸ La Stampa, 14 November 2013

³⁹ *No Euro Day* conference, Milan 23/11/2013, available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJfmmVvKF1g (consulted on 07/01/2014).

⁴⁰ Huffington Post, 15/11/2013.

policies of the latest governments, who had been directly inspired by the EU and the ECB.

Together with its new pan-European allies, LN is about to launch a major anti-Euro demonstration in Brussels, in March 2014. The platform of the demonstration illustrates in a straightforward way the logics of the leap of LN towards hard Euroscepticism. Different from the project of reforming the EU monetary and economic system which characterized LN's electoral campaign until 2013, in fact, the new platform of LN aims at the abolition of the Euro as the first step towards independence. As explained by Salvini, ⁴¹ the common currency has been the "criminal instrument" by which the national government has kept *Padania* subjugated. Hence, the new leadership claims that independence from the national power of Rome would not be sufficient if it is not accompanied by independence from Brussels.

National grievances, European issues: the Movimento 5 Stelle

Openly rejecting the label of 'party' and based on a strongly anti-establishment rhetoric, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (5 Stars Movement) was born in 2009 under the leadership of the Italian comedian Beppe Grillo. In little time and despite running as an outsider, it has achieved unprecedented levels of political popularity: with the 2013 elections, it became the first party in the Italian Lower Chamber (with about 25% of the votes). The organization's name makes reference to the five most important themes in its political programme: public water, transportation, development, internet connection and availability, and the environment.⁴²

Beyond its anti-corruption and anti-establishment features, it is difficult to define the ideological profile of a "movement" that has organized itself around the online and offline activities of the political blog of a famous comedian. Most commentators define it as the most modern version of Italian populism, a definition that the leader of the movement made his own, declaring that he had gathered the votes that – across Europe – convey on the populist radical right (Natale and Biorcio, 2013). The main traits of populism in his rhetoric characterize his critique of the Italian political system and élites which, in the M5S discourse, have dispossessed citizens of their popular sovereignty. Different from the radical right, however, the M5S claims to offer citizens a "tool" to gain back popular sovereignty in terms of direct and deliberative democracy. Moreover, there is no

⁴¹ Matteo Salvini, Federal Congress of Lega Nord: http://www.leganord.org/index.php/seguici/eventi/congresso-federale-2013 (consulted on: 07 January 2014).

⁴² For a detailed genesis of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* see Bartlett et al. 2013.

evidence in the M5S of an ethno-cultural understanding of the national community and there is no intrinsic contraposition to immigrants⁴³ and supranational organization (Natale and Biorcio 2013).

Indeed, until the 2013 elections, the M5S' opposition to the EU had not emerged in a straightforward way. As reported by previous studies (Bartlett et al., 2013; Dehousse, 2013), the electoral programme of M5S made no reference to the EU, 44 focusing on local rather than international issues and policies. Beyond official documents, however, the blog of the leader of M5S provides interesting insights concerning the party's understanding of European affairs. Over the months preceding the general elections, in fact, Beppe Grillo has repeatedly expressed criticism against the EU bureaucracy, the euro and the technocratic government of Mario Monti. 45

Overall, Grillo acknowledges the importance of EU cooperation, describing European integration as a noble ideal that has been over time corrupted due to the influence of organized interests. The attempt is that of reconnecting the M5S to the Europeanist ideals of the founding fathers which, in his opinion, have been betrayed by the bureaucrats and technocrats ruling the EU. The corrupted EU élites have led to the annihilation of "politics" within the EU, substituting the political union with a union of banks, which is at odds with the original European dream. 46 In line with this understanding of the EU, on 6 November 2012 the leader of M5S posted his well-known proposal for a referendum on Italy's participation to the Eurozone: "I believe that Italy cannot afford the luxury of being in the Euro. Yet, this decision must be taken by the Italian citizens, rather than by a restricted group of oligarchs or by Beppe Grillo". 47

With the approaching of the 2014 EP elections, however, the official position of M5S vis-à-vis the EU has been further clarified, with the development of a 7-points electoral programme. 48 The main proposal of the programme represents – in our opinion – a perfect real-world example of Peter Mair's theory of the displacement between Europe's channels of representation and its dimensions of political conflict (2007). Point 1 of the M5S programme, in fact, consists of a formalization of the previously mentioned national referendum on Italy's participation to the Eurozone. In line with

⁴³ Although on the issue of immigration the position of the M5S has been contested (in the past Grillo declared the necessity to "stop immigration", see http://www.beppegrillo.it/2013/10/immigrazione_e_tabu.html, consulted 06/01/2014). Very recently, in an online referendum on the site of the Movement the sympathizers voted in favour of abolishing the crime of illegal immigration (see http://www.corriere.it/politica/14 gennaio 13/grillo-lanciaconsultazioni-reato-clandestinita-dissidenti-politica-non-sia-videogame-b474ad60-7c49-11e3-bc95-3898e25f75f1.shtml, consulted 18/01/2014).

44 The only exception being a reference to the European directives on environmental protection. See the document

available at: http://www.beppegrillo.it/iniziative/movimentocinquestelle/Programma-Movimento-5-Stelle.pdf.

⁴⁵ See in particular the Comunicati n. 34, 49, and 52 available at http://www.beppegrillo.it/movimento/comunicatipolitici.html, consulted 06/01/2014.

46 See: C'è del marcio in Bruxelles, http://www.beppegrillo.it/2012/11/ce del marcio a bruxelles.html consulted

⁴⁷ See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2012/11/grillo for dummies.html, consulted 06/01/2014.

⁴⁸ The document is available at: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/materiali-bg/7punti.pdf, consulted 06/01/2014.

Mair's argument, hence, M5S voices opposition regarding the institutionalization of the EU within the European channel of representation, where – de facto – no relevant competence lays as the EP cannot take decisions on the composition of the Eurozone.

In addition to this, the European programme of M5S includes more policy-oriented proposals, such as the abolition of the fiscal compact and the introduction of European bonds, and the development of a strategic alliance between Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean countries. The M5S also developed a number of growth-oriented economic proposals, such as the exclusion of investments in innovation from EU limits on budgetary deficits; the public financing of agricultural and livestock activities in order to increase domestic consumption; and the abolition of the recently introduced 'balanced budget' amendment regulating public spending.

As we can see, in its electoral programme the M5S calls for a radical reform of the EU, in particular in terms of the handling of economic affairs. In line with this understanding, Beppe Grillo has recently called for a new *Europa Solidale* (fair Europe) built upon growth and development, rather than governed by the ECB. The rhetoric of M5S' campaign is built upon a direct-democratic understanding of politics, whilst the reference remains the national rather than the European arena: "who voted for ECB? Its symbol has never appeared in any European election. Yet, it rules on the EU more than any member state [...]. Who are these bureaucrats and bankers, and their political puppets, pretending to decide instead of citizens?" Similarly, references to Italy's loss of sovereignty emerge from the definition of Italy's Prime Minister Enrico Letta as the "toy soldier of Brussels". ⁵⁰

Although the M5S has defined the EP elections "a crusade" towards the construction of a better Europe, ⁵¹ its view of Community institutions is extremely critical. The group has repeatedly criticized the European Parliament, defining it "a Grand Hotel hosting people waiting for better opportunities in Italy" and a "sumptuous elephant graveyard" for politicians who could not be elected in national parliaments. ⁵² The EU itself is defined "a Club Med infested lobby", where all powers rest in the hands of finance and banks that, with the complicity of technocratic and coalition governments, are strangling national economies. ⁵³ The aim of the M5S is therefore to open up "as a can opener" the European parliament to the scrutiny of the citizenry.

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⁴⁹ See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2013/10/il m5s alle elezioni europee.html consulted 06/01/2014.

⁵⁰ See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2013/10/il m5s alle elezioni europee.html consulted 06/01/2014.

⁵¹ See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2013/10/il m5s alle elezioni europee.html consulted 06/01/2014.

⁵² See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2014/01/europa cosi vicina cosi lontana.html,consulted 06/01/2014.

⁵³ See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2014/01/europa_cosi_vicina_cosi_lontana.html,consulted 06/01/2014.

In so doing, however, the M5S does not address a European audience. Rather, its reference is always the Italian electorate, Italy's internal problems in terms of economic performances and quality of democracy, and the malfunctioning of Italy's representation within the European Union. In other words, despite the attempt to politicize broad European issues concerning the functioning of the EU political system, the project of the M5S does not have the ambition of becoming fully Europeanized, since the frame of reference remains constrained within the borders of the nation state. The fact that EU issues are framed and interpreted exclusively in terms of their repercussions and consequences for Italian people, moreover, emerges in the widely used slogan of the group for the EP elections: "in Europe, for Italy, with M5S". 54

In sum, the main features of M5S' Euroscepticism have to do with socioeconomic utilitarianism, and with the radical rejection of technocracy and economic austerity (Natale and Biorcio 2013). Moreover, its European platform is also strongly connoted by the broader frame concerning the quality of democracy, calling for increased political transparency and efficiency. In both cases, as we have illustrated, the discourse is never fully Europeanized, and remains strongly anchored to the interests, rights and benefits of Italy and Italian people. The explanation for this is that the movement's critique of the EU is not – and does not aim to be – pivotal within its activities: rather than being elaborated *ad hoc* for the EP elections, the criticism of the EU democratic deficit seems to represent a transposition at the supra-national level of the M5S' electorally successful condemnation of the Italian political system.

Pretty much like Italian politicians, EU politicians are unresponsive; similar to Italian institutions, the Communitarian ones lack transparency and accountability; just like in Italy, the inefficiency and corruption of the ruling EU elites leads to the imposition of sacrifices to innocent citizens. Despite calls for "solidarity" within Europe, the M5S' interest lays almost exclusively on the Italian citizens, or on citizens from other P.I.G.S. countries⁵⁵ subject to the same conditions as Italy. In this sense, although technocrats and bureaucrats in Italy and Brussels are equally responsible for the sufferance caused by the austerity measures, the M5S is unable to address a truly European public and to develop a fully Europeanized political discourse. The M5S, hence, simply applies to the supranational level the systemic critique it had developed at the national level: reject the system.

This, however, shall not be considered surprising, given that the M5S is rooted on local needs and policies (Ceccarini *et. al.* 2013). Rather than being a genuinely Eurosceptic movement, the M5S becomes Eurosceptic because it imports European issues within its political platform in a manner

⁵⁴ See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2014/01/europa cosi vicina cosi lontana.html,consulted 06/01/2014.

⁵⁵ P.I.G.S. is the acronym for Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain.

that is coherent with its broader understanding of politics. In other words, since the EU is tackled by the M5S mainly in terms of national politics, its position on the EU is inevitably an antagonistic one, where the unrepresented "people" has to fight the corrupted EU elites in order to change the system and the traditional way of doing politics.

The extra-parliamentary arena: from radical right groups to street-movements

The extra-parliamentary arena of opposition to the EU is composed by a heterogeneous mix of groupuscular organizations and social movements characterized by a radical rhetoric generally leaning towards hard Euroscepticism. Over the past years, the most visible and influential extraparliamentary opposition to the EU has clustered around minor groups, parties and social movements mainly (yet not always) pertaining to the extreme right and neo-Fascist traditions. In this section, we shall focus on two main groups within this area: the social movement organization *Movimento dei Forconi*, and the neo-Fascist parties *CasaPound* and *Forza Nuova*.

Within the organizations participating to anti-EU protest movements, many do not have an explicit ideological profile. In recent times, organizations pertaining to this area have received substantial media coverage and national public visibility as they clustered around a number of public events and protests. Although the source and composition of these protests is subject to debate, many recognize the centrality of the *Movimento dei Forconi* (*pitchfork movement*) in the organization and planning of the protests. Self-defining as "non partisan", this group was originally founded by a Sicilian entrepreneur on the basis of a bunch of political demands including national monetary sovereignty, and opposition to austerity and economic globalization.⁵⁸ What is important, however, is that the group seem to have offered political visibility to the sections of the Italian society that have lost trust in all other forms of political representation.⁵⁹

Although originally the group's position on the EU was rather controversial, as it recognized the common market as the place where Italy had to increase its economic competitiveness, today the movement calls for the full rejection of the EU and its policies. The group's Euroscepticism is

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⁵⁶ On anti-austerity mobilisation in Italy, see: Zamponi, L. (2013) "Why don't Italians Occupy? Hypotheses on a failed mobilisation", *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 11, 3-4; pp.416-426.

⁵⁷ In addition to these, there are many other minor groups that try to mobilize on EU issues, including left wing social movements. Yet, we decided to focus on these rather than others as these groups have gathered most of the media visibility. Moreover, the vast majority of left-wing protests did not endorse fully Eurosceptic stances, which would have required a more extensive assessment than possible in this report in order to be compared to those expressed by mainstream parties from the political right.

⁵⁸ http://www.marianoferro.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/iforconi.pdf

⁵⁹ Lauren McCauley, 'Spiral of Rebellion' Sweeps Italy. Pitchfork movement organizers vow 'peaceful Invasion' of Rome until ruling regime steps down, *Common Dreams*, 14/12/2013.

grounded on pure utilitarian reasoning, in line with the findings of literature studying the perception of costs and benefits of EU membership (Gabel and Palmer 1995; Anderson 1998; Mahler *et al.* 2000), and with the study of the new cleavage between winners and losers of EU integration and globalization (Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Lubbers and Scheepers 2005).

On *Facebook*, one of the leaders of the movement calls for the immediate withdrawal of Italy from the EU, since "too much austerity imposed by the EU has already killed Italy". Similar claims reflect utilitarian calculations of socioeconomic nature, mainly concerning expectations about better living conditions. Special attention is in fact devoted to small entrepreneurs, which represent one of the categories which are suffering the crisis the most and the original constituency of the group. In particular, claims describe the negative consequences of austerity and technocracy on people's wealth and physical health. The general frame is that living conditions have worsened due to EU integration, and that the expectations of EU-led redistribution have not been met.

Utilitarian arguments of this nature are not fully absent from the discourse of neo-Fascist organizations such as *CasaPound* and *Forza Nuova*. Radical right opposition to the EU, in fact, represents a widely studied field, and many authors have underlined the nationalistic, utilitarian, and socio-demographic logics that could explain the phenomenon (for an overview see Vasilopolou 2009, Vasilopolou *et al.* 2013). Concerning our case studies, however, it is worth investigating the deeper ideological stances that generally accompany the more common types of argumentations, since the definition of their own idea of Europe is an aspect that has been – until now – largely underestimated by research on this party family.

Pan-Europeanism and transnationalism, in fact, have been one of the prerogatives of the Italian neo-Fascism, both within the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* and among non-institutional actors like *Jeune Europe* and *Ordine Nuovo* (Carioti 2011, Bar On 2011). In this understanding, Fascism is perceived no longer as a form of nationalism, but rather as a European alternative to imperialism. As a result, EU issues are always tackled in a multiple way: on the one hand, the groups stand in opposition to the EU technocracy and its austerity policy which are perceived as challenges to national sovereignty, identity, and prosperity; on the other, they call for European solidarity among people sharing common religious and cultural roots (an Identitarian call to create the Nation Europe, often called Peoples' Europe).

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⁶⁰ See https://www.facebook.com/pages/Mariano-Ferro/511920352152473?fref=ts Consulted 07/01/2014.

⁶¹ See: http://www.iforconi.it/iforconi/linee-programmatiche.html consulted 07/01/2014.

⁶² See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ieY_bsyrdQ consulted 07/01/2014 and against technocracy and austerity http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ieY_bsyrdQ consulted 07/01/2014.

The 2013 electoral program of *CasaPound*, for example, makes an exceptional opening with respect to Europeanization. It is stated that "We believe [...] in a strong, autarchic Europe, that has its own internal market regulated by politics". 63 This goes far beyond the recognition of a feeling of cultural and religious bond – rooted in a common history – among European peoples: CasaPound explicitly supports European economic cooperation, yet in terms of economic and cultural protectionism rather than integration. Despite a different understanding of the religious origins of the 'Nation-Europe', the same mix of nation-based Europeanism can be found in the 2013 electoral platform of Forza Nuova. 64In this understanding, Europe shall be based on cultural and economic isolationism, in order to protect the traditions and welfare states of peoples that have been historically divided. Hence, the leaders of these groups self-define as pro-European, being against the "Europe of the banks"65 but in favour of a "Europe of the nations".66

Although Europe has been a feature of neo-Fascist propaganda since long, in recent times the Italian radical right has reinvigorated its specifically anti-EU rhetoric. In particular, CasaPound has taken rigid positions against the major crisis-related issues such as austerity, and has mobilized and participated to several street protests against technocracy (see Castelli et al. 2013). Remarkably, CasaPound participation contributed in a sensible way in Europeanizing the anti-austerity protests of November and December 2013. Although targeting austerity measures, protesters were originally pointing mainly at the inefficiency of the national political élites, whereas the leaders of the radical right rallied outside the European Commission's offices in Rome, wearing Italian flag masks. In the course of the protest, CasaPound militants exposed white nooses around the neck symbolizing the effects of austerity, and took down the European flag.

Neo-fascist parties, hence, represent the prototypical case of hard Euroscepticism, since the rejection of integration is strongly related to their ideological vision of the European space as Europa Nazione. Rather than a political institution, this shall be understood as an entity regenerating the "strong, unified, homogeneous, pan-European empire" in opposition to dominant

⁶³ See www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/25_elezioni/17_CASAPOUND_ITALIA.PDF,

p. 2, consulted 29/07/2013.

64 In the 2013 Manifesto Forza Nuova writes: "The Europe that we want has to be founded on the principles of Christianity, the European cultural tradition, Greek philosophy and Roman legal and political concept. - The borders of Europe should follow a logical historical, geographical, religious, ethnic and cultural diversity that includes all peoples from the Atlantic to Russia (included) but that totally excludes all foreign objects such as Turkey and Israel. - These borders must be actual, ie non-European immigration and protect the people from the flood of foreign products. - This European Union should lead to a compact size in ethnic, cultural and religious, but also socio-economic and legal form of the welfare state of Christian inspiration " (http://www.forzanuova.org/programma, p.7, consulted 07/01/2013). The group strongly critized the EU as source of austerity and technocracy (see www.forzanuova.org/comunicati/peopleeurope-rise-forza-nuova-con-il-popolo-greco consulted 07/01/2013) and defines the former Italian technocratic Prime Minister Monti a "Social butcher" (http://www.forzanuova.org/info-comunicati consulted 07/01/2013).

⁶⁵ Interview n. 3a made on 01/06/2012.

⁶⁶ Interview n. 3a made on 01/06/2012.

ideologies, from liberalism and conservatism, to social democracy, socialism and communism (Bar On 2008, p. 328). The EU, on the contrary, represents nothing but a modern-day imperialistic project, trying to impose itself globally to the detriment of enrooted European cultures, pretty much like the former Marxist-Leninist Soviet Union and the liberal democratic USA.

In conclusion, it is unquestionable that extra-parliamentary opposition to the EU follows the idea of a "principled opposition to the EU and to the European integration" (Taggart 1998, 364). Yet, as we have illustrated, this form of hard Euroscepticism is structured along different types of arguments, which range from utilitarian calculations to genuinely ideological interpretations. Rather than being mutually exclusive, however, the two seem to be mutually reinforcing, as illustrated by the joint organization of protest by the various movements and organizations, in December 2013.⁶⁷ Under these circumstances, it is likely that in the years to come ideological Euroscepticism will become an increasingly characterizing feature of the neo-Fascist identity in Italy.

Conclusions

In his recent account of Italian 2013 elections, Renaud Dehousse identifies the emergence of a new phase in the long process of Europeanization, i.e. the unprecedented emergence of EU issues within national electoral debates. Given that the election campaign unfolded during a severe economic crisis, and after one year of government by technocrats highly sponsored in Brussels, Italian political parties were simply forced to take up European issues. All this "transformed the nature of the election, which became an important moment in *European* political life". Yet, he defines this as "negative Europeanization", since the process is still anchored to national rationales and frames of reference, with the result of fuelling anti-European resentment rather than constructive European debates. In other words, if EU issues are played only to gain support at the national level, then today Euroscepticism represents the most electorally rewarding option.

Developing upon this framework, we have investigated the main traits of contemporary Euroscepticism in Italy in the eve of the 2014 EP elections. In particular, we analysed the electoral platforms, propaganda and policy proposals of the main actors opposing the EU in Italy, differentiating among, on the one hand, extra-parliamentary social movements and extreme right organizations and, on the other, parliamentary actors such as the mainstream right and other populist parties. In so doing, we investigated the different ways of being Eurosceptic from radical

⁶⁷ On the decision of CasaPound to join the Pitchfork protest see http://www.casapounditalia.org/2013/12/casapound-con-i-comitati-9-dicembre.html, consulted 07/01/2013. On the same decision by Forza Nuova see http://www.forzanuova.org/comunicati/9-dicembre-fn-azioni-legali-chi-ci-diffama, consulted 07/01/2013.

street-movements to mainstream and governing parties, from established populist actors to emerging Eurosceptic populists.

Our analysis reveals that there are several aspects by which Italian politics have turned increasingly Europeanized over the past years. First of all, the degree of disenchantment with the EU has grown substantially in terms of popular attitudes, disconfirming Italy's tradition of Euro-enthusiasm. Secondly, we saw that the process of Europeanization of Italian politics increasingly follows a left-right pattern, with all major right-wing actors endorsing more or less radical forms of Euroscepticism. Importantly, we also illustrated that there are different ways in which Eurosceptic values are expressed, ranging from ideological opposition (calling for the dismantlement of the Union), to more nuanced forms of protest contesting specific policy choices because of their negative effects on national polities.

At the same time, however, we have shown that there is a general tendency to shift from "soft" to "hard" forms of Euroscepticism, in which the opposition to EU policies reaches levels that are *de facto* equivalent to opposing the process of integration as a whole. Although only the radical right explicitly suggests substituting the current EU with other types of organizations inspired by the doctrine of Italian neo-Fascism, the challenge of 'moderate' Eurosceptics has been more and more targeting the essential features of the Community system. In this sense, our analysis not only confirms the idea that the EU has been so far "negatively politicized" (Dehousse 2013), but it also suggests that the lasting process of Europeanization of Italian policy making is likely to further strengthen political opposition *to the EU*, rather than opposition *in the EU*.

The financial crisis has produced an institutional arrangement within which it is almost impossible for citizens to separate out what is European and what is domestic, as the two dimensions have become even more closely bound up and intertwined with one another. Above all, this has to do with the culture of consensus characterizing EU affairs, and with the new political context that has emerged in the attempt to respond to the strains of the economic crisis, and it contributed substantially to increasing the level of Europeanization of Italian politics. At the same time however, the perception that national politics lost most of its value due to the progressive delegation of decision-making powers to EU regulatory agencies, transformed party competition in a substantial way. In other words, Europeanization resulted in a reduction of the political value of national polities for all actors involved, since the practices of grand-coalitions and technocracy contributed to the permeation of the depoliticized nature of the EU to the national level.

This is confirmed, among other things, by the fact that most of the actors that we took into consideration frame Euroscepticism in terms of opposition to technocracy, hence restoring a form of

opposition to the EU that often pre-existed the current political phase. Since more than twenty years, in fact, the EU has been perceived as a supranational bureaucracy dealing with the technical regulation of policy areas of little – if any – salience in the public agenda. Still, the same form of "interference" of EU institutions in national policy making is perceived as an abuse of power when the socioeconomic circumstances make citizens aware of the direct impact of these decisions on their lives.

Despite unprecedented levels of Europeanization, therefore, the changes of the last years of Italian politics do not indicate the pathway towards a renovated popular control over EU issues, as some have predicted. Indeed, the greater attention provided to European issues by all parties takes place in a context of cartelized politics: the results of the elections determine the composition of the government but do not yield concrete political consequences in terms of economic governance. In line with the prediction of Mair (2007), in a context where the exercise of electoral accountability is so defective, political entrepreneurs will be further incentivized to organize opposition *to* the EU, rather than *in* the EU, challenging the polity instead of the policies it promulgates.

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