

# The Italian Right-Wing and the European Integration Process: The Case of the Italian Social Movement

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Throughout the Republican age, the Italian Right has been a political space encompassing highly different approaches<sup>1</sup> based not surprisingly on a unifying element of negation: anti-communism. It has taken some very different forms, from the Liberals' democratic anti-communism to neo-fascism and its rejection of the value of democracy. Of the many parties established in Italy after the Second World War, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) was the only one that explicitly defined itself as a right-wing party, in 1973 spelling it out by supplementing its name with the words "Destra nazionale" [National Right]. That said, until the early 1950s, the MSI traversed a significant period of uncertainty regarding its decision to identify with the Right of the political spectrum.<sup>2</sup> Always a minority party, the MSI achieved its best electoral result in 1972, when it polled close to 9% of votes for the Italian Chamber of Deputies. Considered an "excluded focal point" to illustrate its marginality with respect to the rest of Italy's political system,<sup>3</sup> the party's policy choices may have had no direct impact on the process of continental integration, but the MSI did develop a discourse on Europe, albeit one that at times was redundant, identifying Europe first as a metapolitical entity, and only later as a historical reality in the process of institutionalization.

## *1. Cold War and Aporias in the MSI's Europeanism*

In its early years, the MSI looked to Europe as a Third Way between American and Soviet society.<sup>4</sup> Although the concept of "Europe, a Third Force" alluded to a

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<sup>1</sup> See: Marco Tarchi, "Continuità ed evoluzione della destra italiana negli 'anni di piombo'," in Gabriele De Rosa and Giancarlo Monina (eds.), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta. Sistema politico e istituzioni*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2003, pp. 143-79; G. Orsina (ed.), *Storia delle destre nell'Italia repubblicana*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> See: Piero Ignazi, *Il polo escluso. Profilo storico del Movimento sociale italiano*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1989), pp. 31-62.

<sup>3</sup> See: P. Ignazi, cit.; M. Tarchi, *Cinquantant'anni di nostalgia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1995

<sup>4</sup> For a reconstruction of the MSI's origins, see Giuseppe Parlato, *Fascisti senza Mussolini. Le origini del neofascismo in Italia, 1943-1948*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006.

political and economic subjectivity based on common institutions and a foreign policy that was relatively autonomous from the two superpowers, the party's concept of Europe as a Third Way implied a more marked otherness, underpinned by the idea that, inspired by non-utilitarian ethics, as a civilization the European continent stood in opposition to capitalist and communist materialism. Initially, the MSI provided a home for political and cultural tendencies for which Europe could indeed be a Third Force; this conviction faded away within a few years, when the party was taken over by a faction that focused on anti-communism as a way of legitimizing itself within the Italian political system.

Reversing the stance the party declared in 1949, Secretary Augusto De Marsanich's 28 November 1951 statement in favor of the Atlantic Pact proved to be a watershed in the MSI's international approach.<sup>5</sup> Embraced by all of the party's internal currents, paroxysmal anti-communism became one of the party's flagship attributes. The outcome of this shared idea of Europe may easily be intuited: it was viewed as a bulwark against Soviet expansion to the West. The concept of "European civilization" continued to be associated with the *topoi* of the Third Way, even if all ambition of being a Third Force disappeared. In the cultural pages of the MSI-related press, coverage of the themes of European anti-Americanism between the two wars underwent a right-wing interpretation, identifying Fordism not just as a system of production but as a model for standardization potentially extendable to all spheres of social life.<sup>6</sup> Such views coexisted with a vision of international politics in which the centrality of anti-communism ended up subordinating Europe to the United States, as the central plank of the anti-USSR front.

The MSI wavered between nationalist rhetoric and a rigid adherence to Atlanticism. On 10 July 1952, Filippo Anfuso, who belonged to a minority within the party that wanted Europe to remain autonomous from the two blocs, criticized "indigenous apologists for a European army," accusing them of wanting to "artificially

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<sup>5</sup> See: Roberto Chiarini, "Atlantismo, americanismo, europeismo e destra italiana," in *Atlantismo ed europeismo*, eds. Piero Craveri, Gaetano Quagliariello, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2003, p. 498.

<sup>6</sup> David Ellwood, *Una sfida per la modernità. Europa e America nel lungo Novecento*, Rome, Carocci, 2012, p. 69.

eliminate national sentiment.”<sup>7</sup> Around that time, Anfuso sought to ingratiate himself with US Ambassador to Rome, Claire Booth Luce, a champion of the anti-communism vanguard.<sup>8</sup> It followed that the primacy of national sovereignty was not absolute for the party, but tied to its opposition to communism.

European economic integration was something the party considered to be a promising approach to countering Soviet expansion. The majority wing of the party promoted its legitimacy by voting in favor of the Treaties of Rome, which established the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. In the 1960s, after the Socialists became a party of government in Italy, perceptions of constraints on national sovereignty began to undermine this attempt at legitimization, prompting the Far Right in Italy to consider mounting a coup d'état<sup>9</sup> as a last resort should the Communists come to power.

The Cold War and the superpowers' political strategies heavily influenced the MSI's perception of Europe. By the late 1960s, détente between the Soviets and the United States prompted the party to adopt a buccaneering strategy of confrontation with communism, one that the MSI struggled to contain for its aporetic effect on the party's approach to Europe. Initially, the MSI thought that Nixon's 1968 presidential victory would shift Europe rightwards. The party was keen for authoritarian regimes in Greece, Portugal and Spain to receive legitimization, hoping to leverage the new international situation to expand its own scope in domestic Italian politics. Between the summers of 1968 and 1969, leading MSI figures Raffaele Delfino and Franco Servello established contact with figures in Nixon's entourage to pursue these objectives. Despite expressing a willingness to renounce any nostalgic calls to fascism, their mission came to nothing as a result of anti-fascist prejudice against them.<sup>10</sup> When Giorgio Almirante became party secretary in June 1969, the MSI's anti-communist

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<sup>7</sup> F. Anfuso, *Isolazionismo europeo*, in “Il Secolo d'Italia,” July 10, 1952.

<sup>8</sup> See: Mario Del Pero, *L'alleato scomodo. Gli Usa e la Dc negli anni del centrismo (1948-1955)*, Rome, Carocci, 2001, p. 203; Federico Robbe *L'impossibile incontro. Gli Stati Uniti e la destra italiana negli anni Cinquanta*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2012, pp. 43-70, 138-45.

<sup>9</sup> See: Guido Panvini, *Ordine nero, guerriglia rossa. La violenza politica nell'Italia degli anni Sessanta e Settanta (1966-1975)*, Turin, Einaudi, 2009, p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> See: G. Sargonà, cit., pp. 27-37.

mobilization became even more radicalized in an attempt to wrest control of Italy's piazzas away from the 1968/1969 student and worker mobilization.<sup>11</sup> While perpetuating its political isolation, within a few years this policy helped the party double the number of votes it polled. Moreover, détente – in particular, its tangible results such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – had a disorienting effect on the party,<sup>12</sup> feeding an unfounded fear of US disengagement from Europe. The MSI did not consider détente was a policy that would further enshrine the blocs;<sup>13</sup> albeit against a backdrop of bipolar opposition, fears of the USA abandoning Europe paradoxically brought the idea of European autonomy from the two blocs back into the fray.

This explains the context for comments made by Antonino Tripodi, Editor-in-chief of the MSI's official newspaper (from 1969 to 1982), on the outcome of the September 25, 1972 Norwegian referendum against joining the EEC (European Economic Community): "There is no value in defending one's own particular well-being if, through the communion of unique forces, there is no one to defend the good of all Europe [...] from the intrusiveness of this monstrous enlargement of the superpowers over the rest of the world." The Europe Tripodi envisaged would still be united in the task of resisting communist penetration, which he saw as the latest in a series of threats to the West, citing the battle of Lepanto as a template for the task of defenders against communism's attack on the last vestiges "of Roman and Christian civilization."<sup>14</sup>

Expressing this approach, the closing motion at the MSI's Tenth Congress (Rome, January 18-21, 1973) requested the Italian government to "reject specific ephemeral security systems beginning to make headway via the Helsinki Conference, brainchild of the USSR to replace Community institutions and bury the Atlantic Pact." In a claim typical of proponents of Euro-federalist integration, even if the MSI

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<sup>11</sup> See: G. Panvini, cit., pp. 55-61.

<sup>12</sup> See: G. Sorgonà, cit., pp. 47-57.

<sup>13</sup> On this defining aspect of détente, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War. A World History*, New York, Basic Books, 2017, pp. 365-393.

<sup>14</sup> Nino Tripodi, *Europa senza volto*, in "Il Secolo d'Italia," October 7, 1972.

considered its own values to be at the antipodes of such an approach, the emergence of a European political community was now tied to “a process of integration in the field of defense.”<sup>15</sup> The party did not consider democracy an absolute value; it looked favorably on all dictatorships in the West spawned under the Cold War framework, from Latin America to the Mediterranean, as well as segregationist regimes in southern Africa.

In the latter half of the 1970s, the MSI underwent a split that impacted its international approach. In 1976, one current of the party keen to go beyond nostalgic references to fascism founded *Democrazia Nazionale*, a party that was wound up after polling just 0.6% of the vote in Italy’s June 3, 1979 elections.<sup>16</sup>

As well as enabling Almirante to reassert his leadership, after the split a minority current led by Pino Rauti – a former follower of Julius Evola who, in 1956, had founded the extreme right-wing movement *Ordine Nuovo* before returning to the MSI fold in 1969 – gained popularity among young party militants, among whom a political and cultural anti-Americanism was gaining ground.<sup>17</sup> Once more, the idea of Europe as a Third Force became popular among younger MSI recruits, and began to resurface in official party documents.

In the run-up to the first European elections, held in June 1979, an alliance of parties on the extreme right, of which the MSI was the single largest force, published the “Euro-right planning document” in support of accelerated continental integration. Defining the Euro-parliament as the “focal point for forming a common political will and legislation,” the document called for the establishment of a Council of Ministers with executive powers, a president of this Council, “a military general staff” and “an integrated European intervention force,” “a European currency with fixed parity with the different national currencies,” and the “harmonization of existing fiscal and social burdens among the various countries.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Concluding motion of the first congress of the MSI - *Destra Nazionale*, *ivi.*, January 24, 1973.

<sup>16</sup> Giuseppe Parlato, *La Fiamma dimezzata. Almirante e la scissione di Democrazia Nazionale*, Milan, Luni, 2017

<sup>17</sup> M. Tarchi, *Cinquant’anni di nostalgia*, *cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>18</sup> Basic document of the Euro-right approved at the Marseilles meeting by delegations of the PFN, the FN and the MSI-DN, in “*Il Secolo d’Italia*,” November 15, 1978.

Post-1979, recrudescence of the Cold War and the Euro-Missile crisis brought the East-West clash back to the center of the MSI's international approach alongside the theme of nuclear deterrence, putting a damper on the idea that Europe could be a Third Force with respect to the two opposing camps. Anti-communist extremism, on which Almirante once again wagered, found a referent in the politics of Ronald Reagan, the American president to whom the MSI looked with greater empathy, considering him a nemesis to Roosevelt and democratic America that had defeated Fascism.<sup>19</sup> The party contrasted Reagan's intransigence with European governments' willingness to dialogue with the Soviets. Indeed, during the December 1981 Polish crisis, the party accused European governments of leaving defense of "Polish Europeans" "to far-off America."<sup>20</sup>

As European integration accelerated in the 1980s,<sup>21</sup> the MSI took up an extreme Atlantic position. Speeches at the party's December 1984 Congress reiterated that the Atlantic Pact was the "necessary guarantee of defense," calling for "revision of [disarmament] treaties, including the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the party did not shy away from supporting positions consistent with greater integration: in the debate preceding approval of the Single European Act, the MSI's daily newspaper came out in support of adopting the "democratic principle of majority decisions" as opposed to "the protective if paralyzing rule of unanimity,"<sup>23</sup> positions the party unequivocally reiterated in Parliament. On 18 December 1985, MP Ludovico Boettis stated that an "intergovernmental conference" method was insufficient if not "planned in concrete terms to discuss and resolve monetary policy unity, the European Parliament's deliberative powers, and economic integration."<sup>24</sup> MSI members further declared that given other countries' reluctance, most notably the government of Great Britain led by Margaret Thatcher, Italy should

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<sup>19</sup> See: G. Sorgonà, cit., pp. 125-126.

<sup>20</sup> C. M. (Cesare Mantovani), *Vergogna sull'Europa*, in "Il Secolo d'Italia," December 3, 1981.

<sup>21</sup> See: M. Gilbert, "Il processo storico dell'Europa integrate," in S. Fabbrini (ed.), *L'Unione europea. Le istituzioni e gli attori di un sistema sovranazionale*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2002, pp. 61-67.

<sup>22</sup> "Il Secolo d'Italia," December 3, 1984.

<sup>23</sup> Cesare Mantovani, *L'Europa dei prefissi*, ivi, December 4, 1985.

<sup>24</sup> Italian Chamber of Deputies (CD), session of December 18, 1985, speech by Ludovico Boettis Villanis Audifreddi, p. 35160.

promote such integration and push for an idea of Europe in which market liberalization was administered by national governments.<sup>25</sup> Tomaso Staiti di Cuddia, who during Rauti's secretaryship held the post of shadow Foreign Minister, asked Foreign Minister Andreotti for "a great leap forward to achieve common European institutions, a common currency (not just a common monetary system), and therefore a common economy, as well as a common army and weaponry."<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, the party greeted the signature of the Single Act with skepticism, almost verbatim paraphrasing Altiero Spinelli's well-known opinion<sup>27</sup> that the mountain "had given birth to the usual molehill."<sup>28</sup>

Faced with such varied cultural and political approaches, caution is in order. Spinelli's federalism was an attempt at rethinking democracy at a time when the nation-state was in crisis. Throughout the 1980s, the MSI's relationship with democracy continued to be a source of controversy. While more wholeheartedly accepting the rules of parliamentary confrontation and democratic life, the party did not abandon its nostalgic views of fascism, lending its support to numerous authoritarian regimes, from South Africa to Chile, in what was by no means the only aporia in the MSI's political culture.

During the twilight of the Cold War, the party relied more heavily on the metapolitical conception of Europe as a Third Way, setting this within a context it hoped would lead to advances on the neo-liberal right. After succeeding Almirante in December 1987, on 16 July 1988 Gianfranco Fini told the MSI's Central Committee that "the Europe of free trade" was "a thousand light years away" from his own ideas, but he also acknowledged that it was laying down a "challenge to the current Italian economic system."<sup>29</sup> However much the party trumpeted its idea of "Europe as a Third Way," indicative of the MSI's economic approach to the critical nature of State intervention, given the global success of the neo-liberal right in the US and UK, it

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<sup>25</sup> M. Gilbert, *Surpassing Realism. The Politics of European Integration Since 1945*, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford, 2003, p. 177.

<sup>26</sup> CD, session of December 18, 1985, speech by Tomaso Staiti di Cuddia delle Chiuse, p. 35169.

<sup>27</sup> See: P. V. Dastoli (ed.), *Altiero Spinelli. Discorsi al Parlamento europeo 1976-1986*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1987, p. 369.

<sup>28</sup> Unsigned, *Dal vertice europeo il solito topolino*, "Il Secolo d'Italia," July 1, 1987.

<sup>29</sup> Report by Gianfranco Fini to the Central Committee of the MSI, *ivi*, July 17, 1988.

viewed free trade as a positive external constraint, as part of a twin-track approach that veered between calls to the party's origins and an embrace of influences from the new right-wing models that would characterize the party's interpretation of European integration via the Maastricht Treaty.

## *2. Europe after Empire. The Neo-liberal Right versus the National Right*

The MSI viewed the end of the Cold War as a watershed that would free nation-states from their battlefield affiliations, even if the party's nationalist matrix clashed with the pro-European tones it had espoused in previous years. Faced with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a dramatic failure for the European Community<sup>30</sup> and its member countries which we were divided on what support to give the separatist republics, the MSI questioned the intangibility of the borders established after the end of the Second World War, claiming that, as Deputy Gastone Parigi stated to the Chamber of Deputies on 22 October 1991, these borders should be reviewed “in the light of the centuries-old Italian character of the lands of Istria, Dalmatia and Fiume.”<sup>31</sup> The Yugoslavian conflict offered an opportunity to push for a unitary continental presence: on 23 October 1991, during the siege of Dubrovnik, Deputy Mirko Tremaglia, long responsible for foreign affairs at the MSI, defined “intervention by a multinational European force” as vital, all the while claiming the Italian nature of Istria and Dalmatia.

Tremaglia also announced his party's confederal conception of European institutions, summarized in the slogan a “Europe of Nations”, while the MSI continued to defend an individual federal approach: the party's international approach still bore evident traces of Cold War culture, including an ongoing objective for a European army. Indeed, war in Yugoslavia had made setting up “a rapid intervention force”<sup>32</sup> imperative. The birth of a common army was justified as part of a conflictual conception of international relations, one that, at the antipodes of European federalism,

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<sup>30</sup> M. Gilbert, *Surpassing Realism*, cit., p. 205.

<sup>31</sup> CD, session of October 22, 1991, speech by Gastone Parigi, p. 88453.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, session of November 29, 1991, speech by Franco Servello, p. 90096.



presupposed multilateral cooperation.<sup>33</sup> As it emerged from the ashes of the Italian Communist Party, the Democratic Party of the Left took up these very same positions.

The MSI's economic culture was strongly impacted by European integration. Even before the Maastricht debate got into in full swing, the party viewed Europe as an external constraint that could have a positive effect on Italy. On 11 December 1991, Congressman Giuseppe Rubinacci, who in the 1980s was renowned for fulsome support of Ronald Reagan's tax reform proposals,<sup>34</sup> appealed to the European legislation to intervene on Italian legislation. The "sentence of the Constitutional Court," according to which Community directives "have immediate effect at State system level," would render the government's decision to introduce "an extraordinary one-off levy" ineffective, given the conflict "with the fourth EEC directive on budgetary matters."<sup>35</sup> Rubinacci did not stop at the idea of conflicting regulations: he went on to express his hope that European integration would reform the State intervention side of Italy's economic system, which was governed by executive groups he dismissed as "residual pockets of [...] real socialism."<sup>36</sup>

Considered to be irreversible, in his view the prospect of international market competition was outlined against a narrative of Italy now lagging far behind its European neighbors. Perceived as both a positive constraint and a risk, continental integration entailed an implied ambivalence. Italy's lag was defined as the political result of the yoke the parties had imposed on civil society, stifling the country's potential. The macroeconomic conditions that made Italy a relatively small vessel among battleships, primarily the "abysmal breakdown of public finance,"<sup>37</sup> was attributed to political corruption, pursuing a line of reasoning that adopted themes typical of Italian anti-party culture,<sup>38</sup> albeit with a productivist, liberalizing slant: party democracy was characterized by verbosity and incompetence, in contrast to the practical solidity of Italian workers and entrepreneurs. The party suggested enacting "a

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<sup>33</sup> See: D. Archibugi, F. Voltaggio, *Introduzione*, in *Ibid, Filosofi per la pace*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> See: G. Sorgonà, *La scoperta della destra*, cit., pp. 158-159.

<sup>35</sup> CD, session of December 11, 1991, speech by Giuseppe Rubinacci, p. 91082.

<sup>36</sup> CD, session of December 11, 1991, speech by Giuseppe Rubinacci, p. 91082.

<sup>37</sup> *Ivi*, Session of December 16, 1991, speech by Giuseppe Rubinacci, p. 91702.

<sup>38</sup> See: S. Lupo, *Partito e antipartito. Una storia politica della prima Repubblica (1946-78)*, Donzelli, Rome, 2004.

pact with the forces of production” and reducing the tax burden, setting “the current high ratio of 41 percent of GDP in tax takings as a ceiling.”<sup>39</sup>

Containing the tax burden – between the 1980s and early 1990s, taxation rose in an almost straight line to over 40%, prompting growth in tax evasion<sup>40</sup> – was one of the two main planks of MSI’s economic stance; the second was a reduction of public debt, which by then had exceeded 100% of GDP. The party viewed the link between the two problems within the political system in the following terms: debt grew disproportionately to justify the patronage meted out by the “partitocracy” (a term the MSI claimed to have coined),<sup>41</sup> while the parties hiked up the tax burden to pay off debt.

Italy’s ever-expanding debt fed into the party’s view that the country was an exception to the rule in the prosperous West, where it belonged. Not surprisingly, comparisons with the Third World were frequent. A series of debt crises in the 1980s, starting with Mexico in 1982, characterized developing nations, many of which were forced to seek International Monetary Fund bailouts in exchange for accepting IMF interference in their national policies.<sup>42</sup> The MSI transposed the debt/underdevelopment/limitation of sovereignty equation into its stance on Italy’s relationship with the European Community, even though in the 1980s Italian debt was not contracted toward foreign countries but, to a significant extent, was held by Italian citizens.<sup>43</sup> The financial implications of this growing debt – for example, the separation of the Bank of Italy and the Treasury that freed up the market for government bonds, contributing to a rise in interest rates and an explosion of debt<sup>44</sup> – seemed, however, to be absent from the MSI’s economic reasoning.

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<sup>39</sup> CD, session of December 16, 1991, speech by Giuseppe Rubinacci, p. 91705.

<sup>40</sup> See: Emanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d’Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2018, pp. 296-297.

<sup>41</sup> On July 3, 1992, Tatarella told Parliament that, in the MSI’s 1948 electoral program, “the term ‘partitocracy’ was for the first time brought into the political lexicon.” CD, session of July 3, 1992, speech by Giuseppe Tatarella, p. 606.

<sup>42</sup> See: Jerome Roos, *Why Not Default? The Political Economy of Sovereign Debt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2019, pp. 138-145.

<sup>43</sup> See: Alexander Nützenadel, “The Political Economy of Debt Crisis: State, Banks and the Financialization of Public Debt in Italy since the 1970s,” in Nicolas Barreyre, Nicolas Delalande (eds.), *A World of Public Debts. A Political History*, Palgrave, 2020, pp. 426-419.

<sup>44</sup> See: Giuliano Garavini and Francesco Petrini, “Il ‘divorzio’ tra Tesoro e Banca d’Italia: il vincolo interno e le origini del problema del debito pubblico italiano,” in Daniele Caviglia and Silvio Labate (eds.), *Al governo del cambiamento. L’Italia di Craxi tra rinnovamento e obiettivi mancati*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2014, pp. 39-71.

The party's explanation of Italy's ever-expanding debt drew on interpretations borrowed from sometimes competing political and cultural circles. The link between debt, unproductive spending and corruption formed the background of the moral question so beloved of Berlinguer and the PCI (Italian Communist Party), not to mention the liberal democratic Left: the two branches of the left were, however, divided in the value they ascribed to wage equality, which the Communists defended and the Liberal Democrats contested. Around this same time, the Italian Left problematized links between the international scenario and the fragility of the country's economy's, attributing a key role to the early 1970s monetary revolution and oil crisis, whereas the MSI attributed solely internal factors and the corruption of Italy's ruling classes. Moreover, in contrast to the Italian Left, which was keen to reconvert domestic production by seeking synergies between investments in human capital and technological development that tended to reward larger companies, the MSI backed an entrepreneurial model underpinned by supporting small and medium-sized companies.<sup>45</sup>

The MSI's economic approach also shared similarities with monetarism, to which left-wing economists in Italy were fiercely opposed. As early as 1976, the "Secolo d'Italia" hailed Milton Friedman's Nobel Prize for Economics as a reward for "a healthy, old-school way of governing."<sup>46</sup> Monetarism, however, considered citizens' growing expectations about expanding debt to be a significant issue,<sup>47</sup> whereas for the MSI, the reason why the average Italian was falling short of their potential was because of constraints on growth caused by the "partitocracy." It was no coincidence that, during the 1985 referendum, the MSI came out against abolishing automatic inflation-linked wage rises.

As we have seen, the MSI's economic approach combined different, not necessarily reconcilable strands, including a neo-liberal framing of how to reign in debt. On January 8, 1992, Raffaele Valensise, the party's Deputy Secretary, cited

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<sup>45</sup> A synthesis of these positions, oriented towards the positions held by the liberal Left, may be found in E. Felice, cit., p. 284.

<sup>46</sup> F. Petronio, *Friedman: un Nobel contro "i pazzi al potere,"* in "Il Secolo d'Italia," October 17, 1976.

<sup>47</sup> See: G. Garavini and F. Petrini, cit., p. 62.

Article 81 of the Constitution, noting that it “envisages an automatic mechanism for covering expenses,” making a veiled reference to the principle of balanced budgets, while “the gap between expenses and revenues has forced government after government to resort to borrowing”:<sup>48</sup> the size of Italy’s debt appeared to justify such an external constraint. On 22 December 1991, Deputy Gastone Parigi spoke of “foreigners’ concerns for the Italian economy,” after EEC inspectors were sent “to check on the progress of the Italian budget” which continued to grow as a result of non-existent services “comparable to a ‘third world’ country.”<sup>49</sup> When it came time to making proposals, however, the MSI Deputy called for an ethical reform of the State, a “re-foundation [...] in its totality, articulations and institutions,”<sup>50</sup> making only generic rather than specific suggestions, which would have laid bare the hard-to-reconcile contradictions between the party’s organicistic conception of the nation and its by no means timid opening up to the market economy.

The parliamentary debate on the financial law the Andreotti government presented for discussion in December 1991 reflected these aporias. On 22 December, Valensise accused the government of failing to proceed “with courage and decision” in selling off “State assets and State holdings to private individuals.”<sup>51</sup> Two weeks later, he pointed out that he was speaking on behalf of a political party that “is not opposed to the principle of returning many of the activities over which the State has extended its reach to the private sector.”<sup>52</sup> Privatization was permissible as a means of restoring international competitiveness to a nation so backward it risked failing to meet the criteria for European integration. On 30 January 1992, Servello told Parliament that Italy was “so out of control” that “paradoxically it would be more worthwhile seeking membership of the Maghreb than the EEC,”<sup>53</sup> a gloomy prediction and extreme comparison that thematized Italy’s backwardness vis-à-vis the rest of the continent.

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<sup>48</sup> CD, session of January 8, 1992, speech by Raffaele Valensise, p. 93189.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, session of December 22, 1991, speech by Gastone Parigi, p. 92860.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, session of December 22, 1991, speech by Gastone Parigi, p. 92860.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, speech by Raffaele Valensise, p. 92946.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, session of January 8, 1992, speech by Raffaele Valensise, p. 93190.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, session of January 30, 1992, speech by Franco Maria Servello, p. 94765.

### 3. *The Maastricht Debate*

The party's unyielding narrative about the country, which it described as the suffering sick man of Europe, in thrall to mafias and the "partitocracy," accelerated with the judicial inquiries that, from February 1992 onwards, began investigating relationships between parties and businessmen. The "Mani pulite" inquiry ended up causing the parties that had governed Italy for decades to implode. Excluded from governmental majorities and indeed from most governmental roles, not only did the MSI emerge unscathed, but even if it did have its doubts about the pillars of the Maastricht Treaty, it took the opportunity to relaunch its protest-based strategy, contrasting virtuous Europe with corrupt Italy.

On 24 June 1992, a few days before the European Council of Lisbon, Tremaglia cited the party's voting history in favor of European integration, from the Treaties of Rome to the EMS (European Monetary System), but was more skeptical about the present. These past merits were cited to justify a pause for reflection, as the MSI called for a consultative referendum on Italian accession to Maastricht,<sup>54</sup> proposing to renegotiate the Treaty due to the risk of it having strong repercussions "on the employment sector and on the entire sphere of Italian agriculture."<sup>55</sup> At the same time, where it coincided with the party's own hot-button issues, for example controlling migratory flows, MSI representatives were happy to evoke the external constraint's positive impacts<sup>56</sup> and acknowledge its beneficial historical effects. On July 3, 1992, Valensise recalled the vote in favor of the EMS as a "challenge to the parties in power" to conduct "a social and economic policy – above all an economic policy – that is on a collision course with the advantages our country may gain from joining Europe."<sup>57</sup>

The MSI, however, considered further integration into the European Union to be risky, espousing protectionist measures that were by no means anathema to its

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<sup>54</sup> Ivi, session of June 24, 1992, speech by Mirko Tremaglia, p. 286.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, speech by Marco Cellai, p. 317. See also the 13th Standing Committee on Agriculture, session of October 14, 1992, speech by Paolo Agostinacchio, pp. 140-141.

<sup>56</sup> The accusation levelled at Italian institutions for the ease with which non-EU citizens could enter the country and "obtain documents subsequently used to enter other Community countries" was reiterated. First Permanent Commission of Constitutional Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office and the Interior, session of July 15, 1992, speech by Carlo Tassi, p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> CD, session of July 3, 1992, speech by Raffaele Valensise, p. 690.

composite political culture. To a party intent on safeguarding Italian identity, which it regarded through the prism of the infelicitous detour of specific historical and cultural criteria characteristic of the period following the defeat of Fascism, the liberalization of cultural, migratory and economic flows fostered by the globalization process appeared as a threat. Concomitantly, the MSI's rhetoric on the breakdown of Italy's institutions was consistent with the idea that the Right must protect the nation from risky ventures. Proposing this agenda, the MSI sought to give voice to the fears of many in the Italian business community who saw market liberalization as something that might lead to them being wiped out by lower-cost production.

The MSI's protectionist instincts should, however, be contextualized: by no means exclusive, the MSI was in competition on these issues with the Lega parties. Moreover, the left-wing heirs to the PCI, not to mention the parties in government, did not support liberalization without rules; skepticism about certain aspects of the Maastricht Treaty ran across parliamentary forces. For instance, on 15 October 1992, the Special Commission for Community Policies expressed its favorable opinion on Treaty ratification provided that the following conditions were met: more extensive powers for the European Parliament; harmonization of national tax systems; opposition to "all forms of social dumping;" and "a decisive recovery of priority ecological focus in the European Union's common policies and institutions."<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, the prevalence of protectionist demands in the MSI's stated policy did not override the policies they espoused in favor of market liberalization, promoted by leaders who, between the fall of 1993 and the spring of 1994, would play a decisive role in legitimizing the party as a governing force. On 3 July 1992, MP Giuseppe Tatarella consulted liberal economist Antonio Martino, a future minister in the first Silvio Berlusconi-led government, to plead for the dissolution of EFIM,<sup>59</sup> a state-owned company held up as a symbol of State inefficiency in the Italian economy.<sup>60</sup> On 29 July, Tatarella associated the "political right" with Luigi Sturzo, founder of the

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<sup>58</sup> Special Committee on Community Policies, October 15, 1992 session, pp. 121-122.

<sup>59</sup> Ente Partecipazione e Finanziamento Industrie Manifatturiere.

<sup>60</sup> CD, session of July 3, 1992, speech by Giuseppe Tatarella, p. 608.

Italian Popular Party, and asked to “start privatizing what is not of the State.”<sup>61</sup> Tatarella would go on to become a founding father of Alleanza Nazionale, the political formation that emerged from the dissolution of the MSI, which served in government on several occasions during the 1990s and 2000s.

The clash between the party’s socializing currents and currents that supported freedom of enterprise ran right through the MSI’s history but, rhetoric aside, the latter current characterized its political line. Even as the party remained a force of protest, these different inspirations continued to coexist. The MSI would continue to think of itself as a “natural” minority party until late fall 1993, when it polled over 30% of the vote at municipal elections in Rome and Naples. This achievement notwithstanding, the party did not seek to unify its diverse approaches by drawing up a program of government; it continued to believe that, given that they were exclusively the fault of a ruling class holding down a virtuous people, the causes of Italy’s economic crisis could be resolved through propagandistic interpretation. For the MSI, the nexus of responsibility that binds civil society and the ruling classes in a representative democracy had been shattered, and was therefore beyond being problematized.

The MSI was not alone in espousing this approach. Influential opinion leaders and intellectuals had much to say about the crisis the Italian Republic was traversing.<sup>62</sup> In September 1991, in an editorial in “La Repubblica” entitled *Lo Stato fallisce, i partiti ingrassano*, newspaper founder Eugenio Scalfari wrote that “this State [Italy] has failed.”<sup>63</sup> The failed State was a leitmotif in declarations by MSI leaders, who indicated corruption as Italian parties’ sole *modus agendi*. Given that conflating the State with business was a *topos* the Italian right would use extensively when Silvio Berlusconi entered politics, the party’s equating of the poor performance of government parties with the poor performance of Italy’s captains of industry was striking.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ivi, session of July 29, 1992, speech by Giuseppe Tatarella, pp. 2108, 2110.

<sup>62</sup> Luciano Cafagna, *La grande slavina. L’Italia verso la crisi della democrazia*, Marsilio, Venice 1993, p. 131.

<sup>63</sup> E. Scalfari, *Lo stato fallisce, i partiti ingrassano*, in “La Repubblica,” September 17, 1991. This quotation is taken from P. Ginsborg, *L’Italia del tempo presente. Famiglia, società civile, Stato 1980-1996*, Turin, Einaudi, 1998, who considered this judgment to lack balance.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Joint Commissions 5 (Budget, Treasury and Planning) and 6 (Finance), session of July 16, 1992, speech by Gastone Parigi, p. 13.

In its characterization of late “First Republic” Italy, the MSI adopted a two-pronged approach: liberalization of the economy and European integration were considered correct in theory, but impossible to adapt to Italy without a new political system and a change in the main players: “It is time to stop saying that things are going badly in this country because of tax evasion. Things are going badly because there is an evil political class that governs badly,” thundered Congressman Ugo Martinat on 27 July 1992.<sup>65</sup> This situation undermined “the credibility of Italian business,” which had been impeded “by various international companies” continuing to take decisions harmful “to [its] credibility” on the international markets, an arena in which “not only small- and medium-sized companies risk being wiped out, but perhaps even some of the firms that labor under the illusion they will save themselves.”<sup>66</sup>

These last quotes were from Maurizio Gasparri, Fini’s lieutenant, in a parliamentary debate on 24 July 1992. In addition to reiterating the *topos* of the Italian company, Gasparri asserted another feature of MSI’s economic culture: a clear preference for small- and medium-sized as opposed to large companies, along the Fiat model, which stood accused of being part of the perverse stitch up by Italy’s parties and economy. Fiat was also a company with a multinational vocation, making it difficult to ascribe patterns of an organicistic conception of the nation to it. In that organicist conception the interests of the individual was harmoniously reconciled with that of the fateful community into which he was born. The *topos* of Italy-as-company is congruent with the idea of an organic nation, similar to a homogeneous body, because, as far as the party was concerned, overcoming social conflict was considered necessary for companies to perform well. For the MSI, the subjects of this homogeneous body were employees, artisans, medium-sized and small-business owners. Seeking to represent concerns about market liberalization, the party sought to stand up for this section of society by railing more and more against signing up to the Maastricht Treaty during the ratification process in the Italian Parliament. Nevertheless, the contradictions in the MSI’s economic outlook were evident: the party

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<sup>65</sup> CD, session of July 27, 1992, speech by Ugo Martinat, p. 1952.

<sup>66</sup> Ivi, session of July 24, 1992, speech by Maurizio Gasparri, pp. 1784-1788.



was keen to defend medium and small producers, and yet it attacked the Amato government for not having prevented devaluation of the lira,<sup>67</sup> that is to say, the method Italian governments had used since the 1970s to raise margins of international competitiveness for its small- and medium-sized companies.<sup>68</sup>

In the fall of 1992, the MSI's political messaging reformulated the value the party attributed to external ties. While continuing to repeat that the Italian economy would be capsized by international competition, it added a significant variation concerning the value attributed to the external constraint as it would be exercised under Maastricht's parameters. On 13 October, before the Commission for Foreign and Community Affairs, Servello spoke out against the devolution of powers to the European Union, from which "onerous new limits on national sovereignty," first and foremost regarding economic and monetary policy. The Treaty's orientation was "highly objectionable," because it "aims essentially at stability, without considering the equally important objectives of social and jobs growth." Rather than a two-speed Europe, "in contradiction with the unitary process that has always been collegial and communitarian,"<sup>69</sup> the party was hoping for an extension of its implementation in order to allow Italy equal access; time would be needed to change the helmsman of the boat.

Servello's statements failed to balance the plurality of positions in the MSI's economic approach. MP Filippo Berselli stated on 15 October 1992 that the prospect of a two-speed Europe "could be avoided solely by undertaking drastic, decisive intervention on public debt, liquidating State and local authority assets, reducing rates, and cutting patronage-fueled spending."<sup>70</sup> Berselli took it for granted that restrictive debt parameters and strict containment of deficit spending were appropriate, calling for a phase of bedding down and a slow recovery of the Italian economy in order to adapt to these criteria.

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<sup>67</sup> Immediately after the September 1992 currency wobble, Congressman Filippo Berselli argued in favor of a peg to a strong currency to limit inflation. See CD, session of October 8, 1992, speech by Filippo Berselli, p. 4258.

<sup>68</sup> See: E. Felice, *cit.*, p. 305.

<sup>69</sup> 3rd Permanent Committee, Foreign and Community Affairs, session of October 13, 1992, speech by Franco Maria Servello, pp. 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> Special Committee on Community Policies, session of October 15, 1992, speech by Filippo Berselli, p. 116.

Seeking to appeal to specific categories of businessmen and workers, the MSI highlighted the risks of integration in the parliamentary debate on Treaty ratification. At this juncture, the party's historical minority's social vocation came to the fore. It is no coincidence that Antonio Parlato, a member of the MSI minority, delivered the counter-report on the financial law put forward by the government led by Socialist Giuliano Amato. Parlato reiterated the thesis that Italy's debt was the result of the party system, and then went on to criticize the Maastricht parameters based on the idea that straight line cuts in debt without an investment policy would have a deleterious effect. Furthermore, he accused foreign buyers of government bonds of speculating to the detriment of Italian sovereignty, only to request that Italian holders be excluded from any consolidation of debt contracted via such bonds.<sup>71</sup> In the party press, the Maastricht Treaty was contested using a vocabulary that sounds familiar to us today: the MSI's leaders claimed to be on the side of the "man in the street,"<sup>72</sup> defining economic integration as a project "that lacks a political soul," "meticulously pieced together by Brussels technocrats."<sup>73</sup>

However, this immovable picture was only one side of the coin. If anything, the MSI experienced a profound contradiction between its nationalist inspirations and its partial support of a neo-liberal conception of the economy. Alleanza Nazionale inherited these contradictions, and Europe was one of the topics that best exemplified this dilemma. One example of this was the basic document issued by the Economy and Labor Committee, defining its planning objectives for the March 1994 elections.<sup>74</sup> This document defined political freedom as being inseparable from "authentic economic freedom;" it supported reducing "the public presence in the economy, which should be limited to a few strategic sectors;" it expressed hopes for "privatization by local authorities and services," and, last, sided with the "process of European integration" with the goal of "accelerating the conversion and restructuring of our productive

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<sup>71</sup> Minority Report by Deputy Antonio Parlato, November 6, 1992, pp. 5-12.

<sup>72</sup> Cesare Pozzo, *Per l'Italia solo guai con Maastricht*, "Il Secolo d'Italia," September 19, 1992.

<sup>73</sup> Silvano Moffa, *È fallita l'Europa delle monete*, *ivi*, September 18, 1992.

<sup>74</sup> At the time, Alleanza Nazionale was the name of the constellation of electoral formations around the MSI that attracted smaller organizations and figures from the Italian Right.

system, so as not to be defeated in the fierce competition underway between nations and large continental areas.”<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the foreign policy document drawn up for those elections criticized the Maastricht Treaty for causing “the future of Europe to hinge upon the dominance of major economic-financial groups.”<sup>76</sup>

Less than two years after the Treaty’s ratification, however, the party opened up to the free market and privatization in a more forthright manner, confirming that the party’s emphasis on protectionism in speeches made during the fall of 1992 was the result of contingencies, in particular an attempt to broaden support among certain sections of the Italian economy that were concerned about the effects of European integration.

To conclude, the MSI’s political culture was fraught with ongoing tensions between a localized issue of nationalism and a universal issue long encompassed in the communism/anti-communism dyad. After the fall of communism, the tension between a determinate and a universal reference was nevertheless perpetuated under different guises. Universalism became muted by neo-liberalism, triggering evident frictions between protectionist and liberalist stances, a defense of identity and a relative acceptance of economic and market flows, allied to a growing distrust of migratory and cultural flows.

The Italian Right’s aporias on Europe were poised to become far more problematic when it evolved from being a marginal force in the political system to governing the country.

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<sup>75</sup> *Libero mercato e giustizia sociale*, “Il Secolo d’Italia,” January 29, 1994.

<sup>76</sup> *Politica estera: l’Italia sia protagonista*, *ivi*, January 29, 1994.