



Department of POLITICAL SCIENCE
Bachelor of POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY and ECONOMICS
Chair of POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MAIN RIGHT-WING POPULIST LEADERS AND PARTIES IN EUROPE

Supervisor
Prof. MICHELE SORICE

Candidate
GIOVANNI TANCREDI BRUSAPORCI
Student ID: 080942

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Introduction

Populism is a term born at the end of the nineteenth century outside the old continent to indicate movements which, though very different in Russia from the United States, were intended to defend peasant people. From the historical point of view, the genesis of Russian populism is earlier than that of the American movement, because its roots can be traced back to the forties. The Russian populist movement, aspired to a sort of rural socialism, in opposition to Tsarist bureaucracy and Western industrialism, which proposed an improvement in the living conditions of the peasant classes and the former servants of the glebe.

In recent years, the term "populist" is frequently used in political discourse following the proliferation of so-called anti-system movements and parties that during the economic crisis that started in 2008 have grown and in many countries are or will become the majority. The word "populism" is used by politicians and the mass media in a denigratory sense of political subjects that criticize elites and exalt the "people" as a source of the legitimization of power. They are advocates of popular instances, which would, however, lead to the overcoming of the limits imposed by the Constitution on the exercise of political power.

According to those who criticize it, populism consists in the over-simplification of complicated public issues, reduced to caricatures suitable to satisfy the appetites of the majority and to incite in them irrational and counterproductive instincts. Such agitation would damage not only the pursuit of the collective good, but also that of the interests of those who are attracted to such simplification.

A negative image of the multitudes is implicit in this conception of populism: the "people" are often disinformed, distracted, disinterested in the common good, volatile in preferences and political judgment, attracted by conceptual simplifications, unrelated to the rationality and civic sense required from the analysis of the most urgent and complex social and economic problems. That accusation also implies a

paternalistic appreciation of the role of technocratic elites, considered the most suitable for identifying and interpreting the true needs and real interests of ordinary people. A majority of citizens, according to anti-populists, live in a kind of false consciousness, induced lack of skills, cognitive laziness, and a subtle use of TV or social media, which would not allow common people to judge for themselves their own political destiny.

However, it seems that a large part of the populist parties affirmed in the European political scenario are right-wing oriented. Even though characterized also by very similar trends, right-wing populism is not really a single monolith, and indeed there are some differences between the various movements, due to the different history and political culture that generated them, while some of these parties are born of neo-fascist or otherwise right-wing movements, while others have arisen thanks to demergers from conservative or liberal parties.

There is no international organization that groups these parties, nor a European party. Right-wing populists in the European Parliament do not form a group of their own, but are divided between Non-registered and other right-wing groups, such as Europe of Liberty and Democracy or, in the past, the European Right-Wing Technical Group, the Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty group, the group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversity and the Independence and Democracy group

Herbert Kitschelt, followed by Pierre-André Taguieff, divided the right-wing populist parties into three different trends or sub-categories: the new radical right, characterized by the defense of the market and an authoritarian vision, (like the National Front) the parties of the so-called chauvinist welfare (like the German Republicans) and, finally, the representatives of the anti-state/anti-statist populism (like the Austrian Freedom Party and the Northern League).

Since the 1990s, right-wing populist parties have established themselves in several European countries, such as France, Italy and the Netherlands. According to Chantal Mouffe, the rise of right-wing populism has often been a consequence of the weakening of the differences between the traditional left and right parties, due to a crushing of

these towards the center, and the ability of these new movements to know how to give expression to needs no longer represented by existing parties.

Many of these political forces in European countries are aiming to make European political integration a form of oppression against national sovereignty, complicating the difficult historical moment and the international crises that surround Europe.

Some believe that political attacks on the institutional architecture of the European Union are well founded and that the inefficiencies of the bureaucratic apparatus and the weaknesses in European governance are evident.

Others believe that the allegations are unjustified and only being used for personal political gain. It is therefore useful to make a map of the major forces that are called populists and anti-Europeanists in Europe.

The British are the first to experience the effects of the "political victories" of Eurosceptic and populist parties, thanks to the results obtained by the English right and especially by the UKIP independence party, a minority force at national level, but decisive for the result of the referendum on the permanence of the country in the European Union. Founded in 1993, UKIP is a conservative, Eurosceptic party whose main ambition and its foundation motive is the "freedom and independence of the United Kingdom", carried out by Nigel Farage, who resigned following the success obtained, acquiring its political objective.

In September 2017, Alternative for Deutschland ranked third with 13% and 94 MPs, and for the first time the party entered parliament. The former president of the party Frauke Petry announced that he would not join the parliamentary group, which is a cause of opposition to the extremist wing formed by Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland, the two heads of lists.

In France, the leader of the Front National Marine Le Pen came to the final ballot with Emmanuel Macron in the elections, picking up a historic 38% of votes. In Holland, Geert Wilders, anti-EU and anti-illegal immigration Party for Freedom (PVV) was favourite but arrived second behind Prime Minister Mark Rutte's VVD but still earning five more seats than the 2012 vote.

The right-wing populist party par excellence in Italy, is the League of Matteo Salvini, openly against unregulated immigration, Eurosceptic and supporting any foreign party that criticizes the European Union. In addition, in Italy, a party with some populist characteristics, is the 5 Star Movement, which claims to be "neither right nor left". Not having a clear, well-defined political line, it is not easy to draw ideological outlines.

In Poland the nationalist and conservative party Justice and Freedom founded by Kaczynski brothers is in power in Poland with Prime Minister Beata Szydlo, colliding on various dossiers with Brussels. It is a party that is in particular against the redistribution of migrants.

Viktor Orban, prime minister of Hungary, is one of the most critical states to the European Union, especially with regard to migration redistribution policies.

In Austria The Freedom Party of Austria is a right-wing populist and national-conservative political party. The party, led by Heinz-Christian Strache, was second at the elections with the candidate Norbert Hofer. For his political positions, the actual chancellor of Austria which has recently replaced Alexander Van Der Bellen, and chairman of the Austrian People's Party Sebastian Kurz, is also considered by many as a right wing-populist leader. Indeed, the young leader started exclusive negotiations with The Freedom Party of Austria for the formation of a coalition government. Kurz said he had "very positive" contacts with the FPÖ leader, Heinz-Christian Strache.

The most successful right-wing populist parties, who had obtained more consensus and electorate in Europe are certainly the league of Matteo Salvini and the Front National of Marine Le Pen. It can be useful to analyze the characteristics of the two parties, their evolution, similarities and differences.

1 From a territorial party to a national party: the Northern League from birth to the present day

1.1 The origins of the party

In the political history of the First and Second Republics a prominent place was played by that party born in the late 1980s, grouping together all the autonomous electoral cartels of northern Italy, which wanted greater freedom and greater decentralization from Rome: the Northern League, the oldest party in the entire political landscape in Italy, founded in the First Republic, and still active.

Since February 1991, the Northern League has entered the homes of Italians starting from western Lombardy and Veneto, and then expanded throughout the territory of so-called "Padania". Previously the party already formed part of the government three times, twice occupying the Ministry of the Interior position, passing laws on its own initiative and electing its own representatives to the European Parliament.

If, on the one hand, the Northern League was different from the old Italian politics, on the other the party had its ups and downs, due to some choices and political strategies that divided public opinion, but positioned it as a new mass party.

Umberto Bossi was the founder and creator of the party, born in Varese in 1941. The most important moment of his political activity, begun in the "left" movements towards the end of the 70s with the meeting with the journalist and politician Bruno Salvadori in 1979, theorist of autonomism and anti-centralism against Rome. Based on his theories of cultural Europe and self-determined Europe, in a few months he succeeded in creating a network of small political entities united in the ideals of autonomism and ethnofederalism. According to him, federalism was the only instrument necessary to save territorial culture and identity, as well as to have greater territorial self-government.

In 1979, just in view of the electoral round, the first political cartel comprising autonomist forces was established, which brought together nineteen movements from the Liga Veneta, "the mother of all the Leagues", to the Piedmontese Renaissance Movement, led by Union Valdotaïne, "Union Valdotaïne - European Autonomous Federalism", obtaining only 166 thousand votes for 0.47%.

After the death of Bruno Salvadori in a car accident on 8 June 1980, aware of his teachings and advice, Bossi created the first nucleus of what would be the Lega Lombarda, the "Autonomous League of Lombardy". The fear of Bossi was the homogenization of society and the fact that the peoples of Northern Italy could lose their identity. At the beginning of the eighties a growing anti-southern sentiment developed in Bossi, due to the fact that, according to him, the evils of Italy derived from the Roman centralism and the "caravan" of the South.

Bossi was nominated in 1983 for the first time in the parliamentary elections thanks to an alliance with the "Lista per Trieste". Thanks to Bossi's contribution in four distinct Lombard districts that brought almost 8 thousand votes. La Liga Veneta instead got 0.3% and brought two parliamentarians to Rome. From that small handful of votes, on April 12, 1984 the Autonomous League of Lombardy was born, with Bossi as secretary, supported by the fraternal friends Giuseppe Leoni, Roberto Maroni, Emilio Sogliaghi, Marino Moroni and Manuela Marrone, his second wife. The newborn party presented itself immediately in the European elections in June: it forming an electoral cartel with all the other autonomous movements of Northern Italy with Bossi as leader. The administrative elections of May 12, 1985 brought for the first-time members of the League to stand in various seats. On 21 March 1986 the Lega Lombarda, the mother of the future Northern League, was born. The Lombard League was more democratic and more organized, even if Bossi immediately became the undisputed leader. The symbol of the party was chosen to represent the soul of the new political formation, a warrior: Alberto da Giussano, who had fought in the famous battle of Legnano (May 29, 1176) against the army of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, that attacked the united

cities in the Lombard League. For Bossi, Alberto da Giussano was the Lega Nord, the Barbarossa against "*Roma ladrona*".

In just four years, the party had increased its votes fifteen times and was able to get its first electoral reimbursement, used by Bossi exclusively for the financing of his "creature". Bossi sat in the "mixed" group together with the senators of Union Valdotaïne and Sudtiroler Volks Partei.

On 18 June 1989 the elections for the third parliamentary term of the European Parliament were held and the Lega Lombarda also managed to send Bossi and Francesco Speroni to Strasbourg. Bossi decided to stay in Palazzo Madama, and was replaced.

1.2 The dream comes true: a single party for all atomist movements, the Lega Nord is born

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall freed Italians from having to vote for the DC against the Communists and the Lega Lombarda, which soon became Lega Nord, was a credible alternative to the much disputed "Pentapartito" and the only one able to change the current status quo.

The Lega Nord was born in December 1991, the new federal-autonomist political party composed of Lega Lombarda and Liga Veneta, with the inclusion of Piemonte Autonomo, Unione Ligure, the Lega Emiliano-Romagnola and the Alleanza Toscana, with the objective that each single region should become a nation inside the "Republic of the North".

Under the statute, Bossi became the Federal Secretary while Franco Rocchetta, leader of the Liga Veneta, became the Federal President.

The first meeting of Pontida, the electoral coup of 1992: the "Lega Nord phenomenon" was born in Milan, the capital of the League.

The early nineties can be defined both the years of crisis in national politics and the "roaring years" of the Northern League. the season of Tangentopoli started in 1992 and

Italians, witnessed not only the collapse of the most voted parties, and they saw their votes betrayed.

The administrative elections of 6 and 7 May 1990 saw the League at 4.1% national and 18.9% in Lombardy, behind the Christian-Democrats and in front of the Communist Party.

1990 was also the year of the event that will make the history of the party: the gathering on the lawn of Pontida, a town in the Bergamo area, on 20 May. The choice was not accidental: just in that village, near an abbey, on the 7th April 1167 the towns of the Lombard League against Barbarossa swore on the "lawn". As a consequence, every year (except in 2004 and 2006) all the militants of the League meet to swear loyalty to the party and the Idea.

The party begins to be a bit 'of political enemies: first the then Head of State, the Christian Democrat Francesco Cossiga, who accuses the League of wanting to overturn the Constitution and to put itself only as a vote of protest and aleatory. Spitting comments also come from the Church, which accuses Bossi and his followers of indifference and verbal violence. The party, by the mouth of the most authoritative political scientists, is instead closer to the people and more distant from the "palaces" and does not seem rotten like the other parties. From this moment the invective against the South and the Tricolor started. There was a stronger desire to split the country into three complementary but independent identities and break away from "*Roma ladrona*".

They wanted to make Italy a federal country, exporting Lombard thought and culture beyond its regional borders and keeping taxes in the North. The Northern League has always used "exclusive" issues to carry on battles for the use of dialect, for secession, for the claim of the self-determination of the Regions.

On April 5, 1992 the political elections took place for the XI legislature: there was the collapse of the party of reference of the then Pentapartito, the Christian Democracy fell to 29.6% in the House and 27% in the Senate (historic lows). On the other hand, the success of the small Bossi movement, which won 55 MPs and 25 senators, becoming the fourth most voted party in Italy made up of candidates presented only in

the regions of the Plain Padana and the first party in Piedmont. The fulcrum of the League's electoral success was not only Tangentopoli, but also an accurate electoral campaign driven by the novelty effect that the movement created in the country, with strong opponents. Already in 1987 it was said that Bossi was lucky to have achieved so much success, but his detractors did not understand that the success of the League derives from the failed promises of political parties of the time: the party was a bulwark of fairness and respect for the electoral vote.

Another success of the League is the contamination of the walls, an action already started in 1988, with writings praising the party, which allowed it a strong visibility.

On 18th and 19th April 1993 an important referendum consultation was held, with the mass.

Mayor of Rome armchair between the "left" exponent Francesco Rutelli and the Gianfranco Fini missile, would have voted without a shadow of doubt for the latter.

This gesture was intended as the clearance of the Italian Social Movement from an anti-system party to a "presentable" party thanks to a possible entry into politics of Berlusconi, in view of the legislative elections of March 1994.

Silvio Berlusconi decided to enter politics on January 26, 1994 with a televised speech in which he explained the birth of a new political party he founded, Forza Italia. Politically they were poles apart, the one "one self-made man" and frequenter of the salons, the other sober and farther from the intelligentsia, but the President of Fininvest had sensed the importance of the votes of the North. On the contrary, the Lega Nord of the beginnings had no television space, as RAI had been divided, the newspapers dedicated small spaces to it.

In the March 1994 elections, the Lega Nord, despite the ally/enemy Silvio Berlusconi and his young party, Forza Italia, lost some votes compared to the political elections of two years before. It got 8.36%. The Lega lost only 0.3% but the interesting fact to note is how the territories where the Lega Nord had consensus had moved. It lost ground in the areas of Pavia, Turin, Milan and Emilia Romagna but gained about 8% in Veneto. In the political elections of April 1996, the Lega Nord obtained for the

first time more than 10 %, the best result of the Bossi era, becoming the third national force. The increase was notable especially in the northern suburbs, but in the cities was more contained. The political elections of May 13, 2001 saw a victory of the right-wing coalition, but the Lega Nord got less than the 4% threshold. 3 voters out of 5 of those who voted for the Lega Nord in the previous round of elections decided not to reconfirm their vote. The Lega Nord with Forza Italy before and the People of Liberty after, never failed to support the center right wing coalition, apart from the fall of the government of December '94, but received less than it gave and this to many voters did not like.

In addition, the facts of 2012 have weighed not a little: many voters have felt more betrayed than the failure to promise secession or devolution, as according to the basis, with the scandal of the "magic circle", many have turned his back on the Party, guilty of having moved away from its founding principles and having "sat" and thought only of the seats.

The 2013 elections were the last elections of the Bossi era. The Lega Nord suffered a sharp decline and amounted to just over 4%. (After a short time where Roberto Maroni was party secretary, Matteo Salvini replaced him in 2014).

In 2012, during the *annus horribilis* for the party, the leadership of Bossi was already collapsing, after the fall of the last government led by Silvio Berlusconi, in November 2011, and with it of the promise of federalism. At first, the internal competitor of Bossi was Roberto Maroni. At the beginning of that year, Bossi decided to exclude Maroni from public events. His closest colleagues, were convinced that Maroni wanted to take control of the Lega. "*Maroni president of the Council*", had appeared in fact a few months before on a giant banner in front of the stage of Pontida, placed by who knows who. This was perceived as an affront to Bossi. This ban was taken very badly by Maroni, who considered this exclusion as a *fatwa* and counterattacked, inviting various sections of the Lega to revolt against Bossi's leadership. At that point Salvini contacted Maroni offering to help him even though they did not get on very well. Salvini, with a group of young leaders of the Lega Nord,

organized mobilization, locally and on social media. This was a success, and the exclusion of Maroni was overturned. We can say that Bossi's fall began on 3 April in Via Bellerio, when the Finance Police arrived with the Public Prosecutor Henry John Woodcock. Umberto Bossi, his sons and the treasurer of the party were investigated together with the treasurer Francesco Belsito for personal use of the funds of the Lega Nord. As a result, Bossi had to leave the leadership of his party. The Lega Nord was close to extinction. That morning of April 3, Salvini went to Radio Padania, which he had directed since its foundation, to listen to the doubts and the protests of the listeners. At the most difficult moment in the Lega's history he spoke to a confused party and offered to help Maroni. After a few months, Maroni became the new federal secretary, Salvini the new Lombard secretary, while almost all the leaders became "Maronians" or were removed.

During the congress of Turin in December 2013, Salvini won the primaries against Bossi and became the new party leader. Salvini immediately started to create alliances with the Eurosceptics and the nationalists in the European Parliament. In Turin there were already delegations of the parties of Vladimir Putin and Marine Le Pen, there was also the Dutch Geert Wilders, indicating the political and ideological alliances that the Lega would have led.

1.3 Matteo Salvini's arrival and change of strategy

The strategy introduced by Matteo Salvini changed radically the prospects of the party. He started his political activism with the Lega Nord, with the Comunisti Padani, in which he became leader. Today, having become the party leader, he has begun to create a network of alliances with the leaders of the extreme right of half of Europe.

Initially, the Lega Nord, started with autonomist and federalist positions. After thirty years of history, thanks to Salvini, the party that represented the revolt and exasperation of the North has changed its name, symbol and enemy. The word North was dropped and it became a national party called just Lega (Lega - Salvini Premier)

at the Federal Congress of Parma, in May 2017. Salvini started to consider all Italian regions, from North to South, hoping to get more support but inevitably collecting some criticism within the party.

Above all Umberto Bossi, the first secretary who still does not believe in this transformation, and has often criticized the positions of the current secretary.

In particular he declared that to delete the word Nord from the name and the symbol of the Lega would mean betraying the political project.

Matteo Salvini found himself at the head of the Lega Nord due to a series of unforeseen circumstances. Salvini usually takes center stage in the controversies of current affairs. He represents the Lega as a movement that can bring justice wherever it is needed, from the North to the South of Italy, and protect Italian citizens, victims of an "organized and funded ethnic replacement and immigration". He is sometimes politically incorrect to make communication more effective.

1.4 Salvini and the media

Salvini is an excellent communicator, able to attract attention. He speaks about what people expect from him, taking advantage of the theme of the day and does not care about reactions. He has understood that the public's concern of the moment is no longer so much of the North against the South, but of the common citizens against the elites, of people who lost their job against economic migrants in search of work and benefits. The Lega secretary's proposal is presented as the affirmation of common sense against the politically correct. He has profoundly transformed the identity of the Lega: from a secessionist party to a right-wing national party. Salvini's critics mainly consider him as a political entrepreneur of fear. The principal problem affecting the public is immigration, followed by Euroscepticism. Close ally of Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National, Matteo Salvini has recently become the Minister of the Interior of the Italian Republic. He was accused in the past of not refusing the support of Casa Pound, social center of extreme right inspiration, whose vice-president Simone Di

Stefano declared «*to watch with interest the formation of the yellow-green government*» and that «*the government contract goes in the right direction*».

One example of the recurrent criticism of the Lega is the following by According to Furio Colombo: «*The Lega Nord movement has pursued a fierce campaign of imposition and spreading racism through the two poisoned paths of the local government, where life is made impossible for legal foreign citizens and workers and their families by the violent action of mayors-sheriffs and the central government, where they are used without scruples by the police, and even the armed forces, to hunt down the foreigners who work and pay taxes and Italian contributions that will remain to the Italians after the illegal expulsions that are the end of all these laws and maneuvers*».

1.5 Salvini's elections program

Initially, however, the Lega of Matteo Salvini had presented itself at the elections of March 4 together with the center-right, that, in theory, had not yet been dissolved.

Within the electoral program there would be all the issues most dear to the three leaders Silvio Berlusconi, Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni. If Forza Italia seems to have succumbed to the Fornero reform, the cart in turn would seem to have blunted its position on Europe.

However, the program that we will now go to summarize, was presented by Matteo Salvini last spring, when he defeated the challenger Gianni Fava.

- *Foreign policy.* Condemnation of the sanctions against Russia and Vladimir Putin; change of course in relations with Libya, where it would be necessary to seek a lasting agreement to allow the reconstruction of the country. Consolidation of Salvini's excellent personal relationships not only with the Kremlin, but also with the United States and Israel.
- *Immigration.* Restoring controls along the borders and trying to stem the influx of migrants by sea thanks to the rejection policy. The League wants

potential control, with the creation of ad hoc bodies, of public money spent on reception of migrants.

- *Work*. They propose the introduction of a single tax rate of 15% on the income of individuals and companies. They also want to defend and support Italian exports by introducing effective levers against unfair competition from foreign products. The fight against delocalization is also important, with fines for those who decide, after receiving state funds, to move their production abroad.
- *Pensions*. In addition to the elimination of the Fornero reform, it also intends to reform trade union bargaining which must be on a regional basis to be more effective.
- *Political and monetary sovereignty*. Revision of treaties aimed at restoring sovereignty to the Member States and the Regions with legislative power. The single currency is also being questioned.
- *Support for the family*. Given the demographic crisis, an aid plan of at least 1 billion a year is needed to support the family, to guarantee free nurseries for all Italian children.
- *Social reconstruction*. Introduction of six months of civil service or compulsory military leverage to be also integrated with the scholastic path.
- *Land protection*. Investing in agriculture and taxing those who decide to dedicate themselves to the primary sector.

Many of these proposals are now also present in the government program with the 5 Stars Movement.

1.6 Salvini Home Secretary

During a public meeting in Pozzallo, Salvini explained his immigration plans: «*We'll keep what good Minniti did. Opening new centers of expulsion, in the regions, agreements with the countries from which the migrants come and redefining the role*

of Italy in Europe» is the recipe proposed by Salvini. «Those who use the business of immigration, lead people to die, it is not possible that Tunisia is the first source of trafficking in 2018. I will talk to the Tunisian government. In Libya there are the problems we know, we will keep the good the previous government has done, because however the landings have been reduced, we are not fools, we will continue on this line but the problem is the expulsions».

«No to changes to the Dublin regulation»

«Last year», continues Salvini, «we managed to reject and expel only 7 thousand immigrants, so we would take a century». Next week, there will be the meeting of the ministers of the Interior of European countries, and, says Salvini, «instead of helping Italy we would make it even worse by giving us thousands of migrants for ten years. Italy was left alone - no changes to the Dublin regulation, for new asylum policies because they condemn Italy, Spain, Cyprus and Malta to be alone».

«The goal is to save lives»

«The goal is to save lives, and this is done by preventing the departures of the boats of death that are a good business for someone and a disgrace for the rest of the world. We are working without magic wands to get less landings, more expulsions, more security and to block and cut a huge turnover. I work because all the international organizations are working to stop departures, landings and deaths. Today other deaths at sea: the Mediterranean is a cemetery. There is only one way to save these lives: fewer people leaving, more repatriation. As a minister I will do everything, working with those governments, to avoid the departures of those desperate people who think that there is gold in Italy. There is no work for Italians».

Now that he has arrived at the Viminale, in his Security Decree Minister Salvini has included those that are the first measures to try to respond to the needs of citizens, who many have voted because they are very sensitive and worried about the issue.

The points of the decree regard immigration, public security, prevention and opposition to terrorism and mafia crime.

Considering in particular the immigration issue, there have been significant changes:

- Request for political asylum: the kind of crimes that cancel the suspension of the political asylum application are increased, after a conviction in the first instance, leading to immediate expulsion. The offenses in question are sexual violence, drug dealing, theft and aggravated injuries to a public official.
- Abolition of humanitarian protection: at the moment the norm can guarantee, in case of humanitarian emergency situations, a residence permit to foreign citizens who request it. Initially, it was thought to be abolished and replaced by a one-year residence permit for civil or natural disasters in the countries of origin. In the end, instead, an "immediate proceeding before the Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection" was chosen.
- Withdrawal in repatriation centers: doubled times from a maximum of 90 days to 180 days.
- Revocation of citizenship: if a person is considered a possible danger to the state, the revocation of citizenship could take place in the event of a final conviction for crimes related to terrorism. In addition, a request for citizenship may be rejected even if presented by those who married an Italian citizen or Italian citizen.
- Free legal aid: no free legal aid for a migrant if his appeal against the denial of humanitarian protection is declared inadmissible.
- Funds for repatriations: allocated € 500,000 for 2018, € 1.5 million for 2019 and € 500,000 for 2020.
- Sprar: the small centers that host migrants, under the aegis of the Municipalities, will no longer be able to accept asylum seekers but only unaccompanied minors and those who have already received international protection.

The decree has received criticism from political opponents, like some mayors of the Democratic Party, who are trying to overcome the law. However, according to several opinion polls, the majority of Italians approve of this policy, which is producing great electoral success.

1.7 Salvini's electoral success and party structure

Matteo Salvini's League is a remarkable phenomenon, especially on the electoral level. The cases of parties that in five years go from 4.1 percent to 17.4 percent (polls 2018) and to 31 percent of voting intentions are extremely rare. November. But it is also because there is no other case of a secessionist and regional party that has managed to become a nationalist and national party. What makes it all the more extraordinary is that this transformation took place without any real discussion within the League and without a congress that would sanction the end of the old Northern League and the birth of the new National League. Everything happened on the web, thanks to Salvini's initiative and its use of social media. He decided everything, circumventing the party structures and addressing the voters directly. The turning point for the Lega of Salvini was on March the 4th.

However, today we cannot speak of a single League, that of Salvini. In reality, the Lega of Salvini is not that of which he is a secretary, it is not the one whose symbol is still Alberto da Giussano, which is formally still the Lega of Bossi founded in 1991. The 'real' Lega of Salvini is the one whose statute was published in the Official Gazette of December 14, 2017. It is called precisely "Lega for Salvini Premier", Salvini has to overcome the unfortunate affair of the 49 million euro that the League must repay. The current Lega of which Salvini is secretary is still the Lega Nord for the Independence of Padania, as stated in article one of the Statute still in force. In this League the South is excluded. Tuscany, Marche and Umbria are the southern border statute of the Northern League.

The Lega Nord still hasn't become the National League or the Lega for Salvini premier also because there would take a congress. The Lega Nord is not only the oldest Italian party, but it is also the most organized on the territory with its sections and its militants. It still has strict rules on membership and *cursus honorum* within it and in institutions. Secession is no longer its objective, but the idea of a different North from the rest of the country and the desire for autonomy is still part of its DNA. Most of the northern militants still want this and it's hard to change this, even for a popular and successful leader like Salvini.

But the fact is that after March 4, the Northern League has changed, in reality it had already changed before. It has changed Facebook and the discovery that Salvini has made of the communicative and electoral potential of social media in these liquid times. Actually, the old party has not actually changed, the party of the sections coexists today with that of Facebook. Just as the Lega Nord coexists with the Lega for Salvini premier. The difference is that the first is a consolidated reality, even if now a bit 'disoriented, the second is still a project in progress. But the project is catching on. Meanwhile, it materialized in an extraordinary way in the polls on March 4 and now in voting intentions. Recently it is also taking shape on the organizational level, even in the South.

1.8 The new southern frontier

In the South, starting from 2014, the Lega Nord presented itself locally with the 'Noi con Salvini' list. The results were very modest. The last policies presented itself as a League. With the same mark with which it is presented in the rest of the country, it got 17.4 percent. Today, given that the surveys at the national level give an average of 31 percent, it should be between 15 and 20 percent in the South. The League is taking root in this area of the country, opening offices and recruiting members.

He is doing it using the Lega for Salvini Premier, which is the tool to attract new southern recruits without upsetting the old and proven structure that has allowed the

Lega Nord to survive in hard times and become today the first party in the North of the country. In addition to the first party in the country as a whole. In this way, however, the Lega for Salvini Premier tends to look more like the "Noi con Salvini" list than the National League. The difference is that unlike the "Noi con Salvini" list, the new Lega also works in the south of Italy. There are very clear signs that in the desert left by the decline of Pd and Forza Italy, and thanks to the poor organizational and relational capacity of the M5S, important sectors of the working class in the south, are transferring their votes to the League, not that of which Salvini is a secretary, but the other parallel one. It is the success of Salvini that has changed things. The southerners are practical people who are not interested in utopias but in relationships with local and national power. They believed in Grillo and now they hope in the income of citizenship, but most of the southern electors do not completely trust the Five Star Movement. They are orphans of DC and Berlusconi, Salvini is becoming their point of reference. In the short term, citizenship income will decide the matter. If Salvini wants to grow in the South he must agree on this with Di Maio and Northern Leagueists.

In short, the Lega di Salvini today is in a sort of limbo. Confusion, transition or strategy? It is not known. The militants of the League do not know it and maybe Salvini does not even know it. However, the League has the wind in its sails. It has no credible opponents, the competition with the Five Stars is won, and the organizational problem maybe will be solved later, after the European elections. It is not certain that the two Leagues of today must necessarily become a single League tomorrow. And it is said that the League of sections cannot continue to live with the League of Facebook. As long as it works is not fundamental to change. The former party secretary and Home secretary Roberto Maroni has also spoken about the subject: *«To make a group in the Parliament of Brussels, numbers are needed and this is an opportunity to present themselves with a unique symbol between certain parties in various countries. In this way Salvini can change symbol and perhaps even name. I have been with the Bossi among the founders of the Lega and therefore I hope it does not happen, but in fact it is a new time with different leaders»*. For the European elections, Salvini is aiming to

transform the leadership in the European parliament, also by forming alliances with other nationalist leaders in Europe.

1.9 Europeans forecast

According to the latest polls in the European elections of May 26, 2019 the sovereign front should perform well, and that would benefit Matteo Salvini.

According to analysts of Europe Elects, at the moment, the League would get 26 seats against the 24 of the CDU of Angela Merkel that behind it would be a slew of nationalist allies of Salvini. The PiS of the Polish Jaroslaw Kaczynski would take 23 seats while the Marine Le Pen party would have 20. The M5S that in Europe is in the EFDD group together with the Eurosceptics of the Ukip which, however, after the Brexit will no longer sit between the banks of the Europarlament. A scenario that, as we read on TPI, would in any case allow the people and the socialists to continue to govern together, but that, according to the PollofPolls.eu forecast, would see the Eurosceptics as the second force of the European Parliament. Given that the Popolari should get 180 seats and the Socialists 137, if an alliance was born between ENF (the League group), ECR (the one to which FdI will join) and EFDD (M5S), the *sovraniisti* with 160 seats would become the second group more represented. Then there would be the Alde (95), the Left (54) and the Greens (44). According to a study carried out by Votewatch, nationalist rights could reach 25% of the seats of the European Parliament, thus winning a quarter of Parliament.

Recently, in Warsaw, Salvini spoke about the need to find an agreement for the European elections: *«I have proposed a contract, indeed a pact for Europe, on the Italian model, in ten fundamental points, to be shared with the European allies»*. This was stated by Matteo Salvini, in a press conference from Warsaw, explaining the strategy in view of the European vote. *«This would allow us to overcome even the differences between parties, geographical, cultural traditions. A pact – he explained – like that of Italy where they govern two different movements based on precise*

commitments. Ten points on which the allies will decide whether to agree or not». «*We will work on it in the next days*», announced the vice premier.

2 Evolution of the Front National, from extremist "nostalgic party" to second party of France

2.1 The origins of the party

Weakened in the aftermath of the Second World War, the far-right regained strength with the Algerian war in 1954. Small groups formed when Charles de Gaulle opened the way to the independence of this French colony. Among them, the New Order federates, from 1969, former SS, nostalgic for the Vichy regime or former militants of French Algeria.

Three thousand people attended the official presentation of the movement on March 9, 1971 led by Jean-François Galvaire. «*We must make a revolutionary party, white as our race, as red as our blood and green as our hope*», François Brigneau, one of his leaders, said.

At the Second Congress of the New Order, organized in June 1972, a "National Front Strategy" was adopted to create a party of the same name. A veteran of French Algeria, a Poujadist deputy elected in 1956, Jean-Marie Le Pen was considered the ideal man to lead the movement. On October 5, 1972, he became the president of the "National Front for French Unity". The Objectives were to place nationalism at the heart of the political thought and bring together the political forces to the right of the Rally for the Republic (RPR).

Behind this strategy, the real inventor of the FN was François Duprat. Jean-Marie Le Pen was largely inspired by the theses of this ideologue and their expressions such as the famous "One million unemployed is a million immigrants in excess".

The National Front had its first electoral meeting in the legislative elections of 1973. On its campaign posters, the political party printed a tricolor flame, a symbol of the MSI, the Italian "neo-fascist" party. The movement recorded a severe defeat, attracting only 108,000 votes, or 0.52% of the votes cast.

This modest score was also significantly higher than in 1968, when the extreme right obtained 0.08% of the votes cast. In the 15th district of Paris, Jean-Marie Le Pen achieved the best result of the FN with 5.22% of the votes.

Confirmed at the head of the party, Jean-Marie Le Pen started the race for the presidential election of 1974, after the death of Pompidou. During his campaign, he presented himself as a "shock" candidate of the national, popular and social right. He stigmatized "foreign immigration" in his speeches, while denying racism.

On May 5, due to lack of means and support, he obtained only 0.75% of the votes. "Despite his poor score, his candidacy gave him a status: that of leader of the French far right," said Valerie Igounet in his book "The National Front: from 1972 to the present. The party, men, ideas.

The party of Jean-Marie Le Pen adopted a new rhetoric during the legislative election of March 1978. For four years, the Secretary General of the National Front, François Duprat, insisted that the party denounced the "dangers of immigration". The election campaign focused on this theme.

Despite an important militant mobilization, Jean-Marie Le Pen gathered only 0.33% of the votes during the first round of legislative elections. A few days later, on March 18, François Duprat was assassinated during an attack, without knowing the culprits. This attack gave him the image of "martyr of the national right".

In 1981, Jean-Marie Le Pen tried to run in the presidential election. But the president of the National Front failed to collect the sponsorship of 500 elected officials necessary, a mandatory condition to embark on the electoral campaign.

François Mitterrand, candidate of the left, finally won the election. Jean-Marie Le Pen was in opposition to this new government and exploited the theme of immigration "from every angle". A theme taken up by frontist candidates in the various elections,

with the principle of "national preference" embodied by the slogan "French first". That year, the party would have fewer than 300 members.

In 1986, to mitigate impending electoral defeat, President François Mitterrand introduced full proportional representation in parliamentary elections and an increase in the number of deputies, a promise made during his campaign five years before. However, this decision of the government was carried out when polls were low for the majority. The National Front thus obtained 35 seats out of 577, for its executives, the party became a "formidable political and militant machine". The press started to take an interest in the "Le Pen phenomenon".

Invited on RTL, Jean-Marie Le Pen referred to the gas chambers used by the Nazis. *«I did not study the question specifically, but I think it's a point of detail in the history of the Second World War»*, he said.

This slip triggered a public outcry and a lawsuit. Jean-Marie Le Pen was sentenced on 18 December 1991 by the Versailles Court of Appeal for "trivialization of crimes against humanity". This declaration then placed the party at the margin. *«Jean-Marie Le Pen gave a violent stop to the rise of his party. After September 1987, a story ends: that of a candidate, considered serious by some, for the function of President of the Republic»*, analyzes Valérie Igounet.

Jean-Marie Le Pen made another "false step". On 2 April 1998, he was sentenced to two years ineligibility for assaulting a Socialist candidate in the legislative elections held a year earlier. The situation was tense within the party.

The leader of the National Front, who limited his excesses, focused his campaign on the theme of insecurity and national preference. On April 21, 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen qualified for the second round with 16.86% of the votes cast. An electoral pamphlet then presented Jean-Marie Le Pen all smiles. The photo is one of the first signs of the strategy of "cleaning up" of a party whose ideas remained the same. At the same time, demonstrations of protest were organized throughout France. Jacques Chirac, candidate of the RPR, won a large victory. This was an important step for this political

party, which became the third political force in France in the 1990s. But the influence of the National Front weakened at the polls in the following years.

The real transformation of the Front National, started with Marine Le Pen, the daughter of Jean-Marie, who inherited the leadership of the party.

2.2 The arrival of Marine Le Pen and the "de-demonization" of the party

Marine Le Pen was elected president of the National Front, at the age of 42, at the party congress organized on January 15 and 16, 2011 with 67.65% of the votes of activists. The same year, the American magazine Time ranked her among the 100 most influential personalities in the world.

The party's success was confirmed in the presidential election of 2012, with 17.9% of the votes in the first round, without qualifying for the second round.

The same year, Marine Le Pen also became leader of the association Generations Le Pen whose goal was to "de-demonize" the party.

For example, in early 2013, there were demonstrations against the opening of marriage to homosexuals. According to the association La Manif Pour Tous, one million people took to the streets of Paris in January. However, Marine Le Pen, Florian Philippot and several cadres of the party refused to join the processions. A "gap between the Marine generation and that of the historic FN", noted the historian Valerie Igounet, according to which the new president of the party is far from the positions of her father.

A few months before the municipal elections of March 2014, the National Front excluded the candidates whose excesses were widely relayed in the press. The National Front won 13 town halls. Marine Le Pen started to restore credibility to her party.

The founder of the National Front, who has repeatedly questioned the strategy of "de-demonization" of the party, returned, in April 2015, on his controversial remarks of 1987 by reaffirming that the gas chambers are a "detail of history and refusing to regard Marshal Pétain as a traitor.

Marine Le Pen started disciplinary proceedings against her father. The executive bureau of the FN decided to suspend him. Jean-Marie Le Pen challenged this decision in court and won the case. However, it was definitively rejected on August 20, 2015. Several elected party members opposed to the change of direction left the party.

Marine Le Pen wants to deconstruct the European Union. The far-right party is tackling immigration from a border point of view. In a context of rising extreme right in Europe, the National Front on May 25, 2014 won a large victory in the European elections.

For the first time, she arrived ahead of the Socialist Party and the UMP with 24.86%. Marine Le Pen claims that the National Front is "the first party in France". The press speaks of a "navy blue wave". This victory further strengthens the legitimacy of the party president.

The National Front confirmed its position as first party in France, on December 6, 2015, during the first round of regional elections, it was ahead of the Republicans (former UMP) and the Socialist Party with 27.73% of the vote and led in six regions out of 13. In two regions, the left withdrew in favor of the right.

The FN was not able to capitalize on its excellent scores of the first round. It won no region at the end of the second round but still beat its vote record of the first round of the presidential election of 2012 and tripled its number of elected compared to 2010. Marine Le Pen obtained a seat in the 2017 presidential race.

The polls had consistently predicted that she would qualify for the second round, sometimes even in first place. In the first round of the presidential election, she finally won the second position, with 21.4% of the vote after Emmanuel Macron. The front-runner drew 7.5 million votes, compared to 6.8 million gained at the regional elections of 2015. In 2002, he collected 4.8 million voters.

On April 29, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, announced his support for Marine Le Pen. She will make her prime minister if elected. This was the first time that another party supports the National Front.

2.3 The political communication strategy promoted by the current President of the National Front, Marine Le Pen.

With the recent electoral successes of the party, she provides some answers as to how the politician successfully operated the party's image-change strategy, which, until then, had been very far-right. The break with her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, is a key turning point, and is part of a desire to leave the party of which he has been a prisoner since the 1970s. Two main axes were favored to analyze this strategy of conquest of power; the ideological reorientation of the party on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a major difference between father and daughter, the "genre".

On 9 August 2015, Jean-Marie Le Pen, publicly declared "without change, I will not vote for Marine in 2017". The break between the father and his daughter, Marine Le Pen, president of the party since 2011, is now official, the father having been excluded on August 20, 2015 from the party he had founded in 1972. In recent months, the media has seen two diametrically opposed conceptions of the party's political communication strategy. On the one hand, there is a popular protest logic, which claims an "out-of-system" positioning, and on the other a declared desire to forget the party's antagonistic past. At the instigation of Marine Le Pen, an issue becomes central for the National Front; that of the possibility of alleviating its image as a far-right party and gaining access to government functions. Resolutely oriented towards a logic of conquest and exercise of power, Marine Le Pen does not hide the wish to convince new voters to cross the Rubicon.

Although it is necessary to be cautious about the polls, it must be noted that there is a movement of opinion increasingly favourable to the National Front and its current president, Marine Le Pen. She managed to become the third French political party in October 2013 and, since June 2013, the vision of the far-right party as a danger to democracy has passed for the first time under 50%.

Faced with the rise of the extreme right in Europe, it could be interesting to focus on the French example, the change of presidency of the party, that is concomitant with the gradual acquisition of a more respectable image, and therefore potentially

presidential. The current state of the French political system undeniably benefits the National Front, which presents itself as an alternative, the two main French political parties, the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and the Socialist Party (PS), being criticized, one for its deleterious fight between leaders, the other for its management of power. However, it cannot be the only explanatory fact.

The success of the party, could be explained by the economic and social crisis currently facing France, which has rekindled the economic, cultural and territorial divides that were already going through society. This economic crisis would have contributed to strengthening of an identity crisis, a rupture of the collective narrative.

2.4 Marine Le Pen's electoral program

In view of the crucial presidential vote in France next April 22, Marine Le Pen and her Front National have created a detailed program manifesto that can be defined in all respects a clearly governmental platform. Marine Le Pen believes in her chances to conquer the *Élysée*.

Marine Le Pen proposed to "re-order France in five years" and to base political action on the doctrine of the "neighborhood revolution", as has been repeatedly stated: *«I want decisions to be taken as much as possible by citizens and directly controlled by them. It is necessary to reorganize our territory, to put everyone in a position to take advantage of public services, to relocate our businesses and therefore jobs. No more French people, no more corners of France, including the overseas territories, for which I have already presented my complete project, will have to be forgotten».*

An action based on *les oubliés*, the forgotten, and on a purposely sovereignist attitude that is declined from the first points of the Le Pen electoral program, with the will to give the vote to the people on the position of France in the European Union. The unilateral rift with Brussels is not explicitly stated in the manifesto but is openly implied: much of Le Pen's electoral program is based on the enhancement of French national independence, on the restoration of borders. The intention to leave the

Schengen Area expressed in point 24) and, above all, expansive economic policies in which there is no lack of a Keynesian substratum that today's Europe could hardly accept are symptomatic.

The identity issue occupies a non-secondary portion of the Front National program. Among the proposals of Le Pen are the desire to include in the Constitution the principles of defense and promotion of French cultural heritage and "national priority" (points 91 and 92), but absolute centrality is assigned to the economic field and, within it, to the theme of work. The France of Hollande starts the presidential elections afflicted by a chronic economic weakness and a continuous increase in unemployment rates, Le Pen proposes her most disruptive demands and sanctions the most significant rift with Macron, Fillon and Hamon launching the idea of a "patriotic model in favor of work". The France that Marine Le Pen has in mind should be characterized as an interventionist state in the economy in areas such as the protection of strategic factors and the revival of national industry, it would favour public investment in research and development (which the candidate of the Front National it proposes to increase by 30%) but, at the same time, it would opt for actions that are less pervasive and more favorable to simplification on issues such as business start-ups, bureaucratic simplification, the reduction of tax rates to small and medium companies.

In point 131, Marine Le Pen makes explicit her desire to «*break with the economic model founded on the wild globalization of trade and social, health and environmental dumping*», advocating the revival of renewable energy produced on national soil and the short supply chain Implicit in this vision, is a position clearly contrary to the implementation of free trade treaties such as the TTIP and CETA, intended to deny any possibility of realization of the "economic patriotism" devised by the Front National.

The issues concerning social security and health are closely related to the economic policies of the Marine Le Pen program, in which the Front National candidate expresses herself decisively in favour of strong and widely inclusive welfare. On these matters, we read clearly the transition made by the Front National, to an anti-system force not placed on the right or left but intent on carrying out an action of rupture with the past

based on concrete proposals. The fact that Marine Le Pen openly declared herself favourable to the repeal of the Loi Travail introduced by Hollande and Valls, to the revival of the 35-hour working week, to facilitate the social protection of the disabled, to offer maternity support plans and to guarantee health care to all the French, as well as the reimbursement of all the costs incurred by Health Insurance helps to explain the motivations that have pushed a substantial part of the workers' electorate and of the middle class to marry the cause of the Front National. On these issues FN proposes an agenda very similar to that of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, candidate of the radical Gauche who promotes a platform of "sovereign socialism".

2.5 From Front National to Rassemblement National

Following the good but unsuccessful result of the last presidential elections, Marine Le Pen proposed to frontline militants to rename the National Front "National Rally" (NR) at the congress of the far-right party in Lille, presented as that of the "refoundation": a symbolic and political decision.

By renaming the party, Marine Le Pen wants to address a wider electoral base by trying to stave off the distrust that the FN inspires in other formations and voters, although the political line remains the same. For Erwan Lecœur, sociologist and specialist on the far right: *«The aim is to give the feeling that it is renovating the FN to open it to new alliances in order to gain power, but also to reassure the fundamentals values of the party».*

He also highlights the "symbolic and family dimension" of the name change: The FN, it is the party of Jean-Marie. The RN is Marine, as she had already created the Rassemblement Bleu Marine. Swapping the FN for the RN is, in his opinion, a way of "marking a change of era".

The name "Rassemblement National" is a semantic fusion of "National Front" and "Rassemblement Bleu Marine", a campaign association created for the 2012 legislative elections.

The new denomination of the FN recalls the name of the frontist parliamentary group that existed in the National Assembly from 1986 to 1988, "National Front-National Gathering". Jean-Marie Le Pen had presented lists under this name in the legislative elections of 1986 to open, already, to the whole of the right.

The same party label was chosen in 1954 by Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, who was the candidate of the far right against General de Gaulle in the presidential election of 1965, with Jean-Marie Le Pen as campaign director.

The "national gathering" may also recall the National Popular Rally, a collaborationist party founded in 1941 by Marcel Déat, and active until 1944.

The co-founder of the National Front and father of the party's president, Jean-Marie Le Pen, said that the change in the name of the party was a "political assassination".

«I find it disastrous that we abandon the name of the National Front because it is an inimitable and unavoidable landmark», he said on France. *«The National Front, which is forty-six years old, has fought like an icebreaker in the Arctic for years and years ... It's more than an appellation, it's more than a grouping, it's a soul. It's a story, it's a past. And to ignore all this seems disastrous to me»,* he said.

Jean-Marie Le Pen assured that he would not join the Rassemblement National and opened the door to the idea of reusing the name of the National Front for future projects.

When will the new name be ratified?

Marine Le Pen said that the principle of a change of name of the Front National had already been validated by a narrow majority (52%) of right-wing party activists, invited to vote in a questionnaire.

National Gathering must then be submitted to a vote of activists by mail, the result of which will be known after at least six weeks. A consultation which, according to the political scientist Erwan Lecœur, risks being "polluted by legal affairs and the long history" of the National Gathering.

2.6 Differences and similarities with the League of Salvini

The link between the president of the Front National and the secretary of the League, the role of the right-wing parties in Brussels and the new balance of power after the success.

In 2014, Marine Le Pen publicly praised Matteo Salvini, who was invited to the Front National Congress in Lyon: *«He sends me into ecstasy»*, she said, *«I think he is an extremely courageous executive, he gave the Lega Nord a national dimension that now allows it to be fully at the center of Italian political life. Salvini has an overflowing energy and even I, at times, go into ecstasy in front of his strength, of his ability to convince and the skill in the work. Prime Minister in the future? Why not? »*.

- The no to the euro and the fight against immigration. The strongest link between the two is on the no to the euro, national sovereignty and the fight against immigration. Marine Le Pen repeatedly claims alliance with Salvini: *«The League has made a change»*, she said in 2015, *«We are in an era where priorities have to be defined. Which? Being freer, the return of democracy, taking us from the clutches of Europe, the defense of identity, control if not the end of immigration. So, we have many points in common with the League, which is becoming a big party and proposes radically different solutions compared to those who have succeeded in leading Italy and have brought your country into a complicated situation»*. About her friend Matteo, she adds, *«He quickly became one of the Italian political figures, he deserves it. Because he is intelligent, measured, different from the caricature he tries to make of himself. Above all, he is solid. That's what's needed: solid people who know where they want to go»*.
- The group in Europe and the call to Milan. In 2015, Marine Le Pen announced the birth of the new parliamentary group Europe of Nations and Freedom, composed of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Polish Congress of the New Right (KNP), the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB). On January 28, 2016 in Milan, the conference of the European right parties called for by the Lega of Matteo

Salvini was held: guest of honor at the event was "Freer, stronger, another Europe is possible" Marine Le Pen, back from success of the French regional elections.

- The battle against the "Eurocracy". In the conference wanted by Salvini, alongside the alliance between the League and the Front National, the European right was organized to present their ideas on the future of Europe: the fight against the "Eurocracy" and the single currency, a return to sovereignty and to the national currency within a confederation of nation states
- The tweet after the March 4 vote and the vote analysis. After the success of last Sunday's elections, with the League at 18%, Marine Le Pen said enthusiastically, *«The spectacular advance and the arrival at the head of the Lega coalition led by our ally and friend Matteo Salvini is a new stage of the awakening of peoples! »*. In the following days, in Le Figaro, the leader of the Front National analyzed the success of the party led by her friend Salvini, *«After Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Denmark or Finland, beyond the result obtained, Italy voted mostly Eurosceptic. This means that tomorrow our goal of having a majority in the European Parliament is perfectly achievable in 2019. The League expresses an extremely strong opposition to the policies conducted by the European Union. Like France, Italy is overwhelmed by illegal immigration, weakened and impoverished by European policies of rigor. If you add the quality and energy of Matteo Salvini, you get a spectacular result»*.
- The victory of the League and the new balance of power. On March 10 and 11, in Lille the Front National holds its 33rd congress during which Marine Le Pen will try to exploit to her advantage the victory of the League, her ally in the European Parliament. In the axis with Salvini, so far, the weak part has been the Italian with the League strong only in the North without being able to impose itself as a national force. Over time, Salvini has repeatedly reiterated that he was inspired by Marine Le Pen to give the League a sovereign and anti-Brussels dimension rather than federalist and hostile to Rome. Now, Le Pen, who in

France seemed definitively overtaken by Macron's European drive, stands to benefit from the success of her ally.

The League and the Front National were born far apart, and that means that until just ten years ago the comparison between the two parties would have been completely inappropriate.

On the one hand, the League was founded in the mid-nineties as a movement deeply linked to a specific geographical territory – northern Italy – and to a specific political purpose, federalism. Despite the fact that Padania imagined by the Northern League has always been "white and Christian", xenophobic and discriminatory traits were subordinated to the goal of its independence. Not surprisingly, the League of the nineties does not find a precise location in the political spectrum, but is allied with those who are useful to carry forward their own agenda, speaking exclusively to a certain type of electorate.

On the other hand, the Front National was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen. This is a party explicitly locatable in the extreme right, which comes from the set of a series of groups declaredly neo-fascist.

Over the years, the different paths of the two parties, motivated by the common need to find space in their respective political scenarios, make the two agendas converge; today there are many similarities.

The Lega Nord, while remaining a movement deeply linked to a certain territory, in recent years, with Salvini, has tried to become a national movement.

A different process but with the same end of overcoming the barriers (in this case political) in which it operated, has also occurred within the Front National, which while remaining a markedly right-wing movement has tried to revise its image to attract a wider electorate.

The person responsible for this process was Marine Le Pen, who took the place of her father in 2012 and then supported his expulsion (voted by a majority of the party leaders) three years later following his repeated defence of Nazism "*the gas chambers are a detail*" was an assumption that cost him a sentence.

Today, the programs of the two parties present many common features, as demonstrated by the alliance that sees them together in Europe.

First of all, both of them make immigration their main theme. Yet, if the tones used are very similar, the level of political maturity is extremely different. If the League uses immigration as a communicative target without then having a precise program (just read the Party Guidelines on the subject), the Front National of Marine Le Pen, also in view of these elections, has definite positions, supported by a concrete program.

In spite of the effective declaration with which in a meeting a few days ago Le Pen promised a moratorium on legal immigration, the program talked about certain points: re-establishing national borders, tightening up the measures to obtain the right to asylum, putting a ceiling on legal immigration of 10 thousand people per year, exiting Schengen, preventing the naturalization of people in a situation of illegality, abolishing *ius soli* and abolishing double nationality outside Europe.

As for the other cornerstones of the two parties, both focus on patriotism and national priority, on the issue of security (linked in both cases to that of immigration) and on the revision of the European agreements. Precisely on this last issue, while the League has repeatedly declared that it wants to leave Europe, Le Pen has in its program the proclamation of a referendum on the matter.

Therefore, if the two parties are rather similar in terms of themes, there remain substantial differences that greatly influence their political strength. The first, as already mentioned, lies precisely in the level of concreteness with which these issues are brought forward, the second is to be found in their two leaders and in the way in which they reach the electorate.

There are some traits in common between Le Pen and Salvini: they are both parents, they are both divorced, they are both relatively young - not just by birth, but in their approach to social life. But there are important differences in their origins and the way they communicate.

Specifically, Marine Le Pen, is a lawyer who has always led an aristocratic life - just think that she grew up in the castle given to her father by a rich militant. Salvini,

on the other hand, has a delayed student background split between journalism and activism, with a more popular and more direct approach. It's not just a presidential adjustment by Marine Le Pen, they have different styles.

These styles are reflected in the way the two communicate and use social media. If Le Pen in the past did not give up on launching strikes (it released the video of a beheading of ISIS in response to a journalist who had compared it to the Islamic State), it generally maintains a much lower and more institutional profile than that of Salvini.

Salvini is more open-minded, Le Pen is more glossy: there is a certain solemnity in her, a bit for presidential aspirations, but a little also for the idea that the French have of themselves, a very high in the so-called eternal France.

Regarding her presidential aspirations, Marine Le Pen, always very attentive to her image, has made the softening on this one of the fundamental points of his political program-part of that intention to overcome the boundaries of a determined electorate. Beyond what will be the result of the run-off, with a party that has obtained more than 20 percent and which gathers consent from right-wing supporters to the working class to the electorate that is recognized in the extreme left of Mélenchon and is tired of the system, Le Pen to some extent has certainly succeeded in her purpose.

During the last elections, Marine Le Pen got us widely disadvantaged: the great mobilization that led her father to lose with only 17 percent of the votes in the 2002 ballot and the fact that all the other main candidates, with the exception of Mélenchon, have called their constituents to jointly fight against the Front National make his challenge difficult.

2.7 Marine Le Pen and her style of communication

Paradoxically, however, wanting to seduce the electors traditionally opposed to her, she has somehow "contracted" the lexicon of the radical left, speaking for example, surprisingly, with regard to immigrants, of "reserve army of capital" (*l'armée de réserve du Capital*)!

If we are to characterize Marine Le Pen's rhetorical strategy, we can say that its argumentative developments are ambiguous, often built on insinuation and marked by verbally excessive inflections to stigmatize the antagonist or to designate a scapegoat (migrants, "the system", "the caste"). Hence the systematic discrediting of opponents through adjectives such as "presumed", "so-called", etc. These are some of the linguistic elements that characterize what I have called the "disorder of discourse".

What differences can be identified between the communication of the elderly patriarch Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter Marine?

The difficulty for a linguist who wants to make an analysis of the speech lies in the fact that he must detect the implicit. Jean-Marie Le Pen has assumed the role of commander, compared to his daughter, to whom he conferred the investiture of the Front National. The father does not hesitate to reiterate that the gas chambers in which the 6 million Jews died are just a "detail of history", adding that, "personally, he has never seen it". "Marine" shows some embarrassment in front of journalists who ask her to react to her father's *gaffes*. Jean-Marie's younger daughter tries to justify him by saying that he is an impulsive man, and that by doing so, he wants to jeopardize her unstoppable political rise. However, she never answers the content of the declarations or so-called jokes of the party's founder. Marine Le Pen's ability is that her communication strategy is tightly controlled by spin-doctors. In almost all of her public interventions, for example, the expression "*submersion migratoire*" (migratory submersion) will be detected without ever pronouncing the words "foreigner" or "immigrant". If in the same sentence or the same paragraph as the derogatory tones, we find "*communautarisme*" and "*djihadiste*", or "*terrorisme*" and "*immigration massive et incontrôlée*", it is clear that the implicit conclusion that emerges is «*the Muslims – those present on French territory and refugees waiting to be welcomed in Europe – they are jihadist terrorists*». The main difference between the father and the daughter consists in the fact that the daughter insinuates and the father instead exposes his creed without subterfuge. We certainly cannot accuse Marine Le Pen of being racist or anti-Semitic. But why then, one might ask, in the online newspaper of the party,

were the political or sports personalities of color systematically represented with the devil's sardonic smile? What exactly does Marine Le Pen mean when she speaks of the political and financial caste being "nomadic", "without roots" (*hors-sol*) and "stateless"? As someone points out, these last words echo the Pétainist rhetoric of the 1930s, which re-emerges dangerously under apparently innocent declarations.

Marine Le Pen wants to be the incarnation of France and of the nation. For example, the figure of Joan of Arc represents the lay saint who liberated the French from invaders, who sacrificed her life to rebuild the kingdom. Traditionally celebrated in May by Catholics and the far-right party, this legendary character, archetypal heroine patriot, belongs to the collective memory of the French, who should recognize in her and in Marine Le Pen a saviour.

In addition, the leading frontist uses the signifier of her first name in an intelligent and discerning way: "Marine" which refers to the color called *bleu marine*, or navy blue, the color of the navy and the color also of the French nation. She often appears dressed in *bleu marine*, uses maritime metaphors, puts forward her Breton origins. Calling herself by the name "Marine", she removes the surname of his father "Le Pen" and, at the same time, flaunts her femininity. Thus, in the last presidential campaign, the traditional logo of the tricolor flame was erased as the surname Le Pen was deleted.

Increasingly we hear the term "patriots" adopted by politicians, what is the axiological value of this phenomenon?

The term "*patriote*" was born as a contextualized word in a counter-discourse, to be opposed to the derogatory word, "nationalist", with which the far-right party was qualified up to fifteen years ago. The word "*patriote*" had fallen into disuse in political discourse since the period of resistance. Its rehabilitation seems to have been a winning move by Marine Le Pen since this term has the advantage of being polysemantic, having designated movements and groups of opposing sides in the course of history. During the Second World War, the resistant patriots clashed with the collaborators of the Vichy government when the Pétainists declared themselves, patriots, against the "Judeo-Communist" front. Some scholars rightly point out that the ideology of the

Front National is close to that of the *boulangiste* movement of the Third Republic, both characterized by a form of republican nationalism, a call to order and authority and the desire to wipe out the corrupt caste politicians in power. The patriot of Marine Le Pen is the quintessence of being French (ideally the French of "French stock", ie "*de souche*"), willing to defend the country with arms and blood, as the Marseillaise says: «*Allons enfants de la Patrie ... Aux armes citoyens*».

Naturally, one cannot help but associate the French word with the Italian one "patriots" used by Giorgia Meloni. The passionate meaning she intends to give to the word are very similar to those of Marine Le Pen in her speeches. According to etymology, the notion of homeland, that is "the land of the fathers", recalls the visceral attachment to the land of the ancestors, the duty to transmit their memory and their ethical values. Hence the defence of the two leaders of the *ius sanguinis* and the rejection of the principles of a modern democracy that opposes the idea of nation in perpetual construction and redefinition to defend the homeland, an entity unchanged over time. Since 2018, Les Patriotes is the name that Florian Philippot, author of the communication strategy of Marine Le Pen at the presidential elections, has given to his political dissident formation, and this will force Marine Le Pen to reshape the paradigm of his party.

2.8 For Marine Le Pen, leaving the euro «is no longer a priority»

Speaking on BFM national television, the former Republican presidential candidate announced that exit from the euro "is no longer a priority".

«*In the framework of the return of sovereignty to the French people, we said that monetary sovereignty would be the conclusion and crowning of this process*», explained Le Pen, «*so we have reversed the order of priorities. It's more a priority because we understand what the French want*».

The exit from the euro, to be decided through a referendum on the Brexit model, was one of the strong points of the presidential election campaign, which ended with

disastrous results. According to numerous analysts, however, it was precisely the campaign against the single currency that was one of the decisive factors in the defeat of Le Pen. Now that the far-right party has metabolized that blow and is preparing to deal with the near future even that old policy is thus questioned.

It is no coincidence that the statements of the leader followed a few hours after very important upheavals in the internal hierarchy of the party. Florian Philippot, who resigned from the vice presidency of the Front, was particularly linked to the monetary policy, which was then rejected in the polls by the voters.

Now that anti-European and anti-euro populism seems to be going through a phase of reflux, it is indicative that even the continental champion of the fight against the single currency - which stands as a symbol of every world-wide and anti-popular power has decided to postpone, if not to abandon, a struggle that is, at least symbolically, fundamental.

3 Geert Wilders and his "particular" populist right-wing party: origins of the leader and the party

Although the various right-wing populist parties in Europe have many similarities, we cannot yet speak of an official populist "creed", partly because each party tends to adapt itself to the social structure and traditions of the respective countries by developing its own peculiarities.

Of all the right-wing populist parties in Europe, the one that stands out most for its own characteristics is the Dutch Partij Voor Den Vridheim (Freedom Party), a perfect example of how the canonical instances of European populism intertwine with the characteristics of the political and social context of reference. The human and ideological path of its leader, Geert Wilders, is the ideal instrument to understand how

the growth of a party considered "xenophobic" was possible in a country traditionally champion of civil liberties and multiculturalism.

Wilders was born in Venlo, a town in the Southern Netherlands, to a Dutch father and an Indonesian mother in 1963. It is probable that at the root of Wilders' ideological path there were two particular events: his journey to the Middle East and his stay in Kanaleneiland.

Wilders' deep sympathy for Israel, undoubtedly dictated by personal reasons, is attributable to a feeling shared by many Dutch people, probably due to the regret for collaboration during the Nazi occupation of the country. During his trip to Israel, where he learned about the efficiency and pride of the new republic, Wilders explored some neighboring countries, including Egypt, entering for the first time in contact with Arab and Muslim culture.

The first impact with Islam contributed to the premises of the future political commitment, gained during the stay of Wilders in Kanaleneiland, suburb of Utrecht, where he moved in 1985. At that time the district was subject to large migratory flows, mainly from Turkey and Morocco, but also from other Muslim countries such as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, which profoundly redesigned its physiognomy. In Wilders' words, it was a question of a small Casablanca and Istanbul, "whose streets were swarming with signs in Arabic and women with veils", in which non-Muslims, including Wilders himself, were insulted and attacked.

While Kanaleneiland and the journey to the Middle East, however significant, did not lead to any political consequence, the subsequent period of employment in the offices of the national social security system marked a decisive turning point. The observation of the slowness and inefficiency of the bureaucratic system led Wilders in 1988 to enter the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (Party for Freedom and Democracy), a Dutch right-wing liberal party led by Frits Bolkestein from 1990.

The political ideology of Bolkestein, later curator of the homonymous directive as European Commissioner for the internal market, was a miscellany of economic neoliberalism, pragmatism in foreign politics and socio-cultural conservatism. The

typical approach of the liberal right, focusing on issues such as administrative decentralization and welfare cuts, along with fierce criticism of the growing European integration and multiculturalism in Holland.

The most disturbing trait of the VVD leader, however, was his communicative style: short and aggressive sentences that ranged from invectives against cultural relativism to the blame of the ruling class. Bolkestein's strategy proved successful in the 1994 elections, where the VVD obtained 20%. Thanks to the 31 seats won, the VVD proved essential to exclude from the government the Christian Democrats, in power for seventy years, and form a coalition with the Social Democrats and the left liberals.

The government was confirmed in the 1998 elections, where the VVD won enough seats (45) to allow even Wilders, in forty-sixth place on the party list, to earn a seat in the Tweede Kamer. At the time, Wilders was almost unknown. The "xenophobic" instances, increasingly important in Wilders' agenda, were light years away from the feelings of Dutch society, characterized in the years of Premier Kok by strong economic growth and broad popular consensus.

In one of his books, *The Politics of Accommodation*, the Dutch political scientist Arendt Lijphart shows the evolution of political theory in Holland during the twentieth century. The theory of consociativism based its premises on the existence in the social and political fabric of Dutch autonomous subgroups, with their own institutions such as schools, newspapers and clubs. These fundamental units, despite ideological differences, managed to live under the same roof through a continuous compromise policy, constantly seeking the agreement between majority and minority and proportionally allocating the power between the various pillars.

The result of this "pillarization" was the creation of a four-compartment system, one for each subgroup. The first was the Calvinist one, formed by the Historical Christian Union (CHU) and the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), which merged in 1980 into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). Following the Catholic pillar, consisting of the Catholic People's Party (KVP), the socialist pillar, composed of the

Labor Party (PvDA) and finally the liberal pillar, embodied by right-wing liberals (VVD) and left-wing liberals (D66).

During the 1960s and 1970s, this model was challenged by New Left's demands, based on the politicization of the conflict, on the protest and above all on the appeal to the electoral base. This season of political turbulence, which ended in the seventies with the acceptance of these requests (abortion, light drugs, euthanasia), was rekindled in the late nineties with right-wing populists and their spiritual father, Pim Fortuyn.

The success of the Pim Fortuyn List in the May 2002 elections was essentially the political expression of a contrast in Dutch society, torn between the traditional defense of civil liberties and popular concerns regarding immigration. Fortuyn was very skilled in exploiting this fracture, resolving it in a further opposition, which saw, on one hand, the Muslim culture hostile to Dutch liberties, and on the other, the Dutch national identity, whose survival necessarily depended on the destruction of Islam.

In other words, with Fortuyn, the xenophobic turnaround was achieved by adversity against minorities and hatred of Islam, of which Geert Wilders was a capable interpreter and spokesman. At the same time in the VVD Bolkestein had left the party presidency to Hans Dijkstal, who had taken the party to more centrist positions. In a crescendo of disagreements and contrasts, in July 2004 Wilders, after having sent Dijkstal on a rampage with a program to take the VVD totally to the right, left the party, founding the Party of Freedom a year and a half later (February 2006).

The gospel of the new party, the so-called "Declaration of Independence", outlined a markedly neoliberal socio-economic program, which included cuts to welfare, decentralization and tax relief, adding a distinctly xenophobic and nationalist tone. In the same year, members of the Wilders Group actively engaged in the referendum campaign against the European Constitution, attacking the elitism and submission in Brussels of the Dutch ruling class.

Despite the failure of the referendum and the parties that supported it, Wilders and the PVV remained almost unknown to the public, with only 1% of the preferences in polls in the summer of 2006. The party leader decided to set aside the anti-

establishment, nationalist rhetoric, focusing exclusively on the dangers of uncontrolled immigration. Thanks to this change of program and a wise use of the media, PVV earned nine seats in the November 2006 elections, entering for the first time in the parliament.

3.1 Between libertarianism and xenophobia

The characteristics of Dutch populism derive from the ideological division law & order / libertarian ethics, fruit of the personal experiences of its leader Geert Wilders and of the national context.

Since its foundation, the PVV has done a wide use of institutional instruments available to members of the Chamber as motions and questions. Most of these measures were proposed with the precise objective of provoking debate through controversy. This strategy is reflected in the provocative communicative style of Wilders and the resonance of his proclamations in the country, often the result of many processes to instigate hatred.

One of these trials was caused by a short film shot by Wilders in 2008 entitled *Fitna*, translatable into Arabic as "dissent". The purpose of this short documentary was to present Islam as a totalitarian religion, similar to Nazism and Bolshevism. Islam is conceived as the antithesis par excellence to Western culture, whose sense, according to Wilders, is to bend the world to the Koran, dubbed the "Mein Kampf" of Islam.

If, before, Wilders was willing to admit the existence of an "impure" Islam, that is moderate and tolerant, with *Fitna* there is only one Islam, which through mass immigration and the exploitation of national welfare aims to weaken the West. According to Wilders, the multiculturalism and globalism of the left elites, creating a tolerant and welfare system, would have done nothing but favor the game of fundamentalists.

In Wilders' thought, these dark forces are opposed to Henk and Ingrid, a metaphor of the Dutch people, of which the party presents itself as the sole interpreter. The spirit

of the country, embodied by the honest and working mass, is however weakened by years of welfare policies, so the only medicine is a reform of the school system and the recovery of national memory.

Many constituent elements of the party's ideology led observers to compare the PVV to the fascist subculture of the country and to the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, the Dutch National Socialist party of the 1930s and 1940s. A rather dubious comparison, considering first of all that if the NSB was strongly anti-Semitic, the PVV and Wilders in the first place, clearly rejects anti-Semitism and generally Nazi-fascism.

As regards the hatred of minorities, the issue is more complex. For Wilders there are minorities perfectly integrated into the socio-economic fabric of the country and some completely alien to it. Islam is the enemy par excellence, hostile to Western culture and aimed at destroying that natural order that in his vision is the soul of society.

In this natural order, elements in apparent contradiction live in perfect harmony: the cult of authority and the authoritarian repression of criminality, pillars of law & order, are intertwined with the theory of the minimum state, gender equality, LGBT rights and freedom of choice regarding abortion and euthanasia. It is by no means a coincidence that the PVV, a supporter of measures against crime such as forced labor in pink clothing or public pillory on the internet for criminals, has always opposed the liberalization of firearms and the death penalty.

3.2 Geert Wilders's political positions

Wilders has never been inspired by parties or ultra-nationalist movements, but has been indicted for incitement to hatred and tried in the Netherlands, while in Britain, at least for a few years, he was considered a *persona non grata*.

However, on issues like rights of homosexuals or abortion he has a very-soft positions. The defense of gay rights represents, for Wilders, a typically Dutch value that cannot be derogated in any way.

His ideas about Islam are clear: he would like to banish the Koran, which he associates with Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and he would like to prevent immigration from Muslim countries.

3.3 Economic and fiscal policy

The PVV holds many different views, including many free market reforms as well as reversals of budget cuts. Firstly, their Eurosceptic position involves leaving the Euro and the EU in general and returning to their own currency. They call the EU a violation of national sovereignty and consider its policies to be contrary to the interests of the Netherlands, especially on immigration issues. Next, they support expansion of the government provided healthcare, increasing the budget by 3.7 billion Euros (according to their own projections). They also want to reduce the retirement age back to 65 and expand public pensions to everyone. Their plan also specifically states a reversal in all recent budget cuts, while advocating lowering income taxes and vehicle ownership taxes. They plan to offset this increase in the deficit by removing all foreign aid, many subsidies, and shutting down the public broadcasting company. The PVV advocates reducing regulations and taxes on companies, especially small businesses. They also support "clean" coal and oil until cheaper alternatives have been found.

The PVV is nationalistic and often considered anti-Islam for its social and foreign policy. A large reason for this is due to immigration policy, in which the PVV rejects all refugees and supports deporting those already in the country. They believe the EU has not done enough to protect the exterior boundaries and has caused the immigration crisis. When it comes to Muslims, the PVV calls for the banning of the Koran, burqas in public, kosher and Muslim slaughter, and Muslim "expressions that are against the public order". In their platform, they state that they want to "de-Islamize" the Netherlands. They also call for tracking the ethnicity of all Dutch citizens, deportation of criminals who are dual citizens, rejection of all immigration from Muslim countries

and potentially sections of Eastern Europe, and Constitutional protections for the dominance of Judeo-Christian culture in the Netherlands.

3.4 Geert Wilders and European populism

In the 2009 European elections, the PVV got 17% and four seats in the European Parliament. Wilders immediately declared that he did not want to associate with the Eurogroup Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty, marking the distances between his party and the continental populist right. He even forced his MEPs to change their seats, so as not to appear in photos too close to that of the founder of the Front National Jean Marie Le Pen.

No wonder the liberal and anti-fascist Geert Wilders immediately wanted to distance himself from an anti-Semitic and nostalgic French Vichy like Le Pen. The only contacts made by the PVV with the populists were those with the British UKIP, led by Malcolm Pearson, and the Danish People's Party, both hostile to the populist right-wing MEP and strongly Islamophobic. However, it was hostility towards the Muslims that later divided them, after the criticisms of Pearson's successor, Nigel Farage decided to sever the association due to Wilders extremist views on the Koran.

In the legislative elections of June 2010, the PVV managed to get 15.5% of the votes, confirming itself as the third party of the country. In October of the same year, the liberal Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced the formation of a minority government, consisting of the VVD and the Christian Democrats with the external support of Wilders. The agreement between liberals and Wilders, which provided for the implementation of many of the PVV's flagships, was however largely unexpected, causing protests from Wilders until the withdrawal of support in April 2012 and the subsequent fall of the government.

The main pivotal point of disagreement between the Liberals and the PVV concerned the submission of the Dutch government to Brussels authority, which resulted in Wilders' refusal to sign the budget for 2013 which contained numerous

budget cuts to meet the EU's request not to exceed the ratio of public deficit to 3% of GDP. The decision to bring down the government turned out to be negative, plunging the PVV to 10% in the 2012 elections and excluding it from the negotiations for the formation of a new executive.

The European elections in 2014 marked a slight decline for the PVV, going from 16% to 13% but maintaining the same number of seats. The real novelty was the alliance, officialized in 2013 with the National Front of Marine Le Pen, who succeeded her father in 2012 at the helm of the party.

Despite the advance of European populism on the continent, sealed by the establishment of the European Parliament of Nations and Freedom in 2015, the PVV has remained substantially stable in support, gaining only 3% in the national elections of 2017. This data suggests ideological coherence of the Freedom Party over the years, able to evolve following European trends without losing its founding principles.

4 Conclusion. Causes of success and ascent of right-wing populism

4.1 The roots of ascent of right-wing populism

The refugee crisis was not the only factor responsible for the rise of far-right parties. As we have seen, recent gains confirm and strengthen a tendency that has been observable for several years. A series of issues have been successfully exploited by the far right in the last decade, including immigration or more "foreign" immigrants, and anti-EU sentiment. Some authors have pointed out that without the "irritating question" of immigration and asylum seekers, right-wing extremism in Western Europe would probably have remained a negligible quantity, not considerable as a threat for Western European democracy. But there are also deeper and more structural causes, related to

the particular socio-economic situation of some social strata, the wide social and political developments within the European States, and the skills and professionalization of the far-right parties. The "losers" of globalization, the lowest income classes threatened by unemployment and international competition form the core of the radical right electorate. It is with this electorate that slogans like "foreigners take away work" have success. But such groups, which are otherwise generally the goal of left parties, are not the only ones to be successfully subtracted from traditional parties. In all the political spectrum, individuals respond positively to the prejudices related to the "other", which more recently has become "the Muslim".

Other explanations on developments in the political system focus on increasing electoral volatility and on the fact that left and right-wing parties have recently had a tendency to converge. The populist parties, not just those on the right wing, fill the void left by this ideological convergence and present themselves as the only alternative to the obsolete and fossilized political establishment. In most countries, this development has favored the right, since the left alternative is too weak or co-opted in the political establishment or represented in the government - as in the case of the Greens.

Furthermore, the radical parties on the right have worked successfully on their image and their message to distance themselves, from all forms of neo-Nazism, fascism, and other types of "black" pasts. A clear cut with the past is sustained in order to avoid a politically compromising vocabulary. The rhetorical ability of the extreme right goes even further, however, when it draws a line of demarcation between the acceptable and the undesirable that is not based on religious, ethnic or racial, but cultural divisions: For example Muslims or Rom don't necessarily have to be expelled, as long as they adapt to the dominant culture, work hard, avoid building mosques and, more generally, integrate.

4.2 A sociological analysis of the ascent of right-wing populist parties

Roger Eatwell synthesized some models that can explain in the "supply-demand" and "supply and demand theories" formulas to explain the growing support for the extreme right in Western Europe.

The "demand side" refers to the factors that make individuals more likely to support such subjects, while the "supply side" alludes to the radical right's political and ideological strategy.

The first of the theses on the ascent of the extreme right to be analyzed is the monothematic one; the popularity of far-right parties increases when there are major concerns about immigration in the electorate, especially in relation to the issues of unemployment and the scarcity of available resources. However, a detailed look at historical statistics shows that the success of the extreme right is not necessarily related to the new waves of immigration. Eatwell says that the issue of immigration «*seems to be a matter of perception rather than reality*».

Another thesis concerns the protest, the idea that disillusionment with traditional parties has helped to increase support for radical right parties.

Then the thesis of social disintegration, which links the emergence of the extreme right to the sociological concept of anomie, a breaking of the social bond in modern societies that produces feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. When traditional structures decay, individuals turn to groups that seem to offer them a chance to belong. Groups, like the extreme right, which defend traditional values, the family, and nationalism are particularly attractive to individuals who have never experienced a safe social environment. This theory is based on studies that have found a link between high levels of social isolation and the vote for right-wing extremist parties. However, other data suggest that there is a high rate of membership in extreme right groups even when accession takes place through family ties.

The opposition thesis to post-materialism is – as its name suggests – based on the theory of post-materialism used in the 1970s and 1980s by sociologists to explain the

shift in western societies from traditional economic and class interests to greater attention to topics such as environment, women's emancipation, and feminism. In the 1990s, changes were made to this theory to help explain the rise in popularity of the extreme right, as it was becoming increasingly clear that post-materialism had limited appeal; that is to say, which was popular within young and educated strata of society. In fact, many alienated individuals favored opposing ideals looking towards parties that promoted traditional values. While it is evident that many far-right parties in Europe have adopted the characteristics of the "new Anglo-American right", parties such as Vlaams Belang, VB, Belgium and the Front National in France have an anti-materialist philosophy and give the political priorities with respect to economic concerns.

The thesis of economic interests establishes a traditional connection between the right-wing voters and the relative socio-economic discomfort, including those who suffer from the negative effects of globalization. The correlation between socio-economic interests and the right-wing vote is not clear, but there is evidence that socio-economic problems combined with fears of immigration are able to strengthen support for the radical right.

The thesis of the structure of political opportunities (POS) focuses on two factors: how traditional parties can help or hinder a far-right party and how the institutional structure of a state can influence minor parties. The parties can get support when the voters are unable to clearly differentiate between the main parties moving towards the center and forget or converge on issues that are of great interest to the electorate. At the institutional level, the proportional system can give more opportunities to smaller parties, such as in France and the Scandinavian countries. Germany has a 5% barrier threshold that makes it difficult for small parties to have state-level representatives, however, the federal system allows minor parties to be more successful at the local level.

While the POS theory ignores the impact of the media, the mediation thesis emphasizes its potential. The media are generally hostile towards the extreme right and

often play a decisive role in electorally delegitimizing it. However, there have been cases in which the media explicitly supported the radical right. Furthermore, the media can indirectly help the extreme right by focusing on divisive issues such as immigration or highlighting the personality and character of politicians; this helps radical parties who tend to be led by a strong leader. The power of the media to influence the electoral success of the extreme right is difficult to measure, but an extended coverage – both positive and negative – of a Party undoubtedly gives it important visibility.

According to the thesis of national traditions, the success of the far-right parties lies in their ability to represent themselves as a "legitimate part of the national tradition", and thus to distance themselves from Nazism and fascism. The far-right populist parties are careful to build a legitimate speech on immigration and the failure of integration.

The programmatic thesis links the content of the Party's program to electoral support. Political campaigns, in general, are increasingly focused on particular issues, and far-right parties have often used these issues successfully, making them become central components of their programs to attract voters. Moreover, they adopt a "winning formula" that combines authoritarian and anti-immigratory politics with the free market economy.

The thesis of the charismatic leader is centered on the characteristics of the leadership and on the receptiveness of the public opinion. Voters are generally attracted to leaders capable of communicating in a simplified and emotional way. A charismatic leader also has the potential to represent a minor party as powerful and influential.

4.3 Populism between extremism and democracy

Populism has been defined as an ideology that considers the separated society in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elites', moreover, maintains that politics should be the expression of the general will of the population. The people who are represented as the majority, the man of the street, the

common people", are at the same time homogeneous and different as they represent various social classes. All these qualities actually support the idea of legitimacy, which in this way "gives substance to the populist thesis". It is important to stress that populism is not linked to a specific ideological content, but rather refers to "a political style, demagoguery, or an electoral strategy". Having said this, scholars have noted the growing number of common themes propagated by right and left populism. An important difference between the two, however, is the stance towards equality: the extreme right always strives to create boundaries that separate a community of "us" from "them".

4.4 The success of right-wing populism

In the reconstruction of the causes that stimulated the success of right-wing populist proposals the weight of structural factors cannot be neglected, such as the "fiscal crisis" of the state, the slowdown in economic growth, the shift to the east of geo-economic dynamics, the increase in social inequalities, migratory crises and the impoverishment of the middle classes especially in western countries.

In Europe, the EU plays a primary role because of the single currency and the threat of the erosion of the national sovereignty of member states. Populism often assumes in Europe, more than a nationalist dimension, a sovereign connotation.

Besides these tendencies, a plurality of communicative and organizational changes has created favorable conditions for the recent ascent of more-or-less-populist leaders, movements and parties.

Firstly, transformations in political communication, in particular in the growing mediatization and spectacularization of politics. In this sense the success of populism is closely connected to the tendency of the media to favor a simplified language, to move the confrontation on an emotional terrain, focusing on the issues most heard by the public, and adopting the "pop" register of the television entertainment genres. In recent times, the "tele-populism" of the nineties has also been joined by a sort of new

"web-populism" that has found in the network the channel to communicate with citizens.

Secondly, the rise of populism can be understood as a consequence of the weakening of the relationship between citizens and their political representatives. Bernard Manin has defined this new structure as a "public democracy" marked by the centrality of communication and the weakening of party identifications, as well as by the presence of a "floating voter", who orients his vote by reacting to proposals made by political leaders.

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Executive summary in Italian

Quello dei populismi di destra è un tema incredibilmente attuale, visto il recente ed ampio aumento di consensi di tali partiti nei rispettivi paesi europei. Basta pensare al successo elettorale della Lega di Matteo di Salvini, ora al governo assieme al Movimento 5 Stelle, o all'ottimo risultato del Front National di Marine Le Pen, che non è riuscito ad arrivare all'Eliseo, ma è comunque diventato il secondo partito in Francia. Entrambi, assieme ad altri partiti populistici di destra Europei, hanno attuato un profondo cambiamento e rinnovamento della loro struttura, delle loro proposte elettorali e del loro stile di comunicazione, distaccandosi da precedenti posizioni considerate estremiste dall'opinione pubblica. Questa trasformazione ha permesso a tali partiti di ampliare considerevolmente il loro elettorato. I partiti populistici di destra presentano tutti diverse caratteristiche comuni, come la dura critica nei confronti dell'immigrazione clandestina e dell'accoglienza dei migranti, il rifiuto del multiculturalismo, l'euroscetticismo, la rivendicazione della sovranità nazionale. Tuttavia, i vari partiti populistici in Europa presentano anche diverse differenze in termini di struttura, proposte politiche, storia e strategia comunicativa. Tali differenze sono dovute al fatto che ciascuno di questi partiti si è adattato al tessuto sociale, alla storia e alle tradizioni dei rispettivi paesi Europei a cui appartiene. Infatti, ogni paese europeo ha culture e situazioni politiche diverse tra di loro, che renderebbero impossibile la presenza di partiti con posizioni e caratteristiche totalmente omogenee tra di loro. Nel primo capitolo viene analizzata l'evoluzione della Lega Nord, da partito etnoregionalista con posizioni secessioniste guidato da Umberto Bossi, a partito nazionale guidato da Matteo Salvini, ora collocabile nei populismi di destra. In seguito, viene analizzata la strategia politica di Matteo Salvini, che distaccandosi dalle posizioni bossiane, ha saputo ampliare considerevolmente il suo elettorato, anche grazie ad una diretta ed efficace comunicazione. Nel secondo capitolo viene analizzata l'evoluzione del Front National, da partito estremista di destra "nostalgico" guidato da Jean Marie Le Pen, a partito nazionalista ma dall'approccio istituzionale, divenuto

accettabile e rispettabile per una buona parte della popolazione francese, grazie al rinnovamento e alla campagna di “de-demonizzazione” attuata dalla sua attuale leader Marine Le Pen. In seguito, vengono analizzate le differenze e le analogie tra il Front National e la Lega di Matteo Salvini, entrambi collocabili tra i populismi di destra ma con origini e alcune posizioni molto diverse tra loro, prima tra queste il federalismo mai abbandonato dalla lega e il nazionalismo\centralismo del Front National. Nel terzo capitolo, viene fornito un chiaro esempio di come il populismo di destra cambi e si trasformi a seconda della storia e della situazione politica e sociale dei rispettivi paesi. Il partito olandese di Geert Wilders è forse il partito di destra populista che si differenzia maggiormente dagli altri, soprattutto per via delle sue posizioni libertarie in temi come le unioni civili, l’aborto o legalizzazione e tassazione delle droghe. Infine, nella conclusione, vengono analizzate le possibili cause del recente successo dei partiti populistici di destra; tale analisi viene supportata dall’analisi sociologica effettuata da Roger Eatwell, che presenta diverse teorie in grado di spiegare tale successo.