

Chapter 3: Italy

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Introduction

Italy has been historically characterised by a strong and widespread European vocation evident among the political elite as in public opinion, from the ratification of the Treaties of Rome (1957) until the signing of the Maastricht Treaty (1992). Two prominent political figures from different ideological positions, Alcide De Gasperi - secretary of the Christian Democrats for two terms (1944-1946 and 1953-1954) and Prime Minister of eight governments - and Altiero Spinelli - one of the authors of the Ventotene Manifesto and member of the Communist Party in the Italian and European Parliaments - were among the supporters and fathers of the European integration project. This pro-European spirit, supported by the different political parties for different reasons, was reflected in a high turnout to vote in European elections.

The issue of EU membership and its explicit link to domestic political issues have characterised the attitude of Italian political forces during forty years of European elections. Additionally, due to their second-order status (Reif & Schmitt, 1980), also the Italian elections have been affected by the transformations of the country's political and economic system.

From 1979 to 2019, Italy went through some vastly different political phases.

The first period (1979-1989) coincided with the conclusive decade of the political party system of the First Republic which followed the Second World War. It was characterised by the strong ideological opposition between the *Christian Democrats* (*Democrazia Cristiana* or DC) and some minor centralist parties on one hand and the strongest communist party in the West on the other. This period also saw the reorganisation of the political system following the *Moro case*¹ and the re-alignment of the stances taken by the *Italian Communist Party* (*Partito Comunista Italiano* or PCI) and the *Italian Socialist Party* (*Partito Socialista Italiano* or PSI) on the issue of Europe.

The second period (1990-2000) began with the re-organisation of the party system of the Second Republic, after the old political system collapsed following the *Tangentopoli* investigation² and Silvio Berlusconi's subsequent entry into politics. Despite being developed in a narrative linked to the domestic

context, European affairs became part of the electoral debate and contributed to polarising attitudes. This was especially evident due to the anti-European stances of the newly formed parties, *Forza Italia* and *Alleanza Nazionale*, which criticised the old political class for accepting the EU challenges, in particular membership of the EMS and EMU, as an 'act of faith', without assessing either the medium- and long-term implications on the domestic context or the country's real capacity to face the new economic challenges.

In the third period (2001-2010), covering the European elections of 2004 and 2009, a phase of stability was followed by one marked by alternating centre-right and centre-left coalitions in government. The introduction of the single currency in 2001 and the economic recession of 2008 stimulated the development of anti-European sentiments in the centre-right coalition, particularly the *Lega Nord*, and in the extreme left with *Rifondazione Comunista* (PRC), prompting the spread of Eurosceptic sentiment among the public. Meanwhile, the centre-left forces, in government in the second half of the decade, continued to openly support the EU project.

The fourth period (2011-2020), covering the elections from 2014 to 2019, was characterised by the electoral success recorded by nationalist, populist and Eurosceptic forces reflecting trends seen in other EU member states. The prolonged effects of the economic recession and the migratory crisis contributed to polarising attitudes and injecting tension into the political and electoral debate. Italy faced strong and widespread opposition to the EU for the first time, gaining centrality following the success of the *Lega Nord* and *Movimento 5 Stelle* in the general and European elections.

In the space of forty years and nine European elections, only in two cases were the latter held close to the general elections: the following week in 1979 and three months later in 1994. This meant that the campaigns for national elections almost never overshadowed the European elections, as was often the case in other countries. Instead, they served more as a test of the stability of executives and the strength of opposition parties.

1 The kidnapping and murder of the Secretary of the DC, Aldo Moro, by the *Brigate Rosse* (BR) terrorist group in 1978.

2 The journalistic definition of a series of judicial investigations conducted by various public prosecutors, from which a system of corruption and illicit funding of parties involving prominent members of the country's political and business class emerged, undermining its credibility with the public and leading to the disbanding of many of the historic parties.

The Europeanism of the First Republic (1979-1989)

From the 1970s onwards, the stance adopted by Italian political parties on Europe involved the support of the *Christian Democrats* (DC), the main governing force, and the minor formations supporting the executive (*Liberal Party*, *Republican Party*, *Social Democratic Party*). There was ambiguity surrounding the position of both the *Socialist Party* (PSI), which was part of the government but abstained from voting on joining the EEC, and the neo-fascist inspired *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI). Additionally, there was the movement of the main opposition party, the *Communist Party* (PCI), which leaned towards European social democracy and the integration process.

The prolonged era of Christian Democratic hegemony (Giovagnoli, 2004), during which the DC held uninterrupted government power from 1946 to 1992, normalised stagnation and absence of change in the political landscape in terms of political forces and personalities. This entrenched the Italian political system into an imperfect bipartisanship (Galli, 1996) or polarised pluralism (Sartori, 1982)

The Seventies represented a decade of massive social change and attempts to transform the country's political order. A phase opened by the prospect of historic compromise which led to an initial form of collaboration between the DC and the PCI, in an attempt to respond to the new needs and the new configuration of Italian society. A project that ended abruptly with the murder of Aldo Moro in 1978. In the years that followed, the parties had to cope with a phase of intra- and inter-party reorganisation and redefinition of the elements on which to build a renewed relationship with their electoral community, which coincided with the slow decline of the political and party system of the First Republic.

Widespread pro-Europeanism does not underscore the significance of the European question in the political-electoral debate, where the conflict instead focuses on national problems with political parties proposing solutions in keeping with their respective ideological currents. This diversity also emerges in the different conceptions of 'Europe' to be aspired to and in the different model of European integration to be constructed.

The DC's pro-Europeanism gained strength and credibility based on its role as 'leader' of the Catholic Democratic formations in initiating the process of European integration, undertaking to confirm the political choices of the founding fathers. The party's Europeanism is a widely recognised distinctive trait and the Christian Democratic design of a 'united Europe' was already on the road to completion (Durand, 2002).

In the socialist sphere, the political-ideolog-

ical project of Euro-socialism, strongly supported by PSI leader Bettino Craxi, was gaining ground, assigning Europe a central role in strengthening the debate on peace and the implementation of international disarmament policies. Its aims also included the creation of a united and independent area capable of guaranteeing human rights, safeguarding all forms of freedom and containing economic and social inequalities (Varsori, 1998).

The political-ideological project of Euro-communism, championed by the PCI together with the *French Communist Party* (PCF) and the *Communist Party of Spain* (PCE), with PCI secretary, Enrico Berlinguer, as one of the main promoters and representatives, steered towards a more 'reformist' and 'democratic' design of communism. This provided the party the chance to move away from the leadership role of the *Soviet Communist Party*, to define an independent foreign policy and to accept the formation of supranational organisations based on the model of western capitalism (Bell, 1996; Maggiorani, 1998).

The political scenario electoral debates and protagonists remained virtually unchanged for the European elections in the decade from 1979 to 1989. These elections were influenced by significant historical-political events of the period, characterised by the Pentapartite government comprising DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI. The three main parties of the First Republic, the DC, the PCI, and the PSI were preoccupied with national political and policy issues rather than on European campaign issues. The first European elections of 1979 were held a week after the national political campaign. Because the European election was conducted in the wake of the general elections, prominence was granted to national issues central to the political-electoral debate. The results of the vote confirmed what had been recorded a week earlier at the general election, with the DC (36%) confirming its position as the leading party in the country, maintaining distance from the PCI (29%) and the PSI (11%). In terms of European matters, the electoral campaign took place in a relatively 'relaxed' climate and the issue of Europe produced no conflict or polarisation either between the parties or among the public. The 1979 European elections recorded a high turnout (85.6%), which was to remain a constant for European elections in the 1980s. In particular, the 1979 electoral campaign was influenced by the severe political crisis triggered by the assassination of Aldo Moro, while 1984 was marked by the death of Enrico Berlinguer on 11 June during a rally for the upcoming European elections in Padua just days before the 17 June vote. At the 1989 elections, 1.83% of the votes went to the *Lega Lombarda Alleanza Nord*, which brought together the regionalist



Image 3.01. If you speak socialist in Europe they will understand you, PSI, 1979. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.02: For a left-wing Europe Italy votes communist, PCI, 1979. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.03: A safe guide at the helm of Europe, DC, 1984. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

movements of northern Italy and marked the first step towards the subsequent formation of the *Lega Nord* in 1991 and the emergence of autonomist and federalist instances.

The Europeanist election campaign followed two different narratives. On one hand, the parties saw Europe as being an unprecedented space for the pursuit of national and ideological demands. The PSI call for a 'united and prosperous Europe' that could be achieved with 'European socialism', convinced that 'if you speak socialist in Europe they will understand you' (Image 3.01); the PCI invited people to vote communist in order to form a 'left-wing Europe' (Image 3.02). While the DC presented itself as the only 'safe guide at the helm of Europe' (image 3.03) and being capable of 'bringing Italy to the centre of Europe'.

On the other hand, especially in the PCI's campaign, Europe was a place 'of peace and work, for those who will be twenty in the year 2000' and a space to implement the 'need for the future' expressed by the new generations. The process of modernisation and reconstruction of the country, in keeping with the image of a party undergoing renewal, emerged in the image of a new Europe in which rights are guaranteed, freedoms respected, and diversity tolerated. Exemplary in this sense is the communist campaign of 1989, which imagined 'the Europe to come without racism', 'of citizens' rights', 'without unfair taxes', 'also of the South' and 'increasingly of women'.

Europeanism also retained a strictly 'ideological' character expressed through the idea of a Europe

opposed to the USSR, 'to avoid joining the wrong Europe' (DC) (image 3.04), as a centre of mediation between the two superpowers engaged in the Cold War, but also as a driver of the disarmament policy, 'For a Europe in a world of peace and collaboration' (PCI), 'In Europe on the wings of freedom' (PSI), 'The wind of freedom throughout Europe' (DC).

The general Europeanist attitude was accompanied by the Eurosceptic positions of certain parties at the extreme ends of the political spectrum, including the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* on the right and *Democrazia Proletaria* on the left.

The Second Republic and the birth of Forza Italia (1990-2000)

The Nineties witnessed the disappearance of almost all the historical parties and, the birth and success of new political forces such as the *Lega Nord* (LN) and *Forza Italia* (FI). It also saw the fragmentation of large political families such as the *Communist party*, and the reform of the electoral system on a majority basis, aimed at bipolarity with the aggregation of parties into stable pre-electoral coalitions (Laws No. 276 and No. 277, 4 August 1993). The crisis of the previous national party system, which decreed the end of the First Republic and the beginning of the Second (Gundle and Parker, 1996; Koff and Koff, 2000), reached its climax with the *Tangentopoli* case in the early '90, when investigations lead to a series of successful convictions against prominent politicians in the domestic political system

The transition to the Second Republic took place, not only symbolically, during the 1994 political



Image 3.04: Give the DC your vote to avoid joining the wrong Europe, DC, 1979. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.05: Head held high for change, AN, 1999. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

elections with the success of the new *Forza Italia* (FI) party, the rise of the *Lega Nord* (LN) and the explosion of new forms, languages and instruments in electoral campaigning (Mancini & Mazzoleni, 1995; Novelli, 2018; Roncarlo, 2008). The undisputed protagonist was Silvio Berlusconi, owner of the leading private television station with three national channels, founder, and leader of FI and a businessman who presented himself as an ‘outsider’ and ‘man of action’ with a programme based on the fight against communism and the country’s economic relaunch, with anti-political overtones. Berlusconi’s intense and deregulated use of television shifted the debate from content to tools, highlighting the clear advantage that the owner of Mediaset had at his disposal to carry out a hyper-media campaign, supported by

uncontrolled use of election tv-ads, appearances on television programmes and endorsements by popular show business celebrities (Bentivegna, 2001; Mazzoleni, 2012; Novelli, 2018). The allies of the centre-right coalition built by Berlusconi included the southern-based *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), heir to the historical neo-fascist party MSI, which began a slow and laboured process of transformation; and LN, the evolution of the *Lega Lombarda*, in the north. The LN focused on the ‘separatist’ issue and identified its political adversary as the entire Italian political class, ‘Roma ladrona’ (‘thieving Rome’), accused of robbing the citizens of northern Italy with taxes, while the ‘Europe of the peoples’ was seen as a growth opportunity for the northern part of the Italian peninsula. Accession to the European Monetary Union



Image 3.06: To carry more weight in Europe, FI, 1994. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

(EMU) had the potential to accelerate the separation process, as Northern Italy would have been able to independently meet the criteria outlined in the Maastricht Treaty with regard to the introduction of the single currency, once it had freed itself from the public debt and economic instability resulting from the precarious conditions of the southern regions (Quaglia, 2009; Woods, 2009).

The changes in the national political scene were reflected in the campaign and the results of the 1994 and 1999 European parliamentary elections, for which there was a drop in turnout to 70% compared to the elections of the previous decade (1979-1989). A trend that followed the drop in turnout at the national elections due to the general decline in the political participation, the growing distance of citizens from politics, and the increasing mistrust in politics. FI's victory in the 1994 and 1999 European elections confirmed the success of Silvio Berlusconi's new political project.

The widespread Europeanism of the First Republic gradually gave way to critical attitudes towards Europe expressed by the new formations: on the right, FI and AN; on the far left, *Rifondazione Comunista*.

Even though the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 raised many doubts about the constraints imposed by the EU (Pasquinucci, 2016), the Nineties did not seem to initiate a real debate on European issues, partly due to the need of the new political forces to position themselves in the domestic context first to cope with strong internal instability. The campaign of the centre-right was characterised by timid Eurosceptic sentiments detectable in the call for 'change' (Image 3.05) and the desire to 'carry more weight in Europe' (image 3.06).



Image 3.07: Take Italy to the heart of Europe. Secure in Europe with the PDS, PDS, 1994. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

The Europeanism of the heterogeneous centre-left, made up of political forces that were heirs of the PCI such as the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS) in 1994 and the *Democratici di Sinistra* (DS) and the *Democratici* (Dem) in 1999, emphasised the confidence in and support for the integration project that would give Italy greater strength and prestige in the European and international context – 'Stronger in a more united Europe' and 'Take Italy to the heart of Europe' (Image 3.07) in 1994 - and take the lead in the European integration process – 'The left took you to Europe. Don't stop now' in 1999.

Romano Prodi, leader of the centre-left and Dem coalition and the President of the European Commission from September 1999 to November 2004, was a central figure in the management of relations with other European leaders and in negotiations for the adoption of the single currency. He became the symbol of 'reformist' Europeanism, contrasted by Silvio Berlusconi's criticism of the impositions of Brussels, which was, however, still little expressed in the election campaign. This polarisation was to be a feature of the confrontation between the centre-left and centre-right and helped to personalise the election campaign.

The introduction of the euro and the Eurosceptic shift (2001-2010)

The first decade of the new century witnessed the ongoing opposition between centre-left and centre-right in an electorally fluctuating environment and growing mistrust of EU institutions and opposition to the Union.

The 2001 general elections delivered a very solid majority to the centre-right alliance and its



Image 3.08: Europe takes care of small businesses. Berlusconi Doesn't, PD, 2009. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

leader Silvio Berlusconi who, five years later, lost the elections by a handful of votes. The new centre-left majority (2006), led by Romano Prodi, which failed to form a strong coalition, was considered weak and encountered considerable difficulty in identifying solutions in Parliament to lift the country out of its economic and political doldrums. The fall of the government led to early elections in 2008, which saw the centre-left coalition, led by the *Partito Democratico* (PD), founded in 2007, pitted against the successful centre-right coalition, comprising *Forza Italia*, *Lega Nord* and *Alleanza Nazionale*, led by Silvio Berlusconi. At the end of the decade, the effects of the economic recession started to be felt in the eurozone as well. The Italian government's lack of practical and effective responses, despite the European Central Bank's (ECB) warnings on public debt, contributed to spreading a perceived image of a weak Italy with little credibility and to deteriorating relations with other European leaders.

These were also the years of an acceleration in European integration, with national states ceding part of their sovereignty and the EU becoming a supranational entity capable of taking tangible action on the country's legislative and economic system (Gervasoni, 2012). In light of the requests from Brussels that were necessary for the implementation of the single market and the creation of the eurozone, harsh financial manoeuvres were implemented. This led to a further widening of social inequalities which fuelled a malaise among Italian people. For some political forces, Europe became the 'new' enemy to fight and the institutional subject to blame for the country's difficulties. The Eurosceptic shift was evident from the second government of Berlusconi, the first Italian political

leader to demand the country's self-sufficiency, effectively purging Europe of its 'leadership' role that had accompanied the choices of the political class during the First Republic (Pasquinucci, 2016).

In the early 2000s, the *Lega Nord's* previous Europeanism finally gave way to a 'strategic' Euroscepticism in order to attract consensus by exploiting the concerns of the Italians. In the process, *Lega Nord* differentiated itself from the other parties on the political scene and identified the EU as responsible for the country's economic decline and social discontent. The party realised that the EU would be unable to create the necessary conditions for the implementation of fiscal federalism and the independence of the North, so the new battles became opposition to the single currency, the demand for the re-nationalisation of certain powers delegated to EU institutions, the fight against migration policies at national and European level, and opposition to expansion of the Union towards the East (Albertazzi et al., 2011).

The European campaigns during this phase, 2004 and 2009, acted as mid-term elections and offered the chance to measure the change in consensus of the electorate within a variable political scene that failed to express clear and stable majorities. This meant that, rather than on the comparison and analysis of the various parties' proposals, electoral support was based on the assessment of the government's performance (Rocarolo, 2008; Natale, 2010). The 2004 European elections witnessed the presence of *Uniti nell'Ulivo*, a list made up of the *Democratici di Sinistra* party and the other left-wing parties, which achieved a good electoral result (31.8%). This situation was reversed at the following Euro-



Image 3.09: To carry more and more weight in Europe, PdL, 2009. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.10: They put up with immigration. Now they're living in reserves! LN, 2009. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

Image 3.11: Changing Europe to change Italy. We are not paying for your recession, PRC, 2009. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.12: DS. The Italy that doesn't stand by and watch, DS, 2004. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.13: Education: an open book for Europe, SEL, 2009. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

pean elections in 2009, when the centre-right won the elections obtaining the 35.3% of votes and the centre-left, particularly the new political party, the *Partito Democratico*, got 26% of votes.

Campaigns for the European elections continued to be less focused on Europe and more on the domestic context, 'Europe takes care of small businesses. Berlusconi Doesn't' (Image 3.08), 'Europe takes care of those who lose their jobs. Berlusconi Doesn't' and 'One big party can stop the right' (PD).

'Utilitarian' anti-Europeanism on specific issues, such as immigration and the single currency began growing among the right-wing and centre-right formations, along with a desire to strengthen the country's role in the European scenario to regain sovereignty and defend national interests (Quaglia, 2009). *Forza Italia* sustained the need to 'carry more and more weight in Europe' (Image 3.09), muting the more heated anti-EU tones of the campaigns run by *Lega Nord*, which looked at the issue of immigration (Image 3.10), and *Alleanza Nazionale*. Eurosceptic demands on the economy, labour and employment were present in the 2009 *Rifondazione Comunista* election campaign – 'We are not paying for your recession' (Image 3.11) and 'Changing Europe to change Italy' - which produced an effective advert featuring the face of a young girl streaked with tears that ended with 'If you were a bank, you'd already have been saved'.

The centre-left formations that still supported the European integration project combined the defence of the EU project with the national dimension, presenting Europe as a solution to the country's various problems, 'Italy doesn't stand by and watch' (DS) (Image 3.12), 'Education: an open book for Europe' (SEL, *Sinistra e Libertà*) (Image 3.13), 'For a Europe of labour. There is no future without employment' (IdV, *Italia dei Valori*).

From anti-politics to anti-Europeanism: the rise of the M5S and Lega (2011-2020)

In Italy, too, the long-term effects of the economic recession on the real economy which became noticeable from 2012 onwards (Kroh, 2014; Kriesi & Grande, 2014) and the migratory emergency triggered by the Arab Spring in 2010-2011 fuelled the anti-European agenda of the political class and Eurosceptic sentiment. At the domestic level, a new phase of Italian politics began, marked by the abandonment of the traditional bipolarity, centre-left and centre-right factions. There was a restructuring of alliances following the entry into Parliament of the new political force of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S), the strong growth of the political weight of certain minor formations, such as the *Lega*, and the crisis of *Forza Italia*, whose leader Silvio Berlusconi resigned as Prime Minister in November 2011, partly due to pressure from the EU regarding economic and budgetary policies.

Anti-European sentiments found fertile ground in the actions of comedian Beppe Grillo who, transitioned from success in show business to politics. Grillo led a series of popular demonstrations in protest against the corruption of the political class and against the 'European masters' *Vaffa Day* in 2007 and *No Berlusconi Day* in 2009 - which led to the birth of the M5S. M5S combined personalised leadership, a programme focused on environmental and community issues and a futuristic perspective of direct democracy via the web (Biorcio and Natale 2018; Gerbaudo 2019). The decisive shift from public support to electoral consensus took place in the 2013 general election, when the two major coalitions, the centre-left wing '*Italia. Bene Comune*' (29.5%) led by Pierluigi Bersani and the centre-right wing '*Centro-destra*' (29.2%), still led by Silvio Berlusconi, were joined by M5S as a third party, securing 25.6% of the vote.



Image 3.14: No more euro, LN, 2014. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.15: More Italy in Europe, less Europe in Italy, FI, 2014. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.16: Raise your head in Europe. The best vote for Italy, Fdi, 2014. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.17: We will make Italy respected in Europe, FdI, 2019. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.18: Italy first!, LN, 2019. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

The Europe issue assumed unprecedented significance in both national and European electoral debates. It was, however, a primarily negative Europeanisation (Genga, 2015; Belluati, 2016; Bobba & Seddone, 2018; Johansson et al., 2022) linked to the development of the more openly Eurosceptic positions of the M5S and *Lega*. The former, a proponent of soft Euroscepticism (Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004), focused its campaign against 'impositions' from Brussels in the economic sphere and on the EU institutions' apparent mismanagement of migratory flows. While *Lega* criticised the eurozone, the institutions and the bureaucratic system of Europe, even going so far as to speculate on a possible exit of the country from the EU and the single currency.

At the next general election in 2018, the M5S gained over 30% of the vote. In the centre-right coalition, the *Lega's* overtaking of *Forza Italia* led Silvio Berlusconi to cede leadership to Matteo Salvini, the new leader of a *Lega* that was now decreasingly 'regionalist' and 'secessionist' and increasingly 'national and nationalist' (Passarelli & Tuorto, 2018). The party removed the term 'Nord' ('north') from its name, symbolising its growing focus on central and southern Italy. This unexpected development led to the formation of a government led by the new alliance between the *Movimento 5 Stelle* and *Lega*. Europe's first populist and Eurosceptic executive.

The European elections during this period show a sharp decline in turnout - 57.2% in 2014 and 54.5% in 2019 - confirming a widespread trend in all member states (Rombi, 2016). In the 2014 European elections, the *Partito Democratico* - the majority force in the governing coalition, led by the new and dynamic leader Matteo Renzi, who had initiated a radical renewal of the party's image and political positioning - obtained 40% of the vote; the emerging M5S gained 21%, *Forza Italia* 16.8% and *Lega* 6%.

The campaign was characterised by the reinvigoration of Eurosceptic positions, widely spread among old formations such as *Lega* on the right and *Rifondazione* and *Comunista* on the left, and new formations such as Angelino Alfano's *Nuovo Centro Destra* (NCD) and the newly formed far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), heir to the neo-fascist party *Movimento Sociale*, led by Giorgia Meloni. Criticism primarily centred on austerity measures and the monetary union and decisions made by the ECB. Slogans such as 'Against austerity and the Europe run by the banks' (PRC), 'People first' (AET, *L'Altra Europa con Tsipras*), 'Against the Europe of the bureaucrats' (NCD) and 'No more Euro' (LN) (Image 3.14) featured during the campaign. The need to regain that national sovereignty that had been relinquished too often to the Union emerged 'More Italy in Europe,



Image 3.19: Let's build hope, not walls, PD, 2019. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 3.20: Europe will be changed by those who love it most, +EU, 2019. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

less Europe in Italy' (FI) (Image 3.15), along with the need to start looking after the national interest again without being crushed by diktats from Brussels 'Raise your head in Europe' (Image 3.16) (FdI).

The subsequent European elections in 2019 marked a further spread of populist and Eurosceptic or explicitly Eurocritical positions and an intensification of their rhetoric. While the 2014 campaign had focused mainly on criticism of the EU institutions' handling of the economic crisis (Novelli et al., 2017), in 2019, the theme of defending and rediscovering the value of national identity emerged, linked to criticism of the handling of the migratory emergency that was affecting the entire European area. The safeguarding of national interest and identity were emphasised, with slogans such as 'We will make Italy respected in Europe' (FdI) (Image 3.17) and 'Italy first!' (LN) (Image 3.18), the defence of borders, 'Stop invasion' (LN), values and traditions, 'Defending excellence made in Italy' (M5S), together with opposition to the obligations of the single market and monetary union, were the central issues.

Europeanist forces, represented by parties PD and +Europa (+Eu), countered the anti-European narrative with a campaign that emphasised the values and opportunities offered by the Union. They emphasised pro-EU arguments such as freedom of movement and peacekeeping, acceptance and integration between cultures, with slogans such as 'A united Europe will be a solid Europe' and 'Let's build hope, not walls' (PD) (Image 3.19), opportunities and trust in the future, 'Let's invest in education, not fear' (PD) and 'Europe will be changed by those who love it most' (+Eu) (Image 3.20), civil rights and the environment, 'Change the climate, change Europe' (EV, *Europa Verde*).

The victory of the *Lega* with 28.1%, surpassed the alliance between the *Partito Democratico* and *Siamo europei* (22.7%) and the *Movimento 5 stelle* (17%), altering Italy's stance in relation to the Union and its institutions.

The success of the centre-right coalition and particularly the far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia*, in the 2022 general election led to the election of *FdI*'s leader Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister. Presenting herself with a traditionalist and nationalist programme in domestic politics, with slogans such as 'God, country and family', and strongly critical of the European Union in terms of foreign policy, 'the fun is over'. In her first year of government Giorgia Meloni completely changed her attitude towards European Union and its institutions. She no longer viewed them solely as Euro-bureaucrats and a threat to national identity but rather as potential allies with whom to cooperate for the common interest. This repositioning stands out as one of the focal points in the forthcoming

European election campaign in Italy.

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