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**HOW AND WHY RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTIES ARE DEVELOPING IN  
PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS  
A COMPARED ANALYSIS BETWEEN ITALY, FRANCE AND AUSTRIA  
The recent cases of Lega Nord, the Front National and the Austrian People's Party**

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a major crisis of political parties all across Europe, closely linked to the difficult economic, financial and social situation. This inevitably led to the formation of political movements with purely populist characteristics. This analysis will attempt to explain how and why right-wing populist parties are emerging in parliamentary systems, such as in Italy, France and Austria, and what their shared ideals, organizational structure, leadership and methods of communication are. It will deal with the formation of the new Lega Nord that has as leader Matteo Salvini, who changed the name of the party more simply to “Lega”, in order to cover the entire national territory, the Front National, that has as leader Marine Le Pen, and the Austrian People's Party, with the young Sebastian Kurz as leader.

Today the populist wave or also called anti-system wave has reached its peak in Europe. However, no study is able to predict whether the parabola is destined to become descendant or ascendant. There are various other parties that have incremented this tendency. They have been defeated but are still very strong in their countries. France and Holland are two examples, even though they have been swept away by the victories of the Liberals, Emmanuel Macron and Mark Rutte, the Front National in France and Greet Wilders's Freedom Party in Holland, have experienced a boom in consensus in the last elections. The Epicenter study report, which has produced a study that measures the index of authoritarian populism in Europe, has stated that "There is no indication that support for these parties may decrease in the short term. It is likely that the number of populist parties in the government will increase in the near future as countries such as Austria and Italy will soon vote." Austria has voted on the 15th of October of 2017, and the results demonstrated that the hypothesis proposed by the Epicenter was correct. The populist party rose to power. Same occurred in Italy on the 4th of March 2018 where the Lega Nord obtained 17,79% of votes, from its initial 4% in the elections of 2013.

# CHAPTER 1

## POPULISM

### 1.1 Definition of Populism

Today, a precise and correct definition of populism is a complicated job to achieve. The word populism is introduced by the Italian vocabulary *Treccani* as an “ideological attitude that, based on principles and programs generically inspired by socialism, exalts the people as a depository of totally positive values in a demagogic and vivid manner”<sup>1</sup>. While, the Italian vocabulary of *Il Corriere della Sera* uses a simpler definition, it defines populism as “an attitude or political movement tending to enhance the role and values of popular classes”<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, populism establishes a direct, non-traditional relationship between the masses and the politician who brings the latter both the loyalty of the former and their active support in his quest for power. This in view of the charismatic ability of the politician to mobilize the hope and confidence of the masses in the rapid fulfillments of their social expectations in the case that he acquires sufficient power.

Populism can be both democratic and constitutional, but also authoritarian: in a mass society, it denies or devalues the role of the ruling class, demagogically and vividly exalting the people on the basis of generally socializing principles and programs. To analyze the different definitions and populist parties it is essential to bring to light the core ideas of this attitude. At the center of the ideology is the opposition between the people and the ruling elites, the people are imagined as a homogeneous social unit, considered the source of all positive values. The enemies of the people are all those who are extraneous to them, thus the political, economic and financial oligarchies. Lastly, it is crucial to highlight that the different elaborations of the concept of population as "imagined communities" refers to: sovereign population, national population, and class population.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Populismo in Vocabolario - Treccani.” In *Vocabolario - Treccani*, [www.treccani.it/vocabolario/populismo/](http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/populismo/).

<sup>2</sup> Dizionari.corriere.it. (2018). *Populismo: Definizione e significato di Populismo Dizionario italiano Corriere.it*. [online] [http://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario\\_italiano/P/populismo.shtml](http://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario_italiano/P/populismo.shtml) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2018].

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, pp.48-49

When talking about populism it is necessary to make a distinction first of all between parties and movements in general, and then describe the differences they undertake when referred to as “populist”.

A movement, from a sociological point of view, is any relatively structured collective social formation that appears identifiable for the purpose of its participants and members to defend or promote "objects" or situations that have a social connotation, and therefore implications of fact or value for a more or less circumscribed group of subjects.<sup>4</sup> Inserted in the context of collective behaviors, the movement is represented by a group where the roles are not yet defined and in which the social relationships are mostly cooperative and endowed with a strong emotional charge. Usually the movement focuses on a specific objective and mobilizes to achieve it. Thus, social movements are forms of aggregation of individuals whose goal is the defense, promotion or change of a fact that has social connotation<sup>5</sup>. This happens in particular when the political and institutional system is not considered able to fully represent civil society. Movements can evolve towards forms of political parties and participate in elections or remain in the rank of social movement.

A party is an organization that pursues the objective of managing political power through the process of electoral competition or, when democratic electoral competition rules do not enter, through the direct designation of its members in government roles. In general, political parties are private associations that have a monopoly on political elections, by proposing candidacies<sup>6</sup>. Therein lies their ambivalent nature: on the one hand, they have a fundamental private connotation, found in the fact that, at least in the Italian legal system, they are unrecognized associations, without legal personality and with limited patrimonial autonomy, even if constitutionally recognized in art. 18 of the Constitution (Freedom of Association)<sup>7</sup>; on the other, they undoubtedly play a

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<sup>4</sup> Walder, A. (2018). *Political Sociology and Social Movements / Sociology*. [online] Sociology.stanford.edu. <https://sociology.stanford.edu/publications/political-sociology-and-social-movements>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Collinsdictionary.com. (2018). *Political party definition and meaning / Collins English Dictionary*. [online] <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/political-party>.

<sup>7</sup> Senate of the Republic (n.d.). Constitution of the Italian Republic. Parliamentary Information, Archives and Publications Office of the Senate Service for Official Reports and Communication, p.8.

fundamental public function, that of "competing with a democratic method to determine national politics"<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, when we then apply the "populist" qualification to movements and parties, the difference is that the former has a function of mobilization not necessarily aimed at the organization of the institutional consensus, while the parties due to the fact that they compete in elections, have an "institutional" function. The movements do not collect votes, even though they can obviously "flank" parties or participate in a climate of opinion; and the parties instead collect votes and respond to their constituency through the proposal of public policies.

## 1.2 History of Populism

From a historical point of view, populism is the name with which the Russian political-cultural movement Narodnichestvo was designated in the West, and developed in the second half of the 19th century, until the revolution.<sup>9</sup> Later, and especially in the 20th century, the term was used to design trends or political movements, even very different from each other, that developed in various areas and contexts throughout the century<sup>10</sup>. Despite the differences, some common features of populism are in part due to an idealized representation of the "people," generically understood, with little attention to its concrete social determinants and its exaltation as a bearer of instances and positive values, usually traditional, in contrast to defects and elite corruption. Among the common elements, the political tendency to devaluate the forms and procedures of representative democracy, the privilege of plebiscite, and the opposition of new charismatic leaders to parties and exponents of the traditional political class, have often been given particular political significance. When referring to this political movement it is necessary to reference the main example of it, which was Russian populism.

The first populist organization, the Zemlja i volja ("Land and Freedom"), was established in 1861 in a climate of disappointment caused by the modalities, penalizing the peasants, with which the

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<sup>8</sup> Senate of the Republic (n.d.). Constitution of the Italian Republic. Parliamentary Information, Archives and Publications Office of the Senate Service for Official Reports and Communication, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. (n.d.). Narodnik | Russian social movement. [online]

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Narodnik>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

slave servitude had been abolished in February 1861<sup>11</sup>. The populist ideology was based on the conviction of the possibility of a historical-economic development that by leaving the capitalist phase out, would have led Russia, through revolutionary upheaval, to a social and political structure based on socialism. Police repression, however, led to the dissolution of the Zemlja i volja. After the failure of this first experience, populist environments spread a vision of revolutionary action that put the role of the individual before that of the mass, a trend that inspired some conspiratorial experiences in the second half of the 1960s<sup>12</sup>. In the final years of the decade the combined influence of P.L. Lavrov on the necessity of propaganda activity among the masses, and the theory of M.A. Bakunin on the revolutionary instinct of these, brought the populist's attention to the people as the protagonists of revolutionary action. This led, in the spring of 1874, after a first period of propaganda activity among the laborers, the movement of young revolutionaries from towns to villages, with the aim of mobilizing peasant masses through propaganda. The failure to respond by these masses, caused a disorientation in the populist ranks that highlighted the need for a centralized organization. The second Zemlja i volja was born in 1876<sup>13</sup>. Some of its members, in response to growing police repression and persisting peasant passivity, identified terrorism as the only instrument capable of fighting the state apparatus. The debate around this position led to the split of the Zemlja i volja (1879) into two groups. During the next decade, the populist movement further dispersed into provincial-level groups that continued terrorist activity in growing isolation. Some elements of the revolutionary party were reclaimed, at the beginning of the subsequent century, by revolutionary socialists.

### **1.3 Right-wing Populism**

Right-wing populism is a political ideology that combines populism and anti-elitism. It combines a tendency towards laissez-faire and liberalism with some elements of the New Right: the rejection of social equality and of equalitarianism, the criticism of multiculturalism and the rejection of immigration. The populist tendency is witnessed by the instrumental use of popular

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<sup>11</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018). Zemlya i Volya | political party, Russia. [online] <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zemlya-i-Volya>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

sentiments, from referendums to anti-politics, and from appeals to ordinary people in contrast to institutions, elites, and establishment.

There are indeed instances where populist movements could be characterized as movements of popular mobilization against the system or the elites in government, they later gain power and keep it for years, becoming themselves a system, without changing their feverish and populist approach to political action. Although characterized by the above-mentioned 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 originate from the extreme right, others have arisen by shifts from conservative or liberal parties. There is no international organization or European party that groups these parties. In the European Parliament, right-wing populists do not form a group for themselves, but they are divided between non-members and other right-wing groups. Herbert Kitschelt, a political science scholar and professor, divided right-wing populist parties into three different sub-categories: the new radical right, characterized by market defense and authoritarian vision (e.g. Front National), the parties of the so-called chauvinist welfare like the German Republicans and, finally, representatives of anti-state populism as the Austrian People's Party and the Lega Nord.

## CHAPTER 2

### THREE POPULIST PARTIES: LEGA NORD, AUSTRIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY AND FRONT NATIONAL

#### 2.1 Analysis of Structural Organization and Ideology

In general, the parties included in the family of populism are not particularly structured and to make up for these bureaucratic-organizational shortcomings, they have a highly personalized leadership that, by allowing members, sympathizers and voters to recognize each other in it, serves as a channel for forming the identity of the party. According to Paul A. Taggart, in his book "*Populism*," populist parties find in the leader the embodiment of the virtues of the people. The result is a strong identification between people and leaders who are "decisive in shaping a common and univocal identity among the followers of the movement"<sup>14</sup>.

Ideology refers to a set of political beliefs or a set of ideas that characterize a particular culture, it is a form of political orientation<sup>15</sup>. Some examples are: communism, capitalism, Marxism, socialism, and in this case populism. Best to say, right-wing populism that has as its main feature the anti-elitism, which ideologically is positioned on the right of the political spectrum.

##### 2.1.1 The New Lega Nord

The Lega Nord is a political party created by Umberto Bossi, officially born in December 1989 with an agreement between the Lega Lombarda and the leagues of Veneto, Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany.

Over the years its electoral program and political ideology have undergone constant evolution, abandoning the original secessionist project of Umberto Bossi, to embrace Matteo Salvini's ethnic-

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<sup>14</sup> Taggart, P. (2002). *Populism*. New-Delhi: Vivabooks.

<sup>15</sup> Vocabulary.com. (2018). ideology - Dictionary Definition. [online] Available at: <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/ideology> [Accessed 28 Sep. 2018].

nationalism and euro-skepticism. He was elected party secretary in December 2013. The Northern League is present today as a party in defense of historical identities and individual Italian cultural traditions, trying to put a brake on the overtones of globalization. For this reason and for its fight against international finance, called "greedy" in the 2014 election program, this party can certainly be considered populist and euro-sceptic. It is essential to highlight the fact that ethno-nationalism and euro-skepticism are ideological aspects to keep in mind when analyzing the electoral success of the Northern League. The original Lega Nord, led by Umberto Bossi, was characterized as a populist party, which opposed state centralism, and which leveraged widespread anti-media sentiment, gaining many votes in the northern regions.

With the political rise of Umberto Bossi, the phenomenon of populism emerged in Italy, which recognized in the charismatic leader the people's defender of the expropriated territory. Lega Nord represented for the first time in Italy a great anti party system, which aimed to upset the country's political and territorial framework. The main shift towards a more populist Lega Nord occurred after the 2013 political elections. The North League, which coalized with Silvio Berlusconi in the PDL, collapsed in consensus. Gaining 4.08% in the House of Representatives and 4.33%<sup>16</sup> in the Senate, achieving the worst election result since 1989. This heavy electoral defeat led to the organization of primaries for the party secretariat. The secretary Roberto Maroni resigned, and was replaced by Matteo Salvini, elected by the league members with 82% of the votes<sup>17</sup>.

The new Salvini League constitutes an evolution of the party concept, proposing itself as the sole interpreter of popular will. The new secretary has been able to interpret the feelings and needs of the people, renewing the league's electoral program and catalyzing the votes in the fastest possible time. Matteo Salvini, who aspires to play the role of leader of the entire center, has become a spokesman. In addition to the irreverent language, typical of Umberto Bossi's period, the new party secretary has also given symbolic importance to clothing; Vittorio Feltri, on one of his articles on *Il Giornale*, commented: "Salvini's choices in the field of clothing fully meet the need for him to

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<sup>16</sup> [Ilsole24ore.com](https://www.ilsole24ore.com/). (2018). Elezioni 2013 ,Riepilogo Nazionale, risultati Italia. [online] Available at: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/speciali/2013/elezioni/risultati/politiche/static/italia.shtml> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2018].

<sup>17</sup> Salvatori, P. (2013). Primarie Lega, vince Matteo Salvini con l'82%. Umberto Bossi si ferma al 18%. [online] L'Huffington Post. Available at: [https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2013/12/07/primarie-lega-salvini-vince-82-bossi-fermo-18\\_n\\_4404640.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2013/12/07/primarie-lega-salvini-vince-82-bossi-fermo-18_n_4404640.html) [Accessed 26 Sep. 2018].

appear to the people as one of them.<sup>18</sup> No longer formal dresses, but cheap sweatshirts and t-shirts with the name of the city or region that hosts the league's tour on that day.

In January 2014, Matteo Salvini marries nationalism and announces the presence of lists of the Northern League also in Southern Italy on the occasion of the May European elections. The League's Secretary has thus overcome the territorial issue, blending the North with the people of the South, and has ridden the rampant socio-economic insecurity that struck the entire country. Today, this party stands as the defender of the entire Italian population, interpreted as a homogeneous subject, to whom the establishment and the left systematically give democratic freedoms and rights. While Bossi's league pointed to the "excessive" presence of the southern within the political institutions and against the poor management of the economic resources by the state, the new North League is defending the social rights of the Italian people. Those rights, which, according to Matteo Salvini, would have been suffocated by an inefficient state and a European Union "led by Masons, bureaucrats and financiers who did not bring anything good"<sup>19</sup>. The strategy is to exploit the discontent of the popular classes towards the European Union and, in particular, to new migratory, fiscal and economic policies.

### **2.1.2 The Austrian People's Party**

The Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei in German) is one of Austria's oldest political parties, with a Christian Democrat and conservative orientation. It is a Christian-social party. The Christian-socials are in fact a current of thought typical of the German-speaking territories, in particular of the regions with a Catholic majority. The Austrian people, like all social Christians, are a moderate party, difficult to place in the "right-left" spectrum. They are very attentive to the social question, to environmental protection and to administrative decentralization,

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<sup>18</sup> Feltri, V., Sallusti, A., Vigo, F. and Sgarbi, V. (2018). Date un sarto al leghista Salvini e forse avrete un vero leader. [online] *ilGiornale.it*. Available at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/date-sarto-leghista-salvini-e-forse-avrete-vero-leader-1061608.html> [Accessed 26 Sep. 2018].

<sup>19</sup> Rame, S., Sallusti, A., Vigo, F. and Sgarbi, V. (2018). Salvini contro l'Ue dei massoni: "L'Italia torni a controllare confini, moneta e banche". [online] *ilGiornale.it*. Available at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/salvini-contro-lue-dei-massoni-litalia-torni-controllare-1275956.html> [Accessed 26 Sep. 2018].

above all because they are the expression of the peasant masses as a party. For this reason, they are also a party linked to national traditions, to the concept of country and to Catholic culture. Similar to the Italian Christian Democracy, which is known to be a center party, a combination of socio-political positions held together by the opposition to the PCI and the Christian inspiration. They are far from liberal conservative parties because of their mass party nature, even if they share their appreciation for the free market. They are even more distant from the radical parties of which they do not share the anti-clerical positions, like the social-democratic parties of which they do not share the role of the state in economics.

Sebastian Kurz, leader of Övp Conservative Party, has become the new Austrian Chancellor: with his 31 years old, he is the youngest leader governing a European country.

With the arrival of Kurz to the party's leadership, the ÖVP took a tough stance against illegal immigration by moving to the right, to the point that he was accused of having copied the Austrian Freedom Party program<sup>20</sup>. Under Kurz's leadership, the popular party has changed considerably. At the elections it did not appear with its acronym, but with the name of its candidate (Sebastian Kurz - Die neue Volkspartei), and the color symbol of the party has changed from black to turquoise. Kurz conducted a campaign based on renewal but sought to win votes by subtracting them from the Freedom Party (FPÖ): the issue of migrants was one of the main themes of the electoral campaign. Austria is one of the countries in Europe where more requests for asylum have been filed and where 8 percent of the population is Muslim<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, one-third of the Austrians would not want to have a Muslim as his neighbor and in recent years has in fact supported xenophobic parties and movements. Kurz has argued and approved a law in force since October that prohibits burqa, he refers to "parallel societies" that are emerging in the country, and during a visit in Malta he openly criticized the folly of Ong that favor migrant traffickers. He then called for the closure of the Mediterranean route, threatening to block the Brenner, and in February 2016 he

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<sup>20</sup> The Freedom Party of Austria (German: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) is a right-wing populist and national-conservative political party in Austria. The party, led by Heinz-Christian Strache, is a member of the Europe of Nations and Freedom group in the European Parliament, as well as of the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom.

<sup>21</sup> Ec.europa.eu. (2018). Asylum quarterly report - Statistics Explained. [online] Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report) [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

was the organizer of a meeting in Vienna between the Slovenian Foreign and Interior Ministers and eight other Balkan countries to discuss a common strategy on the so-called "Balkan route" from the Middle East to Western Europe. At the end of the conference, the ten countries had issued a joint document in which they agreed to tighten their border controls with the aim of reducing arrivals. Sebastian Kurz, despite the opposition of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, he decided to prevent access to Austria to those who were traveling that route, mostly Syrian asylum seekers. Thanks to his very strong position on immigration Kurz won the Prime Minister position of the OVP with great facility, obtaining almost 99 percent of the votes of the delegates. Kurz has focused most of his election campaign on a break with the past and a remarkable personalization. In addition, many of the OVP candidates do not come from this policy. As the New York Times wrote, Kurz aimed at "rebranding one of the most conservative and traditional parties in Europe, proposing it as something dynamic, digital, interested in change."<sup>22</sup>

### **2.1.3 The Front National**

The Front National was born on October 5th, 1972 from Jean-Marie Le Pen, already a member of the National Assembly since 1956, with the name of the National Front for French Unity. Born as the political arm of Ordre nouveau, placing itself as a party of patriotic sentiment, respect for the hierarchy of values and family tradition, it has transformed from a marginal party in the French political landscape to become, from the second half of the eighties, the catalyst of all the French radical right parties. The "Front" has always distinguished itself as a radical right-wing non-fascist but xenophobic and populist party. Jean-Marie Le Pen has been the leader and undisputed central figure of the party until his resignation in 2011, following which his daughter Marine Le Pen became president. Relegated to marginal political force during its first ten years, until it became the first French political party in the European elections of 2014 with 24.86%<sup>23</sup>. In

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<sup>22</sup> Eddy, M. (2018). Austria Is Poised to Shift Sharply Right in Election. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/13/world/europe/austria-election-freedom-party.html> [Accessed 26 Sep. 2018].

<sup>23</sup> Results of the 2014 European elections - Results by country - France - European Parliament. (2018). Results of the 2014 European elections - Results by country - France - European Parliament. [online] Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-fr-2014.html> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2018].

March 2018 it was renamed Rassemblement National to marry a more conciliatory line, and she appealed to the moderate right: "winning without alliances is a difficult undertaking. The name Front National is the bearer of an epic and glorious history that nobody wants to deny. But you know, for many French people, even in good faith, that name is a psychological brake." <sup>24</sup>

Positioning on policies typical of the extreme right, the first electoral results of the "creature" of Le Pen were very disappointing because France had and still has a very particular electoral system, for all the electoral rounds except for the presidential and for the European, not only based on a dry bi-partitism , but on a majority electoral law that has a large barrier, set at 12.5% and that in cases of ballot it sees the Gaullists and socialists vote for each other in order not to have the exponent candidate of the Front National elected in that constituency (the so-called "sanitary cordon"). The first elections in which the Front was presented were the legislative elections of 1978, obtaining a narrow 0.33%.

In 1984 the second elections were held in the twelve countries that were then members of the EEC and in France there was a mini political earthquake: The Front National took about 2.2 million votes, equal to 10.95%, sending ten deputies out of the 81 due to be in Paris, to Strasbourg. On the seats of the European Parliament the "Group of the European Right" was formed, which also saw among the members the five elected members of the MSI, the Greek member of the National Political Union and that of the Ulster Unionist Party. For the first time, the first far-right nationalist group was organized, a feature of all subsequent elections. 2002 is the year of recovery for the French nationalist party and the presidential elections are always the driving force. The outgoing neo-Gaullist President Jacques Chirac decided to reapply for a second term and his challengers were, among others, the outgoing socialist premier Lionel Jospin and Jean Marie Le Pen. The success is sensational: Le Pen obtained 16.86% and two weeks later he challenged Chirac to become President of the Republic. Surprisingly, the socialist candidate comes third with 16.18% and Jospin decided to withdraw from political activity given the debacle. Jacques Chirac got 19.88% in the first round. However, from the day after the elections all France was mobilized so that the former poujadist would not win the ballot: a "coalition" formed with the socialists who

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<sup>24</sup> Zanon, M. (2018). Marine Le Pen celebra la fine del Front National. [online] Ilfoglio.it. Available at: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2018/03/11/news/front-national-cambia-nome-marine-le-pen--183443/> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

"forced" their voters to vote Chirac, for reasons of force majeure, as it was feared that France in the hands of the extremist could end badly. Two weeks later, as expected, Chirac won hands down elections with over 82.21% of the votes. On January 16th, 2011, after the resignation of her father, Marine Le Pen was elected President of the party with 67.65% of the votes. In the 2014 European elections, the National Front allied with the Italian Northern League and the Austrian Freedom Party to form the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom. On May 4th, 2015, the honorary president of the party Jean-Marie Le Pen, after reiterating for the umpteenth time in an interview that: "the gas chambers were a detail of the Second World War"<sup>25</sup>, was suspended by the party. Following the suspension, Jean-Marie repudiated his daughter Marine. The party candidate Marine Le Pen to the presidential elections in France in 2017, which in the first round of the elections of the 23rd April with 21.30% of the votes came second, going to the ballot of May 7th together with Emmanuel Macron (24.01%). This is the absolute best result of the FN for the presidential elections. At the ballot of May 7th Le Pen reached 10.644.118 votes, with 33.9% of the preferences and was exceeded by Macron with 66.1%.

## **2.2 Compared Analysis of the Three Right-Wing Populist Parties**

When talking about populist parties it is important to consider those elements and ideals that are common or different in their programs. In order to analyze the three populist parties some issues must be compared, such as their positions on: immigration, security, education and business and economy.

### **2.2.1 Immigration**

The main point that the Italian Lega Nord, the Austrian OVP and the French Front National have in common is the phenomenon of immigration. These parties are in favor of the suspension

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<sup>25</sup> Barbière, C. (2018). Wilders inquiry puts far right group under strain. [online] euractiv.com. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-priorities-2020/news/wilders-inquiry-puts-far-right-group-under-strain/> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

of the Schengen Convention, that is, the set of Community rules aimed at encouraging the free movement of citizens belonging to the signing States. They are calling for the restoration of national borders and the end of European so-called "open door policy". They recognize and respects the status of political refugee but demand the introduction of more severe penalties to limit the phenomenon of illegal immigration.

What unites these populist parties is certainly the principle of "national priority", which applies to welfare and work. For example, public housing must be guaranteed first to nationals and then to immigrants, as only the first can participate to public contests for the allocation of state employments. The Övp (People's Party) has clearly stated in its program and statute that it is closing the Mediterranean route: migrants should be blocked at the external borders, creating internships in Libya or other North African states. Furthermore they declare that: "illegal migration into our country must be stopped and qualified immigration geared to Austria's needs<sup>26</sup>" and that in "the past few years - particularly the migration crisis, but also the increasing threat of terrorism, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in the Middle East and North Africa - have again made it clear that international developments have a direct impact on the security of our country.<sup>27</sup>" Thus, their main objective is to create a migration policy with the aim of orienting legal migration strictly towards the needs of Austria and effectively combating and stopping illegal migration. To secure social peace in the long term, they will develop a migration strategy which will form the basis for all action in areas relevant to migration. In order for this to occur it is necessary to have a functioning EU external borders management system, and this should be achieved by strengthening the cooperation with the European Union member states, FRONTEX (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) and by carrying out border controls to ensure public order and security. The main points of their statute are: a return to Schengen with a regular exchange with neighboring countries, strengthening and expansion of Austrian borders, reform citizenship law, promoting a more effective return policy, increasing efficiency in asylum procedures and out-of-country transfers and commitment to a "Common European Asylum System" which refers to a resolute fight against human being's trafficking and resettlement of those rescued at sea in "Rescue Centers" outside the

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<sup>26</sup> Kerr, C. (2018). Austria and Hungary unite in WARNING to EU: Nations promise stronger ties over migration. [online] Express.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/912321/eu-austria-hungary-orban-kurz-warning-integration-migration-European-Union> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2018].

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

EU. Furthermore, the Övp wants a cut in aid for immigrants, reducing the “Mindestsicherung”, a kind of citizenship income, at least for the first five years, to 650 euros a month, provided there has been at least one full-time job. As for family reunions, the Övp accepts them with the limitations already provided for by the 2016 Asylum Act and also it wants the course for citizenship examination to become compulsory. Hence, integration is a long-term process having as prerequisites: the acquisition of the German language, the acceptance of their values and participation in the labor market.

In the Front National’s statute, it is thoroughly described how they intend to find border that protect their country and stop uncontrolled immigration. The restoration of national borders and the exit from the Schengen area are highly stressed, also because the plan is to replenish the deleted items in the customs by recruiting 6,000 agents during the five-year period of governance<sup>28</sup>. They want to make it impossible to regularize or naturalize foreigners in an illegal situation, and simply facilitate and automate their expulsion. The central ambition is to reduce legal immigration to an annual balance of 10,000<sup>29</sup>, ensure that family reunification and reunification are automatic, and that French nationality is automatically acquired by marriage. Abolition of and rights, where the acquisition of French nationality will be possible only through parentage or naturalization, the conditions of which will also be more demanding and elimination of dual non-European nationality. Lastly, the Front National wants a return to the initial spirit of the right of asylum, which can only be granted following requests submitted to French embassies and consulates in countries of origin or neighboring countries.

As for the Lega Nord, their statute on immigration begins by stating that: “No one should feel compelled to leave their country and their roots for economic reasons. We can really help the most disadvantaged areas of the planet by supporting projects on the spot, certainly not by welcoming everyone.<sup>30</sup>” Thus, their aim is the regulation of immigration and repatriation of immigrants. This has to occur through the Identification and Expulsion Centers, that will be re-founded and

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<sup>28</sup> 144 ENGAGEMENTS PRÉSIDENTIELS. (2018). [pdf] Rassemblement National, p.6. Available at: <https://www.rassemblementnational.fr/pdf/144-engagements.pdf> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.6. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

implemented in no less than one for each Region, and at the same time, they will extend the detention period to at least 6 months, in order to make expulsion possible<sup>31</sup>. This provides that the circumstance of the absence of documents for asylum seekers involves the detention at the CIE in await of identification in compliance with EU directives and request that the Italian State acts as spokesperson in the European context to extend the possibility of detention until the completion of the asylum application procedure<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the management of the reception centers must be done by the Regions and not by private individuals. What is greatly important is to encourage countries of origin to sign bilateral repatriation agreements rather than economic agreements. International protection of the immigrants must be done by setting up reception centers in safe countries close to Libya under the aegis of the UN, with which Italy must become a proponent and the cost of both proposals is charged to a European fund<sup>33</sup>. Refusal to disembark for NGOs that are located on the edge of the Libyan territorial sea is crucial to raise alarm about self-induced shipwreck that prelude to the exploitation of illegal immigration. Crucial is the prohibition of disembarkation from NGO ships for passengers who are not in possession of identity documents. However, the most relevant point according to Matteo Salvini is to provide for a budgetary constraint according to which for the "refugee" the State will not be able to commit higher resources than those destined to a 100% invalidity pension of an Italian citizen<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, it will not be possible to establish greater contributions for the reception of foreigners compared to those aimed at policies to support Italians in poverty, which, according to ISTAT, are about 8 million, of which 1 million and 600,000 families in absolute poverty<sup>35</sup>.

This perfectly portrays the strive for all three parties to put national citizens before immigrants.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.6. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.7. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2.2 Security

For populisms, this theme is inevitably linked to the migratory phenomenon. The generalized punishment of the penalties and the immediate expulsion of foreigners condemned by a national court are two key points that the European populist parties have in common.

Austria has been spared by the recent wave of terrorist attacks. The latest episodes of terrorism date back to the decade 1975-85. Ordinary crime is also decreasing, especially when referring to homicides. And yet the Austrians feel insecure, alarmed by newspaper headlines showing the episodes of sexual assault by refugees. For this reason, the security theme has played an important role in the electoral campaign. Wolfgang Sobotka, Minister of the Interior, and Wolfgang Brandstetter, Minister of Justice, both drafted two draft laws to work more effectively on the fight against terrorism and crime: the first modifies the rules of public security, the second modifies the code of criminal procedure. Both go under the name "Sicherheitspaket" (security package). This double action mainly involves monitoring messaging via WhatsApp, Skype etc.; extension of video surveillance; registration with the name and surname of mobile phones sim cards from July 2018, as the cards are currently anonymous. The Security Package program states that "Austria is a safe country worth living in. To keep it that way, we are pursuing a proactive, comprehensive security policy. We will protect and promote people's fundamental rights and freedoms. This is the best way to take the ground away from anti-state extremism.<sup>36</sup>" First of all the aim is to make police profession more attractive, creating up to 2,000 training places from 2019 and introducing future-oriented investigation methods with expansion of legal protection<sup>37</sup>. The judiciary will be functioning and independent, and it will guarantee legal peace and security. At the same time, the citizens' high level of trust in the efficient and modern legal system and jurisdiction is a task for the future. Therefore, there will be further aggravation of penalties for violent and sexual offenses, acceleration of proceedings, inter alia through the use of electronic legal transactions and reduction

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<sup>36</sup> Zusammen. Für unser Österreich. (2018). [pdf] Die Neue Volkspartei, p.4. Available at: [https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm\\_Kurzfassung.pdf](https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm_Kurzfassung.pdf) [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

<sup>37</sup> Zusammen. Für unser Österreich. (2018). [pdf] Die Neue Volkspartei, p.4. Available at: [https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm\\_Kurzfassung.pdf](https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm_Kurzfassung.pdf) [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

and capping of court fees, and promotion of the concept of "detention at home"<sup>38</sup>. Austria is also committed to military national defense by the Austrian Armed Forces according to the principles of a militia system<sup>39</sup>. The effects of conflicts became visible through the migration crisis and require that the Austrian territory and its citizens be protected. More security for all people in the country will be provided by improving the framework conditions for the police, through sound training and further education, opportunities to research new phenomena in the light of science. The legal system must therefore be constantly adapted to new dangers and threats in order to give the police the opportunity to act, but further organizational development of the national police departments and the subordinate services must also be seen in this light. This requires personnel resources, coupled with a fair and individual right to service and pay within the framework of civil servants' service law. Lastly, but of extreme importance is combating anti-state extremism and anti-state radicalization, in order to prevent terrorist activities. In fact, the part regarding terrorism in the Ovp's statute starts like this: "As in previous years, the greatest threat to Austria's internal security comes from Islamist extremism. Even though Austria has so far been spared terrorist attacks, the security authorities must be vigilant in order to be able to intervene in advance against potential threats. This has been achieved thanks to the excellent work of the state security and security authorities. To ensure that the security authorities can continue to perform their work to the best of their ability, the legislator is called upon to create the necessary legal framework."<sup>40</sup>

The Lega Nord, in a document called "Security Resolution", deems it necessary to extend powers and functions to law enforcement to ensure greater legality for citizens. It also proposes the cancellation of the crime of excess of legitimate defense, currently governed by Article 55 of the Criminal Code<sup>41</sup>. In the League program, the theme of security and migration is always treated in a joint manner. Security and public order are clearly defined in the Lega's Government Program,

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<sup>38</sup> Zusammen. Für unser Österreich. (2018). [pdf] Die Neue Volkspartei, p.5. Available at: [https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm\\_Kurzfassung.pdf](https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm_Kurzfassung.pdf) [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Regierungsprogramm 2017 – 2022. (2018). [pdf] p.31. Available at: <https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm.pdf> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

<sup>41</sup> Article 55 of Italian Penal Code: "When, in committing any of the acts provided for by articles 51, 52, 53 and 54, the limits established by the law or by the order of the Authority or imposed by necessity are culpably exceeded, the provisions concerning culpable offences are applied, if the act is provided for by the law as a crime."

having as its first point the reform of the legitimate defense, with the prohibition of appeal in case of acquittal at first instance and exclusion of compensation for damages to the thief and relatives except for serious error. Terrorist acts or terrorist apology acts must be convicted through the 41-bis regime. The restructuring of unused prisons and expansion of their number is necessary, plus the obligation for prisoners to contribute to their own maintenance, even with replacement work. This will also lead to increased equipment and means for the forces of law and order and greater presence in the territory. Law enforcement agencies will be given non-lethal weapons such as teasers or key defenders, as well as adequate weapons. Furthermore, there will be anti-terrorism training courses (C. A. T.) for all operators who carry out activities of construction and control of the territory<sup>42</sup>.

To conclude, the Front National principal aim when referring to security is its restoration by ensuring protection of individual freedoms. There must be a massive reinforcement of police forces: in personnel with a recruitment plan for 15,000 police and gendarmes, in equipment with a modernization of the equipment, police stations and barracks and adaptation of weapons to new threats, but also morally and legally, referring to self-defense<sup>43</sup>. There has to be a refocus of the police and the gendarmerie on their mission of public safety by freeing them from undue and administrative tasks. A disarmament plan will be put in place for the suburbs concerned and there will be a takeover by the State on the lawless areas. The target is of 5,000 criminal and criminal gang leaders identified by the Ministry of the Interior and in order to prevent their reconstitution, they will establish in addition to the penal penalty the civil injunction of removal<sup>44</sup>. Finally, in order to stop criminal trafficking, Islamic terrorism, and terrorism in general field intelligence services will be restored.

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<sup>42</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.7. Available at:

<https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>43</sup> 144 ENGAGEMENTS PRÉSIDENTIELS. (2018). [pdf] Rassemblement National, p.5. Available at:

<https://www.rassemblementnational.fr/pdf/144-engagements.pdf> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

### 2.2.3 Education

Education is a methodical conferral or learning of intellectual and moral principles, valid for certain purposes, in accordance with the needs of the individual and society. Education of the masses is crucial, and this is the reason why populist parties emphasize its importance and see it as a basic and fundamental element to be included in their political programs. Education is strongly encouraged by increasing the funds at its disposal to ensure that people have more opportunities to learn, to attend schools and universities.

Recently in Austria, an agreement was reached between the federal state and the Länder for the development of the nursery school network. The topic now under discussion concerns the introduction of the second year of compulsory attendance. It would help foreign children, with more problems of integration and language learning, so that they can access the elementary school with less difficulty. Austria is the only country in Europe where the fate of its pupils is determined already at the age of 10, with the choice between a professional school and the gymnasium. In some cities, a "neue Mittelschule" (new middle school) was set up on an experimental basis. The Austrian People's Party program regarding education is introduced by saying that "The Austrian education system must not be designed to preserve what has been achieved or to change at any price. Every pupil has different talents and possibly needs to be supported. A modern education system must take these differentiated requirements into account with a differentiated range of school types.<sup>45</sup>" The most important point is the introduction of compulsory education, with the definition basic skills and basic knowledge such as: reading, writing, arithmetic, social and creative competences<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, the innovative strength of a state depends on the quality of its universities and on the commitment of all those who research, teach and study in them<sup>47</sup>. Hence, improving study conditions through a new access regulation management system, the introduction of moderate financial contributions from students to increase the nature of studying, increasing the number of training and study places for digital professions and continue to promote coordinated priorities at universities and make the range of courses offered more responsive to social and

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<sup>45</sup> Zusammen. Für unser Österreich. (2018). [pdf] Die Neue Volkspartei, p.6. Available at: [https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm\\_Kurzfassung.pdf](https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm_Kurzfassung.pdf) [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

economic need will lead to a further development of universities of teacher education and increased integration into university framework.

The Lega Nord similarity asks for more spending for investments in education and a reduction in the tax burden for students. The Lega Nord believes that it is necessary to ensure maximum financial support for non-state schools, in order to increase competition between public and private schools. Foreign students who do not yet speak the Italian language, before being included in the normal school circuit, will have to attend the "bridge classes" to learn the language and learn about Italian culture. This party proposes the abolition of the legal value of the qualification to stimulate competition among the different universities and to better assess the preparation of candidates in public competitions. Their educational statute in their Government program states: "Our new educational model starts from the assumption of respecting all the evolutionary phases of the child. During the first three years, the child acquires in succession the upright station, the faculty of language and the faculty of thought; in this way, the gradual liberation from hereditary conditioning takes place: this is how the individual manifests himself. It is the task of the school to encourage this process of development, which is prevalently psychological and emotional."<sup>48</sup> In fact the primary objects that unite the entire educational system must be oriented towards the creation of conditions for training to open up to the world of work and to guarantee and guide employment integration in sectors that meet individual expectations, demands and needs. Universities are generally very qualified in Italy, but the greatest problem is the absence of relevant working places, so the crucial point is to "stop brain migration"<sup>49</sup>. The aim is to maintain in Italy its best researchers, scientists and, in general, university-specialists such as those who do not find space in the country to grow professionally. The reason is that Italy invests only 1.2% in research and development<sup>50</sup>. As part of the solutions to ease the economic burden on the students, there is the idea of a contract with the student, in which the student agrees to pay the university an amount

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<sup>48</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.48. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>49</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.50. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

agreed upon at the time of enrollment, where thanks to the university "job placement"<sup>51</sup>, within a year of graduation, the student has found a suitable job.

The Front National, similarly to the other two populist parties of Austria and Italy ensures the transmission of knowledge by strengthening fundamental learning with regard to the French language, history, and mathematics. In primary school, they will reserve half of the teaching time to French, both written and spoken and delete "the teaching of languages and cultures of origin" (ELCO)<sup>52</sup>. The FN will make the school an "inviolable asylum where the quarrels of men do not enter" (Jean Zay)<sup>53</sup>, thus imposing not only secularity, but also neutrality and security. There will be a real restoration to true equality of opportunity by returning to the path of meritocracy. In Universities there will be a selection going from failure to a merit and a revalorization of merit scholarships. It will be essential to defend the model of French higher education, which passes by the complementarity of the university and the grandes écoles (prestigious universities). In such way, this will strengthen the network of French schools and high schools around the world, develop popular patronage by creating a digital platform dedicated and build a Heritage Planning Act to allow better support for the maintenance and preservation of heritage, which will be increased by an allocated budget of 25%.

#### **2.2.4. Economy and Business**

Economic reforms in the right-wing populist parties always tend to favor and help their citizens, in order for them to pay less taxes, to receive higher pensions and also to guarantee through the reduction of taxes to firms a greater possibility of employment for the unemployed.

In fact, if there is a subject on which Austrian parties think the same way it is taxation. The shared goal is to reduce taxes. The differences manifest themselves on the quantum. There is a competition for those who offer more. The winner is actually the leader of the winning party at elections,

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<sup>51</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.50. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>52</sup> 144 ENGAGEMENTS PRÉSIDENTIELS. (2018). [pdf] Rassemblement National, p.16. Available at: <https://www.rassemblementnational.fr/pdf/144-engagements.pdf> [Accessed 25 Sep. 2018].

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Sebastian Kurz, who promised a tax relief of 14 billion, not immediately, but during his legislature. The Övp, as just said, proposes: 14 billion cuts between income tax (3-4 billion), social security contributions (3 billion), tax relief (1.6 billion), deductions for dependent children (2 billions), reduction of corporation tax (1 billion) and other minor interventions. The party's statute on finance and taxes introduces itself by stating that: "In hardly any other country is the tax burden as high as in Austria. In 2016, our country had the fifth highest tax and contribution ratio in the entire EU at 42.9 percent. We will reduce the tax and contribution ratio in the direction of 40 percent. This means that small and medium-sized incomes in particular will be noticeably relieved and our companies more competitive. This will make it easier again to build something up through one's own work.<sup>54</sup>" Hence, the primary initiatives will be: the reduction of wage and income tax, the reduction of unemployment insurance contribution for low incomes and reduction of the VAT rate. Another necessary improvement will regard Austrian businesses that are actually exaggeratedly regulated, and this harms their location and endangers growth and jobs. In order to significantly change this situation, administration and bureaucracy will be reduced, there will be more flexible working hours, business promotion strategies and the thinning of employee protection regulations. Lastly, referring to pensions it is necessary for those who have worked all their lives to be able to rely on social security in old age. In order to be so, there will be the abolition of all remaining pension privileges, bringing the actual retirement age into line with the statutory retirement age, allow additional income from statutory retirement, all this mainly to fight against poverty in old age<sup>55</sup>.

Similarly, the Northern League calls for the abolition of the progressive tax on income and proposes the proportional tax system of the Flat Tax: a very low rate (15%) equal for all, with a deduction on a family basis to respect the constitutional principle of progressivity. According to Matteo Salvini, the adoption of this system will reduce tax evasion - as tax revenues will increase - and the tax burden, with a consequent relaunch for the Italian economy. The Flat Tax principle, in addition to family income, should also be extended to business income. The Lega Nord thus is in favor of the abolition of burden in tax matters, which means that today the taxpayer is at a great

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<sup>54</sup> Zusammen. Für unser Österreich. (2018). [pdf] Die Neue Volkspartei, p.12. Available at: [https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm\\_Kurzfassung.pdf](https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm_Kurzfassung.pdf) [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

<sup>55</sup> Regierungsprogramm 2017 – 2022. (2018). [pdf] p.108. Available at: <https://www.oevp.at/download/Regierungsprogramm.pdf> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2018].

disadvantage with the State, which contests him with an infidelity of scale<sup>56</sup>. This system will be abolished, and it will no longer be the taxpayer who has to prove his innocence before the State at his own expense. Concerning pensions, there will be the re-introduction of retirement pensions, which means access to the pension with more than 40 years of contribution regardless of age. About Italian businesses, this party is highly emphasizing youth-entrepreneurship and start-ups by creating a law that actually favors their true development. This would lead to economic, social and employment growth of the Italian nation. Finally, Matteo Salvini is presenting the "fourth industrial revolution" which will be compensated by a tax on robots carrying out human work<sup>57</sup>. The advent of the technological revolution will occur through: appropriate measures necessary to avert an employment crisis, the implementation of school education in secondary and university schools in order to encourage the birth of new professional skills and the support to micro and small enterprises in the renewal of their production processes.

Marine Le Penn, as leader of the Front National is urging the support of companies and the privileging of the real economy. The main point is to promote hiring, lower the social security contributions of small and medium-sized businesses, maintain the reduced-rate system at 15% of corporate tax for micro-businesses, and impose on the State and the local authorities the respect of the deadlines of payment by applying automatic penalties.

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<sup>56</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.3. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>57</sup> Elezioni 2018-Programma di Governo. (2018). [pdf] Lega, p.12. Available at: <https://www.leganord.org/programma-politiche> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

## CHAPTER 3

### LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION METHODS

#### 3.1 The Charismatic Leader and Social Networks

As already mentioned, the literature on populism contains a number of omnipresent elements. Among these, the importance of leadership in populist parties and, even more, of leadership. Mény and Surel point out in the book *Democracy and the Populist Challenge* that "despite their extreme variety, all populisms have one thing in common: the importance of leadership"<sup>58</sup>.

When referring to today's populist leaders it is essential to analyze the "charismatic leader" described by Max Weber. It is licit to one can ask oneself what path the European parliamentary system has taken to the point of soaking up such a strong dose of populism; whether it was a gradual and continuous infiltration or a massive and sudden introduction, coinciding with the collapse of the political class. It is important to evaluate the level of populist elements in politics that are taking place, thus whether it is limited to changing the style of its leading actors or whether it also influences the values cultivated by public opinion. Furthermore, it is interesting to analyze the immediate effects it is causing and what the foreseeable consequences will be in the near future. In particular, the tendency towards charismatic leadership is a sign of a general predilection for strong leadership. In fact, "strong leadership", in the case of populism, is above all an example of that simplicity which the party intends to restore to politics: it is the actual demonstration of how citizens' demands can be expressed without the need to resort to the lengthy representative process. Furthermore, there is a relationship of unlimited trust, which binds supporters to leaders in a pact of mutual solidarity. This leads to the personalization of populist parties which gives evidence that another type of policy different from the one based on professional and bureaucratized parties is possible. It is based on the idea of face-to-face mediation and relationship between the people and their leaders. Nowadays, the charismatic leaders have an essential tool to sponsor their political initiatives and ideas: the social networks. But, the obvious question may be: why should someone be interested to how people react to political pages on Facebook, Twitter or any other social

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<sup>58</sup> Mény, Y. and Surel, Y. (2002). *Democracies and the populist challenge*. New York: Palgrave.p.65.

platform? The first answer that comes to mind is that parties use social media communication and electoral campaigns to trigger specific emotions in their supporters, who will then vote for them.

### 3.2 Matteo Salvini

Matteo Salvini had inherited a party, the Lega, which was at 4% and managed to bring it to 17%, overtaking Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and then the government. Now the polls predict that in future elections he could gain a good 30%<sup>59</sup>. But what is the secret of its success? This party is well structured locally and deeply rooted in the territory, and it has a simple, clear and incisive ideology and communicative line. The main communicative model relies on the idea of sovereign populism, which means that the people are the sovereign in their own state. Salvini's message is straightforward and always in first person. He uses slogans that can easily be repeated: "Italians first", "Fun's over", "At home". Simple concepts that put people at the center and exclude the elite. A way of communicating that puts the listener in a position in which he can take sides, with or against him. Speaking directly and without filters to the people is the best solution and, in this case, it is social media that dominates. The feelings he uses in his posts on Facebook and Twitter are increasingly polarized and this is what happened during elections, polarization and likes grew more and more. Matteo Salvini has developed a strategy highly based on videos and negative emotions in his posts, that greatly affect people. An Italian journalist, Francesco Piccinelli Casagrande, was able to create a sentiment analysis of the language used to derive the nuances and emotions that arose to Italian people while reading Matteo Salvini's posts. The set of data that has been used for this analysis consists of over 4,000 posts on Facebook published between 2011 and January 25, 2018<sup>60</sup>. Sentiment analysis studies each sentence of a post through 10 dimensions and assigns them a score<sup>61</sup>. The evolution of Salvini's social strategy is said to have at least three explanations: he is approaching a crucial test for the League and its leadership, he wants to be a credible leader and

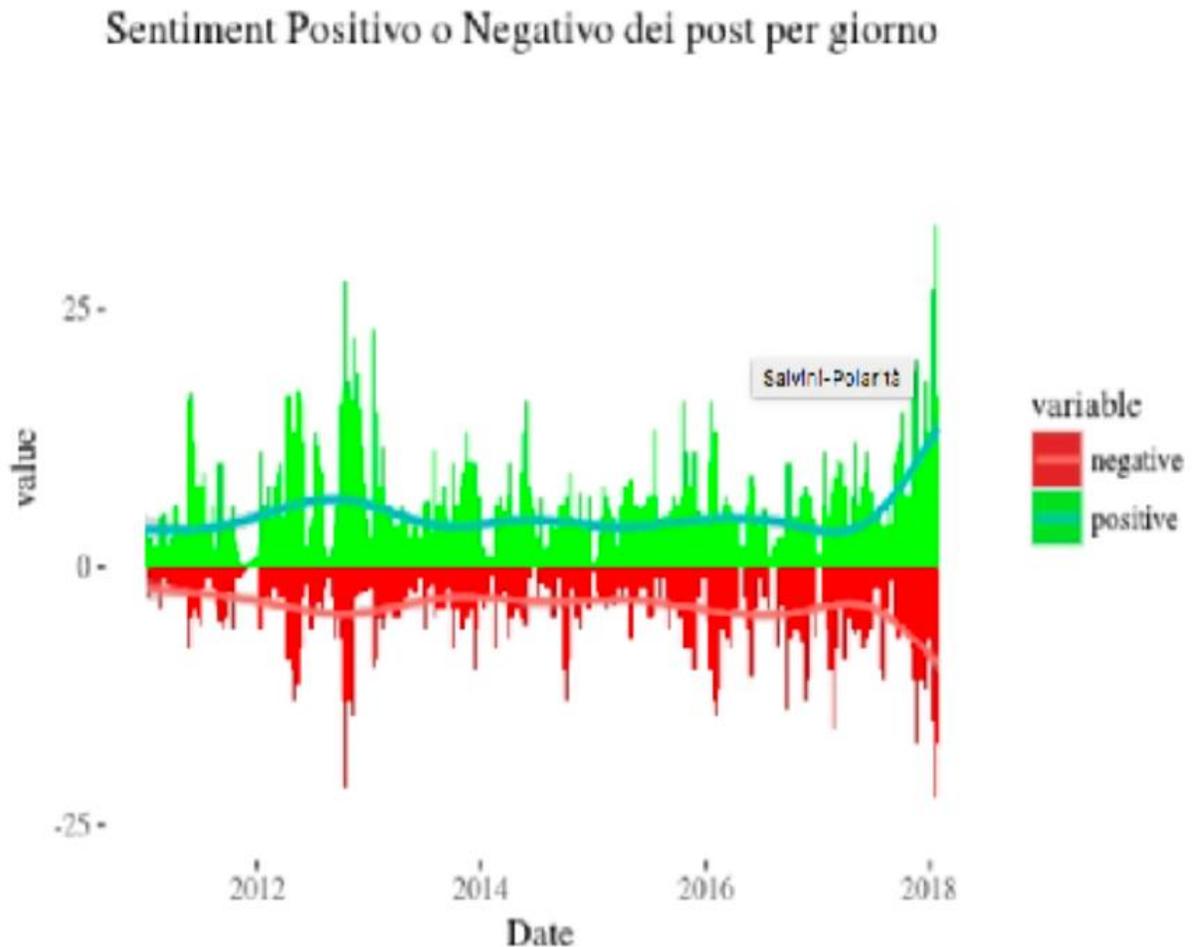
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<sup>59</sup> Rame, S., Sallusti, A. and Sgarbi, V. (2018). La Lega oltre quota 31%: ora toglie consensi ai Cinque Stelle. [online] *ilGiornale.it*. Available at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/lega-oltre-quota-31-ora-toglie-consensi-ai-cinque-stelle-1547010.html> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>60</sup> Piccinelli Casagrande, F. (2018). I segreti della strategia di Matteo Salvini sui social network - *Wired*. [online] *Wired*. Available at: <https://www.wired.it/attualita/politica/2018/02/15/matteo-salvini-strategia-social-network/> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2018].

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

that the League's spin-doctors have learned to refine more and more the language of their posts<sup>62</sup>. How has the polarization evolved through the simultaneous use of very positive and very negative themes in Salvini's posts? A description of this phenomenon is displayed on this graph<sup>63</sup>:



([https://images.wired.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/08191002/1518109801\\_Salvini-Polarità.jpeg](https://images.wired.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/08191002/1518109801_Salvini-Polarità.jpeg))

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<sup>62</sup> Piccinelli Casagrande, F. (2018). I segreti della strategia di Matteo Salvini sui social network - Wired. [online] Wired. Available at: <https://www.wired.it/attualita/politica/2018/02/15/matteo-salvini-strategia-social-network/> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>63</sup> Wired.it (2018). Sentiment Positivo o Negativo dei Post per Giorno. [graph] Available at: [https://images.wired.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/08191002/1518109801\\_Salvini-Polarità.jpeg](https://images.wired.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/08191002/1518109801_Salvini-Polarità.jpeg)

In this graph the posts are aggregated per day. The trend lines give a clear answer to the question as polarization is a constant element of Salvini's communication, but mainly in the last months it has become a crucial and structural component of his posts. This image ascertains the idea that this process is not accidental at all, in fact according to a study made by the University of Michigan in 2005, negative emotions are a way of drawing attention, but it is actually positive sentiment that brings a voter to the politician's side<sup>64</sup>. Thus, negative feelings make us lower our guard and make us accept messages that we would not have shared before, that are sent to us as packed with positive sentiment. Let's consider the last weeks before the Italian elections of March 2018, there was a confirmation of a trend that, in some way, can explain the Italians' decision to vote for the center-right parties: the world of politics increasingly speaks the language of the social networks. By examining Matteo Salvini's Facebook page, in the last seven days of the election campaign he published a total of 93 posts and shared many videos, many were live broadcasts, and each nearly exceeded 9.5 million views. On average, each intervention has collected thousands of comments from supporters and those who have expressed disappointment, were unaware that in doing so this helped to extend the scope of the message.

In short, at the communicative level, the strategy used by the leader of the Lega is undoubtedly a winning one. We can either agree or not agree with the opinions expressed, but the reality is that however this type of method works in order to gain followers and voters. Matteo Salvini's interventions are always direct, he actually speaks to people, asks them their own opinion on certain political initiatives he wants to set in place and he visits cities and villages to have direct contact with "his" people. He enters the daily life of the electorate and touches its most sensitive keys. He places accents on themes which affect his electorates in first person, such as: immigration, taxes, the failures of the opposing sides and the initiatives put in place on the territory. Some people only define his approach as populist, while his voters argue that it is the only possible way to put real problems under a magnifying glass and seek a solution collectively.

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<sup>64</sup> Piccinelli Casagrande, F. (2018). I segreti della strategia di Matteo Salvini sui social network - Wired. [online] Wired. Available at: <https://www.wired.it/attualita/politica/2018/02/15/matteo-salvini-strategia-social-network/> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

### 3.3 Sebastian Kurz

The Austrian People's Party leader, Sebastian Kurz, is only 31 years old. He is a man of nice presence, elegant and always precisely dressed, these are the aesthetic elements of the new Austrian Chancellor. The Austrian Foreign Minister since 2013, he has taken a battered Popular Party (ÖVP) and has led it, with 31.4% of the votes, to the clear victory. In order to understand how this occurred it is crucial to analyze his winning strategy through the use of social media and his charisma as a leader. He firstly renewed the party by completely changing the communication, especially through social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, on Facebook he reached 772.408 followers and 311.00 on Twitter. On his social profiles there are many photos that portray him with citizens and with elderly people, as to demonstrate his perpetual closeness to the problems of ordinary people. His communication, therefore, is easy to understand with videos, photographic material and messages full of nationalist rhetoric. He made a real customization of the party, building an entire election campaign based on his figure, and this element is evident if we consider his election posters in which the name and symbol of the party and the dark blue color disappear to be replaced with the more reassuring turquoise color. The fact is that Sebastian Kurz's PR strategy portrays him as spontaneous in behind the scenes posts, and this is the main strategic function because they set the fundamentals for his political agenda<sup>65</sup>. Thus, through this method he actually created a new positioning for his party, who once was stagnant on a 20% and with Kurz's arrival it greatly increased consensus. This occurred because he changed the themes, he changed his historical alliance with the Social Democratic Party of Austria and turned to the right-wing electorate. Therefore, the focal point of the entire electoral campaign has become the fight against immigration, a fight intended as a fight against non-EU migrants but also against the migration phenomenon in the Schengen area, aimed exclusively at using Austrian social services. It is clear that behind his victory there is a competent communication staff, which has been able to read perfectly the trends of the polls and, at the same time, perfectly position the candidate, bringing him to the final triumph. Today, thanks to social media, it is possible to follow politicians in real

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<sup>65</sup> Tragler, C. (2018). The show must go on --Sebastian Kurz and social media. [online] News Mavens. Available at: <https://newsmavens.com/news/aha-moments/1460/the-show-must-go-on-sebastian-kurz-and-social-media> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

time and this is the key to sponsor Kurz's political activity. These platforms helped him maintain control over his image and create an appealing background for his work. Experts actually describe his PR strategy as "very very structured"<sup>66</sup>, in fact on his Instagram page he is represented as an outstanding speaker, with various pictures that depict him caught up in conversations with famous leaders such as Vladimir Putin or Viktor Orbán. The article "*Political Storytelling on Instagram*" by Bernhardt and Liebhart addresses the strategic use of Instagram in election campaigns for the Austrian Federal President in 2016<sup>67</sup>, and they vividly highlight the fact that in general the pictures on Instagram may seem spontaneous but in reality, nothing is a coincidence on social media. They believe that those who elude traditional media such as newspaper and television and use social platforms have the actual control of the content but also the entire effect of their own presentation. However, this does not exclude the use of traditional media for additional consensus deriving from all parts of the Austrian society, and through this type of media not only can his image be sponsored but it can also be questioned or undermined from opposing parties.

### **3.4 Marine Le Pen**

Marine Le Pen, as well as all the leaders in the "populist" category, use social media, multimedia communication and related tools to increase their popularity. The Front National communication strategy office is located in Rue du Fauburg Saint-Honoré, in Paris. The classic election campaign could no longer work compared to the direct link that is created between the voter and the leader through social networks, this is why the communication team of Marine Le Pen started utilizing social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. These platforms are able to be aware of every subject and make any choice, which means that they can actually influence under certain aspects people's ideals. In fact, Facebook stands as a number one alternative

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<sup>66</sup> Tragler, C. (2018). The show must go on --Sebastian Kurz and social media. [online] News Mavens. Available at: <https://newsmavens.com/news/aha-moments/1460/the-show-must-go-on-sebastian-kurz-and-social-media> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2018].

<sup>67</sup> Liebhart, K. and Bernhardt, P. (2017). Political Storytelling on Instagram: Key Aspects of Alexander Van der Bellen's Successful 2016 Presidential Election Campaign. *Media and Communication*, [online] 5(4), p.15. Available at: [https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/55250/ssoar-mediacomm-2017-4-liebhart\\_et\\_al-Political\\_Storytelling\\_on\\_Instagram\\_Key.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/55250/ssoar-mediacomm-2017-4-liebhart_et_al-Political_Storytelling_on_Instagram_Key.pdf?sequence=1).

to the proliferation of populism, and it is through its tools that the phenomenon in question is spreading in the West.

Marine Le Pen is no exception and the Financial Times has described her communication strategists as a specialized and powerful group. The image of the Front National leader is structured by Philippe Vardon, a 36-year-old man and is one of the most influential of the group. He comes from the ranks of the Republicans and passed to the Front National when he became Le Pen's consultant for the regional elections of 2015. The Lepenist "propaganda" that appeals to people is centered on the claim "au nom du peuple" (in the name of the people), therefore, a story that sees Marine Le Pen make a continuous descent among the French people, on the social as well as during the real election campaign. The data shows that she has 1.6 million followers on Facebook and 2.1 million on Twitter. Thus, on the social level, Marine Le Pen's strategy is a winning one. This occurred because she is considered a woman that is close to her citizens, to her people, populist under many aspects. Her opponent Emmanuel Macron's electoral campaign was much more media-oriented, depicting himself as close to the testimonials of the new economy, thus distancing himself from the French factories and workers. Marine Le Pen instead created a popular election campaign, that saw her close to the real needs of society. Generally, leadership in populist parties tends to be perceived as charismatic; solving the "dilemma" of populism, that is that of the institutionalization, since it offers simplicity and immediacy<sup>68</sup>. As mentioned above, the leadership of populist parties may not necessarily be only charismatic, sometimes it can also be personalized, and this is Marine Le Pen's case. Weber theorized the typical process of the charismatic leader in succession, which confirms as charismatic not so much the current leader but his or her predecessor's leadership<sup>69</sup>, namely the historical leader and founder of the Front National, Jean Marie Le Pen. Marine Le Pen officially became leader of the party on the basis of a legal-rational process, but much of her authority derives from being the daughter of the historical leader of the Front. Max Weber explained that in the moment of the succession of a charismatic leader there is a confirmation of his charismatic character through various elements<sup>70</sup>. Among the various possibilities listed by Weber, one that can be followed is precisely that of selecting a family member as successor, since it is believed that "the charisma is a quality of blood and therefore inherent to the parental group,

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<sup>68</sup> P. Taggart: "An answer to the questions posed by the institutional dilemma that afflicts populism is constituted by virtue, finding it embodied in the person of the leader";p.166

<sup>69</sup> Weber, M. and Winckelmann, J. (1976). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: Mohr, p.245.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

and in particular to the closest relatives of the bearer: such is the hereditary charisma. The order of succession in this case is not necessarily that which applies to the appropriation of rights but is often heterogeneous; or the exact place of succession within the parental group must be established with the help of the means<sup>71</sup>". However, it is not enough to limit oneself to this idea of succession of charisma to understand the rise of Marine Le Pen; many other elements give an account of the leader's intention to become such and of her awareness of being able to be a leader. This can be seen by briefly looking at her career. Initially, Marine Le Pen did not want to devote herself to politics, although this, of course, since she was a child occupied an important place in her life. In 1986, at eighteen years of age, he joined the FN and in 1993 was also a candidate for legislative office in a Parisian constituency. After graduating in law, she starts her own law firm, but given the limited success obtained as a lawyer, Le Pen prefers to enter the legal office of her father's party. From this position, Marine Le Pen starts her escalation until she becomes the vice president of the Front National and begins to build a serious mortgage on her possible leadership in the party. In fact, at the Congress of Tours in January 2011, which coincides with the farewell of Jean Marie Le Pen, she became president of the party with 67% of the votes. Summing up what was previously hyper-personalization of leadership and the vertical hierarchy are the two central elements in Marine Le Pen's front national identity and organization as a leader.

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<sup>71</sup> Weber, M. and Winckelmann, J. (1976). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: Mohr, p.245.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is a simple question to take into consideration: why does populism seem to win everywhere, not only in European democracies, but all around the world? Populist parties and movements are conquering always wider spaces in Western politics. This does not mean, however, that suddenly, all citizens have gone mad and have decided to vote in large masses for these political parties; on the contrary, there are many reasons behind these choices.

The most obvious is that the traditional, liberal and social-democratic parties, are in great crisis, and have been at least since the nineties of the last century. Betraying the promises made election after election they have lost the rooting and the ability to mobilize their historical electorate, as well as the ability to attract new voters. "People are no longer able to identify with the parties," says Professor Jungar, "and this creates an opening for the new parties." Furthermore it should be added the fact that the traditional parties have not been able to give answers to the problems posed by globalization, which has caused impoverishment and suffering - aggravated by the crisis of 2008 and that of the Eurozone - for a part of the population that no longer has any historical reference able to interpret their needs, so that as soon as citizens have the opportunity to vote and give a critical signal to national and European elites, they do so. Also the contrast to immigration, as it has been seen in Brexit, in many European countries, and also in the American elections, plays a fundamental role in the rise of populism. The latter, fully exploits the desire to simultaneously defend their standard of living and their way of life against the invasion of foreigners who are bearers of other cultures and competitors in the labor market. Finally, the populist parties have become much more professional in many ways; especially on a communicative level-and have found a "media landscape much more receptive to their messages and their slogans. Furthermore, the appeal to the people takes on particular importance in the phases in which political regimes are challenged and questioned. When a democracy is consolidated and functioning satisfactorily, political forces simply mobilize citizens on their programs and values. Today, the idea of people remains in a latent state, but the crisis of Western democracies, the transition to a "post-democracy" that takes away sovereignty from the citizens, the commissioning of national policies by Brussels increases the distance between the political and economic elites and the population. For these multiple reasons the right-wing populist party of Sebastian Kurz in Austria and the Northern League in Italy won the elections and Front National is gaining more and more power in France.

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