

This article was downloaded by: [ECMI]

On: 21 January 2015, At: 07:59

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Perspectives on European Politics and Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpep20>

### In the Name of the People: The Euroscepticism of the Italian Radical Right

Manuela Caiani<sup>a</sup> & Nicolò Conti<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Assistant Professor, Institute for Advanced Studies, Department of Political Science, Vienna, Austria

<sup>b</sup> Assistant Professor, Unitelma Sapienza University, Faculty of Law, Rome, Italy

Published online: 17 Mar 2014.



[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Manuela Caiani & Nicolò Conti (2014) In the Name of the People: The Euroscepticism of the Italian Radical Right, Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 15:2, 183-197, DOI: [10.1080/15705854.2014.885766](https://doi.org/10.1080/15705854.2014.885766)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15705854.2014.885766>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# In the Name of the People: The Euroscepticism of the Italian Radical Right

MANUELA CAIANI\* & NICOLÒ CONTI\*\*

\*Assistant Professor, Institute for Advanced Studies, Department of Political Science, Vienna, Austria

\*\*Assistant Professor, Unitelma Sapienza University, Faculty of Law, Rome, Italy

**ABSTRACT** *In this article, we analyse Euroscepticism as a common trait of current radical right-wing formations. Public opinion in Italy has become increasingly polarized on the issue of European integration, and largely Eurosceptic. Thus, it is relevant to understand whether there is an ideological opposition to the European Union (EU) in Italy, both inside and outside the Parliament, which, in the future, could capture the malaise of the citizens and grow within the political system. Particularly, we explore differences and similarities between the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary right. We show that the ways in which they perceive and (negatively) represent the EU through frames is strikingly similar, despite the fact that these organizations do not really cooperate and are even in competition with each other. Ultimately, despite many factors being mature for issue mobilization and the creation of an EU cleavage in Italy, the success of this process largely depends on the ability of the radical right organizations to come to terms with their ideological background, give priority to this emerging cleavage and establish more synergies with each other.*

**KEY WORDS:** Radical right, frame analysis, party manifestos, discourses on Europe, Euroscepticism, Italy

## 1. Introduction

Despite being an understudied aspect of right-wing radicalism, scholars agree that Euroscepticism is a common trait of current radical right-wing formations, as a stance of both political parties (e.g. Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004; Mudde, 2007; Vasilopoulou, 2011) and non-party organizations (Caiani and Della Porta, 2011). According to Hooghe, Marks & Wilson (2002), this negative attitude towards European integration stems from ‘a series of perceived threats to the national community’ (p. 976), including immigration, multiculturalism, and the loss of national sovereignty and traditional values (*Ibid.*). These are all core myths of the radical right (Bar-On, 2011, p. 217) that are challenged by processes of supranational integration. This broad pessimistic orientation is

---

*Correspondence Address:* Manuela Caiani, Assistant Professor, Institute for Advanced Studies, Department of Political Science, Stumpergasse 56, A-1060 Wien, Austria; Nicolò Conti, Unitelma Sapienza University, Faculty of Law, Viale Regina Elena, 295, 00161 Rome, Italy. Email: [caiani@ihs.ac.at](mailto:caiani@ihs.ac.at); [nicolo.conti@unitelma.it](mailto:nicolo.conti@unitelma.it)

Although the article is the result of a joint effort, Manuela Caiani is particularly responsible for sections 2 and 3 and Nicolò Conti for sections 1 and 4, the conclusive section was written jointly.

reinforced by the fact that parties at the extremes of the political spectrum are often Eurosceptical as part of an anti-system posture that they adopt in order to challenge the mainstream parties (Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004; Sitter and Batory, 2008; Sitter, 2001; Szerbiack and Taggart, 2003). In recent times, the growing success of radical Euroscepticism is evidenced by the affirmation of radical right parties in the European elections,<sup>1</sup> certainly due in part to the second-order nature of these elections that rewards opposition parties (Schmitt, 2005), and also due to the capacity of such parties to represent sentiments that are widespread in society, but little represented by national governments (Mudde, 2007). For example, De Vries and Edwards (2009) show that the Eurosceptical rhetoric of radical parties has also contributed to shaping widespread discontent in public opinion. In turn, Werts, Scheepers and Lubbers (2013) show that (beyond perceived ethnic threats and political distrust) Euroscepticism is a contributing factor in explaining citizens' vote for the radical right.

More generally, the ideology and propaganda of radical right parties or movements 'influence people's frame of thought', offering 'a theory guidance in black-box situations' (Rydgren, 2003, pp. 52–53, 2008). For many issues, radical right forces frame the agenda that influences competition beyond the right, and even impact centre-left parties (Caiani, Della Porta & Wagemann, 2012, ch. 1). Thus, since Euroscepticism has become a main issue of the radical right, and one that is very influential for the explanation of its appeal to citizens, studying this version of Euroscepticism is not only a way to understand the ideological nature and the programmatic supply of a political milieu, but also a way to understand issue competition within the political system in general.

Italy is an interesting case study since research shows that, in general, Euroscepticism has not played a big role in the domestic party system. Even those anti-EU parties that are more cautious face serious difficulties in translating this underlying position in concrete institutional behaviour. A main reason for this is that, in the last 20 years, the Italian government has been very inclusive and been made up of large coalitions, so that most parties have, at different times, shared in the final government responsibilities, which has contributed to constraining their behaviour in a pragmatic manner (Conti & De Giorgi, 2011). On the contrary, public opinion has become increasingly polarized on the issue of European integration and largely Eurosceptic (Bellucci & Serricchio, 2012). Thus, it is relevant to understand whether there is an ideological opposition to the EU in Italy, both inside and outside the Parliament, that in the future could capture the malaise of the citizens and grow within the political system. Particularly, we explore differences and similarities between the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary right.

Despite the scientific (and social) relevance of radical right-wing positions on European integration, this topic has so far received limited attention (for important exceptions, see Mudde (2007)), with research often focusing on the radical left and the European Union (EU). In this article, we aim to fill this gap with a study of the Italian radical right, including both its party and non-party organizational faces.<sup>2</sup> However, we have grouped them on the basis of their numerous relevant commonalities (Bartlett, Birdwell & Littler, 2011, pp. 25–26).

Through a content and frame analysis covering a wide set of documents (party manifestos, newspapers, magazines, etc.), the political discourse of the Italian radical right on the EU has been mapped. We ask how 'European integration' is framed in the radical right discourses and we shed light on whether there is a convergence of the opposition to the EU with a large body of institutional and non-institutional organizations.

Particularly, in our analysis, we attempt to answer the following questions: what are the main features of Euroscepticism in Italian radical right organizations? What are the differences/similarities between Euroscepticism in parliamentary and non-parliamentary organizations? Finally, is there the potential that these organizations could provide a coherent EU ideology and capitalize on the increasing disaffection of a considerable number of Italian citizens?

Given the fact that the radical right has limited representation in Italian institutions, in this article, we focus on a broad group of (institutional and non-institutional) organizations. With respect to parties, we consider the main political force in the Italian parliament, the Northern League (or Lega Nord), which was also in government during 1994, 2001–2006 and 2008–2011. Although this party did not start out as a radical right force, but, rather, as a regionalist one, over time, it has embraced xenophobia and traditional values, including the defence of national sovereignty and identity against the EU. For this reason, many consider the Northern League to be a radical right party, although under the different labels of populist right (Tarchi, 2003), populist regionalist (McDonnell, 2006) or, more simply, radical right (Norris, 2005). The extra-parliamentary organizations that we included in our study are: the party, Forza Nuova,<sup>3</sup> and the two movements, Camerata Virtuale (neo-fascist) and the Veneto Fronte Skinheads. The analysis of these different organizations allows us to describe the nature of Euroscepticism within the Italian radical right and to assess whether a solid Eurosceptic ideology really is in the making within this broad political milieu.

## 2. Method

In our empirical analysis, we focus on ‘frames’, namely the ‘cognitive schemes’ that 1) help people give a meaning to social and political reality; 2) guide the choices of organizations; and 3) mobilize potential adherents (Snow *et al.*, 1986; Gamson, 1988; Snow & Benford, 1988). ‘Frames’ are interpretative packages often produced by the organizational leadership to mobilize potential adherents and constituents. In this sense, they provide the necessary ideological background through which single activists can locate their actions (Snow *et al.*, 1986; Gamson, 1988; Snow & Benford, 1988). As has been observed, discontent, resources and political opportunities are not simply ‘out there’ in the external world, but have to be cognitively perceived, constructed, defined and mediated into public discourse, i.e. ‘framed’, to become a basis for action (Snow *et al.*, 1986; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Frames also clarify the ‘identities’ of the contenders, distinguishing the ‘us’ from the ‘them’. It is exactly through the framing process that actors define who is a friend, and part of the self, and who is the enemy, or the ‘other’ (Snow & Benford, 1988). Consequently, frame analysis focuses on the process of attributing meaning, which lies behind the explosion of any socio-political conflict.

Specifically, we consider three different types of frames in the political discourse of the radical right (see Snow & Benford, 1988): *diagnostic* (which refers to the identification of some events or aspects of social life as problematic and in need of alteration – i.e. frames that allow the interpretation of a phenomenon as a social problem that becomes the object of collective action); *prognostic* (which indicates the possible strategies to be adopted to solve these problems); and *motivational* (the motivations to act on the basis of this knowledge). Then, we focus on the *ally/enemy* actors in the frames that, as we demonstrate, are elements that deeply characterize the discourse of the radical right. Finally, we distinguish

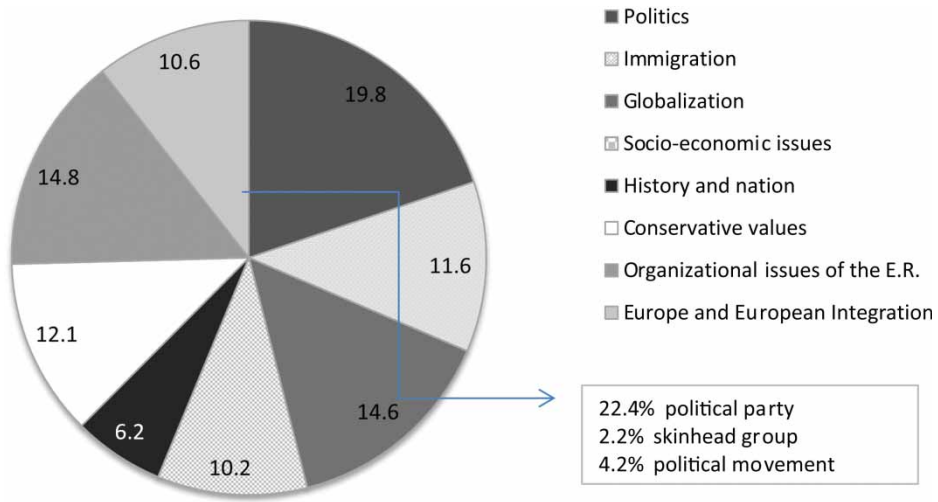
between specific frames on political, economic and cultural aspects of integration. This method of analysis allows us to relate every diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frame to specific actors and contents.

Given the differing nature of our analysed actors, we made use of a diversified body of documents for the analysis. Because the Northern League is, among our selected actors, the only one that is represented in the domestic institutions, we were able to analyse its institutional documents, particularly the Euromanifestos issued by the party to contest the European elections. These documents, issued by the party's central office, are rich in references to the EU, provide valuable information on the party's official stance, and represent, together with the expert survey, the main methodological tool to assess party positions on political issues. As the communication of the extra-parliamentary radical right is contained in non-institutional channels, we were compelled to perform a frame analysis on a more diversified and non-institutional set of documents, including the Forza Nuova's (FN's) newspaper, *Foglio di Lotta*,<sup>4</sup> all discussions stored in the online archive of the Camerata Virtuale (CV) forum,<sup>5</sup> and the bi-monthly magazine-bulletin, *L'Inferocito*, of the Veneto Fronte Skinheads (VFS)<sup>6</sup> (on the method, see also Caiani, Della Porta & Wage-mann, 2012). This large body of documents reflects the different communication styles and the various arenas in which these organizations operate. We show that, despite these asymmetries in communication, role and responsibilities, there is an impressive degree of convergence in the way these organizations perceive and represent the EU, a phenomenon that suggests that these forces all work, more or less, consciously together for the construction of a European cleavage within Italian society.

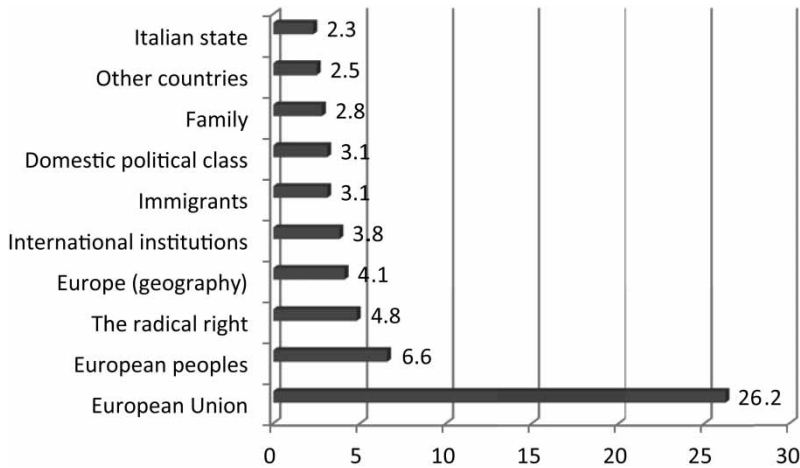
### 3. The Broad Representation of Europe as the Enemy

Our data indicate that there is a significant presence of Euroscepticism in the discourse of the Italian radical right organizations. We begin our analysis with the extra-parliamentary organizations (Figure 1) and show that European issues represent a significant debated topic in their discourse (accounting for 10.6% of all coded frames).<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the Forza Nuova party addressed European themes more frequently (22.4% of frames), whereas the other two youth groups (that are internally organized as movements, not as parties) addressed them less frequently (2.2% and 4.2% of frames, respectively). In addition, if we consider that Europe and European integration are often associated with globalization (14.6% of all coded frames), it is evident that the internationalization processes play an important role in the rhetoric of this political area (the two topics together account for one-fourth of all frames). These findings confirm that opposition to Europe and globalization have become crucial elements for the new radical right (Mudde, 2007).

As to the construction of a social collective self-identity (the 'us') and, therefore, the identification of the main important allies and enemies (the 'them'), the EU and European institutions are very prominent (Figure 2) among the main quoted enemies (26.5% of frames).<sup>8</sup> First of all, a clear differentiation (and a sharp conflict) is depicted between the EU (particularly European institutions) on the one hand, and the 'European peoples' on the other, with the latter represented as victims in several sectors of social, political and economic life. Indeed, the EU is represented as a 'distant and oppressing power' (working against the interests of the 'Italian people'), a 'totalitarian super-state that aims at Europe-wide homogenization (e.g. against nations, cultures)', a 'centralizing state',



**Figure 1.** The main issues in the discourse of the (extra-parliamentary) radical right in Italy  
 Note: No. of frames = 2400.



**Figure 2.** The most important actors (allies and enemies) in the discourse of the extra-parliamentary radical right on Europe (%)  
 Note: The first 10 more frequently recurring types of actors out of 200 categories (= 53.5% of total actors)

the ‘technocratic Europe of Maastricht, and a ‘mason (*massona*) and relativistic’ Europe under steady control of international finance and the United States (US).

It is also worth noticing that European integration is often depicted by these organizations with reference to *conspiracy theory*, as is typical of the traditional extreme right (Tateo, 2005). Likewise, Europe is associated with a secret economic–political power,

the aim of which is to dominate the world. In this respect, we found references to a mysterious ‘powerful oligarchy’, a ‘global elite’, ‘global lobbies’, a ‘mondialist sponger’ – as well as to other unspecified economic actors (‘high international finance’, ‘big economic powers’, ‘strong powers’) supposedly behind the main policy choices of the EU.

Beyond the EU institutions, there are other actors that are frequently referred to as ‘enemies’ in the European discourse of these organizations. First of all, the ‘domestic political elites’ (of both left and right) who, instead of defending the national interests, have opened the borders to multinationals and to immigrants. These elites are described as ‘cartel politicians’, ‘behaving improperly’, ‘only oriented to power’, ‘highly paid’, ‘alien to the people’, ‘not credible’, ‘not linear’, ‘not courageous’, ‘corrupt’ and ‘easily corruptible’, ‘focused on money’ and even ‘anti-Italian’. Furthermore, they are labelled as ‘cowards’, ‘short-sighted’, ‘narrow-minded’, ‘electoral tricksters’ and even ‘drug addicts’. The institutional parties are described as ‘hostile to human dignity’, ‘decoupled from the people’s will’, ‘not interested in finding solutions to problems’ and ‘responsible for social deprivation’. We frequently found expressions such as ‘cartel parties’, which refer to how collusively mainstream parties collaborate with each other to exploit their ‘clients’ (the electorate), ‘enrich themselves at the expense of the ordinary people’, and how they are manipulated by European institutions, banks and the media. Then, many references concern the US, which is represented as the ‘main force’, ‘logistic base’ and the ‘armed arm’ of globalization,<sup>9</sup> an ‘imperialistic and arrogant power with hegemonic goals’.<sup>10</sup> Finally, international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank (WB) are represented as ‘anonymous criminals without country and nation’ (FN, March 2013), whose global influence makes them capable ‘of dominating and starving the people of the world’.<sup>11</sup>

The only true opponents of European integration are, indeed, the ‘nationalists’ – ‘valiant combatants who do not bow their own heads’ and the ‘only force that can protect the victims of the complot from globalization’ (VFS, June 2005). The radical right identifies itself with ‘the Italian people’ (described as ‘without hope’, ‘without power’, ‘hungry’, ‘unhappy’, ‘desperate’), oppressed by the negative effects of European integration (We are the people, FN, September 2004).

We now move the analysis to the case of the Northern League. Given the different nature of this party, the only one in our selected group that has been represented in the Italian Parliament for the past 25 years, the analysis has been carried out differently. The communication of this party is of course more institutional and, therefore, more specialized in the different arenas in which the party operates. More precisely, our decision to analyse Euromanifestos allows a high degree of depth as far as the contents of EU communication are concerned. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to measure how often the Northern League refers to Europe in the Euromanifestos, as contestation of Europe is exactly what these documents are meant for. As a result, we decided to analyse the discourse of the Northern League on Europe using different data sources and different metrics from those used in the analysis of extra-parliamentary organizations. In addition, we considered the evidence that has emerged through the analysis of the latter as a benchmark to evaluate the stance of the Northern League and establish whether there is a convergent EU ideology held by the radical right that operates within and outside electoral institutions.

We found that, similar to what happens with the extra-parliamentary groups, the Northern League represents the ‘people’ as inherently pure and victims of corrupt ‘elites’. The theme of the party’s self-identification with the people is also present here (‘the *Northern*



*League* is the voice of the people') together with the typical populist idea of the party being called to fight a historical battle to rescue its people (Rydgren, 2007). Then, the way the supposed EU threat is represented is very similar to that reported with reference to the extra-parliamentary groups. The representation of people by the Northern League is, instead, more ambiguous than that of the extra-parliamentary organizations: being a regionalist party, it refers distinctively to the Italians of the North (*popolo padano*), whose self-determination is its original *raison d'être*; then it refers to the European peoples; but (as we discuss below) its discourse has also become increasingly nationalistic with respect to global and European phenomena, so it also accommodates a defence of the Italian people from outside pressures. Otherwise, the discourse of the Northern League is framed in a way that very much converges with the one presented above: people are naturally wise and virtuous (also as a result of the Christian heritage in Europe), but their rights and survival are in danger due to the anti-democratic nature of the European elites and EU institutions (particularly the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Court of Justice, made up of 'technocratic elites alien to the real interests of the people') and due to the corrupt interests of the global finance and international lobbies. These powers are considered to be working against the self-determination of the people, imposing on them cultural models, ethnic compositions and economic interests at odds with their natural aspirations. The EU process as a whole is represented very negatively as the product of an anti-democratic global ideology, aiming at the dismantling of the European system of social rights.

Over time, the Northern League has become more and more critical of the EU (Huysseune, 2010), embracing a typical radical rhetoric – a shift in its political alignment that has encompassed other issues as well. This is despite the fact that once in government, this party tends to adopt a pragmatic strategy more than an effective anti-system tactic (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2005) and to be a rather acquiescent legislator (Conti & De Giorgi, 2011). Certainly, despite this gap between rhetoric and institutional behaviour, the party tries to present itself as a Euro-critical force within an Italian party system otherwise characterized by widespread attitudes of loyalty toward the EU (Roux & Verzichelli, 2010).

Regarding the proposed solutions to the diagnosed problems, the Northern League has particularly emphasized inter-governmentalism and the preservation of the veto powers of member-states to protect democracy and the rights of the European people. The prognosis constitutes the main difference between the Northern League and the other extra-parliamentary groups: the former frame solutions within acceptable institutional boundaries, whereas the latter are more vague in proposing viable strategies and only make broad reference to plebiscitarian un-mediated solutions carried out spontaneously by the people and led by a charismatic leader.

In the end, we found a high degree of convergence between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary radical right organizations in their broad opposition to the EU as to the diagnosis, motivation and representation of allies and enemies. They represent the EU in a way that is similar to the point that, although it is not possible to talk about a voluntary alliance among these forces, which usually do not really cooperate with each other,<sup>12</sup> it is still possible to talk about common feelings and shared beliefs on the European integration process. This translates into a similar representation of the EU through frames. The main differences that we could find concern the prognosis that is more institutionally correct and compatible with representative democracy in the case of the Northern League, but which can be

considered plebiscitarian and anti-democratic in the case of the extra-parliamentary organizations.

#### 4. The Specific Contents of Opposition to Europe

In this section, we analyse more specifically the contents of opposition to the EU process. In particular, the analysis is carried along the three dimensions of political, economic and cultural integration. These three faces of the EU process characterize the EU as a level of government, as a market, as well as a polity. The EU-led change across these dimensions has been at the centre of a theoretical debate in the recent past (Bartolini, 2005; Cotta & Isernia, 2009) as well as empirical analyses (Bellucci *et al.*, 2011; Best, Lengyel & Verzichelli, 2011; Conti, Cotta & Tavares de Almeida, 2011) because of its significant impact on citizenship (Benhabib, 2002). European integration is changing not only the economy and the policies of the Europeans, but also their political entitlements, duties, systems of representation and identity. In other words, the EU process is changing the meaning, scope and working of citizenship in contemporary Europe. Thus, for the sake of our analysis, we decided to go beyond the general opposition to the EU by the far right and insert our investigation in the above theoretical framework, mapping the positions of radical right organizations on the most important aspects of integration and its impact on citizenship – namely, political, economic and cultural integration. This operational choice allows us to show that radical right Euroscepticism is not only an underlying principle, it is also an articulate ideology.

First of all, our data show that the European discourse of the far right really is multidimensional. In the case of extra-parliamentary organizations, this covers the political (50.2% of all frames on Europe) and the economic and policy aspects (45.2%) as well as the cultural dimension (4.6%) of integration.<sup>13</sup> As an example of the awareness of the multidimensional nature of the EU process, we could quote the following statement by Forza Nuova: ‘European integration, as well as globalisation, not only have economic consequences, they also influence the socio-cultural and political context’ (FN, May 2002). In the case of the Northern League, the tendency is similar: the political (49.3%) and the economic and policy (31.3%) aspects of integration are more salient than the cultural ones (17.6%, which is, however, more than in the extra-parliamentary organizations and increasing over time).<sup>14</sup>

European integration processes, according to the extra-parliamentary organizations, not only lead to the ‘loss of peoples’ identities’, they also bring limitations ‘to the sovereignty of the national states’ (FN, May 2002) and ‘to national interests’ (FN, September 2003) (*diagnosis*). Europe is described as a set of non-democratic and opaque institutions, far from citizens (a ‘centralizing state’, a ‘dictatorship’, an ‘intrusive body’, a ‘distant and oppressing power’), and its ‘deficit of legitimacy’ is underlined (e.g. ‘the European Commission is the self-appointed, not-elected, decisional tool’ aimed to impose ‘the wishes and powers of the anti-national forces and of the users’ (FN, September 2003)). For this reason, a call has been made to bring the powers back to the state and to ‘empower the nation state’ or ‘the original national, cultural and economic identity’ of the people (VFS, 2004) (*prognosis*). At the same time, these organizations prescribe a rebuilding of a ‘new Europe’, ‘based on its traditional glorious history’ (i.e. the reference is to a past as old as the Roman empire), a Europe that should be ‘big and strong, independent from the United States’ (*motivation*), ‘with a single European army’, an independent power

capable of self-determination and defence against globalization and the American enemy (VFS, May–June 2004). The general call for action is to ‘save, by any means, the millennial history, culture and tradition of Europe against the foreign interferences’, while the EU is represented as a product of external interests that are alien to the European people. Indeed, the preference of these radical organizations is inserted in an ideology based on a ‘micro-nationalism’ of native regions that are opposed both to Europe-wide federalism and to EU centralization (in Brussels). Noticeably, European integration has pushed the radical right to re-elaborate its belief system and move from the traditional hierarchical racism in favour of the superiority of a race or a country above all others (Tateo, 2005) to a ‘neo-racism of differences’ that still insists on the separation of nations, but on the basis of their equality and requiring a joint effort by the European nations to fight against their common enemies: international finance, technocratic elites, the US or global interests.

The Northern League shares similar arguments with the extra-parliamentary organizations. They consider any delegation of competence to the EU as negative and endangering democratic representation (*diagnosis*). Furthermore, inter-governmentalism should be preserved and expanded as the defining principle in the EU (‘a confederation where the sovereignty of states is not altered’) and some powers should be brought back to member-states. In particular, EU law should become secondary compared to state law, which, in turn, should be given supremacy (*prognosis*). These measures are deemed fundamental in order to preserve the rights and independence (‘popular sovereignty’) of the European people (‘deprived of their voice’) (*motivation*), who should also be given the right to decide on major steps in integration (‘it is unacceptable that decisions are imposed on the people, as has happened in the past with the creation of the Euro’) and even the possibility of their country exiting the EU. Overall, the way political integration is framed by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary right-wing organizations is very similar in the politics dimension. However, given its role of legislator and of a party often in government, the Northern League is far more specific than the other organizations in terms of diagnosis and prognosis, making systematic reference, for example, to specific EU treaties, to the EU legal system and to the powers of specific EU institutions.

Economic integration also plays an important role in the European discourse of all radical right organizations. The frame analysis shows that they intensely associate this face of integration with globalization and criticize the EU primarily for its negative impact on employment security and social harmony (*diagnosis*). In particular, the building blocks of economic integration (i.e. the Common Market and the monetary union) are severely criticized. Specifically, the removal of state borders and trade barriers, the Eastern enlargement, and restrictions on state aid to national companies are aspects that are considered more negatively (Lega Nord, 2004). The terms that are more pessimistically associated with European economic integration include ‘flexibility of work’, ‘free market’, ‘increasing instability of the labor market’, ‘the rise of workers’ exploitation’, ‘delocalization of firms’, ‘precariousness’ and ‘third world countries (...), that are exploited by the multinationals’ (FN, May–June 2004). More broadly, European policies are represented by the radical right as serving the interests of international finance at the expense of the real interests of the European people. The influence of economics over politics and the hegemonic role of the US are also criticized, particularly by the extra-parliamentary organizations, which are characterized by strong anti-Americanism, as they represent American power as the driving force behind EU economic policy, whose final goal is the weakening of the European states to the benefit of ‘the winner of the economic competition’ – the

United States. We found that this radical opposition to European economic integration is often voiced through dramatization and stories of moral panic (Härmänmaa, 2002). For example, the crushing effect of the EU on domestic social and economic life, resulting in a consequent increase of unemployment, reduced competitiveness of small business that will cause the closure of many companies and small enterprises, the invasion of foreign goods, a decline of communitarian values and ties and a decline of the middle class, and a flood of immigrants. In particular, immigration will put ‘social security and employment even further at risk’, ‘exploit the social state’ and ‘create competitive advantages for foreigners vis-à-vis the Italians’. In the end, the Italian opposition to economic integration is framed by the typical radical right arguments of grievances and ethnic competition, opposing immigrants. The radical right proposes solutions characterized by strict protectionism, a ‘chauvinist’ conception of the welfare (Mudde, 2000) and even ‘self-sufficient state’ (FN, March 2003) (*prognosis*). It is interesting to note that beyond their anti-immigrant discourse, and although they occupy opposite camps along the political spectrum and even present remarkable different preferences for the integration process (Conti & Memoli, 2012), the views of the radical right and left converge a great deal regarding their representation of European economic integration and, implicitly, they mutually reinforce within the system the argument that the EU is an engine of social injustice.

The third dimension of European integration that we examined concerns culture. The EU is considered by the radical right as responsible for the loss of identity, deterioration of ethno-cultural specificities and even the annihilation of the European peoples, it being an engine of cultural disintegration, not of integration (*diagnosis*). More specifically, this negative cultural influence of the EU is presented with reference to traditional and religious (Catholic) values since the EU ‘does not protect the family’, ‘does not support an increase of the birth rate’, ‘equates catholic religion with other religions’, ‘protects sexual deviances’, and ‘gives rights to civil unions between homosexuals’.

The EU is particularly blamed for promoting the ideas of a ‘multi-ethnic (or “multi-racial”, as often it is named) society’ or ‘an *ethno-masochistic* utopia’ (VFS, May 2004). The solutions that are proposed can be summarized in the triarchy of ‘nation, family and god’ (*motivation*) and include a return to the ‘traditional values, customs and usages’ through the preservation of cultural and religious traditions (*prognosis*) that are increasingly ‘threatened by the invasion of immigrants’ and particularly by Islam, ‘the ancient enemy of Christian and Western values’ (EUMC, 2004). Cultural identity is exclusively defined by all these organizations with reference to ascribed elements (especially Christianity), while the achieved elements (e.g. to become a citizen, respect laws, learn the language of the country) are not considered part of identity or useful in building a cultural ‘we’-feeling.

Certainly, the emphasis on Christianity as the main element of European culture makes any effort by the EU to build a European identity by definition insignificant, given that the Christian religion is far older and totally independent from the EU process. In addition, it excludes all those who are not Christian by birth from the European identity. It is important to note that these identity discourse elements are also shared by the Northern League, despite its institutional character and governmental responsibility. Indeed, its original nature of a regionalist party and its fight for the self-determination of the Italian regions are purely based on economic justifications, not on cultural ones.

Conversely, over time, the stance of the Northern League has become more nationalistic in cultural terms and xenophobia has become more central to its programme. In particular,

this happened after another party, the post-fascist National Alliance, moved from the extreme to the core of the political spectrum with a re-alignment resulting from a merger with Berlusconi's party, People of Freedom. This process freed up space at the extreme right of the political spectrum, space which is now resolutely occupied by the Northern League, which has attained ownership of issues such as the preservation of national sovereignty and culture from outside 'enemies'. Because of its relevant role within government coalitions (notably, under the three-time Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi), the Northern League has become rather influential in immigration policy and has definitely contributed to its harshening.<sup>15</sup> Islamophobia is particularly prominent in the discourse of the Northern League; for example, the party has defined Turkey as 'historically and culturally not European' and has defined the Turks as 'descending from gipsy peoples of central Asia, pervaded by a tribal culture of exaltation of armed clans', and, furthermore, it claims that 'the union of Turkish ethnic identity with their religious identity creates an explosive national-islamic mix'. According to the Northern League, Turkey should not even be considered a possible candidate for EU membership as it represents a threat to European identity.

## **5. Final Remarks**

In this article, we showed that there is a high degree of convergence in the Eurosceptical discourse of a large and diversified group of Italian radical right organizations. The way they perceive and (negatively) represent the EU through frames is strikingly similar, despite the fact that these organizations do not really cooperate and are even in competition with each other. This finding shows that, regardless of their competition strategies and different levels of popular success, all these forces share a broad belief system and similar views on the processes of internationalization, particularly of supranational integration in Europe. This finding is relevant to the Italian political system because it shows that although contestation of the EU has not been very salient for party competition in the recent past, it is an issue that is growing in importance at the flanks of the political spectrum. Considering the growing Euroscepticism of the Italian public opinion, it is also an issue that could become combustible for Italian society in the near future, especially in times of economic crises when austerity measures are imposed by the EU. At this point, popular Euroscepticism could easily find representation in the radical right parties and movements that, as shown in this article, are very active in proposing a critical vision of the EU and alternative views of the current trajectory of the integration process. As the research shows (Pappas, 2008), the far-right finds more opportunities to become successful in contexts where there is a niche of citizens whose malaise is not represented by the other parties and, thus, there is room for political mobilization. This seems to be the case in Italy. However, the link between political organizations and citizens can only be fully achieved if the former supply ideological frames that give a coherent structure to those popular attitudes that are latent in the political system (Rydgren, 2003). In this respect, our frame analysis shows that this process is very advanced and that radical right forces of various kinds – whether a party or movement organization and in or outside the national parliament – are really working in order to politicize the EU issue and give representation to an emerging cleavage of Italian society.

Certainly, there are some ambiguities that need to be resolved before the radical right forces can impose such a cleavage in the Italian scene. We found that many elements

(diagnosis, motivations, representation of allies and enemies) of their political discourse concerning the EU really converge, therefore these could become issues for coherent political mobilization. However, on other issues (prognosis, ‘we’-building), there are some important differences between the Northern League (which, thanks to its institutional role, could more easily channel an EU cleavage within the political system) and the extra-parliamentary organizations. As to prognosis, the Northern League proposed solutions (inter-governmentalism, veto power of member-states, superiority of state law over EU law) that are more acceptable from the democratic point of view and confined to viable institutional practices. Conversely, the extra-parliamentary right organizations are more vague, but also more radical (a popular revolution) in their supply. Hence, it remains to be seen whether the more institutional Northern League will manage to give direction to formless prognosis by the other radical right organizations and take the lead and give institutional representation to the widespread malaise directed at the EU.

Finally, another critical point concerns the different conception of people by these organizations. The extra-parliamentary organizations are fiercely nationalistic, but the Northern League is more ambiguous in this respect as it combines aspects of localism with others of nationalism vis-à-vis the EU. Until the Northern League decides to abandon its original mission and to de-politicize conflict within the Italian state (i.e. between the central state and the North of the country) and to empower the state against the EU, it could be difficult to achieve cooperation between these different groups and establish a solid anti-European block within Italian society. In the end, despite many factors being mature for issue mobilization and the creation of an EU cleavage in Italy, the success of this process depends on the ability of the radical right organizations to come to terms with their ideological background, give priority to this emerging cleavage and establish more synergies with each other.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the most recent European elections of 2009, Eurosceptical radical right parties were particularly successful in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Among the party groups in the European Parliament, two are openly Eurosceptic: the European Conservatives and Reformists and the Europe of Freedom and Democracy.

<sup>2</sup> Despite there being an open debate – one that goes beyond the scope of this article – on conceptual definition and terminology, this party family is defined in the literature by some common ideological attributes, such as nationalism, exclusionism, xenophobia, defence of the state from supranational and international organizations, welfare chauvinism, revisionism and traditional ethics (Mudde, 2007, p. 21). At the same time, ‘despite being referred to as “far-right”, many of these groups are not easily placed according to traditional political categories, often combining elements of leftwing and rightwing philosophy, mixed with populist language and rhetoric’ (Bartlett, Birdwell & Littler, 2011, pp. 25–26). In the article, we group different organizations on the basis of their common ideological attributes, but we do not separate them on the basis of their differences that are indeed relevant.

<sup>3</sup> The political party, Forza Nuova, has been chosen because it is broadly recognized as the most rapidly growing, active and determined extremist group on the extreme right Italian scene (Caldiron, 2001; Ferrari, 2006). This organization shows, on the one hand, the characteristics of a militant movement organization, thus obtaining the support of radical right-wing activists, while, on the other hand, it has contacts with the institutional far right, especially at the local level, where it is permanently searching for unity of action with the Northern League for campaigns against immigration and Islam and in favour of ‘law and order’ principles. Therefore, the political discourse of this group can be considered

as representing a mix between the institutional (and more ‘politically educated’) far right and the grass-roots basis. The second (more informal) group is Veneto Fronte Skinheads, which is the main representative of the skinhead movement in Italy. Founded in 1985 as a non-profit organization for the promotion of cultural and sport activities, it is considered one of the most violent racist organizations in Italy (EUMC, 2004). Camerata Virtuale is an online discussion forum and a meeting point for several radical right political movements.

- <sup>4</sup> The year 2004 is excluded from the analysis of Forza Nuova’s magazine because it was impossible to get any copies for this year from the organization. We sampled two issues per year. All articles in the main section of the paper (the first three pages) were checked for statements containing frames, totalling about five or six per edition (including the editorial).
- <sup>5</sup> Analysed for the years 2005 and 2006.
- <sup>6</sup> Analysed from 2002 to 2006 (since this publication is informally produced and printed, it is not always published in a bi-monthly rhythm, but sometimes more rarely).
- <sup>7</sup> The codebook used for the analysis is available on request from the authors.
- <sup>8</sup> While the EU is the most frequently recurring actor in the documents of Forza Nuova (7.4% of all its frames) and significantly present in the discourse of the subcultural skinhead group (occupying third position among all mentioned actors, with 4.3% of frames), it is under-represented in the discourse of political movements (0.5%). This can suggest that although political issues play an important role in the discourse of the extra-parliamentary radical right, supranational politics (in this case, ‘European politics’) is a more relevant topic for grass-roots militants. Ultimately, the more institutionalized (or formal) a group is, the more these issues become part of its political discourse.
- <sup>9</sup> VFS, May–June 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> They are labelled as an ‘arrogant’ and ‘imperialistic power’, the ‘root of several dangers for the world’ (FN, various issues).
- <sup>11</sup> It is striking to notice that, here, the criticism of the extreme right towards globalization is almost overlapping with that of the global justice movement: The IMF, for instance, is accused of engaging in ‘criminal’ behaviour and practising ‘neo-colonialist politics’ by exploiting foreign debt (FN, May 2002).
- <sup>12</sup> Many observers agree that a genuine radical right does not really exist and that this broad milieu is actually made up of many organizations that do not cooperate, but, instead, compete with each other (Mudde, 2007, p. 159).
- <sup>13</sup> We classified the following as ‘political dimension’ categories: European integration and institutions, nation-state and the EU, the US and the EU. Then, we classified the following as ‘economy and policies’: domestic system and the EU, international economic system, monetary policy, agricultural policy, taxation, pension, employment and social policy. Finally, we classified the following as ‘culture’: culture and society, European identity and enlargement.
- <sup>14</sup> In the case of the Northern League, we made use of the Euromanifesto data gathered by the University of Mannheim, which is also part of the European Election Survey. The political dimension includes the following domains: external relations, constitution freedom and democracy, political system. The ‘economy and policy’ dimension includes: economy and welfare. Finally, the ‘cultural dimension’ includes: fabric of society. Only the Euromanifestos of 1994, 1999 and 2004 were considered for this calculation, as the Euromanifesto of 2009 was a very long joint document that was issued to contest both the European and local elections; therefore, a calculation of frequency distribution would be misleading for this document, which addresses the contents of both the local and the European arenas.
- <sup>15</sup> The 2002 Bossi-Fini law on immigration was co-authored by the party secretary and founder of the Northern League, Umberto Bossi.

## References

- Albertazzi, D. & McDonnell, D. (2005) The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government: In a league of its own, *West European Politics*, 28(5), pp. 952–972.
- Bar-On, T. (2011) Transnationalism and the French nouvelle droite, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 45(3), pp. 199–223. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2011.585013> (accessed 10 December 2013).
- Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J. & Littler, M. (2011) The new phase of digital populism. Available at <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/thenewfaceofdigitalpopulism> (accessed 12 October 2012).
- Bartolini, S. (2005) *Restructuring Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- Bellucci, P., Sanders, D., Tóka, G. & Torcal, M. (Eds) (2011) *The Europeanization of National Politics? Citizenship and Support in a Post-Enlargement Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bellucci, P. & Serricchio, F. (2012) Cosa pensano i cittadini dell'Europa?, in: P. Bellucci & N. Conti (Eds) *GLI Italiani e l'Europa* (Rome: Carocci).
- Benhabib, S. (2002) *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Best, H., Lengyel, G. & Verzichelli, L. (Eds) (2011) *The Europe of Elites. A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Economic and Political Elites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Caiani, M. and Della Porta, D. (2011) The elitist populism of the extreme right: A frame analysis of extreme right wing discourses in Italy and Germany, *Acta Politica*, 46(2), pp. 180–202.
- Caiani, M., Della Porta, D. & Wagemann, C. (2012) *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Caldiron, G. (2001) *La destra plurale* (Rome: Manifestolibri).
- Conti, N., Cotta, M. & Tavares de Almeida, P. (Eds) (2011) *Perspectives of National Elites on European Citizenship* (London: Routledge).
- Conti, N. & De Giorgi, E. (2011) L'Euroscetticismo a Parole: Lega Nord e Rifondazione Comunista, tra Retorica e Comportamento Istituzionale, *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 41(2), pp. 265–289.
- Conti, N. & Memoli, V. (2012) The multi-faceted nature of party-based Euroscepticism, *Acta Politica*, 47(2), pp. 91–112.
- Cotta, M. & Isernia, P. (2009) Citizens in the European polity, in: C. Moury & L. de Sousa (Eds) *Institutional Challenges in Post-Constitutional Europe*, pp. 72–94 (London: Routledge).
- De Vries, C. E. & Edwards, E. E. (2009) Taking Europe to its extremes: Extremist parties and public Euroscepticism, *Party Politics*, 15(1), pp. 5–28.
- EUMC (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia) (2004) *National Analytical Study on Racist Violence and Crime* (Brussels: Report).
- Ferrari, S. (2006) *Da Salò ad Arcore. La mappa della destra eversiva*, (Rome: Nuova Iniziativa Editoriale).
- Gamson, W. A. (1988) Political discourse and collective action, *International Social Movement Research*, 1(2), pp. 219–246.
- Gamson, W. A. & Modigliani, A. (1989) Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach, *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), pp. 1–38.
- Härmänmaa, M. (2002) Un modello per il nuovo discorso fascista. Alcune osservazioni sul linguaggio politico di Alleanza Nazionale, paper presented at Romansk Forum XV Skandinaviske romanistkongress, University of Helsinki, Nr. 16; 12–17 August, Oslo, Sweden.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole J. Wilson. (2002) Does left/right structure party positions on European integration?, *Comparative Political Studies*, 35(8), pp. 965–989.
- Hooghe, L., Marks, G. & Wilson, C. (2004) Does left/right structure party positions on European integration?, in G. Marks & M. Steenbergen (Eds) *European Integration and Political Conflict*, pp. 120–140 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Huyseune, M. (2010) A Eurosceptic vision in a Europhile country: The Lega Nord, *Modern Italy*, 15(1), pp. 63–75.
- McDonnell, D. (2006) A week-end in Padania: Regionalist populism and the Lega Nord, *Politics*, 26(2), pp. 126–132.
- Mudde, C. (2000) *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press).
- Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Norris, P. (2005) *Radical Right: Parties and Electoral Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Pappas, T. (2008) Political leadership and the emergence of radical mass movements in democracy, *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(8), pp. 1117–1140.
- Roux, C. & Verzichelli, L. (2010) Italy: Still a pro-European, but not a fully Europeanised elite?, *South European Society and Politics*, 15(1), pp. 11–34.
- Rydgren, J. (2003) Meso-level reasons for racism and xenophobia, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 6(1), pp. 45–68.
- Rydgren, J. (2007) The sociology of the radical right, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33, pp. 241–262.
- Rydgren, J. (2008) Immigration sceptics, xenophobes or racists?, *European Journal of Political Research*, 47(6), pp. 737–765.
- Schmitt, H. (2005) The European Parliament elections of June 2004: Still second-order?, *West European Politics*, 28(3), pp. 650–679.
- Sitter, N. (2001) The politics of opposition and European integration in Scandinavia: Is Euro-scepticism a government–opposition dynamic?, *West European Politics*, 24(4), pp. 22–39.



- Sitter, N. & Batory, A. (2008) Protectionism, populism, or participation? Agrarian parties and the European question in Western and East Central Europe, in: A. Szczerbiak & P. Taggart (Eds) *Opposing Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Snow, D. A. & Benford, R. D. (1988) Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization, in: B. Klandermans *et al.* (Eds) *From Structure to Action*, pp. 197–218 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press).
- Snow, D. A., Rochford, E. B., Worden, S. K. & Benford, R. D. (1986) Frame alignment processes, micro mobilization and movement participation, *American Sociological Review*, 51(4), pp. 464–481.
- Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (2003) EPERN Working Paper 12 and SEI Working Paper 69, Sussex University, available at <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sei-working-paper-no-69.pdf&site=266>
- Tarchi, M. (2003) *L'Italia Populista: Dal Qualunquismo ai Girotondi* (Bologna: Il Mulino).
- Tateo, L. (2005) The Italian extreme right on-line network: An exploratory study using an integrated social network analysis and content analysis approach, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10 (2), article 10.
- Tilly, C. (2003) *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Werts, H., Scheepers, P., & Lubbers, M. (2013) Euro-scepticism and radical right-wing voting in Europe, 2002–2008: Social cleavages, socio-political attitudes and contextual characteristics determining voting for the radical right, *European Union Politics*, 14(2), pp. 183–205.