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The European Attitudes of Populist Political Parties in South Europe

Focus in the Italian, French and Spanish Cases

Is there a relationship between populism and the European
attitude among the populist parties?

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ABSTRACT

At a time when the EU is constantly challenged by growing hostility to the European integration project, it is important to understand the relationship between the populist wave that haunts its Member States' political landscape and the expansion of the phenomenon of Euroscepticism. For this purpose, this research aims, firstly, to identify and understand the different populist rhetoric assumed in Southern Europe. Secondly, it seeks to understand how the EU is framed in the narrative of the parties, in order to describe the dynamics of Euroscepticism and to catalogue the different populist political parties within a more or less Eurosceptic framework. Finally, the research examines the relationship between the two variants — the populist rhetoric mobilized by the political parties and their stances towards the European integration project.

Based on the analysis of the political programs of each party, the research highlights the reactionary nature of the phenomenon of Euroscepticism. It also argues the interpretation of Euroscepticism as a discursive formation, similar to what occurs with the populist phenomenon at the national political level. Last but not least, the results of this research culminated in the need to understand the political positions in relation to the European integration project intrinsically linked to the domestic political landscape, which ultimately motivates and conditions the dynamics and discursive contents of the phenomenon of Euroscepticism.

Dedication

*To my grandparents.
Wherever they may be,
they are my guardian angels.*

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May this be the beginning of a new chapter of this beautiful book of mine, with so much to live.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
FN	Front National (National Front)
LN	Lega Nord (Northern League)
MS	Member State
M5S	Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Stars Movement)
PRR	Populist Radical Right
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party)
RN	Rassemblement National (National Rally)

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century brought with it a specter that has been haunting Europe and the West – the growing phenomenon of populist parties that are strengthening in the EU member states. The three recent crises that have hit Europe – the financial crisis of 2008, the crisis of migrants in 2015 and Brexit, which demonstrated the reversibility of European integration - have increased the growing hostility of the Member States to the European integration project and its effectiveness. In the face of the EU's fragility in responding to crises, existing populist movements absorbed its failures to strengthen their rhetoric. Other parties, instead, saw in it the perfect opportunity to raise their movements and boost its popularity among voters, early occupying leadership positions in the national political spectrum.

Nevertheless, while some of these parties continue to deny their Eurosceptic stance, others seem to change their rhetoric over time, replacing the left-right with a much more complex Europhobe–Europhile dichotomy. In the people, they find the receiver and simultaneously the definer of their policies, which they articulate at the mercy of their reactions. Despite academic contributions to the definition of this phenomenon that is so particular in time and space, Populism continues to be mistakenly associated with xenophobic policies and right-wing radical political parties negatively denounced as hostile to immigration, multiculturalism, and characterized as nationalists or conservatives. However, Populism, in its vernacular sphere, is not necessarily synonymous with xenophobic policies, much less a characterizing element of right-wing radical parties.

Developing from a case study with a sample rich in ideological stances, several populist narratives, and different political positions, the research focuses on the cases of Italy, France, and Spain, seeking to answer the question “Is there a relationship between populism and the European attitude among the populist parties?”.

From the definition of Canovan, in 1999, of populism as a “notoriously vague term”, to the populism as a political strategy of Jagens & Walgrave, Cas Mudde formulated his own definition of populism in liberal democracies in attempt of finding an agreement among the scholars. By following a Manichean approach, Mudde sidesteps the unidimensional measure that fails to adequately describe populist attitudes and defines populism as:

“an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004, pp. 543).

Populism is then a political communication strategy, a thin-centered ideology, capable of embracing the various and diverse type of narratives (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012).

Its three-dimensional hierarchical measurement of populist attitudes is built on three main political ideas that unfold in two orders of factors. Anti-elitist attitudes, unrestricted popular sovereignty, and homogeneous and virtuous people establish the first order of ideological factors (Hawkins et al., 2012). By being able to shape the various second order factors, populism can be consequently associated with a number of different ideologies and radical variants (Hawkins et al., 2012). The short-sighted economic policies that appeal to the poor and the political strategy associated with a charismatic leadership are described by the authors as second-order factors that can be corollaries derived from populism in action and are defined by different social circumstances. Thus, when faced with a developing country with an unstable and fragile economy, populism can lead to the economic policies that lure social classes of lower economic power or, if presented instead with a wealthy economy, it can lead to a rightist direction by champions of fiscal austerity and capitalism (Hawkins et al., 2012).

Policy Solutions' reports on the degree of Populism in Europe have proven that the year 2015 was characterized by the strongest wave of populism felt in Europe since the beginning of European integration. By 2015, studies revealed a growing influx of populist movements in Mediterranean countries, especially on the political left, whereas on the other hand, in Western and Eastern Europe the situation was reversed, with a more expressive manifestation of right-wing populism (Bíró-Nagy, Boros, & Kadlót, 2015).

The year 2017 came to discredit the theories of the most skeptical political observers who believed in a rebirth of the extreme-right parties and its takeover of government in many countries. Despite the growing popularity of populist parties, anti-EU and authoritarian leaders, and the struggling of center-right and center-left parties to remain prominent in the national political spectrum, the apocalyptic predictions of a possible end of old Europe proved to be wrong, and progress of right-wing populism in Europe did not manifest itself with the expected intensity (Boros et al., 2017).

However, the 2019 European elections have provided a different outlook. In a race to the polls that have had more voters than in the past 20 years, right-wing and nationalist parties have won a considerable number of seats in the European Parliament (Walker, 2019). From the electoral results, a new nationalist front emerges, called the “European Alliance of Peoples and Nations” and established by the interior minister and Italian Vice-Prime Minister Matteo Salvini (Schulz, 2019). In fact, two of the greatest winners of the European elections that surpassed the forecasts of pundits, were Salvini’s Lega North and the National Rally of Marine Le Pen, in France (Walker, 2019).

As Mudde put it, "The fragmentation of Europe's party systems is once again the great history" (Walker, 2019), and although there are several political forces categorized as populists, there are much and different rhetorics assumed by their leaders. Among the anti-immigration, anti-system, nationalist and protectionist parties, there are cleavages in many issues and divergences in their populist narratives. It, therefore, seems plausible to raise the question whether these same differences in terms of populist rhetoric, once observed at the supranational level, are homogenous or, on the contrary, also show heterogeneity in what concerns their position vis-à-vis the European integration project. That is, given the growing front of populist and Eurosceptic parties in the European Parliament, do they have the same rhetoric about the EU project and its framework?

Throughout the European Member States, we are witnessing the realignment of the opposition parties, gradually shifting their political rhetoric and leaning towards the political spectrum to a Eurosceptic position. The three crises that served as a justification for calling into question the capacity of European integration led to a growing wave of Eurosceptic opposition, with arguments rejecting EU policies.

Euroscepticism, which stems from a contraction of words with the Greek *skeptic*, is described as doubt or the opposition to the European integration process. It concerns not only Eurosceptic arguments towards European integration, but also a justified discourse, representing a mass, mobilized by political actors who reject EU policies (Trenz & Wilde, 2009). However, the ideological lines of Euroscepticism cannot be understood as the exclusive and necessary prerogatives of the populist parties. In the past few years, the European Union has seen waves of both concepts interconnected, both on the agendas of left and right parties, and populist discourses have been mistakenly confused and widespread with the rejection of European integration and EU membership. Furthermore, it is also already recognised that the rise of populist parties was not primarily related to Euroscepticism as such. As the studies of Pirro, Van Kessel, Taggart and other

scholars suggest, the political European spectrum – and with it, the populist reaction to the European crises – is not homogeneous and they do not come from the same lineage (Pirro, Taggart, & Kessel, 2018). The politicisation of the EU issue and the Eurosceptic approach was not undertaken by all as their viable strategy and/or with the same intensity, thus drawing a heterogeneous, disparate European populist spectrum with differentiating characterizing variables.

From right-wing parties, such as the Front National of Marine Le Pen or Viktor Orbán's Fidesz, to left-wing parties like the Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece or even the Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy, populism has been gaining strength within European Union over the last decade. Some scholars look at the phenomenon with some positivity, believing that it represents a temporary reactive condition resulted from the last crises crossed by the European Union. On the other hand, some scholars define it as the golden age of populist movements, the flourishing of populism as a "travelling companion of democratic reform movements" (Arditi, 2007, pp. 86), which may remain within the limits of democracy or to represent a spectre haunting democracy by intelligently manipulating democratic language.

In general, the research begins with the initial presentation of the general lines of populism. Chapter I seeks to highlight the guidelines of this phenomenon among the different positions of the scholars. Likewise, the definition and characteristics of the concept of Euroscepticism are also presented. The research follows narrowing the theoretical background presented to the cases under study. Chapter III is dedicated to the presentation and characterization of the populist narratives of our research political parties. In Chapter IV, a more focused analysis of the electoral programs for the 2014 and 2019 European elections is then made, in order to outline the European narrative and the position of each party vis-à-vis the EU and the European integration project. Quantitative data are also presented. Finally, we conclude the research with the correlation of the individual analysis of both phenomena, drawing conclusions and responding simultaneously to the questions proposed in Chapter II of the definition of the research method and the question-problem.

In Plato's democratic utopia, a perfect city is one in which reason governs Man and State. An imperfect city is one in which reason is supplanted by vice. In times when humanity consists of individuals pursuing supremacy, beating themselves for an advantage or opportunity at all times, populism arises to question a democracy that has been blinded by corruption and deafened to the voices that walk in its streets.

CHAPTER I

Theoretical Background

1.1. The concept of Populism: Defining the Uncertainty

From the Latin *populus* “people”, Populism emerged as a political doctrine or philosophy in the late nineteenth century and, related to the political movements and cultural development felt at the time in favour of the rural Roman community in Russia, named as народничество (*narodničestvo*). The term was heard for the very first time in 1892 in reference to the political theories of the U.S. *Populist Party* to promote and represent agrarian interests and to advocate for the free coinage of silver and government control of monopolies. By organizing themselves to defend their interests against what was perceived as the Eastern elite, farmers and labour unions formed what they officially named the *People’s Party*, against bankers and railroad barons, who charged exorbitant prices and lending rates.

In 1999, Margaret Canovan proposed the division of the macro-concept of populism into two different types. The first, called “farmer radicalism”, had origins in the aforementioned nineteenth-century bottom-up movement of the American People's Party. The American People’s party became known as the first party defending the expansion of federal government power to serve the welfare of ordinary Americans, and to represent the views of the masses. The second type defined is the so-called “political populism”, shaped according to social, economic and historical circumstances elements (Canovan, 1981). Political populism is built around a special relationship with political leadership, establishing the transition to a leader democracy –the suggested personalization of politics –shifting from centralized collective bodies to individual-centered representation (Viviani, 2017).

It was during the 1930s, in the period between the two great wars, that populism gained momentum as never seen in history, driving world history more than any other force. With the aftermath of the economic crisis, protectionism, hostility to minorities, and the collapse of international institutions, democracies were being tested with the major countries allowing populism to take root.

Following Mudde's (2004) contributions, for the definition of the concept, populism is an “ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups”, “the pure people” subjected to “the corrupt elite” when the politics “should be an expression of the *volonté generale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004).

Nevertheless, the conceptualization of populism has evolved in recent years, and Mudde's (2004) conception of populism as a centre-right ideology nourished by "broader ideational contexts" resulting from "deliberate removal and substitution of concepts" (Freeden, 1998, pp. 750) becomes insufficient to respond broadly to the phenomenon.

Some alternative approaches have defined populism as a political strategy, rhetoric or even as a style (Betz, 2002, pp. 198; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, pp. 322; Weyland, 2001, pp. 14; Moffitt & Tormey, 2013, pp. 387). Margaret Canovan (1981) was also shown to be pessimistic about adopting a single globally applicable approach to populism, justified by the impossibility “to unite all these movements into a single political phenomenon with a single ideology, program or socioeconomic basis”, suggesting instead seven general categories of populism. In later works, Canovan further added that a single explanatory theory of populism would be "too broad to be clear or too restrictive to be persuasive" (Canovan, 1982, pp. 544).

Following the conception advocated by Hans-Georg Betz, populism can be seen as rhetoric “designed to tap feelings of *ressentiment* and exploit them politically” (Betz, 2002, pp.198). Kurt Weyland instead, argues that “populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from a large number of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland, 2001, pp. 14).

There are other scholars who go further in defining populism and regard it as a "style." (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, pp. 322) challenging the distinction between "thick" and "thin" populism, considering the latter as a style of communication of “political actors that refers to the people.” In the light of this theory, populism arises not necessarily from a political movement, but rather by actors, mobilized in the context of the decline of traditional values and the politician's "stylization" (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013). This results in a simplified political discourse, a growing antagonism between dualities and “sound-bite solutions” (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013, pp. 387).

Although it has been shown how difficult it is to find a consensus on a single epistemological definition of populism, the lack of consensus in the various interpretations is not problematic as long as it agrees with its *modus operandi*.

Earlier in his studies in 1969, Peter Wiles defended a concept of populism that rested on a majority, the simple people, the supremacy of the "will of the people" (Worsley, 1969, pp. 244) composing a list of populist characteristics close to a leader-centrist and anti-intellectual, together with a clear dislike of the present with the eyes set on a vision of the past (Wiles, 1969, pp. 166). Angus Stewart follows his line of thinking and emphasises the dislike with the state in its present form and talks about the "charismatic" leadership of populist movements (Gellner & Ionescu, 1969, 193).

The contributions of Taggart and Mudde identified fundamental features characterizing the populist movements. Taggart suggests the existence of populist parties with different ideological traits as a reflection of the key characteristic of populism: its chameleonic facet (Taggart, 2004, pp. 275). The author denounces the contextual contiguity of populist movements, through its ability to adopt an ideological "colour" and to be focused on relevant issues limited to their specific context, i.e., "the attributes of the context in which populism occurs will spill into the form that populism takes" (Taggart, 2004, pp.275).

Faced with the failure of a theoretical approach to populism, Margaret Canovan designed a general taxonomy to classify the breadth of populism. She proposed the existence of seven types of populism that differ in ideology, economic program, social basis or political style, but converge on appeals to the people and a distrust of elites (Canovan, 1982; Taggart, 2004, pp. 273). While for Canovan (1982), these similarities were vague and insufficient to deal with the complexity inherent in the concept of populism, Taggart (2004), in turn, stems from Canovan's construct and argues for the existence of common features, enough to build a universally applicable approach to populism. He proposes an assortment of five characteristic features, ranging from hostility to representative politics, the representation by a personalizing leadership, the response-effect to a "sense of extreme crisis", the idealized conception of a 'heartland', and the lack of core values (Taggart, 2004, pp. 273-276).

Beginning with the first characteristic pointed out by Taggart, representative politics do not appear as the necessary basis for the triggering of populist lines, nevertheless, it creates the necessary conditions for its mobilization. Take the examples

of Berlusconi, Haider or Le Pen, key individuals who led a charismatic and personalised leadership, leaning towards centralized structures.

Despite the lack of theory on the subject to determine what makes a political actor a populist, Jon-Werner Müller bases his distinction on three main characteristics. He defines as populist elements the anti-elitist and antipluralist character, the exclusive representation correlated with distinct morals that justify their conduct taken in the interests of the mass they claim to represent (Müller, 2016, pp. 2-4). What really differentiates populist politicians from other politicians is not only the condition of opposition to the elite, but its combination with the belief of pure representation of the people - the belief that they are the only morally pure and righteous representation of the will of a hypothetical and subjective homogeneous *people* constructed in their speeches, and defined by moral values and principles endangered by the corrupt superior entity. For a populist party, any opposition is defined as immoral, corrupt, elitist, and illegitimate, and whoever opposes the support of populist parties represents a corrupt part of the people.

By speaking in the "name of the people," finding its justification on the "will of the people" we come across populism in an era of personalization of politics that cannot be dissociated from its person, the leader. Whilst not all forms of populism have historically been expressed through the personalization of leadership, one of the characteristics that lie in the motor elements of populism, results in "personality politics"(Taggart, 2000, pp. 101), making it difficult not to consider the role of leadership in its development.

Rising from the opportunistic mobilization of the fragility of representative politics, populism emerges whenever there is a strong sense of crisis, a discontent with the present situation, and it feeds on this feeling of nonconformity to strengthen its political criticism (Taggart, 2004, pp. 275; Mudde, 2004, pp. 546).

In order to be able to criticize the status of the political system, populist parties tend to identify themselves with the so-called "heartland" and the struggle for its reinstatement. In the context proposed by Taggart (2004), the heartland emerges as the idealized representation of the community they serve. The conception of 'the people' arises only as the object of populist politics, representing the heartland's community, which is not a utopian construction but rather achieved through a retrospective of the political and cultural status of the past, before being distorted by corruption (Taggart, 2004, pp. 274). The notion of 'heartland' seems to be capable of covering different

positions and shape itself to different populist movements from the left to the right, due to its imprecision and variety. From the vagueness and variety that the heartland can assume, suggests that there are no core values of populism. Through the various conceptions taken from the heartland, populism can connect to different ideological positions, molding itself according to this rhetoric. Populism can create ties with libertarian, authoritarian, left-wing or right-wing, shaping its nature according to the elites and the institutions against which it reacts (Taggart, 2004). Hence Taggart's conception of the chameleonic facet of populism - it will assume the form, which the attributes of the context give it and will react to the threat of its 'heartland'.

Mudde, on the contrary, clarifies his rhetoric not in what the populist movements intend to defend, but rather against *what* and *who*. In attempting to define the concept of populism, Mudde refers to the existence of the duality between two simultaneously opposing and homogeneous groups – “the oppressed people” and the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004). In his rhetoric, the ‘heartland’ is replaced by the concept of ‘the people’, as it does not respond to the main problem, it is inaccurate and, in the same political context, it can generate doubts in the definition of who is its object (Mudde, 2004, pp. 546). The cleavage between the pure people and the corrupt elite is diminished by the approximation of representative politics through this third element that presents itself as independent of the previous corrupt political system. For this reason, populist parties refuse to identify themselves as populists, and are characterized by a personalization of politics, in which the party is no longer identified by its collective bodies, but rather associated with a character who simultaneously assumes the role of actor and director of the conflict between the people and the elite (Viviani, 2017, pp. 282).

Following Mudde’s line of thought, the heartland of the current populist is the rebellion of the “silent majority” that has been displaced from the sovereignty of its own liberal democracy.

Uniting both Mudde and Taggart’s understandings, Teun Pauwels summarises three characteristics that define populism. He refers to the conception of Mudde’s “thin-centred ideology”, the “mobilization of heterogeneous social groups by a charismatic leader” by engaging in a “political communication style” in which the leader legitimizes herself or himself by constantly referring to “the people” (Pauwels, 2015). In line with Mudde (2007), Pauwels suggests three forms of populism: neoliberal populism, social populism and national populism (Pauwels, 2015).

Whereas neoliberal populist parties establish themselves as representing the “oppressed majority” (the average taxpayer) and against the corrupted “elite” (the bureaucratic politicians), the social populist party, on the other hand, associate the “pure people” with the working class and the “elite” with, not the state, but the bourgeois class, whereas defending the deep grounding of the capitalist system. Finally, the national populists claim that the multicultural dreams of ‘politically correct’ politicians are a danger to the homogeneous national state and require rigorous immigration policies and the reversal of the trends of globalization (Pauwels, 2015).

As pointed out either by Mudde, by Canovan, or later Pauwels, the most successful populist model in Western Europe is national populism, also referred to as extreme right or radical right populism. Nevertheless, throughout Europe, we have been witnessing a number of forms of what can be seen as populist mobilization. However, none of them is ‘exclusively populist’, but quite different forms of mobilization that assume strong populist characteristics.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the way populism is applied is in line with the accounts that consider populism as a “thin-centred ideology”, since not all populist parties adopt the same substantive political positions.

1.2. What kinds of populist parties are out there? Different populist parties

Having established the multiplicity of definitions and interpretations of the phenomenon of populism, we can certainly argue that it is difficult to limit and circumscribe the populism felt in recent years in Europe to a characteristic type of populist movement.

Due to the lack of a stable core related to a certain type of political parties, populist rhetoric can be invoked by all types of political parties and actors, differing only in the variation of the degree of populism throughout time. Therefore, it becomes inaccurate to use populism as a classification tool due to the possibility of the existence of borderline parties. We have also seen that populism needs, above everything, a host ideology to become a viable political force. Ergo, it will survive as long as it is able to mobilize and exploit the discontent of the majority, fuelling the reasons that convince them that they are under-represented.

From the US People's Party in the late nineteenth century to the populist phenomena in post-World War II Europe – e.g. the Italian Common Man's Front of Guglielmo Giannini in the late 1940s or the French Union for the Defence of Merchants and Artisan of Pierre Poujade in the late 1950s – populist phenomena have generally tilted to the right of the political spectrum, although it has oscillated between right and left. With the end of the II World War, the Greens (or New Politics) in the early 1980s and the right radical populists were the only parties capable of establishing themselves in the political spectrum long dominated by traditional parties like the Christian Democrats, socialists and social democrats, and liberals (Mudde, 2007, pp. 21).

The radical right-wing populist parties were, however, the only 'populist' party that achieved political significance in European politics, over time associating with many different classifications and definitions, albeit mainly related with the central criterion of an anti-establishment stance (Mudde, 2007, pp. 49). From east to west, Europe witnessed the emergence of far-right political parties. It is important to understand the political position of this party family and to reduce it to a precise definition of its bases and its relation to the term "populism".

From Mudde's (2007) typology of populist parties identifying three forms of populism (neoliberal populism, social populism, and right-wing populism), it becomes relevant to realize then what differs from each category.

Starting with social populism, it combines socialism and populism as core ideological features. Social populists are essentially egalitarian, with a central nativist ideology and, consequently, on the left of the political spectrum, identifying the working class as the 'pure people' and 'the elite' as the bourgeoisie class (Mudde, 2007, pp. 50; Pauwels, 2015). In turn, neoliberalist populism is centred on a neoliberalist economic policy and advocates the reduction of state intervention and the tendency of 'great government' (Pauwels, 2015). The problem arises as to the definition of the latter category, right-wing populism. Due to its broad scope, right-wing populism is often used as a generic term to identify a range of party families (Mudde, 2007, p.50).

Hans-Georg Betz understands that both neo-liberal populism and national populism depart from the generic definition of ring-wing populism (Betz, 1993). Thus, the difference between both concepts lies in a horizontal spectrum between the poles of liberalism and nationalism, in a ratio of inverse proportionality. On the other hand, Mudde (2007) and Pauwels (2015), argue that both share one primary core feature: populism (Mudde, 2007, pp. 50; Pauwels, 2015). They call for attention to the fact that a populist

radical right is a form of nationalism, specifying that whereas all populist radical right parties are nationalist, not all nationalists are, *per se*, populist radical rightists (Mudde, 2007, pp. 49). Thereby, Mudde (2007) grasps populist radical right as a “specific form of nationalism” (pp.50), characterized by the apology of anti-globalization and strict immigration policies (Pauwels, 2015).

From left populism to the populist radical right, also referred to as the extreme right or national populism, the identification of populist parties across Europe in the twenty-first century is required.

In order to understand and organize the different political ideologies and identities of the various populist movements, we chose an inventory of parties according to the types of populism categorized by Mudde (2007) and Teun Pauwels (2015).

Social Populism

As explained above, social populism is characterized by the supremacy of the working class as the pure people, in opposition to the bourgeoisie capitalist class.

With the onset of the financial crisis that spread to Europe in 2008 triggered by the collapse of the financial market in the United States, the most fragile economies of the European Union countries deteriorated precipitously. The recession in the European economy has resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment, rising levels of poverty, financial difficulties and hardship. Shortly after 7 years, and filled with popular discontent against the austerity measures taken to reduce government spending and consequent debt repayment, Europe was again hit by a second crisis, this time the 2015 refugee crisis. Throughout Europe, populist actors, especially the socioeconomic left, as well as the culturally conservative right, benefited from the popular discontent resulting from both crises and began to gain ground. The movements, voicing Euroscepticism, blamed all problems on the failure of European integration, through speeches that denounced the unscrupulous actions of the "corrupt elite" against "pure people" (Pirro, Taggart, & Kessel, 2018, pp. 378-379).

The 2015 report on the state of populism in Europe carried out by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies showed that by 2015 populism was the trend in the European left (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2015).

Southern Europe was the most affected by the economic crisis in 2008, and thus the centrist-parties that were in government became a target.

The radical party “Syriza” in Greece, possibly the most social populist party in mid-2015, emerged shortly before the 2004 legislative elections from a coalition between the radical left. In line with populist rhetoric, its ideology was based on the demand for a higher national minimum wage, an increase in the taxation of the wealthy class, and the demand for a more participatory democracy (Pauwels, 2015, pp. 2). Based on the results of Populism tracker, of the popularity registered at around 4.70% in 2009, the radical left coalition increased its popularity to 26.57% in 2014 (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2015). The results became even more real with Syriza's victory of 36% of voters' votes in the 2015 legislative elections, which allowed its coalition with the independent Greeks –ANEL –a right-wing populist party. With the rise of Alexis Tsipras to the prime ministership, the Greeks were convinced of the humiliation of their nation by their creditors, and were willing to reject the terms of the EU bailout package, through the popular referendum. Despite the failure of Tsipras' policy with a more rigorous bailout program that led to his resignation, by the end of 2017 the populist parties' popularity decreased only by 2%, remaining in the ten strongest populist parties (Boros et al., 2017, pp. 41).

Similarly, in Spain, the left-wing party “Podemos” emerged with the “Indignados” movement against the austerity measures (Pauwels, 2015, pp. 2). Under the leadership of Pablo Iglesias, at the end of 2015, its estimated popularity based on the polls was around 17%, achieving 23% of the voters by the end of 2016 (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2015; Boros et al., 2017). However, in 2017, due to the Catalan crisis, “Podemos” registered the worst performance in southern Europe as it suffered a turnaround in support, losing 7% of its voters to the far-left party as it backed a new referendum on the region's independence at the time (Boros et al., 2017, pp. 42). Moreover, in 2018, Spain witnessed the rise of a right to far-right-wing populist party unnoticed for years, the Vox. Founded in 2013, the party never achieved great influence mainly due to the phantom of Franco's dictatorship. However, the political panorama changed after the People's Party crisis, leaving many of its disappointed voters without a party or shifting their vote for the centrist *Ciudadanos*, an economically liberal party (Boros & Laki, 2018).

In Germany, the socialist party *Die Linke*, with its ideology of greater citizen participation against the supposedly “neoliberal” policies of opposing parties, led the popularity polls of all populist parties in Germany in 2015 (10% of voters in a total of 18%) (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2015). However, by the end of 2017, the far-left saw a large shift in their support decreasing to only 9% and keep it stagnated along the year of 2018 (Boros et al., 2017, pp. 41; Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 57).

Neoliberal Populism

When we talk about neoliberal populist parties it is more complicated to define a common line of ideology because of their diversity. Concentrating their programmes on attacking the excessive taxation by the government, generally, they focus their policies on neither xenophobic nor ethnic nationalism (Pauwels, 2015, pp. 2).

We can identify as populist parties that fall with this definition, the Sweden Democrats (SD), in Italy the party *Forza Italia* of Silvio Berlusconi and its coalition party *Allianza Nazionale*; and the already dissolved examples of Belgium, the *Libertair, Direct, Democratisch party* (LDD), and the party of List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in Netherlands (the latter just mentioned as a curiosity) (Pauwels, 2015).

Starting with the far-right Sweden Democrats, the party has gained popularity among voters from both mainstream parties by moving an anti-immigration ideology, safeguarding traditional values and the primacy of state welfare. In the first quarter of 2016, its popularity was recorded at 15%. Its numbers have increased over the course of 2017, aided by the IT scandals in which the Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and his party participated, as well as the housing shortage caused by the massive influx of refugees in 2015 (Boros & Laki, 2018). By the end of 2017, with the credibility of the governing party declining, the SD had managed to generate 19% support (Boros & Laki, 2018).

According to the Policy Solutions report, among all the founding countries of the EU, Italy is the Member State with the highest level of populism (Boros et al., 2017, pp. 43). By 2015, Italy enjoyed levels of support close to 50% (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2015). The most well-known and well-established party to date remains Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, founded in 1993. Along the way, it has established coalitions with both the *Allianza Nazionale*, the conservatives, and the *Lega Nord*, the national populist party. However, after more than ten years as the government party, in 2018 Silvio Berlusconi's party heavily weakened by the 2015 refugee crisis, which resulted in a change in polls and he failed to secure the 40% needed to govern (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 77)

National Populism

The last category, but the one that has the most impact on the political spectrum of the EU Member States, is national populism.

One of the oldest and most well-established nationalist parties in Western Europe is the *Rassemblement National* (RN-National Rally) in France. The radical right-wing party founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972, was created to unify a variety of French

nationalist movements existing at the time, and its early radical views were on the topic of immigration (Pauwels, 2015). Denominated as *National Front* (FN –Front National) until 2008, the party sought an ideology of protectionism, approaching zero tolerance of breaches of law and order and greater government intervention in the economy. However, in the race for the 2002 elections, although Jean Le Pen managed to advance to the second round of presidential elections, his defeat resulted in the RN becoming an increasingly marginal force, opposed to Nicolas Sarkozy, president of France from 2007 to 2012. With the resignation of Jean Le Pen and the takeover of the party by his daughter in 2012, Marine Le Pen presented herself as a defender of the country’s republican ideals (Pauwels, 2015), downplaying its traditional theme of anti-immigration. Le Pen placed the party in an ideological line that denounced globalization and demanded the protection of national values and the protection of the ethnicity of the French nation. In 2017, the RN managed to reach 34% of the votes in the second round of the race for the presidency (Clarke & Holder, 2017), and although it was not enough to defeat Macron, the results showed high populist potential (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2015, pp. 61). In fact, France has been struggling with the rise of populist power. In 2018 populist parties attracted almost 40% support. Although Le Pen's significant drop in personal popularity toward the end of 2018, due to corruption scandals related to the misuse of EU funds, RN remained the strongest populist party in France at the end of the year, with 22% of support (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 53).

With regard to the minor populist parties, the only one that deserves attention is the left’s France Untamed (*La France Insoumise*), which for a period seemed about to emerge as the main French opposition. However, due to its internal crises and its own corruption scandal, its popularity declined to its lowest point (10%) in the last quarter of 2018 (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 55).

It was not only France from Europe’s inner circle that started to succumb to this phenomenon. With it, also Germany, with the right-wing and anti-immigration populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Belgium with the Flemish Interest party (Vlaams Belang –VB) and in the Netherlands the party Partij Voor De Vrijheid (PVV), have emerged as key populist parties.

In Eastern Europe, Hungary (Fidesz), Poland (Law & Justice) and the Czech Republic were completely absorbed by populism, and now all three countries are currently governed by populist parties. In both Poland and Hungary, the populist parties justified themselves by the fight to safeguard national identities, and European ethnicity

and religion and were able to take control of liberal institutions, starting with the independent judiciary and the free press.

Another case that deserves attention in this category is the populist case of Italy, Lega Nord. The year of 2018 did not leave any doubts that the absolute winner in Italian politics was the Northern League, with Matteo Salvini emerging as the country's leader, securing the cabinet post of deputy prime minister and minister of the interior (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 75). After the legislative elections earlier in the year, which resulted in lengthy negotiations in an attempt to form a government along with another populist and anti-establishment party, Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), the League's popularity doubled in the months following its election, especially due to Salvini's hard line stance on immigration (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp.77).

Divergent Cases of Populist Movements

Among all the examples of populist parties falling into one of the categories proposed by Mudde (2007) and Pauwels (2015), there are some specific examples which, by their circumstantial peculiarity and diversity, cannot be categorized in one of the examples above. The *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S - Five Stars of the Movement), the UKIP of the United Kingdom and even the impervious political spectrum of Portugal are three cases that deserve mention.

In Italy, decades of corruption, mismanagement and the impact of the 2015 immigration crises resulted in the anti-establishment, tax-and-spend Five Star Movement founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo. The predominantly Eurosceptic party has gained the attention of voters by focusing its program on the 2015 refugee crisis. However, its high rate support among the Italian politics was not enough to win the polls in 2018, leading to a joint of forces in a coalition with the far-right wing League. Nevertheless, the party cannot be categorised in a left-right wing paradigm. While its party manifesto focuses primarily on environmental issues and the expansion of digital infrastructure, during its public speeches M5S advocates extreme positions towards anti-European integration and leaving the Eurozone and EU, and greater popular participation in political decision-making (Heinen & Kreutzmann, 2015, pp. 9).

Hand in hand with this last point goes the UK Independence Party. The party, under Nigel Farage's leadership until 2016, underwent an enormous turnaround in its ideology towards the far-right by adopting an anti-Islamic stance (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 135). After taking over the party leadership, Batten introduced into the party's

program a harsh Islamophobia, gaining popularity among young adults after beginning to admit social media stars activists, such as YouTube vloggers (Boros & Laki, 2018, pp. 135). Nonetheless, what makes the UK a special case is its hostile position towards any kind of immigration. By advocating tighter immigration regulations, UKIP's real aim is to ensure the protection of the British labour market for its own citizens, taking a critical stance even on immigration from other EU countries (Heinen & Kreutzmann, 2015, pp. 14).

Following Taggart's (2004) justification for the emergence of populism in Europe, the theory of three crises responsible for opening a crack in European Union policies seems to have failed when we focus on the Portuguese case. After facing the 2011 bailout, the weight of austerity, and a climate of political upheaval, Portugal seems to remain unscathed by populist movements (Salgado, 2018). Whether due to the ghost of the 50 years of Salazar's dictatorship (1933-1974), which is still very much present in the memory of the Portuguese, or by its own political system, both right and left populist political parties and leaders failed to gain political visibility when compared to the rest of Europe. Although it has two leftist parties, the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda – BC) and the Portuguese Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português – PCP), with Eurosceptic elements in both programs, and the right-wing party National Renovator Party (PNR) inspired by the French Front National, Portugal is otherwise strongly pro-European integration, which, according to the Eurobarometer results of 2017, even though representing in 2013 “the European country with the highest levels of dissatisfaction with the European Union, now has approval rates above 50% and similar European average.” (Silva, 2018, pp. 3). Low levels of Euroscepticism, low immigration rates, and a lack of political space to develop and disseminate populism are the basis for the lack of influence of the populist discourse, have kept Portugal away from the general rise of right-wing populism in Europe (Silva, 2018; Salgado, 2018).

1.3. Populism and the European Union: The dimensions of Euroscepticism

Raised in the aftermath of World War II, the European Union began as a mere economic union. With the initial aim of creating dependent relations between countries to avoid the risk of conflict, the EU subsequently evolved into an organization with a wide range of policy areas. From an ever-changing single market, external relations and

security, climate, justice and migration, the European Union is nowadays an institution made up of twenty-eight Member States, with its own framework and same currency (although not implemented in every MS).

From the 1950 Schuman Plan, which entailed the emergence of the European Union, to Churchill's idealized "United States of Europe" and the federalism of Monnet and Spinelli, the founding fathers of the European Union projected the union of political elites and quickly the project became an aggregation of European states, attractive enough to captivate the attention of all those who aspired to be part of it. However, more than a decade later, the utopian construction of a federal union was unsuccessful. Issues surrounding national sovereignty became the central concern of debates within parties and between parties, frightened by the growing centralization of powers from the national states to the EU's institutions. The consensus concerning Europe has evaporated and waves of opposition to the EU and the European integration emerged.

How exactly is the opposition to the EU to be understood? Is it a result of the political panoramic shift in Europe flowing from the Populism wave? And if so, does populist rhetoric entail Eurosceptic position towards the EU?

Populism and Euroscepticism are generally understood as two sides of the same coin. However, it is crucial to deconstruct the latter in order to understand the concept and its implications.

'Eurosceptic', 'Europhobic', and 'Eurorealist' are some of the terms commonly used to classify the opposition towards the EU, presented yet with very little specification on what they may mean. However, the opposition to the EU has to be differentiated between the one advocated by the political elites and the other expressed by the public opinion. And so does Kaniok and Havlík (2016), that emphasized two general research traditions: the formal Euroscepticism expressed by the public and the second, rooted in party-based research (Kaniok & Havlík, 2016, pp. 22).

However, the generic and broad scope of the concept entails debates when it comes to analysing the phenomenon of Euroscepticism and its manifestations in domestic politics and party systems (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2003, pp. 2), leading to a range of different types and definitions of Euroscepticism (Kaniok & Havlík, 2016, pp. 23; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 299).

Taggart (1998) argues that 'Euroscepticism', in its widest sense "expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Taggart, 1998, pp. 366).

The broad definition encompasses a general opposition to European integration and opposition, in particular, to the EU. These two dimensions set a spectrum wide enough to include a variation on the degree of consensus among political elites, i.e., it creates two specific groups of opposition: those who express hostility to the idea of European integration, and those who express specific objections to the nature of the accession process (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, pp. 3). Thus, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2003) break down Euroscepticism into ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ varieties. According to their typology,

“Hard Euroscepticism is where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived.” (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2003, pp. 6).

On the other hand, ‘soft Euroscepticism’ is defined as “where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas leads to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that ‘national interest’ is currently at odds with the EU trajectory” (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2003, pp. 7), without having shown necessarily an objection to European integration or EU membership.

The elaboration of Taggart and Szczerbiak was later criticized by Mudde and Kopecký (2002), who pointed out four flaws. Besides the lack of clarity on the difference between the two terminologies, the authors also criticized the broad and vague scope of ‘soft Euroscepticism’, accusing it of leading to misinterpretations as assuming as eurosceptic any opposition to the EU’s policy decisions ‘diffuse’ support and ‘specific’ support concepts, comparing with other (party) positions on ‘Europe’ (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 300). In this line, with ‘diffuse support’ they refer to the support “for the general ideas of European integration that underlie the EU”, while by ‘specific support’ they understand as “support for the general practice of European integration; that is, the EU as it is and as it is developing” (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 300). From this categorization, it derives then two different dimensions of study: the support for the ideas of European integration, and a second one for the support for the European Union (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 301). Following this line of thought, from the first

dimension it derives two categories – Europhobes and Europhiles – and from the second, other two – EU-optimists and EU-pessimists (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 301-302; Kaniok & Havlík, 2016, pp. 23). It is then a conceptualization of the phenomenon into two levels of dimension that once combined can result into four ideal types of positions towards both EU and European integration: Europhiles, Europhobes, Eurosceptics and Eurorejects (Table 1.) (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 301-303).

		1 st Dimension (Diffuse Support)		
		SUPPORT FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION		
2 nd Dimension (Specific Support)	SUPPORT FOR EU		EUROPHILE	EUROPHOBE
	EU- OPTIMIST	Euroenthusiasts <i>Support general ideas of European Integration and belief that EU is or will institutionalize these ideas</i>	Europragmatists <i>Wavering Position - Do not support general ideas of European integration nor oppose them, but support EU – profit motivations.</i>	
	EU- PESSIMIST	Eurocritics <i>Support of the general ideas of European Integration; Pessimists about the EU's current/future reflection these ideas.</i>	Eurorejects <i>Don't support neither the ideas underlying the European Integration, nor the EU.</i>	

Table 1. Two-dimensional typology of party positions on Europe.
Source: Kopecký & Mudde, 2002

Starting with the first dimension regarding the support for EU (specific support), the EU-optimist is characterized by the belief in the EU as it is and has developed. The EU-pessimists, in opposition, do not support the EU at the moment or are pessimists about its development (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 301).

Regarding the second dimension of support for European integration (diffuse support), it differentiates Europhiles – those who believe in the key ideas underlying the

EU – from the Europhobes – who do not support the general ideas of European integration underlying the EU (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 302).

By analyzing Figure 1. it becomes easier to understand the results that stem from the combination of the two dimensions proposed by Kopecký and Mudde. Mudde and Kopecký, as well as other authors, suggested a similar typology of party positions (e.g. see Appendix A for Chris Flood's Six Categories Avoiding the term Euroscepticism). However, there is a need to stress the important contribution of this categorization while remembering its not exhaustive nature. Indeed, the conceptual schemes suggested, do not define Euroscepticism in rigid and essentialist terms but offer an understanding to delimit the political elites' positions on Europe (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). Moreover, the exhaustive categorization leads to the difficulty of operationalizing and defining parties' positions, as it requires the highest level of precision which often is not possible to obtain due to the lack of information available (Szczurbiak & Taggart, 2003, pp. 10).

Faced by the flaws of their definition and the design proposed by Kopecký and Mudde (2002), Taggart and Szczurbiak advanced a redefinition of their concept by revising it into the dichotomy of support/opposition to the transfer of national political power to the European Union institutions (Kaniok & Havlík, 2016, pp. 23). Therefore, under the light of their revised elaboration, hard Euroscepticism (what under the light of Kopecký and Mudde's categorisation is entitled as Eurorejectionism) is "principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU, in other words, based on the ceding or transfer of powers to supranational institution such as the EU" (Szczurbiak & Taggart, 2003, pp. 12). In contrast, soft Euroscepticism (simply Euroscepticism or Eurocriticism for Kopecký and Mudde (2002)) is when there is

"not a principled objection to the European integration project of transferring powers to a supranational body such as the EU, but there is opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make" (Szczurbiak & Taggart, 2003, pp. 12).

Nevertheless, how can Euroscepticism, in its two-dimensional conceptualization, walk hand in hand with the populist wave that crosses the European Union?

The Spanish *Podemos*, although expressing its displeasure with the crisis of the Eurozone and the intervention of the EU, will have assumed a position of soft Euroscepticism or does its rhetoric indicates a tendency to a growing radicalization? As for the right-wing populist parties, while some have taken a completely opposed stance towards EU membership (UKIP for instance), others, such as French FN, have held Eurosceptic and wavering positions (Pirro, Taggart, & Kessel, 2018, pp. 381). Thus, should be the latter included in the more or less Eurosceptic category?

It is also important to point out that Euroscepticism, although generally an element of populist parties agendas, is not necessarily the prerogative of populist parties only (Pirro et al., 2018; Ultan & Ornek, 2015; Taggart, 1998). As a matter of fact, Euroscepticism can be both ideologically and strategically driven (Ultan & Ornek, 2015, pp. 51) and hence voiced by political parties as a pragmatic addition to their programs. Thus, strategically driven, a political party which manifests opposition to the policies or values of European integration, tends to express Eurosceptic arguments (Rovny, 2004, pp. 37).

Although Euroscepticism is not a temporary phenomenon, the three-crises theory proposed by Pirro, Taggart and Van Kessel (2018), may have been the basic reason for combining Eurosceptic rhetoric and populist movements. Mobilized by the perception of crises and taking advantage of the failure of the European Union, existing populist parties and even newly formed ones, sought to redefine strategically their ideology, merging with populist Eurosceptic discourses.

CHAPTER II

Methodology and Case Selection

Knowing the reality of the phenomenon of populism in EU member states and its relation to the project of European integration through a process of critical reflection lacks a method by which all aspects and dimensions of the research problem can be justified and systematized.

The framework must condition the investigator to the most reliable approximation of the real problem. For the ultimate purpose of knowing and understanding the phenomenon, the method should serve as a guiding line for ensuring the reliability and comparability of the study, in diversity between the appearance and the real essence of the phenomenon (Kosík, 1976). Thus, scientific research unfolds in a systematic and critical effort to uncover what lies behind the evidence, and technical procedures emerge as tools for capturing empirical information. In attempting to unite two competing worlds, quantitative methods alert us to the rarity with which variables have perfect correlations, and qualitative research denies absolute determinism.

2.1 Problem, Object and Method

The present research establishes a comparative study between populist narratives – from Lega Nord, Movimento 5 Stelle, Front National, and Podemos –and the European rhetoric assumed by case-study parties from different European Member-States – Italy, France and Spain. Therefore, the study is developed around two variants of research: Populism and Euroscepticism.

The phenomenon of Populism assumes such complexity that makes it difficult to be subject to a univocal and concordant definition in the scientific world. The elements of its rhetoric are dependent on a set of circumstances that shape it specifically in time, place and social circumstances, diverging accordingly from country to country and, within a country, from the historical-cultural context from which it emerges. On the other hand, Euroscepticism is a dependent variable not only of the ideology carried out by the party under study, but also of the social, cultural, historical, and humanist phenomena on which the position is based.

Both variables find a relationship in a convergent encounter at the supranational level. The ideologies and rhetoric conducted at the domestic level are thus transposed to a supranational level in which, instead of entailing the positions of more or fewer populists (as it happens at the domestic level), it unwinds into more or less Eurosceptic stances vis-a-vis the institution that unifies in a single project the national governments.

Stemming from a null hypothesis of correlation, the sample concentrates four populist parties of Italy, France, and Spain. The research sought to establish diversity in the sample, with different parties in their genesis, agenda, and position on the political

spectrum, in order to allow a comparison between the various populist narratives and to understand how they are reflected in the Euroscepticism analyses.

Thus is presented the following research problem:

“Is there a relationship between populism and the European attitude among the populist parties?”

Insofar as we are faced with two complex realities that are impossible to study exhaustively due to the buoyancy of their elements, the mixed approach seems to be the most appropriate method, allowing examination of both variables independently, coordinating qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. Therefore, the approach outlined here comprises a qualitative methodological priority, followed by a complementary sequence of quantitative data. In this way, the methodological strategy used rests on a constructivist ontological substrate (analysis of the construction of social reality by its actors) followed by an interpretive epistemological orientation.

Objectively, we intend to map and interpret positions of the parties under study, but also to expose substantive arguments and the way they have developed over time.

In addition to the reference to expert research data, the study is based on qualitative analyses of the content of party manifestos, usually recognized as the most reliable source of ideological positions and allowing us to retrieve data on party policies over time (Laver & Garry, 2000).

The contextual variety –left-right political dichotomy; newly founded parties emerging from the populist phenomenon and well-established parties in the national political landscape; different periods of analysis; and the trans-national element –establish a balance between two old and established parties (Lega Nord and Front National) and two new-born with the phenomenon of populism (Movement 5 Stelle and Podemos).

The delimited research period differs from political party to political party. In this way, as the research focuses on the period since the crises crossed Europe until now, for the first two parties the period of analysis has been established since 2007, while for the second parties immediately after its foundation, 2013/2014.

Although before different agendas, the four parties have a common denominator of populism, anti-establishment.

Finally, we chose three parties (Lega Nord, Front National, and Movimento 5 Stelle) that have undergone leadership changes during the period of analyses, two that

have established a governing coalition (Lega Nord and Movimento 5 Stelle), and two that remained in the opposition during the crises (Front National and Podemos).

In summary, the research intends to answer the following general questions:

- 1) How exactly should this growing hostility towards the EU be interpreted?
- 2) Does populist rhetoric *per se* necessarily imply a hostile position vis-à-vis the EU? What are the differences between the four political parties?
- 3) Is it possible to establish some kind of relationship between the Populist wave that has crossed the EU and the proliferation of Euroscepticism among the Member States?
- 4) Of the four political parties, if hostile to European integration, do they have the same degree of hostility or do they express different positions of Euroscepticism?
- 5) What elements can condition the European narratives of the parties?

CHAPTER III

Case Study Parties and its Populist Rhetoric

3.1. Salvini and Lega Nord

The *Il Carroccio* party, the Northern League (Lega Nord in Italian, or simply Lega), was founded in 1991 by Umberto Bossi and raised as a federation of several regions between north and central Italy in the aftermath of the collapse of the so-called 'First Republic'. Nowadays, Lega Nord represents the oldest party in the Italian parliament and it has become over the years a major player at the national level.

The party was born as a Euro-optimist organization. Yet in the late 1990s, it did not take long for the party to show an inclination of its ideological strand to more Eurosceptic fields.

By the time the economic crises broke out, a programmatic document opposing the integration model was released by the party, emphasizing the preservation of state

sovereignty and the “Europe of the peoples” while accusing Europe of being an “undemocratic super-state” (LN, 2009).

Soon the Northern League party achieved its relevance in the Italian political spectrum, through successfully dealing with two major problems already felt at the time within Italian society. Firstly, the demand for more regional power in the north of the state, justified by the enormous economic and social gap between the northern regions and, as stressed in its 2008’s programme, the less developed “ parasite” south (Krause et al., 2008); and last, the hostility and social discontent with political elites, peaking in the late 1980s (McDonnell & Albertazzi, 2015, pp. 4).

Best defined then as a ‘regionalist party’ (McDonnell, 2006), Bossi’s era came to an end in late 2012 with the revelation of the ‘magic circle’ fraud scandal (la Repubblica, 2012). As a result of tensions between party factions, the scandal led to Bossi’s (forced) resignation, leaving a free path for Matteo Salvini, who won the party’s secretary position against the former (still attempting a ‘comeback’) in December 2013.

In the run-up to the 2013 national elections, LN was challenged by the great alliance of right-wing parties (the Democratic Party and the Berlusconi’s Popolo della Libertà) and by its new left-wing populist opposition, Movimento 5 Stelle. Contesting a “more Europe of the People, less euro-bureaucratic”, LN embodied in its program the “acceleration of the four unions: political, economic, banking, and fiscal.” (Lega Nord, 2013, pp. 3).

Nevertheless, it was the year 2014 that revealed the true Euro-pessimistic scope of the party. In its electoral program, LN accuses the EU of becoming a “medieval empire,” and the submission of its member states by always answering “‘yes’ to Brussels” (Lega Nord, 2014, pp. 3-4). The party refers to the euro as a measure that “cannot be postponed”, blaming the single currency for the failure of Europe’s response to the economic crisis (LN, 2014, pp. 15).

Public disenchantment with the EU institutions, together with the national economic situation, provided the party with the necessary catalysts for its progressive radicalization and to increase its opposition to the EU. By strategically abandoning the party’s traditional *raison d’être* for the autonomy of the northern region, now addressing the national dimension, along with immigration and identity issues, the LN gained greater visibility among voters throughout the country (Albertazzi, pp. 650). This influence was mirrored in the 2018 elections, in which LN for the first time overcame its long-time Forza Italia coalition partner, repositioning itself as the main right-wing party.

Reiterating its ideological line, in its 2018 programme Salvini enhance the idea of limited powers to the EU to safeguard national sovereignty. Quoting the party's programme, "Italy cannot leave Europe ... because of its geographical position. The European Union is another case. This is a huge supranational body, without a genuine democratic legitimacy", adding a condition to remaining in the EU the amendment of all treaties that impose restrictions "on the exercise of full and legitimate sovereignty" (Lega Nord, 2018, pp. 9).

By shedding traditionalist ideological roots of the party and leaving behind its cleavages, Salvini directed the party into new political rhetoric. The initially EU-optimistic, right-wing regionalist Bossi's party, gave way to the populist Eurosceptic nationalist (albeit in a complex way) Lega, flowing in the political spectrum between right and far-right.

Salvini's Populist Strategy

Salvini and with him Lega Nord, have become influential political actors, not only in Italy but on a European scale.

The right-wing party advocates an Italy of federal states with greater regional autonomy, with the main focus on the Northern regions. With Salvini's takeover of the party's leadership, the LN has radically changed its narrative of northern regional independence to an Italy united, embracing Italian nationalism and emphasizing its Eurosceptic stance, anti-elitism, and hostile position towards immigration.

Representing the best example of a radical ideological party, the LN presents itself as a strongly moralistic party, perceiving the political world in a set of moralities that divide the society between the morally pure, and the corrupt and therefore morally inferior elite. Invested in moral justification, Salvini calls himself the sole and exclusive representative of the people, endowed with the authority to speak on behalf of the people. In fact, this is the framework from which Salvini's populist narrative develops, in all that can be interpreted as anti-pluralist, anti-elitist and even anti-democratic.

From the moment Salvini took control of the party, the media and the type of communication came to play a key role in his success.

The LN has taken the example of many other populist parties to bring their ideologies closer to the Italian people through the massive use of the Internet, especially Facebook, the most popular platform. Through his personal account, Salvini created his own personal brand associated with the party itself, personalizing the LN with his image,

his speech and his ideologies that, for him, represent the direct claim of the ideologies of the Italian people. This moral justification associated with a strong communication strategy put the party at the center of the acceptance of the people who gradually assumed and supported Salvini's rhetoric. The constant sharing of Salvini's personal life, which led people to feel a false sense of closer contact with the leader, and the massive sharing of political positions, allowed the party to sell the idea of a Salvini as a common man, a man of the people, a man with traditional Italian values, namely religion and family. This image of a Salvini as equal to a common citizen, fostered his popularity among the people who followed him in real-time. If we had to characterize Salvini's populist strategy in a single measure, it would be defined as the "common man" strategy, where even the choice of informal clothing that any ordinary man would wear represents a tactic of approximation to the people.

The Lega Nord can then be seen as a clear case of a populist party, effected in practice by a sharp division between the virtuous and homogeneous "we" - honest, hardworking, and tied to its cultural values and traditional roots - threatened by the immoral political elites. Through their practices, this impure elite brings with them a number of other dangers, which call into question the people's values. Therefore, it is not surprising that the progressive and strong Euroscepticism of the party, faced with the crisis of immigrants seen by the LN as an attempt by its people's roots, founded on Christian values.

3.2. Luigi Di Maio and Movimento 5 Stelle

In the original 'Non-Statute' of the five-star Movement in 2013, in its first article reads: "The Five Star Movement" is a "non-association". It represents a platform and a vehicle of comparison and consultation that originates and finds its epicentre in the site www.movimento5stelle.it" (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2013, pp.3). The article is later developed in Article 4, which states that the M5S "is not a political party" (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2013, pp. 3).

Due to its unique and specific characteristics and to its constantly evolving structure, the M5S has become a non-standard political case, which represents a challenge both in its definition within the political spectrum and in forecasting the evolution of its policies.

When, in 2009, comedian Beppe Grillo together with Gianroberto Casaleggio decided to create the blog to protest against political corruption, they did not imagine that their creation would soon takeover the reins of the Italian government. The motive behind idea of the movement, inspired by the French Revolution, was to bring to contemporary society the model of the Direct Democracy of Rousseau, replacing the current Italian Representative Democracy and bringing back the power to ordinary citizens through the use of the Internet, and without organized parties. The movement focused its target audience on the electorates most affected by the burden of the economic crisis and depleted of the corruption of its political representatives, finding in them the driving force for the phenomenon (Giuffrida, 2018).

From early on, the party showed that its populist ideological was Eurosceptic and anti-establishment. In the first legislative elections that the party contested in 2013, the M5S managed to win more than 25% of the votes. Its election campaign was built on accusations that opposition "failed to represent citizens who could not choose the candidate" and it was mainly focused on investing in information and media quality, as the best means to exercise democratic power (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2013b, pp. 3).

Its strong Eurosceptic stance was seen in the 2014 European elections, when, with a slim program of only seven points, it accused the EU of having submitted itself as a "slave of France and Germany", which "abandoned the states to their own destiny" (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2014). The M5S (2014) begins in its first point to advocate a popular referendum for the maintenance of Italy in the Eurozone, in case Europe does not apply "the necessary measures in order to truly become a community in which states help each other".

After the party's success in both the 2013 legislative elections, as in the European elections –with a resounding 21.2% of the votes –the popularity of the movement grew exponentially, consolidating itself as one of the largest political parties.

However, not a year later, co-founder Beppe Grillo announced his willingness to back down from politics and return to comedy (Giuffrida, 2018). With Grillo occupying the back seat throughout the year 2016, the party gradually gave the lead to Luigi Di Maio, who in September 2017 was confirmed presidential candidate by raising more than 82% of the party's votes (Casalini & Custodero, 2017).

Defending a policy of "Law and order" in relation to immigrants in order to combat the so-called immigration business, the party's 2018 election program focused on issues ranging from the defence of sovereignty and national independence to

environmental protection policies and measures to combat economic austerity. Regarding foreign policy and EU issues, besides emphasizing its concern with environmental issues suggesting a “circular economic system”, which guarantees an increase in the effectiveness of resource use, the programme focused as well on alliance between the southern member-states to combat the economic crises (as LN) coupled with an economic strategy with the powerful Russia (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2018b). The movement claims to the EU the “principle of non-interference in business internal countries” (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2018a, pp. 2). It indicts the EU of betraying its own founding values of respect for “self-determination of peoples, sovereignty and territorial integrity”(MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2018a, pp. 2). During the election campaign, Luigi Di Maio reinforced the party's position vis-à-vis the European Union stating its belief that the EU “will multiply the instruments of direct and participatory democracy, as well as promote it consultative referendum tool (with electronic vote), without a quorum, at all levels decision-making” (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2018b, pp. 6). In fact, at the level of European institution, the party calls for a concentration of decision-making power on the citizens, "increasing its representativeness and democracy" (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2018b, pp.5). It defends a policy driven "by the popular will, expanding and reinforcing the use of all instruments of direct and participatory democracy” (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2018b, pp. 5).

The results in legislative elections were a success and, with 32.7%, M5S was the most voted party (The Guardian, 2018).

After several months of deadlock and negotiations of what was marked as one of the greatest Italian political crises, the party of Luigi Di Maio decided to form a government with the Northern League of Salvini. However, with Salvini's refusal to have Di Maio as Prime Minister threatening to not form a government, the latter appointed the jurist and university professor Giuseppe Conte to the position.

The credibility of the party was called into question with the terrible result obtained in the European elections. Moved by a program voted by the citizens registered on the Rousseau platform, it reinforced what had already been said in the last European elections: “Europe must once again become a community where citizens are given top priority”; “With the various Junkers, Moscovici and Dombrovskis the Europe (...) that applies the rules for some and “interprets” them for others, favouring them in fact”(MoVimento 5 Stelle Europa, 2019). Notwithstanding, the party only managed to raise 17.1% of the votes (la Repubblica, 2019), which led Di Maio to give the Italian people the power to decide to stay in the M5S via online plebiscite. To the question “Do

you confirm Luigi Di Maio as leader of the M5S?" 45% of the 80% of the militants who voted responded positively (Il Tempo, 2019). Faced with this result and the record in popular participation, Di Maio reacted on Facebook, stating: "the ratification of my position is only the first step to initiate a deep organization of the M5S, to bring it closer to citizens and to accentuate our identity." (Avó, 2019).

Luigi di Maio's Populist Strategy

Movimento 5 Stelle is the archetypal example of a populist party following Mudde's definition, raised to recall a "silent revolution". It began by clearly defining the class of society to whom it gives voice, those most affected by the burden of the economic crisis and discontent with the political corruption in which Italy sank. Assuming a rhetoric dividing society into two poles, the victims who defend, and the political enemy, the Five Star Movement rejects its definition as a political party, but rather its conception as a popular movement. It even includes in its non-statute created in 2013 the mention to a "non-political party", yet presenting all the dimensions and coordinating structures that define it as such (MoVimento 5 Stelle, 2013). However, invested with the popular movement power the party finds its arguments to accuse the whole political class as if it wasn't one of them. On several occasions, Beppe Grillo has categorically refused to be placed in any position on the left-right spectrum and the movement 'non-statute' itself establishes it. Its ideological position strategically encompasses both the left-wing electorate –concentrating on ecology and democracy, opposition to high finance –and, at the same time, right-wing policies such as the hostile position to immigration and even the use of language, by adopting much more aggressive rhetoric, typical of right-wing movements. The party's approach to the people through a strongly charismatic leadership and the capacity to build a cross-cutting consensus regardless of its political ideology, whether among the electors of the left - discredited by the scandal of corruption on the political left - or among the discontent of ex-supporters of the right, were the key reasons that led to the party's success. This entails on the impossibility of defining M5S as a single-issue party, but rather a party with a mixed programme with left-right themes.

They seize and encourage the anti-political and anti-establishment sentiments of the masses to refuse representative democracy that strengthened corrupt social class. The party advanced with a detailed vision for political reform and the institutionalisation of direct democracy and sought to return the power to those who are the true owners of the state (citizens), and who alone can perform constant monitoring of their employees

(politicians). To this end, advocating for political transparency, the party finds on the Internet the only and best means of providing political communication. From social networks to debate programs, and online platforms (the party itself), the internet has thus become the main (and most effective) mechanism for the proliferation of its ideas, as often repeated as necessary to make their supporters accept them and progressively increase their support.

In short, the black and white vision of the 5-star movement assumed by a charismatic leader already well-known in Italian society, translates into the classic populist rhetoric, culminating in the anti-elitist approach and the dichotomy between "we" and "them", that is, the cleavage between the virtuous people and the corrupt elites.

3.3. Marine Le Pen and Front National

The National Front has never seen such a great performance in its early years as it has over the last seven years. Although not enough to qualify the party for the second round, only one year after Jean-Marie Le Pen's succession by his daughter Marine Le Pen the party managed to win 17.9% of the first-round votes in the 2012 presidential election, more votes than his father ever had (The Guardian, 2012). However, this great success under the leadership of Marine Le Pen is also much due to the slightly different rhetoric assumed by the party in recent years.

As one of the strongest and well-established PRR in Europe, the FN has always exhibited a nativist, populist, authoritarian ideology, which has persisted over the entire leadership of Jean Le Pen. Since the 1990s the restoration of French sovereignty and a coalition of cooperation between EU member states have been the party keywords during the election campaigns. In 2007, with the increasing politicization of the economic recession that had never reached such proportions since WWII and the overwhelming flow of immigrants from Syria to France, the priority of the Front National agenda centred on opposition to the European single currency, blaming it for disparities between member states in combating the crisis that plagued the EU (République Française, 2007). The party's traditional Eurosceptic and anti-US framework has allowed it to absorb the crises-crossed by the EU to highlight policies long defended. Therefore, it adopted a very radical stance and the Eurosceptic discourse progressively caught the attention of the electorate.

In 2012, now led by Marine Le Pen and renamed as Rassemblement National (National Rally), the party committed its program to 12 measures. It called for direct democracy with the inclusion of popular referendums in the French Constitution (RN, 2012, pp. 8), a stop to immigration and the preservation of privileges and social aid to nationals. Le Pen mentions that Article 50 of the European Union Treaty to advocate renegotiations of the treaties to break with the failed European "dogmatic" construction and restoring the sovereignty of "popular identities, languages and cultures" (e.g. see Appendix B for Article 50 TEU: Withdrawal of a Member State from the EU) (RN, 2012, pp. 15). The RN repeated its promise of a French exit from the Eurozone in the European elections of 2014, accusing the common currency of serving only the "interests of the bankers and the wealthy" (Page, 2014).

After its great success in 2012, the party topped the 2014 European elections with 24.9% of the vote, becoming the largest French party in the European Parliament with twenty-four seats (European Parliament, 2014). It won 21.3% in the first round of the 2017 Presidential elections and it increased the result for 33.9% in the second round (The Guardian, 2017).

However, it was in the presidential race in 2017 that the RN radicalized its Eurosceptic position. Fuelled by the terrorist attacks of November 2015, the RN used the fear of the French people to associate the attacks with the crisis of refugees of the EU, demanding the closing of the French borders and the exit of Schengen (RN, 2017, pp. 7). In what regards to its anti-immigration measures, the party suggested to simplify and automatize the expulsion of immigrants, promising to end illegal immigration and ban the migrants' right to a family reunion (RN, 2017, pp. 7). In addition, RN (2017) promised to close all "extremist mosques" (pp.7) and the expulsion of all those associated with Jihadist movements. Despite the strongly nationalist program, there is an attenuation in its stance towards EU integration. For the very first time, instead of advocating for the exit of the country from the EU, the party calls for a "Europe of the Independent Nations at the service of the people" (RN, 2017, pp. 3). However, it foresees the possibility of a popular referendum, giving to the people the power of the decision to remain.

The party's step-back on its strong and radical opposition to the EU was felt even more in the Europeans of 2019, imposing the slogan "The European Alliance of Nations" (RN, 2019). Even though standing its position in the matters of immigration, Marine Le Pen doubled down Euroscepticism and adopted the so-called "euro-reformist" stance, both advocating a reform of the European institution and the importance of the European

identity and its heritage as the common roots that keep straight the ties between Nations. In its 2019 program, which was followed as well with a manifesto, Le Pen calls for a reform of the asylum system, adding that leaving the Euro is no longer a priority (RN, 2019, pp. 15). The results were the biggest success ever achieved by the party, putting the far right in the lead with a result of 23.31% of shared votes, in popular participation also unexpected of about 50% (EURACTIV, 2019).

In a recent open letter to its electors written by Thierry Mariani, the party member emphasized the patriotism and meritocracy of the movement for the struggle for social justice and national independence, stating that the election results reflected the identification of the French people in the values embodied in the National Rally and vowing to continue to resist the "capitalism of connivance, the technocracy of Brussels and the interests of blind speculators" (Mariani, 2019).

Marine Le Pen's Populist Strategy

The French Front National is already recognized by scholars as the archetypal PRR party type of Western Europe, exhibiting the key features of the PRR, namely nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde, 2007).

Strongly nationalistic, focusing its electoral programs mainly on national sovereignty and French people interests, for more than two decades, the party has been a vehicle for right-wing populist Euroscepticism in French politics (Ivaldi, 2018, pp.280).

With the institutional transformation of the party in 2012, triggered by the assumption of Marine Le Pen as the new leader and with it, the renaming of the party for 'Rassemblement National', its new image was taken by the media as a 'de-demonization' of the party.

Although the typical PRR ideology persisted, the party radically changed its communication strategy. Whether through the media, social networks or even the frequent and unique personal publications of Party members on the party online platform, the RN followed the Italian example and brought the image of Le Pen closer to the French society. Becoming thus, the face and driving force of the party, Marine Le Pen doubled down her interactions with the French people, constantly posting online messages directly addressed to the masses.

Len Pen's rhetoric focuses mainly on feeding and proliferating the fear and repudiation of immigrants and refugees, widespread as terrorists and linked to the increased crime rate in the country. To this end, it blames the EU, which in addition to

weakening the French economy with the failure of the single currency project, it was seen as the responsible for the refugee crisis, requiring member states to accept the immigrants, violating their national sovereignty.

By using a strong and simple language, in all political programs of Le Pen it is possible to find the repetition of words like "rupture" or "break-up", emphasizing its opposition to the system and, at the same time, presenting herself as an outsider to the political system (Stockemer & Barisione, 2016). Indeed, Marine Le Pen has become the party's charismatic leader, calling herself the "representative of the honest and hardworking people" or the "crisis manager" ready to "rebuild France" (FN, 2012).

Le Pen's populist discourse is defined by many scholars as the combination of a 'populist ideology' and a 'populist communication style', which finds its elements in a combination of people-centrism and anti-elitism and in the consideration of people as a homogeneous body from which results the exclusion of specific categories of population (immigrants, seen as a threat to cultural values and national security) (McDonnell & Albertazzi, 2015; Mudde, 2007; Canovan, 1999). Moreover, the RN framework rests in the opposition between 'the Patriots' and 'the globalists' (*mondialistes*) (Ivaldi, 2018, pp. 280), and feeding the cleavages between the two poles.

It follows that the differences between the two party leaders lie not in the so-called process of "de-demonizing" the party but rather in the degree of "populism" of both rhetorics: to Jean Le Pen's radical anti-Semitism, Marine Le Pen replaces it by populist and respectful rhetoric.

3.4. Pablo Iglesias and Podemos

After a long period in which Spanish society seemed immune to the phenomenon that has spread throughout Europe, in January 2014, was raised the movement that would shake the Spanish political spectrum and put into question the two-party system, which has dominated Spanish politics over the last 30 years: Podemos (we can). Echoing Obama's "We Can", the party led by the young university professor Pablo Iglesias and taken in full force with the aid of students, alumni and faculty academics, intended to shake the discontent of the class more harmed by the economic crisis to fight against the so-called "la casta", an elite of corrupt politicians.

Less than a month before its first European elections in 2014, a poll conducted by the party itself revealed that only 8% of Spaniards had heard of them, while about 50% knew Pablo Iglesias (Tremlett, 2015). Faced with this overwhelming difference, the party abandoned its strategy to another of giving to the party Iglesias' identity, including his face even in the party's logo (Tremlett, 2015). Despite emerging only four months before the elections, the party managed to secure a result of 8% of the votes (about 1,250,000 votes), which gave it five seats in Parliament (European Parliament, 2014).

Strongly inspired by popular nationalist movements in Latin America and Tsipras' Syriza in Greece (Zarzalejos, 2016, pp. 185), Podemos called for a revolution against political corruption, enormous social inequalities, the nationalization of public utilities and the restructure of the national debt (Torreblanca, 2015, pp. 10), while advocating the rejection of the 1978 Constitution and the reconciliation agreements that established the democratic transition.

In just one year of existence, the party almost tripled its share of votes by accumulating about 21% of shared votes in the general elections of 2015, thus breaking the Spanish bipartisan system (Garea, 2015).

By establishing a strong media presence to reach the Spanish people on a daily basis, either through social networks or through new digital media or broadcasts of political debates with high rates of spectators, the party has proved to be an innovation in using social networks and appeal to the Spaniards for their direct participation in the decisions of the movement. Indeed, on its first manifesto of 2015 for the general elections, the party counted on the participation of more than fifteen thousand people in the choice of almost all the proposals through the online Plaza Podemos platform. With an innovative program "decided by the people" (Podemos, 2015, pp. 9-10), the party was based on the defence of the four democracies - political, social, citizen and international - to "change the country" (Podemos, 2015).

Due to the higher political fragmentation and the failure in forming a government after the 2015 elections (EL PAÍS, 2015), Iglesias pursued an alliance strategy with the left to overtake the PSOE as the second political force. However, despite positive polls that had pointed at overtaking the PSOE by the new "Unidas Podemos" alliance, the results in 2016 elections only hovered around 21.1% (EL PAÍS, 2016), only about 1% more than what Podemos achieved by itself in 2015.

After three years of internal instabilities around issues raised during its structural reform after the failure of the results obtained in the 2016 elections, the alliance Unidas

Podemos (now also in a coalition with the ecological party), has adopted a much more demarcated position. In its 2019 electoral programs, both for the European Parliament and general elections, the party explored intensively issues around environmental matters and feminist empowerment, taking advantage of the feminist movements that have marked the country. In addition to adopting a much more radical narrative in relation to the European Union, advocating a complete reform of the institution (Podemos, 2019; Podemos, 2019b), it also points to the danger of the opposition "three of Aznar" blaming the far-right coalition for regressing Spain to "forty years to the past in civil fundamental rights and women's rights" and "increasing the tax privileges of large corporations, crushing the work class" (Podemos., 2019, pp. 5). They also accuse the opposition of "not having even taken more than five minutes to reform the Constitution to put the interests of the German banks ahead" (Podemos, 2019, pp. 94), instead of advocating the draft of a feminist Constitution, the elimination of the Crown Rights and the inclusion of social rights into their new Constitution.

Nevertheless, in both the European and national elections, the Left Alliance was heavily crushed by the Socialist Party and the far-right alliance (EL PAÍS, 2019; EL PAÍS, 2019a), which for many scholars it represented only the reflection of the party's strategic flaws and weaknesses.

Pablo Iglesias' Populist Strategy

Observers found the reason for the so-called "explosion" of the Iglesias movement pointing to the strategic moment in which it emerged. The party arose as a breath of fresh air between two key moments, catalysing the resulting social discontent: the end of the socialist government (2004-2011) that drew 7 years of economic mismanagement and the takeover of the government by the Popular Party (PP) in 2011, which focused its governance on austerity and fiscal and economic reforms (Zarzalejos, 2016, pp. 189).

In analyzing the narrative throughout its political programmes, it's possible to denote that Podemos follows left-wing radicalism in economic and social questions.

Following a strategy in everything similar to Di Maio's M5S, the party's commitment to the massive use of social networks and the new digital media, as well as the continuous presence on discussion programmes that reported remarkable audience ratings, helped the party to spread its ideology and to win the sympathy of the dissatisfied Spanish electorate. Either the political program created through public participation, or the constant appeal for popular referendums to decide decisive issues in the country,

whether to change the “obsolete” constitution or to decide on the country's permanence in the EU, are part of its strategic mechanism of an approach to the people and their inclusion in the political movement of the party, insinuating itself as a party whose rhetoric and political ideology as a direct reflection of the popular will. In fact, the party fosters its ideology based on the rejection of representative democracy, emphasizing political elites as enemies. Podemos builds the core of its ideology in the same line as the M5S, the “exploiting casta” as the enemy of the “exploited people”, the Spanish working class. Its political programs are developed around the defence of direct democracy as the means for the restitution of power to its rightful owner, the people.

The strategy adopted by the party to include in the logo the photo of Pablo Iglesias, reflects its intention to attribute the identity of a figure to the movement in order to bring it closer to ordinary people. The party is no longer only Podemos, to become the Pablo Iglesias’ Podemos, the charismatic leader with whom the Spanish people can easily identify, by sharing somehow some common origins.

In order to win the credibility of its people in the midst of the two political powers that have dominated the political spectrum for more than 30 years, Podemos mobilizes simple messages, fuelled by the mistakes of the opposition to blame them for the regression of the Spanish economy and all the problems that are reasons for the people’s discontent. It is important to note the chameleonic characteristic of the party. Its capacity to conform to the positions of the people is further enhanced by issues of social division: the independence of Catalonia. In fact, the party has spoken little or nothing about the subject, which shows its fear of defining its position in the matter. Podemos aims to reach the broadest possible target audience, left or right-wing and for this, it needs to maintain its unclear rhetoric, flexible and overarching as possible.

They advocate against liberal democracy, seen as an intrinsically corrupt and unjust system by which the upper classes legitimize their control over all levels of social, political and economic life. At the national level, it is the corrupt politicians who exploit the medium taxpayer who plays the role of the enemy. At the European level, it is Germany that sought to dominate Europe through its economic empire.

CHAPTER IV

Euroscepticism in the European Narrative of the Parties Case-Study

4.1. Lega Nord & The European Union

Salvini's anti-establishment, homophobic and Populist Party, proved in the European elections of 2014 its strong Eurosceptic vein, shouting "Enough Euro!" as a campaign slogan.

Its 2014 program focused entirely on heavy criticism of the Eurozone and on the EU's imposition of the single currency as a premeditated strategy of "who wanted to drive the European people to their idea of "unification"", which prejudices the countries already in difficulty and only strengthens the stronger economies (LN, 2014, pp. 9). The party calls for Italy quitting the Eurozone and claiming sovereignty to manage its own currency as the only solution to avoid the country's decliner to the Third World.

The opening of the electoral program is all dedicated to the claim of national sovereignty, a "perverse" outrage of a "distant, obscure and abstract" EU. Salvini accuses the UE of becoming a "non-imperial empire" and by attempting to replace domestic sovereignty with a universal government and powers - on the one hand, the "secular arm with seat in Brussels, and, on the other hand, the Court of Human Rights based in Strasbourg" (LN, 2014).

The party advocates a people-centred policy and the direction of European construction with the European people at the centre of its ideology. To that end, it advocates expanding the legislative powers of the European Parliament, the only EU body democratically representing the European people, and reforming all European treaties by submitting to a referendum in each Member State.

In addition to criticizing the EU's failure to deal with the economic crisis, the party also strongly attacks the institution's position on the immigrant crisis, focusing not only on its sovereignty to manage the phenomenon but also on heavy criticism that is xenophobic and nationalist. Affirming the existence of a new dichotomy between 'globalization' and 'identity', the party accuses the EU's "homologation" of culture and customs to untie man from his society. Lega Nord demands the affirmation of the

traditional values and founders of its society, to safeguard the identity of the European citizen. Thereby, no wonder the party's hostility towards Turkey's entry into the EU, reinforced both in the 2014 election campaign and in the more recent European elections of 2019 (LN, 2019). Among the various reasons pointed out by Salvini's party are the idea of European secularism opposed to the predominantly Muslim community, fears of the loss of Christian values and fears of the demographic power of Turkey, which as a populous young country would represent a "disproportionate" seat in EU decisions (LN, 2014).

In addition, the party devotes a paragraph of its program to emphasize the importance of traditional family values. Recalling a clearly homophobic language, LN refers to same-sex couples as a "madness", promoted by the EU in its message of diversity between a sexual choice and gender-free. The party pledges to "reaffirm the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition" (2014) on which the party was founded.

Its 2019 European elections' program did not change the party's hostility much. Salvini focuses once more on the question of national sovereignty, with respect for the democratic principle and protection of the European nations' identity, compromised by the immigration crisis (LN, 2019). The withdrawal of the single currency and monetary sovereignty have been issues strongly reiterated by the party, without however stating directly Italy's exit from the EU.

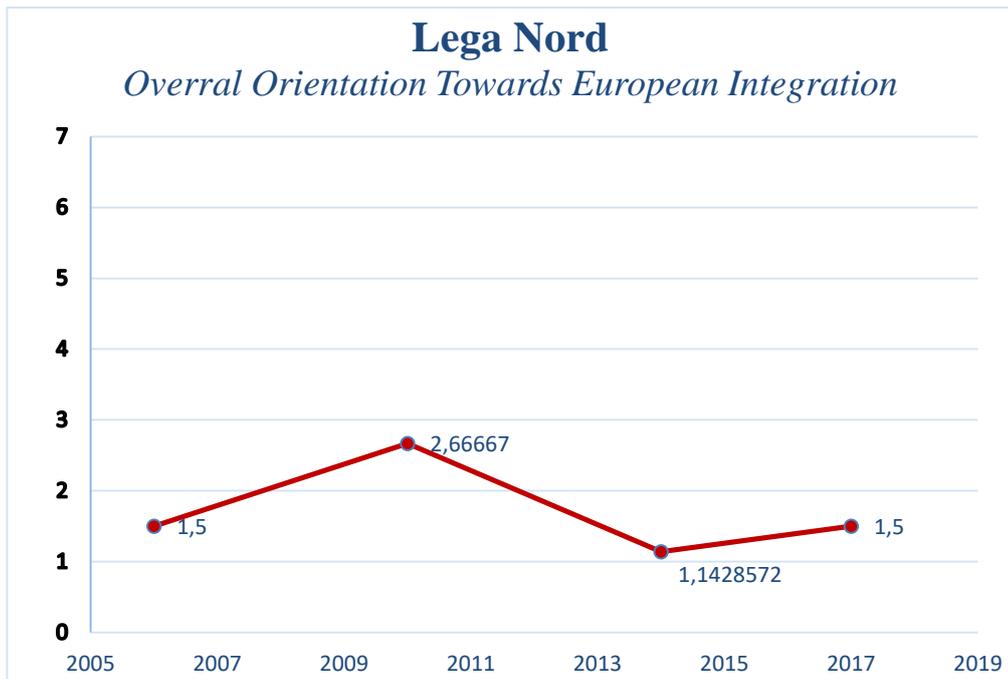


Figure 1 Overall Orientation of Lega Nord towards the European integration. Source: 2014, 2017 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Bakker et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2015).

Note: 1= Strongly opposed; 4 = Neutral; 7 = Strongly in favour.

It is undeniable that Salvini has been leading the party in a much more critical direction, both as regards the future of the EU and the draft of the single currency (see Figure 2.). Identified primarily by its radical, homophobic and anti-Semitic character, the party attenuated its regionalist position and concentrated its program on nationalist messages to combat globalization. However, the party's abstention from directly affirming the idea of withdrawing from the EU, while strongly criticizing the institution's policies, incorporates the great line that characterizes the European narrative of LN.

The year 2014 reached opposition levels on the EU's never-before-assumed integration project (1.14 in the direction of the "Strong Opposition"), showing an almost inscrutable softening of its rhetoric after the European elections. It is, therefore, safe to say that the Lega Nord adopts a 'conditional' position which, according to the Kopecký and Mudde (2002) typology, is characterized as a Euro-critical position: disagreement on the practice of the EU framework and the future of the principle of multilateral cooperation. In sum, while rejecting completely the EU framework and the future of European integration, seeking above all to limit its competences, Lega Nord accepts the principle of multilateral cooperation, which justifies its reluctance to radically address a possible exit from the EU.

4.2. Movimento 5 Stelle & The European Union

The electoral programme of the party for the European elections in 2014, was focused on only seven measures: 1) Abolition of the Fiscal Compact; 2) Adoption of Eurobond; 3) Alliance between Mediterranean Countries for a Common Policy; 4) Investments in innovation and new production activities exclude from the 3% annual budget deficit limit; 5) Financing for agricultural and breeding activities aimed at internal national consumption; 6) Abolition of budget balance; 7) Referendum for the stay in the Eurozone.

The presentation of their projects on the so-called "V-Day" is already part of the characterization line of the movement. V-day, in fact, is the realization of the organization and mobilization capacity of the online party. As such, the party organizes the V-Day to gather the maximum constituents and voters and speak directly with the electorate, a transposition of their slogans and political battles from social networks to the country's squares (Lupato & Tronconi, 2016, pp. 174). In fact, its program for the 2014 European elections was featured in the party's third V-Day (Amici di Beppe Grillo, 2013), bringing together different reactions from its electorate to the party's seven-point agenda.

In examining the content of the program, the first measure that stands out is the initiative of a popular referendum to decide on the future of the country in the EU. The proposal had different reactions among the electorate: some feared the measure, conscious of the economic implications that a possible exit from the EU could have for national economic sustainability; others have sharply criticized the unconstitutionality of the measure. However, Beppe Grillo immediately intervened through his blog to appease the insecurities of his electorate against the radicalism of the measure, ensuring the merely consultative nature of the referendum, so as to give the people the opportunity to express their will to remain in the EU. The M5S leader also insisted on interpreting his proposal not as an expression of opposition to the EU project, but as an opening to weigh the pros and cons of the country's permanence in the EU and, above all, the widening of the legitimacy of these matters to the people opinion.

In what matters to the other measures, the abolition of the fiscal compact, the investments in innovation and the sixth, the abolition of budget balance, are all related with the still-established austerity measures from the economic crises.

The suggestion of a Mediterranean Alliance and the abolition of a budget balance are pointed as a critic to the EU mismanagement of the public economy during the

economic crises (accusing, in particular, the economic monopoly from Germany), especially in what concerns to the Mediterranean countries, whom have suffered the biggest impact of the crises.

Lastly, the Eurobond proposition is in everything controversial, raising some questions to the spirit of the party's manifesto. The Eurobond financial instrument involves summarily debt securities and implies that the debt of each Member State is guaranteed by the other members. Such a guarantee would entail the integration of a common system of fiscal and monetary policies in the EU. These measures would lead to further narrowing among the EU Member States, a condition which the previous measures induced the will to abolish.

Taking a look at the subsequent program for the 2019 European elections, the party extended the program to ten measures. From the previous electoral program, the party seemed to take a new approach to the issue of European integration, talking about a "change of the European Union from within" (M5S, 2019). In addition to being on the same measures for the abolition of austerity policies, instead of defending Italy's exit from the eurozone, it proposes measures to redefine the EU, namely an EU based on direct democracy with the increase of the legislative power for the European Parliament or even a common system for the redistribution of immigrants between member states. Indeed, the party has even changed its language on the EU, drafting a manifesto in which the slogan is no longer the EU as "they" to become "we: the true priority of Italy and Europe," "the borders of Italy are the borders of Europe" (M5S, 2019).

When analysing both electoral programs within an interval of only five years, the evolution in the party's European rhetoric is notable. In the party manifesto (especially in 2014), the measures both point to the defence of the radical repeal of the European project - the initial proposal for a popular referendum on the single currency and the vindication of its national sovereignty – and, simultaneously, it preview measures for a greater cooperation between member states advocating, instead, an EU reform. This expresses a clear contradiction on the party narrative which, more than refuse the European integration, reveals a heterogenetic and unclear definition of its core ideological directives.

From the initial Euroreject position according to the definition of Kopecký and Mudde (2002), which results in the combination of the disavowal of the EU as well as an opposition to the ideas underlying the European integration, or even the typology of hard Euroscepticism of Taggart and Szczerbiak (2003), the party seems to have softened its

hostile position towards EU. This assumption seems to be corroborated by the data in Figure 3., which shows a slight reorientation of the party towards a less hostile position in terms of the EU integration project.

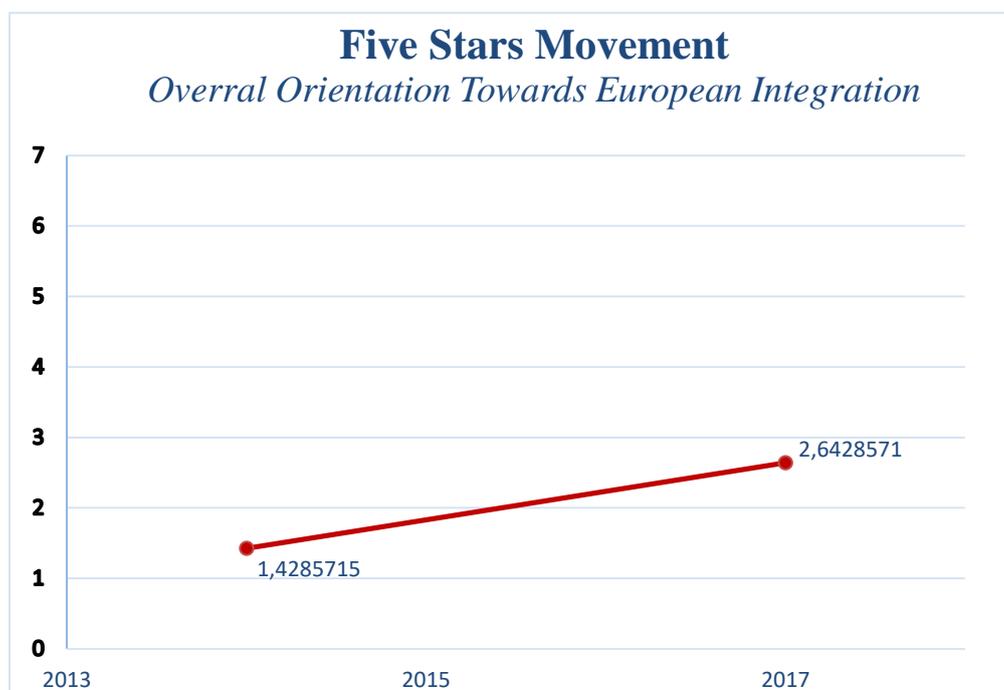


Figure 2 Overall Orientation of Movimento 5 Stelle towards the European integration. Source: 2014, 2017 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Bakker et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2015).

Note: 1 = Strongly opposed; 4 = Neutral; 7 = Strongly in favour.

It becomes, therefore, complex to curtail M5S stance to an unambiguous approach.

Nevertheless, we must take into account what might have been behind the different approach in the last European elections. Besides the later manifesto having been done in cooperation with the people, through the disposition of the proposals to popular approval, Beppe Grillo had the example from the previous elections that radical rhetoric of an EU withdraw may frighten their electorates and put at stake its popularity.

During the 2014 campaign, Beppe Grillo heavily criticized the European economic policies, stating “This Europe so invoked and so absent has become a modern dictatorship which uses democratic ceremonials to legitimize itself. The M5S will enter Europe to change it, make it democratic, transparent, with shared decisions at the

referendum level” (Grillo, 2014). Coupled with the expert survey data that still shows a strong opposition stance (2, 64), this may be the best interpretation of the M5S narrative towards the EU: anti-establishment rhetoric, the pledge for an institutional reform “from within” and, with it, the replacement of representative democracy with direct democracy.

4.3. Front National & The European Union

From an early stage, the party has always been framed within the field of hard Euroscepticism, adopting highly aggressive rhetoric both with regard to the European integration project and with the EU itself. The themes of the party have always revolved around the claim of French national sovereignty, against the Brussels bureaucracy that oppressed the country. France's withdrawal from the euro area and the repeal of the Maastricht Treaty and later the Treaty of Lisbon have always been Le Pen's strongest cards, who always rejected the principle of multilateral cooperation advocated by the EU institution. Albeit Marine Le Pen's remarkable attempts to renew the party's image and identity after her takeover, the renamed Rassemblement National remained with its characteristic radical rhetoric over the first years.

In the 2014 European elections program, Marine Le Pen repeated her father's pledge of a French exit from the Eurozone, criticizing the single currency for being an "anomaly" and a "prison" serving the "interests of bankers and the wealthy" (Page, 2014). Although France hasn't suffered the heavier consequences of the 2008 economic crises, the country has seen its economic growth stagnant and unemployment rates at 10%. However, throughout the European program of 2014, the party exposes critics and measures which are rooted in its nationalistic and anti-immigration rhetoric. RN advocates the safeguarding of traditional European family values and the strengthening of European culture. Accordingly, the party appoints the right of each member state to implement its own immigration policies while advocating the end of the European Schengen Area, and zero tolerance towards illegal immigrants, accused of being a “criminal threat” and a “burden” for France’s public finances (Page, 2014).

The nationalist nature of the party has further strengthened with the party's opposition towards the dual citizenship for non-Europeans and the claim of French citizens as a priority for the country (for jobs, social care, and housing).

Without neglecting the various criticisms to reform the European institution and legislative powers and to increase the participation of the European citizen in matters of common interest through popular referendums, what outlines Marine Le Pen's campaign is its undeniable xenophobic trait that leads the party to advocate an immediate closure of national borders, aimed at protecting the "secularism in Europe, whose Christian and humanistic roots are threatened by the rise of radical Islam within the EU" (Page, 2014).

However, the European elections of 2019 unveiled a party program with softened rhetoric towards the EU. Entitled "The European Alliance of Nations", Le Pen's party has abandoned the position of total rejection towards the European integration project to promote measures aiming a reform of the Eurozone. Among them, the party vaguely suggests the integration of the combat against unemployment in the European Central Bank competences, discarding the policy of monetary sovereignty (RN, 2019).

Moreover, instead of advocating the national sovereignty over asylum measures, the party claims for a reform of the European asylum system (RN, 2019).

Therefore, is it possible to assert a softening of the party's radical stance vis-à-vis the EU?

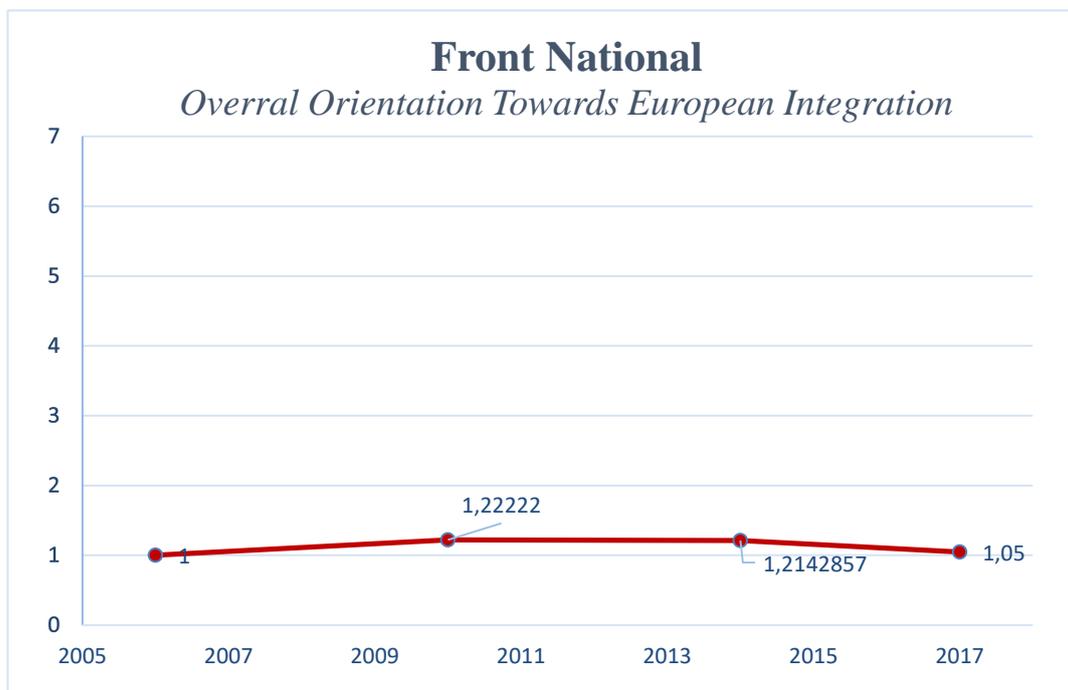


Figure 3. Overall Orientation of Front National towards the European integration. Source: 2014, 2017 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Bakker et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2015).

Note: 1 = Strongly opposed; 4 = Neutral; 7 = Strongly in favour.

The data provided by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey may point us in the opposite direction to what Marine Le Pen's populist discourse tells us. In fact, maintaining a strongly Eurosceptic overall position over the entire spectrum of the analysis, the data indicate an increase in hostility towards the European integration project since the 2014 elections (from 1,214 to 1,05), getting even closer to the "strongly opposed" level.

The rich pre-existing Eurosceptic framework coupled with the crises that plagued the EU, have enabled the party to strengthen its position on the French political spectrum. Yet the progressive diluted Euroscepticism of the party cannot be interpreted as a radical transformation of the party's ideology towards the EU, but rather as the ability of the RN of Marine Le Pen to shape her rhetoric in order to reach the more moderate voters. Although Marine Le Pen had described the difference between her party leadership towards her father's as a process of 'de-demonization' of the party, in fact, the main difference finds its reasons on the populism degree of the leaders.

However, the party advocates the abolition of the Lisbon Treaty, the sovereignty of the national currency and, above all, the elimination of the Schengen area stemming from its nationalist and xenophobic traits. To this end, the EU emerges as the primarily responsible for the internal problems related both to the immigration crisis and the national economy caused by European economic integration. It opposes to the principle that nations should cooperate at a higher multilateral level, including the EU framework, insisting that foreign policy should remain at the national level.

It seems, therefore, correct to describe Marine Le Pen's party as the kind of 'rejecting' type, which rejects the principle of renouncing national sovereignty to non-national institutions and, with it, a strict opposition to the Lisbon Treaty or to the legislative reinforcement at the EU level.

4.4. Podemos & the European Union

Like the M5S, the newly formed party Podemos only participated in two European elections (2014 and 2019), yet sufficient to outline the lines of its position before the EU.

The party's very first European elections program was summarized into six parts:

- 1) Reclaim the economy, build democracy;
- 2) Conquering freedom, build democracy;
- 3) Conquering equality, build democracy;

- 4) Reclaim Fraternity, build democracy;
- 5) Conquering sovereignty, build democracy;
- 6) Recover the land, build democracy;

As is clearly noticeable since the opening of the program, the whole campaign has been developed around the ideology of building a democracy and, throughout its program, there are several proposals that are rooted in the goal of building a more "democratic" democracy. However, the democracy demanded here is not the current representative democracy of the EU, which the party denounces as almost reduced to a technocratic economic-financial monopoly. Instead, Podemos claims the implementation of all the mechanisms and instruments of direct democracy, the only one that can put people at the centre of the whole European project, rather than "prioritize and benefit" some specific entity (Podemos., 2014; Podemos., 2019).

In addition to all the policies focused on the economic and social crisis that the party clearly conveys from the discourse at the domestic level, Podemos calls attention to greater transparency, a new model of economic development, democratic control and control of corruption.

However, the crucial measure for defining the trait of the party's European narrative is undoubtedly the proposal to repeal the Lisbon Treaty. The measure already mentioned in the 2014 program and later emphasized in the last run of the European elections in 2019, finds its grounds in the party's policy at a national level on the demand for sovereignty over public services and its non-submission to the principle of competence and mere mercantilization. Albeit, it is in this matter that the narrative of the Podemos becomes hazy. In addition to upholding the need for the integration of a common European fiscal system, the 2019 program expresses the demand for a profound reform "bottom-up" of the European institution, in order to transform the EU "into the vector that facilitates and paves the way for policies that put people at the centre" (pp.5). To this end, the party proposes full legislative powers to the European Parliament, an EU Democratic Charter that would implement the instruments for direct and participatory democracy, and the election of high commissioners by the people through voting (Podemos., 2019b).

Therefore how can we describe Podemos' European narrative?

The party both calls for the full repeal of the Lisbon Treaty and, at the same time, it calls for an intensive EU reform and supports measures that require greater integration into the European Community (in particular the common tax system and the Democratic

Charter). It strongly criticizes certain European policies, such as the failure of the EU's position in the economic crisis or the mere commercialization of public services, blaming the anti-democratic and neo-liberal Europe that favours technocrats. Ergo, defining itself Eurosceptic only in the sense of opposing the EU as it is currently conceived, Podemos leans towards what would be called by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) as Soft Euroscepticism.

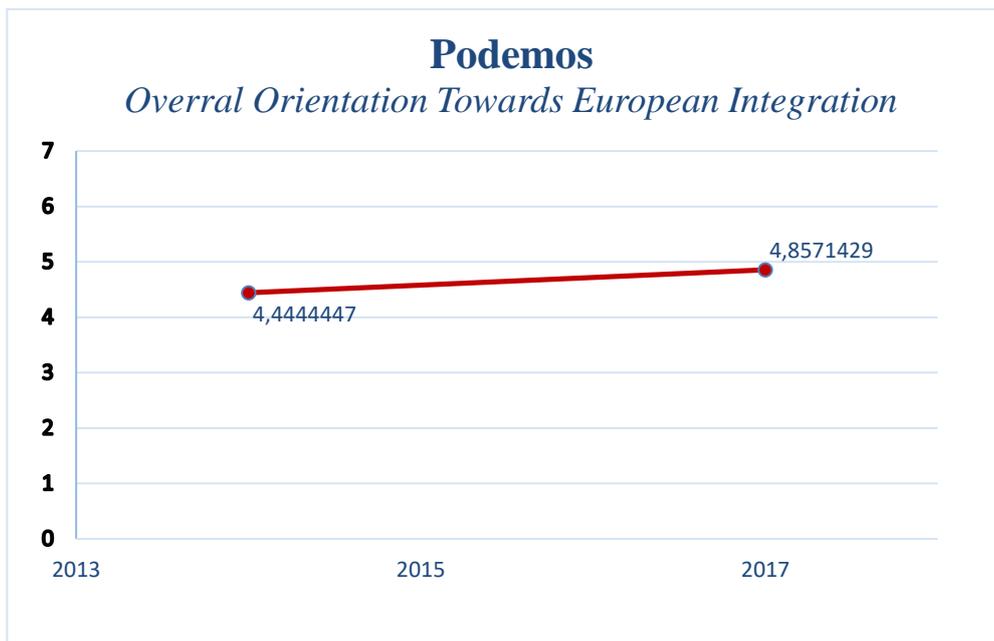


Figure 4. Overall Orientation of Podemos towards the European integration. Source: 2014, 2017 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file (Bakker et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2015).

Note: 1 = Strongly opposed; 4 = Neutral; 7 = Strongly in favour.

However, the mix of proposals, one aimed at diminishing the role of the EU by empowering people, and others than at the same time increase the narrowing of the EU integration project by giving it a greater presence in certain issues, reduce the party to an ‘articulated position’ (Lupato & Tronconi, 2016). In fact, the general orientation of the party from 2014 to 2017 has reduced its Euroscepticism towards a "somewhat in favour" position, manifesting from the moment of its foundation a position that was inclined towards neutrality. Hence, Podemos is the perfect example of a Euro-critic party, supporting the EU project itself, yet not as it is currently conducted, and for this reason,

strongly criticizing some of its policies – the true Eurosceptic according to Kopecký and Mudde's (2002) typology.

Table 2 EU positions in the manifestos of the case studies.

<i>European Union Position</i>	<i>Lege Nord "Europragmatic"</i>	<i>Movimento 5 Stelle Wavering position "Euro-reject" & "Euro-pragmatic"</i>	<i>Front National Strong "Euro-reject"</i>	<i>Podemos "Euro-critic"</i>
Revise European Union Treaties	YES	YES	YES	YES
Supranational Multilateral Cooperation	YES	YES	YES "Europe Independent Nations"	YES
National Sovereignty	YES	YES	YES	YES
Exit Schengen	Not mentioned, but strongly criticism towards the asylum programme	Not mentioned	2014 YES 2019 NO Asylum System Reform	NO Transparency – any macro-economic decision submitted to referendum
Leave Eurozone	2014 "Immediately quit of Italy" 2019 YES Monetary sovereignty	Referendum In case Europe does not take measures to the creation of a community in which states really cooperate	2014 YES 2019 "Not a priority anymore"	NO
Leave EU	2018 NO 2019 Not mentioned	2014 Referendum 2019 NO "reform from within"	2012 Art.50 to renegotiate treaties Referendum to France-Exit 2017 NO 2019 NO	NO Reform "bottom-up" of EU institutions

Source: Author's analysis of political parties' manifestos
EU: European Union

CONCLUSION

Populism is currently everywhere. The phenomenon has been transforming the European political landscape in recent years, and the recent European elections of 2019 have finally brought to the EU Parliament the profound changes already suffered at a domestic level. However, associated with this rapid diffusion of the phenomenon, also appear the erroneous labels attributed to anything that threatens to destabilize the status quo.

There are many attempts to find an ultimate definition of Populism, without however finding a definitive description of the phenomenon that finds agreement among the scientific community. Mudde (2004) suggested his own corollary of the populist movement, summarizing it in a generic way that involves the ideological creation constituted by two antagonistic and homogenous groups: a virtuous mass –the exploited people –against an elitist enemy –the corrupt political class. On the other hand, other authors, faced with the difficulty in asserting a single and univocal definition of the concept, sought to characterize it by identifying its features. Muller (2016) specifies the ideology of the movement, characterizing it as anti-elitist, anti-pluralist, and bearer of a distinct morality that makes the party inevitably the only one worthy and morally capable of representing the interests of the mass, speaking on its behalf. Therefore, from these baselines departs different key aspects of populism. Betz (2002) points to the perspective of populism as a rhetoric, denouncing the exploitation carried out by the elite; Weyland (2001), in turn, highlights the typical strategy assumed by the phenomenon: the exercise of the power of government in a direct and unmediated way, by mobilizing the support of a large number of followers; finally, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) reduce the phenomenon to a communication strategy of a political author, directed specifically to the mass that they intend to mobilize. In short, populism can take the form of a specific rhetoric, a political strategy and/or a style of communication (Betz, 2002; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Weyland 2001), which aligned reflect the so-called ‘chameleonic’ nature of the phenomenon (Taggart, 2004).

It follows that Populism can take on a variety of narratives, mobilize different discourses filled by more or less similar guiding principles and, therefore, adapt to different sociocultural circumstances. However, the phenomenon is reduced to certain

common denominators present in any populist movement: the anti-elitism, anti-system, the group of "virtuous and exploited people" and the "corrupt political elite", and the charismatic leader, who undertakes the ideology and increases the cleavages between the two groups.

Populism and Euroscepticism are often understood as sides of the same coin that go hand in hand. Euroscepticism is, however, a complex concept which, when deconstructed, defines a range of different positions towards the EU and the European integration project, whether expressed by voters or by political parties. Kopecký and Mudde (2002) suggest the decomposition of the term in four different positions – Euroenthusiastic, Europragmatic, Eurocritic and Euroreject. These last two stand out for the pessimism about the current European integration project and its future, but while Eurocritics support the general ideas underlying the European integration, Euro-rejects reject them. Euroenthusiasts, in turn, reflect a total optimism, both regarding the EU project itself and the framework in which it develops. Finally, the more conditional position, the Europragmatics, characterized by a fluctuation in support/opposition of the general ideas of the project, but accept the EU as the best mechanism for institutionalizing these ideas.

Focusing this research on the narrative of the Lega Nord, M5S, Front National and Podemos, and using for that purpose their own political programs, it was possible to outline the political strategy pursued by each one of the parties and, thus, understand their rhetoric. Hence, several generic conclusions were drawn:

First, the left-right political dichotomy assumes certain importance in the definition of the populist narrative, inasmuch as the themes that are prioritized in its rhetoric derive from the position of the political party. Thus, in a generalized way, parties that are positioned on the political left (both ideological and economic), preferentially reiterate economic and social themes, accusing the blatant inequalities of social classes and the high taxation of the average taxpayer. On the other hand, the political right tends to assume a strongly nationalist and cultural narrative, focusing mainly (but not only) on the loss of cultural and religious identity as a result of the immigration crisis of 2015.

A second point concerns the floating character of the populist parties' discourses and positions. In fact, no rhetoric proved to be unscathed. Throughout the period of time in which the research is focused, there are some rhetoric fluctuations (some more and less radical) at the mercy of voters' reactions to the party's position. In order to reach as many sympathizers and followers as possible, the parties under study tend to soften their

rhetoric when faced with a negative response from the people and to reiterate the measures taken, when strongly supported. In this way, the parties delineate their narrative over time and adjust it towards the positions their people stand for.

Thirdly, all the populist parties of our analysis, at some point of their political career develop or strengthen the charisma of their leader strongly associating with the image of the party. The strategy of the parties, both right and left-wing, was based on the approach of the party leader to the image of the common man. The ultimate goal of this purpose culminates in defining the identity of the party as a member of the heterogeneous group of the people, showing the sharing of the same ideologies, same values, and principles and, thus, detaching themselves from the image of the 'political party', in order to be seen as a 'people's movement' that emerged from the people's revolt to fight those corrupt political elites. This line takes us to the fourth point concerning the type of language mobilized by the party. What has sharply marked the parties of this new wave of populism in Europe is its innovative strategy of communication with the target public, focusing mainly on the media and personal pages of social networks.

Finally, and strongly associated with the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon, the unmistakable note of the demonization of the political elite. All the parties understudy, without exception, trace a large gap between the heterogeneity of the people heavily impaired and exploited by the corrupt, immoral, and unworthy political elite. At the domestic level, this elite identifies itself with the political parties that have hitherto been in the governing of the country. At the supranational level, the target tends to lean towards the bureaucratic technocracy of the European Union.

In practice, these five general considerations assumed more or less similar expressions among the four parties under study.

The populist narrative of the M5S stands out from the remaining three by its express rejection of assuming itself as a political party and by merging policies that span the entire political spectrum, in an attempt to create an ideology flexible enough to reach as many voters as possible. The party is close to Spanish Podemos either by the circumstances in which they were founded (strategic moments, both emerging from the crises that undermined Europe) and in the communication strategy. Both movements rose up as forces to claim the discontent of the people in the face of the corruption of the political elites, the austerity implemented by the economic crisis, and the gap of inequalities between social classes. To this end, both parties were born through the intense mobilization of the Internet to spread their movements, placing in the leadership

individuals of ties strongly narrowed to the middle-low social class. Popular referendums are the party's preferred mechanism of action, both at the level of national and supranational decisions, for being the most suitable instrument to implement direct democracy.

On the other hand, there are similarities between the Salvini's Lega Nord and the National Front of Marine Le Pen. Both parties are characterized by being well-established, with a long history in the national political scene, and fall within the classification of Mudde (2007) as PRR, assuming characteristics of nativism, authoritarianism, and anti-system as common denominators. Moreover, both the FN, in an attempt to clear the image of the xenophobic and anti-Semitic radicalism left by the previous leader, and the LN detaching itself from its regionalist character, sought to expand the party to sympathizers, bringing it closer to the common man and thereby raising the level of populism of their rhetoric during the period under study. Although both parties establish an ideological 'homogeneous' group of people who they claim to represent, they discriminate classes that do not identify within the ideal of people created in the light of the party, for instance, immigrants, excluding them from this group. Within this line, the strong moralism of the parties, conditioned by nationalism and protectionism, and the ultimate intention to protect the culture, values, and principles rooted in European society are also highlighted. In fact, one of the features that distinguishes the LN and the FN from M5S and Podemos is the strong protectionist message of the traditional European culture, family, culture, and religion, called into question by multiculturalism and globalization.

However, we cannot crowd the four parties into two political groups. The M5S is a predominantly negative political movement - the elites are corrupt and the system is rotten. However, in reality, the party does not define concretely any motor ideology. Rather, it presents diverse and different policies, as loose ends, and the cornerstone of the creation of direct democracy.

Of the four parties mentioned, the FN is decidedly the party with much more aggressive rhetoric, characterized by a policy of anti-immigration and spread of fear, thus moving away from the LN.

These reflexes of the populist character were intrinsically associated with the European narrative expressed by the parties. The issue of European integration is a subject in which different parties traditionally formulate similar arguments. If at the internal level, the party advocated anti-immigration, anti-globalization, and anti-system policies, it

would be expected to adopt the same position on issues of European integration and the EU framework. However, the results did not follow this linear paradigm and, for a rigorous conclusion, a case-by-case analysis is necessary.

In general, all parties called for the revision of the European Treaties and their submission to a popular referendum, blaming the failure of the EU framework in the face of crises and accusing the EU of suppressing national sovereignty on a number of issues. More or less radical, all parties reject a concentration of powers in the EU and advocate the expansion of legislative powers in the European Parliament, the only body capable of putting democracy into practice. The rejection of representative democracy and its replacement by direct democracy is achieved through the implementation of mechanisms that increase popular participation in international and national issues, including popular referendums and the nomination of European leaders by national governments.

The analysis of the parties' electoral projects for the 2014 and 2019 European elections was important to understand certain nuances in each other's European rhetoric. In fact, the European elections of 2014 have assumed great importance for the manifestation of the Eurosceptic nature of several parties.

Once again, the radical right parties - LN and FN - showed an apparent more Eurosceptic position, linked to the idea of national identity and protectionism, as two of the traits of the party family. While in the LN and FN electoral programs the Maastricht Treaty is often mentioned as the turning point for the spread of anti-European sentiments, M5S and Podemos do not focus on the Treaty as much as on the failure of the EU to respond to the crises, in special the economic crisis of 2008. In apparent terms, we could say that both the M5S and Podemos, tend to develop EU-pessimistic rhetoric, while the LN and the FN fit better on a Europhobic position. However, the rhetoric is much more complex when analysed more deeply.

Podemos, proves to be intransigently Euro-critical, not presenting any measures that express the will of an exit from the EU, from the Schengen Area or from the Eurozone. However, the party advocates deep reforms in the structure and policies of the EU while at the same time admitting the importance of the role of the European institutions in international matters. There is, however, a certain vagueness in the rhetoric of the party, in the sense that it does not assert positions on the EU. In short, it is optimistic about the European integration project, however, not as it is currently being developed.

Although in some perspectives it is possible to find similarities between the populism of Podemos and M5S, the latter undertakes a more hostile position on the

European integration project. Unlike the Spanish party, M5S mentioned the possibility of leaving the Eurozone and the EU, if so decided through a popular referendum. Albeit it has softened its Eurosceptic stance after the negative reactions of its voters to some radical measures, M5S also reflects at the supranational level some of its populist characteristics, more leaned to the political right. In fact, the party takes an anti-immigration stance (though not very radical) and shows an initial refusal of the EU project and the single currency. Hence, the party's ambiguity by simultaneously defending measures of strengthening and reform of the EU leads us to waver between a more pragmatic position or one total opposition to the project.

Finally, the cases of Lega Nord and Front National are the most obvious of transposing their populist rhetoric to the issue of EU integration. Anti-immigrant policies, the proliferation of fear in linking immigrants to crime and terrorism, the safeguarding of European ethnicity, culture and religion are guidelines that outline their political policies. Thus, these characteristics are transmitted to the supranational level, denouncing a Euroscepticism position in blaming the EU for its inability to act in the face of crises and for its ideology of globalization, which puts European identity at stake.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out the strong pessimistic Europhobic position of the Front National as opposed to the more moderate Lega Nord. The latter, although advocating an exit from the Eurozone, has never shown a clear interest in leaving the European Union due to its geographical location and the negative impact that it might have on Italy. Therefore, this apparent step-back of the Lega Nord concerns issues of national strategic interest, which leads the party to a pragmatic European position. Front National, by contrast, is the Euroreject party par excellence, revealing a hard Euroscepticism.

It follows that, while populist rhetoric influences the basic ideologies of European party positions and therefore shows a strong hostility towards the EU, they do not necessarily mean rejection of the European integration project. It has been proved that much of the hostility embedded in party rhetoric, deep down, demands only a profound reform of the structure, rather than the radical withdrawal of the EU. The apparent hostility employed in political narratives serves as a form of mobilization to counter the system's status quo.

For the Mexican Political Theorist Benjamin Arditi, populism is like a drunken guest at a polite party: He can disrupt table manners, rules of sociability and may even start “flirting with them beyond what passes for acceptable cheekiness” (Arditi, 2007, pp.

89). Yet along the way, he may also be blurting out the failure and hypocrisies that everyone in the room has agreed to ignore – the arraignment of a liberal democracy lost in the gap between ideal and reality, promise and performance.

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9. APPENDIXES

Appendix A

EUROSCEPTICISM: A PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT

(Illustrated with particular reference to France)

Chris Flood
University of Surrey

Source: Flood, 2002

(...) My own view at present is that broad party positions towards the EU should be categorised under descriptive labels which imply no assumptions as to the question of how those positions are reached in terms of ideological or strategic reasoning. This is not to say that the motivations of choices should not be considered. On the contrary, they are obviously essential to any real understanding of the dynamics of public debate and political action in this area. However, as I shall argue in more detail later, ideology needs to be addressed in different terms from the simple labelling of types of party positions. I suggest a set of six categories, while emphasising, of course, that they are merely practical aids to describing approximate locations along a continuum. For clarity they should all carry the prefix, EU-, but that would be cumbersome and unnecessary in the present context. The set is as follows:

- *Rejectionist*: positions opposed to **either** (i) membership of the EU **or** (ii) participation in some particular institution or policy.
- *Revisionist*: positions in favour of a return to the state of affairs before some major treaty revision, **either** (i) in relation to the entire configuration of the EU **or** (ii) in relation to one or more policy areas.
- *Minimalist*: positions accepting the status quo but resisting further integration **either** (i) of the entire structure **or** (ii) of some particular policy area(s).
- *Gradualist*: positions supporting further integration **either** (i) of the system as a whole **or** (ii) in some particular policy area(s), so long as the process is taken slowly and with great care.
- *Reformist*: positions of constructive engagement, emphasising the need to improve one or more existing institutions and/or practices.

- *Maximalist*: positions in favour of pushing forward with the existing process as rapidly as is practicable towards higher levels of integration **either** (i) of the overall structure **or** (ii) in some particular policy areas.

The purpose of this classification is to allow somewhat tighter specification of positions than either of the two models mentioned earlier, but without engaging in excessive proliferation of categories. The labels are intended to be value-neutral and as unencumbered as possible by metaphorical associations. They are not intended to convey any suggestion of a specific content to the positions which they describe, beyond basic stances towards the EU's development, either as a totality or in some particular policy area(s) (for example, a party might be revisionist or even rejectionist with regard to EMU in the form currently instituted but reformist in its overall posture). They imply nothing about the route by which any group or individual might have reached them, whether from the left or from the right. I do not think we need to tie the question of ideology into the categorisation but, of course, that does not mean excluding ideology altogether. It is merely to observe that further specification requires different levels of analysis where issues of ideology, strategy, institutional factors and political context can be brought in. What we can do first with these categories before deepening the analysis is examine national distributions of parties and pressure groups — or of public opinion if we have sufficiently specific data — across the categories, compare them with the distributions in other countries and examine changes over time, if we wish to do so. It is a mapping exercise as a preliminary to analysing causes and effects. The importance of establishing categories for both negative and positive positions arises from the fact that parties often shift over time. Clearly a transition from overall EU-rejectionism to overall EU-maximalism would be the most unlikely for both ideological and practical reasons, and I cannot think of any instances at present, but no change between any one type of position and any other is absolutely inconceivable.

Appendix B

European Parliament Briefing – February 2016

Article 50 TEU: Withdrawal of a Member State from the EU

Source: Poptcheva, 2016

Article 50

Treaty on European Union (TEU)

1. Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.

2. A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. That agreement shall be negotiated in accordance with Article 218(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It shall be concluded on behalf of the Union by the Council, acting by a qualified majority, after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.

3. The Treaties shall cease to apply to the State in question from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification referred to in paragraph 2, unless the European Council, in agreement with the Member State concerned, unanimously decides to extend this period.

4. For the purposes of paragraphs 2 and 3, the member of the European Council or of the Council representing the withdrawing Member State shall not participate in the discussions of the European Council or Council or in decisions concerning it. A qualified majority shall be defined in accordance with Article 238(3)(b) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

5. If a State which has withdrawn from the Union asks to rejoin, its request shall be subject to the procedure referred to in Article 49.

The genesis and rationale of the withdrawal clause

The right of a Member State to withdraw from the European Union was introduced for the first time with the Lisbon Treaty. Prior to that, the question of the right of

withdrawal was highly controversial. Some authors had argued for the application of customary international law (*clausula rebus sic stantibus*, also established in Article 62 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of the Treaties providing for unilateral withdrawal from international treaties) within the EU framework. Moreover, several constitutional courts saw a unilateral right to withdraw from the EU as necessary in order to preserve national sovereignty.¹ Other authors denied the possibility of a Member State withdrawing unilaterally, but pointed to the role of the EU Member States as 'masters of the Treaties', who could, in agreement, decide that a Member State can terminate its membership. Other scholars rejected the possibility of withdrawal from the Union as a whole. The application of international law to fill in alleged gaps in the EU Treaties has been often seen as flawed, due to the specific character of the EU as a supranational organisation that drew from international law for its own creation but then established an autonomous legal order with its own rules.² Furthermore, the creation – with the Maastricht Treaty – of the European Union as a permanent organisation, as now reflected in Articles 53 TEU and 356 TFEU, was understood by many to exclude the possibility of voluntary withdrawal from the Treaties. The federal features of the EU and the materially constitutional content of the EU Treaties also tend to discount the possibility of a state terminating its EU membership.³ The inclusion of a right to withdraw from the Union in the Draft Constitutional Treaty was based on the premise that such a withdrawal would have been permissible anyway through application of the general principles of international law. Therefore, a procedure under the Treaties, adjusted to the reality and needs of the EU and its Member States, instead of recurring to international law provisions, was deemed appropriate. That the introduction of the withdrawal clause was a compromise necessary in order to reach agreement on the Constitutional Treaty is clear from the comments attached to the draft provision (Article I-59) saying that it was a 'political signal to anyone inclined to argue that the Union is a rigid entity which it is impossible to leave'. The 'exit' clause was included unchanged in the Lisbon Treaty.

Substantive conditions for a withdrawal

Relevant international-law provisions cannot be applied in parallel to Article 50 TEU. Rather, the procedure and consequences of a withdrawal from the EU are now governed by EU law and no recourse to international law is possible. This is all the more important as Article 50 TEU lowers the conditions for a withdrawal as stipulated under

international law. Under Article 62 of the Vienna Convention, a state party can withdraw from a treaty only if there is a fundamental change of circumstances which has occurred compared to those existing at the time of the conclusion of that treaty. In contrast, Article 50 TEU does not establish any substantive conditions for a Member State to be able to exercise its right to withdrawal, but only procedural requirements. Expert opinions on the legal situation prior to the introduction of the withdrawal clause arguing that a withdrawal should be *ultima ratio* and that any Treaty changes should have priority, are not reflected in Article 50 – it does not require a Member State considering a withdrawal to first seek agreement on the amendment of the Treaties before triggering the withdrawal procedure. Commentators have criticised the mere procedural character of the withdrawal clause, which does not even oblige the withdrawing Member State to state formally a reason for its decision.