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THE STATE OF THE RIGHT: ITALY

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In the history of Republican Italy, reference to rightwing politics and parties, in opposition to those of the left, has only been made since 1994. Earlier use of the explicit distinction between the right and the left, seen as rival political forces, was limited to the years 1861-1876, the first 15 years of the Kingdom of Italy. The *destra storica* (historical right), incarnated by the moderate Liberal Party – expressing the aspirations and interests of what at the time was a relatively eclectic bourgeoisie – completed the unification of Italy, adopting the constitutional monarchy model. On the opposite side of Parliament sat the *sinistra storica* (historical left). However, neither of these movements took on the form of a genuine organised party; instead, they remained simple parliamentary groupings (C. Ghisalberti, 1983). Rather than ushering in real change, the right's defeat and the left's accession to power opened a long phase known as *trasformismo* ("transformism"), where right and left were often indistinguishable. The policies of Giovanni Giolitti are a perfect illustration of this confusion. Historian Giampiero Carocci (2002, p. VIII-IX) paints Giolitti's policies as a blend of elements drawn from the right and the left: "Especially between 1903 and 1909, [he] implemented traditional leftwing policies, extending the state's social base, using the instruments of the right, namely the conservative tendencies that were dominant within the governing majority, and the inherently conservative bureaucracy." In any event, no real conservative party capable of governing the state managed to emerge during the Liberal Italy phase, i.e. the years prior to the advent of fascism. Evidently, the Church's hostility to the new Italian state, at least until the early years of the 20th century, was a contributing factor in this phenomenon.

The post-1945 period, which saw the establishment of the Republic, was indelibly marked by the fascist experience, tainting the right with fascism. Starting in 1948, the year in which the Constitution was approved and the Republic's first parliamentary elections were held, Italy's political system was dominated by the centre, represented by Christian Democracy, a party of Catholic inspiration, which formed shifting alliances with various smaller parties at successive elections. After the resounding defeat and subsequent demise of Uomo Qualunque (Front of the Ordinary Man, a populist movement akin to France's poujadist movement) in the 1948 elections, the two main representatives of the right were the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) and the Monarchist National Party. But the establishment of the Republic and the approval of the Constitution, which states that the republican form of government cannot be changed, made the latter party relatively anachronistic, and it was dissolved a few years later (G. Mammarella 1993, p. 177).

The small Italian Liberal Party (PLI), which enjoys relatively stable electoral support of between 4% and 5%, is also worth a mention. In 1954, the election of Giovanni Malagodi to the post of secretary marked the rise of the party's most conservative wing, linked to industrial and agrarian interests, leading to the departure in 1955 of its most progressive current, which went on to form the Radical Party (*ibid*, p. 215). The PLI has always defended relatively conservative policies, especially on economic issues, although this has not stopped it from promoting secularism and the defence of civil rights. However, it should be noted that liberalism and, more specifically, the liberal conception of the state and its institutions have always represented relatively marginal currents in Italy. Liberal thinking has been caught between two doctrines – Catholic and communist – and conditioned by Hegelian idealism, imported into Italy by Giovanni Gentile and "liberal" philosopher Benedetto Croce. Hegelian idealism had the effect of marginalising thinkers of great quality, representatives of empirical and anti-idealistic philosophy, such as liberal constitutionalist Giuseppe Maranini (A. Panebianco, 1995, p. II).

Until the crisis in the early 1990s, Italian politics was a competition between an unmovable centre – unmovable for reasons linked both to the characteristics of Italy's political system and the country's geopolitical position – and a Communist Party which, despite being condemned to remain in opposition, had emerged since the end of the 1960s, in a new version of the old transformist system, as a weighty political player.

It has only been since this crisis that the Italian political landscape has undergone real change. As we will see, the political vacuum it created – particularly in terms of moderate political parties – spurred entrepreneur and media magnate Silvio Berlusconi into action. Berlusconi succeeded in building a new alliance between an Italian Social Movement in the throes of transformation, Umberto Bossi's territorial party (Lombard League, subsequently renamed Liga Nord, or Northern League), which was starting to build up support, and his own party, Forza Italia, founded in 1993. The new alliance was positioned on the right of the political spectrum, in opposition to the left: for the first time since the fall of the fascist regime, the notion of a political right was once again a reality.

FROM THE ITALIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT TO THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE[1]

The Italian Social Movement: a party of outsiders

The Italian Social Movement (MSI) was founded on 26 December 1946, at the initiative of a handful of "political entrepreneurs", with a view to giving a legal form to groups that had sprung up in several regions across Italy, in a wave of nostalgia for the fascist era.

This marked the entry of the neo-fascist right, ideologically linked to the Italian Social Republic (the puppet regime headed by Mussolini during the German occupation from 1943 to 1945), and as such to "leftwing fascism", into the political system, although it remained a relatively marginal force.

The MSI ran for the 1948 elections on a "leftwing" platform, rejecting the capitalist model in favour of one in which workers would have played a role in corporate management and had a stake in corporate profits, and proposing to replace liberal and democratic institutions with a model of corporatist representation. However, the MSI's fundamental anticommunism justified, in the eyes of its leaders, anchoring it on the right of the political spectrum. In addition, it was characterised from the outset by its very harsh criticism of the party system. Alongside the main current, that of party leader Giorgio Almirante, there was also a minority current, more conservative and open to the West. The conflict between these two currents was for a long time central to the life of the MSI.

1. In preparing this section, we made particular reference to the work of Piero Ignazi (1998) and, for the more recent period, to that of Adalberto Baldoni (2009).

By adopting more moderate policies in the 1950s, MSI was able to open a phase of alliances with the right, particularly with the monarchist movement, and work with Christian Democracy. But this phase was short-lived and ended with the fall of the government of Fernando Tambroni, the first and only Italian government led by the Christian Democrats with the explicit support of the neo-fascist party (1960). This ushered in a period of marginalisation for the MSI, from which it only began to emerge in the 1980s.

It was the gradual easing of this climate of political and ideological conflict, which peaked in the 1970s, that allowed relations between the right and the MSI to thaw. Early steps towards a less ideological and partisan re-reading of the fascist experience, inspired by the work of historian Renzo de Felice, were another part of this trend.

Political forces, and particularly the secular parties (i.e. those lying outside the predominant Catholic and communist doctrines), started making overtures to Almirante's party and came to be seen as possible interlocutors. The MSI also benefited from its position outside the party system: criticism of the "partyocracy", long a warhorse of intellectual liberals, especially Giuseppe Maranini[2], started finding an echo in public opinion and became a very effective political argument. However, the neo-fascist party was never to use these opportunities to make a radical review of its underlying values. Its ideological inertia was further linked to its inability to envisage a different political trajectory and new alliances.

The close of the 1980s was characterised by stagnation and a high level of internal conflict. Despite the thaw, the MSI continued to lack any real influence until the early 1990s. But the situation changed swiftly between 1993 and 1994, when it was confronted by abrupt and radical change that shook Italy's political and party system to its very foundations.

The emergence of the National Alliance

Thanks in large part to its criticism of the traditional parties, the MSI obtained good results in the 1992 parliamentary elections (the last held under the First Republic), which saw a fall in support for Christian Democracy and lacklustre results for the two successors of the former Communist Party, the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) and the

2. See G. Maranini (1995) on this topic.

Communist Refoundation Party (PRC). The year 1992 also marked the start of explicit reference to a new national alliance to oppose the left. Conservative political scientist Domenico Fisichella was the first to call for an alliance of the right. But the idea was not in fact new; it actually grew out of a proposal put forward by Pinuccio Tatarella, a front-ranking MSI personality, in the 1980s. There was a succession of meetings and initiatives around the goal of making the right more open and more moderate, as an alternative to the left. In April 1993, Gianfranco Fini, the young secretary of the MSI, whom Almirante had long groomed as his successor, announced the creation of a National Alliance for a presidential republic. The year 1993 was also crucial for Fini, marking his entry into the national political arena.

This came amidst a crisis in Italy's political and party system. Following a series of referenda, and with strong public support, a reform of the electoral system was approved for municipal and parliamentary elections. The municipal electoral law introduced direct voting for the post of mayor. MSI secretary Gianfranco Fini stood in Rome. In the first round, he won 21.04% of the vote, in a city where the MSI had previously tended to score about 12%. Between the first round and the run-off, entrepreneur and media magnate Silvio Berlusconi told journalists that he would choose Fini over Francesco Rutelli, the leftwing candidate. This was a clear signal to voters that the time had come for a moderate coalition to stop the left. Rutelli won the run-off, but Fini, who scored 46.9%, managed to win the support of numerous centrist and moderate voters.

From then on, the process of transforming the MSI (even though some experts, such as Piero Ignazi, deny that the process involved a radical and profound revision of the positioning of its members) increasingly followed the declarations of its leader, which often were not understood, even within the party – even in 1990, the reference to fascism was an important part of the MSI's identity (P. Ignazi 1998, p. 430).

Fini's success in Rome hastened the plan to found the National Alliance, as did the upheavals that beset the party system at that time: first, the dissolution of traditional parties (particularly Christian Democracy and the Italian Socialist Party) and the arrival of Silvio Berlusconi with his new party, Forza Italia (FI). Set up in the space of only a few weeks, this party became the pivot of a new grouping comprising, among others, the MSI, rebranded as the National Alliance.

National Alliance, a party of government

A short time before the March 1994 elections, the first held under the new electoral law, the National Alliance held its first convention. In reality, it was at that time less of a new party than another label under which the MSI, joined by a few front-ranking personalities, intended to field candidates in the elections. The new brand was aimed at rejuvenating the party's image in the absence of real ideological change. The elections were won by an ad-hoc coalition between Forza Italia and the National Alliance in the south, and between Forza Italia and Liga Nord in the north. AN took a record 13.5% of the vote. MSI-AN subsequently joined a government for the first time ever, participating in the first Berlusconi government alongside personalities from outside the party; one of its historical leaders, Giuseppe Tatarella, became Deputy Prime Minister.

During a debate on a confidence motion, Gianfranco Fini significantly changed his language, saying that antifascism had been a vital step in the restoration of democratic values in Italy. However, this language contrasted with a declaration made a short time afterwards, in which he described Mussolini as the "greatest statesman of the 20th century", sparking fierce criticism, especially abroad.

In January 1995, in Fiuggi, the Italian Social Movement disbanded, giving birth to a new party, the National Alliance. Among the essential points affirmed in Fiuggi were that rightwing values pre-existed fascism, that antifascism was a necessary phase in the return of democratic values, and that it was crucial, within rightwing political culture, to reconcile the principles of freedom and authority. All forms of racism, anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism were renounced. The MSI's transformation into the National Alliance was not without internal conflict. Pino Rauti[3], a former secretary of the MSI (1990-1991), denounced the abandonment of the spiritual link with the past and the gradual drift towards liberal democracy and conservatism. Many people saw at that time – and not without a measure of concern – the shadow of a large rightwing democratic party, as described by Pinuccio Tatarella. And that was exactly what ultimately transpired, with the birth of the People of Freedom (PdL).

3. Pino Rauti did not join the National Alliance; in conjunction with other dissidents, he founded a far-right party, the Tricolour Flame Social Movement.

There was no longer any doubt by then that the right had left its ghetto to become an integral part of the new bipolar system. The National Alliance allied itself with Forza Italia for the 1996, 2001 and 2006 parliamentary elections, while Gianfranco Fini distanced himself from the past in an increasingly marked manner. At the Bologna congress in 2002, he set the objective of becoming a "modern, open, European and above all dialoguing right". The following year, he provocatively suggested giving immigrants the right to vote in local elections, putting himself at loggerheads with Liga Nord, as well as with some of the other leaders of his party. The same year, he travelled to Israel. During that trip, after a visit to Yad Vashem, he described everything that led to the Holocaust as "absolute evil", including the decisions that culminated in the enactment of the 1938 racial laws and the experience of Italy's Social Republic, which qualified the Jews as "war enemies". Reported in a simplistic manner, this language sparked heated controversy within the party, prompting the departure of Alessandra Mussolini (granddaughter of the *Duce*) to found the Social Alternative coalition.

In 2005, during the campaign for the popular referendum on law N°40-2004 relative to medically assisted procreation – a law backed by the centre-right government – Fini's positions sparked new and even deeper divisions. The law was contested by parts of public opinion and some politicians, adding to the opposition of the left due to the law's repressive nature. Before the referendum was held, Fini said that he would vote yes to three of the four questions, implicitly coming out in favour of a partial repeal of the law. This declaration, which was in stark contradiction to the more conservative ideas he had previously espoused, marked a lasting split in his relations with large numbers of the party's leaders.

In 2006 Fini set up a foundation, Fare Futuro, which he chairs himself and which presents itself as a think-tank aimed at defining a new cultural project. Its scientific director, Alessandro Campi, describes the foundation's goal as "coming to a better understanding of Italy (and making it better known), a country that is politically identified with the centre-right, to allow it to be heard in the national public debate, to efface the negative and hateful stereotypes propagated by leftwing culture and to guide decisions and thinking on major issues currently at the centre of political debate" (A. Campi 2008, p. 97). Fare Futuro, which comprises intellectuals and politicians close to Fini, is nevertheless a separate entity from the National Alliance, and there are many points of divergence

between, on the one hand, people close to the party's chairman and, on the other hand, the other leaders – not to mention rank-and-file members – who often continue to defend more conservative and traditionalist positions.

To conclude, it is interesting to note that the foundation of the National Alliance resulted from changed circumstances attributable to broader change in the political environment. As such, the party was not really in a position to lay down a new cultural project (C. Moroni 2008, p. 75-77). However, there was no lack of attempts within the party to find another way of defining the right, in a different context. These attempts, often competing with each other within the AN, have continued in the new party, the People of Freedom, leading to new occasions for confrontation.

A NEW CENTRE-RIGHT PARTY: FORZA ITALIA

The birth of an "enterprise-party"

Early in 1994, at the initiative of Silvio Berlusconi, a new party entered the political arena: Forza Italia. It filled the void left by the dissolution of Christian Democracy, the Socialist Party and the small secular parties. Berlusconi, a media magnate and one of Italy's richest men, owns three television networks; he had already tried in vain, at the end of 1993, to convince the leaders of the small centre parties that grew out of Christian Democracy, as well as Liga Nord leader Umberto Bossi, to form a new coalition to oppose the left and, in particular, the PDS, the former Communist Party. At the time, the PDS was seen as the sole party in a position to win a parliamentary majority.

Forza Italia was created in a matter of weeks, its birth having been preceded by a series of initiatives, among which, in September 1993, the creation by Giuliano Urbani, a political scientist at the Bocconi University in Milan, of an association dubbed "In Search of Good Government". Comprising intellectuals and entrepreneurs, this association published, in November 1993, a text entitled *Alla ricerca del buon governo. Appello per la costruzione di una Italia vincente* (In search of good government: appeal for the creation of a winning Italy). This document was inspired by the themes of the New Right, represented at the time on the international stage by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan: its aims were to roll back the state, to modernise the adminis-

tration and cut red tape, to deregulate the economy, to cut spending and reduce the government deficit, to ease fiscal pressure and rationalise the use of public resources and the welfare state.

The text of Urbani and his association was a reference document for the Forza Italia clubs, launched in November 1993 by Angelo Codignoni, the former boss of La Cinq, a television network set up by Fininvest in France. Despite not formally being part of the new party, these clubs played a major role in this phase of the movement's organisation. The first FI convention was held in Rome, on 6 February 1994, offering greater visibility to the consensus that Silvio Berlusconi managed to achieve (E. Poli, 2001, p. 43-49).

That was how Berlusconi was able to form, with an eye to the March 1994 parliamentary elections, an ad-hoc coalition with MSI-AN and Bossi's Liga Nord in the north and Fini's party in the south. For the first time in the history of the Italian Republic, the right and the left (the progressive forces, led by the PDS) were opposed to each other, and the right started to be seen not as a marginal force excluded from the political system, but as one of the system's two main pillars.

The consolidation of a loosely structured and charismatic party

While it may have been set up in record time, on an entrepreneurial model and using financial, human and organisational resources provided by Silvio Berlusconi, Forza Italia quickly became Italy's leading party (in votes); as it became more institutionalised, it gradually shed its initial "enterprise-party" image. It nevertheless conserved a lean and highly centralised structure based mainly on the role of its elected representatives. It must always be borne in mind that Forza Italia was founded at the initiative of a charismatic leader, who remained solidly at the helm until it disbanded in 2009, before taking up the reins of a new party, the People of Freedom.

To quote political sociologist Chiara Moroni, "while democratic governance bodies of a sort were foreshadowed in Forza Italia's articles of association, in practical terms, this did not undermine the party's charismatic nature, with the various consequences this entails: highly centralised operational and decision-making processes, a system of internal promotion based on cooptation by the leader and determined by the extent of the recipient's loyalty to him and the absence of internal debate and forms of democratic participation" (C. Moroni, 2008, p. 35).

Forza Italia's success directly after its creation shows it to have been a fundamentally charismatic party. Silvio Berlusconi's leadership draws its strength from its anti-political nature, the criticism he levels against traditional parties and the professionalisation of politics. He also adopted, at least initially, the ideal of a smaller state and the defence of individual freedoms, as opposed to an invasive state (D. Campus, 2006, p. 144-147). Berlusconi also sought to legitimise the right by assuming a positioning that Christian Democracy – which from the start of the First Republic sought to stick to the centre – had always eschewed. Loudly proclaiming his party's place on the right – long a cause for denigration in Italy – he broke with a political tradition dating back to 1946 (M. Lazar, 2007, p. 23).

Thanks to the alliances that Forza Italia succeeded in forging and its successive electoral victories in 1994, 2001 and 2008, the Italian right was able to project a more appealing image, with its own party and electoral base. It is a stable base made up of moderate voters, many of whom had previously voted for the *pentapartito*[4] in the 1980s, although it remains very much a mixed bag, with very diverse ambitions. Ilvo Diamanti notes that one can distinguish two "blue zones" where Forza Italia won: one in the north and another in the south (the centre being a "red zone", dominated by the left). The first "comprises metropolitan areas dominated by the new economy and services, local systems looking for affirmation and recognition (…), provinces whose economies are built on trade and tourism". It covers varied milieus, which share a secular and socialist – or at least moderate – cultural background, strongly anticommunist, and a high quality of life; their main goal is to preserve the level of well-being and development they have become accustomed to. By contrast, the "blue" region in the south, whose strongholds are in the Sicily and the southern provinces of Sardinia, "has an economic model still dependent on state intervention, characterised by high unemployment and a cumbersome bureaucracy". Unemployment is the main concern in this region, leading to insistent demand for state intervention (I. Diamanti, 2009, p. 128).

4. The term *pentapartito* refers to the ruling coalition in the 1980s comprising Christian Democracy, the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party, the Republican Party and the Democratic Socialist Party.

From the liberal revolution to the rediscovery of tradition

From an ideological perspective, as we noted earlier, Forza Italia painted itself early on as a party aiming to achieve a liberal revolution in Italy, particularly in economic terms, by means of deregulation and fiscal policies more advantageous for individuals and companies. However, while certain aims, notably the implementation of a more equitable tax system and tax cuts, are still on the agenda, the goal of rolling back the state gradually lost its importance in the party's programme, which increasingly became a farrago of different conservative currents. This phenomenon can be ascribed to the eclectic nature of Forza Italia's electoral base and demands for protection made by the southern regions (D. Campus, 2006, p. 147).

After early years marked by the culture of its leader and his managerial approach to politics, Forza Italia sought to define its cultural model more explicitly. This led to the release of a charter of values in 2004. The charter, which reflects the desire to meld different tendencies, was aimed at offering a counter-model to hegemonic leftwing culture. It was an anti-ideological synthesis that sought to install a dialogue between popular liberalism and liberal-socialism. At the summit of the party's values reigns the idea of the prevalence of the individual over the state, explaining the importance given to the notion of subsidiarity. Individual liberty is nevertheless seen in relation to the collective dimension, and particularly the sentiment of the common good (C. Moroni, 2008, p. 106-108).

The way in which tension between the individual and society is dealt with shows the growing importance given to tradition, especially the Catholic tradition. It is no surprise that the term "person", a key concept in Catholic doctrine is increasingly being used in preference to "individual". This trend has really emerged since 9/11 and the ensuing focus on the notion of the West, increasingly identified with the Christian tradition. Ferdinando Adornato, who founded the Fondazione Liberal, wrote for instance, in 2003, that the concept of the West is based on three central ideas: "The recognition of the foundations that, since the Biblical revelation, have governed the natural order of our lives: the centrality of the person in history and the relationship of amicable autonomy between faith and reason."[5] This position, which has on several occasions been qualified as "liberal conservatism", reveals the influence exercised by

5. Cited by C. Moroni (2008, p.109).

certain foundations close to Forza Italia: Liberal, led by Adornato (who subsequently distanced himself from Berlusconi and joined the Union of the Centre), and Magna Carta, founded in 2002 and run by Marcello Pera, then president of the Senate, and historian Gaetano Quagliarello, a sitting senator and deputy leader of the PdL group.

The drift towards increasingly conservative positions very mindful of the Catholic Church's magisterium (which, over the last 15 years, has had an increasingly direct influence on Italian politics) has also translated into highly controversial legislative initiatives taken by the Berlusconi government – such as law N°40 of 2004, which places very strict limits on medically assisted procreation – and firm opposition to measures such as the recognition of unmarried couples, especially homosexual couples.

From a more institutional perspective, the central role given to the leader and the influence of liberal themes and the notion of subsidiarity contributed to the development, within Forza Italia, of reformist opinions favouring on the one hand the reinforcement of the executive and the election of the president by direct suffrage and, on the other hand, a reorganisation of the state on an enhanced federal model. However, the party had trouble formulating coherent plans, whether for the reform of the state or that of the government.

BIRTH, DEVELOPMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF A TERRITORIAL PARTY: LIGA NORD

The politicisation of the North-South divide

The appearance of a territorial party in the country's north stemmed from the crisis experienced by Christian Democracy starting in the 1980s. Christian Democracy was unable to integrate the renewal of localism, a growing phenomenon in various areas of the Italian north. The success of the first leagues in the northeast, especially in the Veneto (Liga Veneta, Lega Lombarda, particularly), then in the Lombardian provinces located on the lower slopes of the Alps (Brianza, Bergamo, Sondrio) and certain provinces in Piedmont (Cuneo, Asti), reflected the emergence of local interests and a northern question. These territories have in common strongly growing economies, built on a fabric of small businesses, openness to external markets and a model of social and cultural organisation based on the role of the Church and the parishes. Traditionally

an electoral reserve for Christian Democracy, they identified less and less with that party and started seeing the state as a constraint and a hindrance to their development (I. Diamanti, 2009, p. 69).

In the second half of the 1980s, Umberto Bossi, leader of Lega Lombarda, set out to unify the various leagues. Lega Nord appeared in 1991, bursting onto the national political scene at the 1992 parliamentary elections, where it took 3,395,000 votes (8.65%), extending its reach beyond the areas where it was born, as far south as Emilia (Centre-North).

Following its successes in 1992 and 1994, the League entered the government, allied with Forza Italia and the National Alliance, and the theme of federalism, a warhorse of Umberto Bossi's party, took a lasting place on the Italian political agenda (Baldi and Baldini, 2008, p. 86). At the end of the 1990s (in the 1999 European elections), the League recorded the first drop in its support, due in large part to the competition exercised in the north by Forza Italia, which also presented itself as an anti-political force. But having fallen to roughly 4% in the 2001 and 2006 elections, the party's support strengthened considerably at subsequent polls, doubling at the 2008 general election and reaching 10% at the 2009 European election.

The League represents the first partisan expression in the history of Republican Italy of the centre-periphery conflict, particularly the antagonism between at one end a productive north and at the other end an ineffective capital (Rome) and an assisted south. Since its creation, its strong points have been a dense party organisation spread across the country, the promotion of a broad political class, a network of specialised sector groups and a strong identity built around territorial themes. The League's organisation as such is much closer to that of a popular party of social integration (represented, for instance, by the former Communist Party), than that of Forza Italia, which is much more loosely structured (I. Diamanti, 2009, p. 81).

With the exception of the 1996 poll, the League has always allied with other centre-right forces at parliamentary elections, and its leaders have occupied important government posts. Its presence in the coalition has constantly weighed on the centre-right government's policies, in favour of decentralisation and federalism, as well as, over recent years, harsher policies with respect to illegal immigrants (at least in terms of language).

The League, between secession, federalism and law and order issues

We should note first of all that while the League has consistently characterised itself by a desire to defend Italy's territories, its positions and proposals have in fact evolved over time. After its first phase, marked by the affirmation of the charismatic leadership of Umberto Bossi and a very localised political offering, between 1992 and 1995, the League, which obtained executive posts at local and national level, adopted a more moderate position, built around its call for federalism. In 1995, it left the coalition, prompting the fall of the Berlusconi government. It then took up openly secessionist ideas and stood in the 1996 elections on a platform of autonomy for the northern regions, winning great support from voters (B. Baldi and G. Baldini, 2008, p. 84-85).

Subsequently, when the League again joined forces with Forza Italia in 1999, these extreme positions, which were accompanied by references to a mythical North – "Padania" and the "Padanian nation" – were gradually abandoned in favour of a return to the notion of federalism, with calls for the devolution to the regions of a large number of powers held by the central government.

Nevertheless, the League's programme started including policies addressing new fears in the northern regions stemming from globalisation and immigration in the 1990s. In response to these fears, it adopted conservative and traditionalist positions in social, economic and religious terms, going from being the "party of producers" to the "party of law and order" (I. Diamanti, 2009, p. 76-79 and p. 212).

It should be noted last of all that Liga Nord differs from the other components of the centre-right, which perpetuate Italy's European tradition, with respect to the process of European integration. It has consistently been highly critical of European integration and while it may recently have toned down its language, its underlying opinions have in fact not changed much. While expressing support for the idea of a federation between the European nations – i.e. a Europe that acknowledges the specificity of the continent's different regions and territories – it denounces what the European Union has become in its eyes, namely a continental super-state with a massive democratic deficit.

In conjunction with the most pronounced changes over recent years, the League has denounced the potential risks of enlargement to the East, especially accession for countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, which has increased the number of immigrants and Roma people arriving in

Italy. In contrast to other parties and the current policy of the Berlusconi government, the League has also maintained its opposition to Turkey's entry into the EU, on geographical and economic grounds (the damages that Turkish accession could have on the Italian system of SMEs), as well as for cultural and identity-related reasons (Turkey's place in the Muslim world). In this respect, it should be noted that the League continues to support the inclusion in the EU Treaty of reference to Europe's Christian roots, in unison with the other centre-right parties.[6]

The March 2010 regional elections appear to have further strengthened the League's weight in the centre-right coalition. It won a considerable success in the north, becoming the leading party in Veneto – eating into support for Berlusconi's party – and reinforced its presence in the country's central regions (Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany). By dint of its agreements with the PdL, it won the presidency of Veneto and Piedmont. On the strength of these results, League ministers and leaders explicitly claimed a mandate to play a greater role in the government coalition, with, in particular, the themes of constitutional reform and fiscal federalism at the top of the agenda.

THE MERGER OF FORZA ITALIA AND THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE: THE PEOPLE OF FREEDOM

The birth of a single centre-right party

The party of the Italian right, the People of Freedom, which held its first conference in March 2009, was born of the merger between the National Alliance and Forza Italia. However, the two parties had very different organisations. The former, structured into chapters spread across the entire country and with a system of conferences and elections to designate leaders at various levels, has a relatively traditional organisation. By contrast, Forza Italia had a looser structure and was controlled by a smaller summit. One may therefore have imagined, prior to the founding of the PdL, that FI would be absorbed by the AN, with its more structured organisation. But this was not what happened. The initiative behind the foundation of a major centre-right party came from Silvio Berlusconi, seizing a sentiment already present among moderate

6. www.padaniaoffice.org; www.leganord.org

voters – opinion polls had consistently shown over previous years that there was a groundswell of opinion favourable to the creation of such a party.

Nurtured over several years, the idea was launched by Berlusconi in November 2007 – to the surprise of even his closest co-workers, whom he had not bothered to inform – during a demonstration in Milan's Piazza San Babila by Forza Italia members calling on people to sign a petition for the resignation of the government of Romano Prodi. Arriving on the scene, Berlusconi, in the midst of the crowd, got out of his car and, in what has gone down in history as the speech of the *predellino* (the running board of the car, on which he was standing), announced the dissolution of Forza Italia and the formation of a new party, the "Party of the Italian People of Freedom", inviting his allies, Fini and Casini (leader of the centrist UDC party, which was at that time allied with the right), to join him.

This declaration allowed Berlusconi to reaffirm his leadership over the increasingly institutionalised Forza Italia apparatus, with which he was openly exasperated. Casting himself as a true charismatic leader, he voiced his suspicion over the consolidation of the party's structure and the appearance within it of "clans". Once again, he presented himself as an anti-political leader, hostile to the power of traditional parties and able to give voice to the aspirations of the Italian people directly.

Fini and Casini initially reacted with great hostility to the plan, fearing that they would be drowned by Berlusconi's charisma. They accused him of adopting a policy of rule by plebiscite, based on the personalisation of power. In the days that followed the announcement, the two men conducted a series of meetings with other political leaders to gauge the possibility of founding a new party, distinct from Forza Italia. But, with unfavourable polls, Fini ended up caving in, deciding after a few weeks to throw his hat in with Berlusconi and to join the single party (L. Della Pasqua, 2009, p. 97).

The troubled cohabitation of the cofounders, Berlusconi and Fini

Following the premature demise of the Prodi government, in January 2008, due to conflicts within the coalition, the two parties (FI and AN) decided to stand together in the April elections. Victorious, they formed single groups in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, under the PdL banner. This set off the merger process, leading to the March 2009

conference. The merger was not however achieved without clashes, due mainly to mutual suspicion between FI and the AN, which made it very difficult for them to come to an agreement on the rules under which the new party would operate. Moreover, Gianfranco Fini, who left one of his allies holding the reins of the National Alliance after being elected president of the Chamber of Deputies, was clearly concerned about his role in the new party and increasingly distanced himself from positions defended by Berlusconi.

Even before the birth of the PdL, Gianfranco Fini had started criticising, as president of the Chamber of Deputies, the subservience of Parliament and the government's abusive use of decree laws and confidence motions. During the construction of the new party, he also made declarations on the question of its organisation and the need to run the party democratically. In November 2008, he overtly denounced the danger of the nascent "Cesarism" in the new party. This coincided with the publication of an issue of the journal *Charta Minuta* (published by Fare Futuro, Fini's foundation), dedicated to the PdL "under construction". Most of the contributions stressed the need to form a party run along democratic lines and to address the issue of the succession – a taboo subject in Silvio Berlusconi's entourage.[7] Fini also adopted, on several occasions, a more open attitude on the issue of immigration, placing himself in clear conflict with Liga Nord and sparking tensions within the PdL, where most leaders were keen to maintain good relations with Bossi's party.

Fini's determination not to be confined to a supporting role in the PdL and to embody more liberal policies in comparison with the conservative and traditionalist positions that have gradually asserted themselves over recent years came across clearly in his speech to the party's founding conference, in March 2009. Adopting the posture of a statesman, Fini laid out his vision of Italy's future. He stressed the need to modernise the country's institutions across the board, and not just with punctual and partial measures, and to rethink the founding contract binding the national community. He addressed issues such as immigration, the integration of immigrants and the secular state, on which his views differ to those of most PdL leaders. This attitude won him the support of minority groups, with liberal, socialist or radical tendencies, which started seeing him as a possible successor to Berlusconi.

7. *Partito unico under construction, Charta Minuta*, November 2008. http://www.farefuturofondazione.it/ff/page.asp?VisImg=S&Art=830&Cat=1&IdTipo=0&TB=Charta%20Minuta&Tipo=UltimeNotizie&CCA=53

Fini's speech made it increasingly clear that it was impossible to trace back the various sensibilities coexisting within the party to one or other of the co-founding parties, AN and FI. Numerous leaders of the former opted to follow Berlusconi (including Maurizio Gasparri, president of the PdL group in the Senate, and Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa), while some representatives of the latter, including parliamentarian Benedetto Della Vedova, a liberal economist hailing form the Radical Party, moved considerably closer to Gianfranco Fini.

Once the PdL had been created, there were many more unorthodox positions taken by Fini, his foundation or political personalities close to him: on the issue, for instance, of the respect of the prerogatives of Parliament, the integration of immigrants and state secularism.

Foundations and new currents: conflict and debate within a party lacking organisation

The main protagonists in these debates within the PdL were the foundations and associations that have sprung up around the centre-right over recent years. Aside from Magna Carta and Fare Futuro (cited above), other foundations have appeared, all linked to front-ranking personalities within the party – although their visibility in the media and their capacity to inform public debate is variable: Benedetto Della Vedova's Libertiamo; Maurizio Gasparri's Italia Protagonista; Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa's Punto Italia; Nuova Italia, created by Gianni Alemanno, the mayor of Rome; Civil Service Minister Renato Brunetta's Free Foundation; Riformismo e Libertà, created by Fabrizio Cicchitto, leader of the PdL group in the Chamber of Deputies; and Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti's Res Publica.

The merger between Forza Italia and the National Alliance was therefore achieved thanks to the impetus of Silvio Berlusconi; organisationally speaking, the People of Freedom is closer to the former than the latter: it defines itself as a charismatic party with a "lean" pyramid structure, very limited scope for internal democracy and high-level appointments controlled by the summit.[8] However, despite its structure, the PdL is beset by rancorous internal conflicts, which are expressed both at the summit and at the territorial level. In particular, while the merger between the AN and FI has been an electoral success – as shown

8. See the PdL's articles of association: http://www.ilpopolodellaliberta.it/speciali/statuto-del-pdl.pdf

by the 2008 parliamentary elections and the 2009 European elections – it is still a work in progress in organisational terms.

As political scientist Roberto D'Alimonte writes, "The merger has not worked at the party level. A joint vision, a shared structure and mutual trust are still lacking. The party is still divided into two big pieces that Berlusconi is having trouble putting together."[9] The new party, which is feeling pressure from local power bases, such as the former Forza Italia in Sicily, appears to be having trouble taking root in a homogenous manner across the country and in encouraging its sympathisers to join. The People of Freedom's membership drive, which lacked a real communications strategy, was a disappointment: while it is not as yet known exactly how many people jointed, there seems to be little doubt that it was well short of the target set by Berlusconi, namely 1 million members.[10] This is compounded by the exasperation, already mentioned, felt by the charismatic leader in relation to the internal conflicts and clans, not to mention his persistent temptation to revolutionise the structure and management of his loosely structured party. This explains the launch of a parallel structure to run the campaign, created on the eve of the regional elections at Berlusconi's insistence, under the aegis of one of his loyal co-workers, Tourism Minister Maria Vittoria Brambilla.

Against this backdrop, the creation of associations and foundations has become the main instrument of debate on the most important issues of the moment. These think-tanks must nevertheless be distinguished from other more classical structures, such as those that exist traditionally in the United States: while they enjoy formal autonomy from the party, they are nevertheless closely attached to the founding personality and have as such become a focus not only for debate, but also for political confrontation.

On major issues bearing on different domains (politics, economics, immigration, biopolitics and civil rights), the centre-right is still divided, and the think-tanks highlight these divisions. We have already referred to the question of immigration. In September 2009, a private member's bill on citizenship, signed by a PdL deputy close to Gianfranco Fini and a

9. Roberto D'Alimonte, "*The merger is working at the polls but still has no organisation*" (*La fusione funziona nelle urne ma la dirigenza ancora non c'è*), in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 4 March 2010.

10. At the time of writing, the only official data available, provided by the party, referred to pre-membership, i.e. declarations of memberships taken out online. To meet administrative requirements, "pre-members' have to submit proof of identity by sending in a copy of their ID by mail or by fax before their membership can be validated. Pre-memberships totalled 286,000. Prior to the merger, Forza Italia and National Alliance had combined memberships of roughly 1 million (in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 4 March 2010).

deputy of the Democratic Party, was tabled in the Chamber of Deputies. The bipartisan bill, which proposed easing the conditions and the wait for naturalisation,[11] encountered very firm opposition from numerous representatives of the PdL and the League. Similarly, a bill on biological testaments, which at the time of writing was before the Chamber of Deputies and had already been approved by the Senate, was the object of fierce disputes within the PdL. Debate on this text – severely restricting patients' capacity to accept or refuse medical treatment when their faculties of understanding and expressing their will have been impaired – has become a proxy for a debate on opposing conceptions of personal autonomy and freedom, as well as the limits of state intervention into the lives of individuals.[12] The latter question is also related to the broader issue of state secularism, which is a major demarcation line in Italy, on the right as well as on the left.

There are two opposing views in the PdL: the first, traditionalist and closely linked to the language of the Catholic Church, is shared – or at least tacitly accepted – by the majority of the party's leaders and national representatives; the minority second view emphasises the idea of reciprocal autonomy between the religious and political spheres and has found its champion in Fini.[13]

With respect to economic policy, we have seen how Forza Italia, originally presenting itself as a liberal force and pushing for a market economy and deregulation, has significantly toned down its language over time. Similarly, the PdL today appears to have jettisoned its more liberal ideas, which the National Alliance never supported, but which are still defended by a minority of liberals, who are often critical of the government's economic policies,[14] in favour of greater protectionism and state intervention in the economy. The case of Alitalia illustrates a paradoxical situation, in which the left, defining itself as the defender of

11. See the comments on this bill by Giovanna Lauro, *Cittadini e integrati: perché e come serve che gli stranieri diventino italiani*, in *Libertiamo.it.* http://www.libertiamo.it/2009/10/08/cittadini-e-integrati-perche-e-come-serve-che-gli-stranieri-diventino-italiani/

12. Think tanks such as Fare Futuro and Libertiamo have taken stances on issues related to bioethics and civil rights that are both more liberal and more respectful of the individual's freedom of choice, just as they have adopted a more open attitude to immigration and citizenship. See on these questions the February 2010 issue of the journal *Charta Minuta*. For more traditionalist positions, see the websites of the Magna Carta foundation (www.magna-carta.it) and its online journal, *L'Occidentale* (www.loccidentale.it).

13. For the outlines of Fini's positions on various issues, see his recent book *Il futuro della libertà* (2009).

14. Aside from the group that gravitates around *Libertiamo* (including economist and former minister Antonio Martino), there are also the positions of several members of the liberal Bruno Leoni research institute (which has no party affiliation).

the merits of the market, supported the national flag carrier's acquisition by Air France, while the right called for state intervention, in the name of the defence of national interests (C. Petrarca, 2008, p. 180).

In his book *Fear and hope* (*La paura e la speranza*), which was generally well received within the party, Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti summarised and theorised these two rallying cries: stronger state interventionism and traditionalist policies on social and ethical issues. He sets out a "vision that does not exclude God and does not demonise the state and the public dimension", not to mention policies "opposed to the tyranny of relativism" and based on key words including "values, family, identity, authority, order, responsibility, federalism" (G. Tremonti, 2008).

After the regional elections and in response to the League's increasing role in defining some of the centre-right coalition's policy stances, dissensions increased within the PdL, coming to light at the meeting of the party's leadership on 22 April 2010 (a meeting attended by all parliamentarians). Gianfranco Fini and Silvio Berlusconi came into open conflict, with Fini defending the freedom to express dissident views on certain issues and the right for minority currents to exist within the PdL. However, the Prime Minister's reaction and the crushing majority received by the document put to the vote demonstrated the depth of opposition to the possibility of allowing a clearer articulation of the different trends comprising the party.

At the time of writing, appeasement had not been achieved: at the initiative of followers of the president of the Chamber (including a few dozen parliamentarians), a new structure, Generazione Italia,[15] was launched in April 2010 in the aim of setting up a structured group within the PdL. Its purpose was to establish relays in the territories, but the initiative has encountered strong resistance among party leaders.

ITALY TENDS TO THE RIGHT, BUT THE RIGHT IS HAVING DIFFICULTIES

The "presidentialisation" of the Italian political system

Despite the Italian right's current difficulties, it has emerged since 1994 as a central force in the new political system. To understand properly the reality of Italian politics, we will conclude by returning to two major

15. In response to this initiative, Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa, who hails from the National Alliance but is very close to Silvio Berlusconi, created a new group named La Nostra Destra (Our Right), thereby betraying polemical intentions in regard to his former ally, Gianfranco Fini.

points: the transformation of the political system following the affirmation of a new centre-right and the presence of a moderate element, not inclined to vote for the left, representing the majority of its voters.

With Silvio Berlusconi's entry into politics, the birth of Forza Italia and the creation of a new centre-right coalition, the Italian political and party system assumed, for the first time, a bipolar structure, with the competition no longer based on the centre, but rather on the confrontation between right and left – the latter being itself forced to regroup in order to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Berlusconi. As tends to happen in majority democracies, the competition to win power has since 1994 been between two main alternative political options, and in those terms virtually all the governments that have been formed since then can be described as "pre-electoral", in that they are based on a majority selected by voters at parliamentary polls.

The various coalitions have left voters with no doubt about the identity of their leaders, who were implicitly running for the Prime Minister's job. These changes have in turn tended to make the political system more presidential (S. Ventura, 2010). Mauro Calise has shown that the Italian case shows all the characteristics of presidentialisation described by Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb in their seminal study, *The Presidentialisation of Politics*: reinforcement of the position of leader within the party, growing control over the executive and increasing autonomy of the executive office, personalised campaigns, etc. (M. Calise, 2005, p. 88).

The phenomenon of presidentialisation is more obvious on the right of the political spectrum. As we have seen, both Forza Italia and the People of Freedom were founded at the initiative of their leader, Silvio Berlusconi, and both can be qualified as "presidentialised" parties. Political communication has also undergone radical change. Previously party-centred, election campaigns have become candidate-centred. The extreme personalisation of politics has seen the emergence of a new style of communication. The abstract and auto-referential language of the First Republic, devised more for negotiations between party elites than to address a large and varied public, has been replaced by a more simple and direct language, playing on peoples' emotions, considered more likely to connect with voters. And television has assumed a central role in communication strategies.

On the left, the changes have been less radical but are no less significant. However, despite more personalisation than in earlier times and a

tendency towards the presidentialisation of the main leftwing party – the Democratic Party, founded in 2007 – these phenomena are still viewed in a very dubious light (S. Ventura, 2010).

Who votes for the centre-right?

The second underlying trend is the fact that most voters identify with the centre-right. This situation is perceived by Italian politicians almost as the result of structural factors; as such, the Democratic Party, which failed in its attempt to present itself, under its former secretary Walter Veltroni, as a party of government, now appears to be seeking to form an alliance with Pier Ferdinando Casini's UDC, a small centre party of Catholic inspiration. The moderate vote, turned away from the left, is a national vote. If we take the example of the 2008 parliamentary elections, the PdL, the League, the splinter "Right Party" (born of a split within the National Alliance) and the UDC (which had not at that time allied itself with any of the large parties) won a total of 59% of the vote in the northern and southern regions and 53% of those in the southern centre (Lazio, Abruzzes, Molise); while they failed to win a majority in the "red" regions (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marques), historical strongholds of the left, they nevertheless scored 43% of the vote. The Democratic Party and the leftwing list won 55% in the red regions (their worst score since 1994), but only 39% in the north and the south. It should nevertheless be noted that the main centre-right party, the PdL, was much stronger in the south, whereas its electoral strength has been sapped in the northern regions by the resurgence of the League over recent years[16] (I. Diamanti, 2009, p. 208-209).

But who exactly votes for the centre-right? Using the results of the 2008 elections, a study by ITANES (Italian National Elections Studies) showed that the People of Freedom, while enjoying support from very varied population categories – as is only to be expected from a party with such a broad electoral base – is overrepresented in some demographics: women (especially housewives, half of whom support the PdL), young people aged between 25 and 34, people aged 75 and over, people with a low level of educational attainment, the middle class (especially the urban lower middle class) and practising Catholics. However, these

16. According to data published by the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) for the 2008 parliamentary elections, while the People of Freedom won 45% of the vote in the south, the northeast and the northwest, it scored only 34.7% and 31.1% respectively (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 4 March 2010, p. 6)

results probably also reflect the influence of the religious factor: 60% of housewives describe themselves as practising Catholics, making them the most religious social category.

With respect to education, while the PdL is underrepresented among people with the highest level of educational attainment (particularly university degrees) and overrepresented among people with the lowest level of educational attainment (primary school), the correlation between political orientation and educational attainment is actually more complex than it may appear at first sight. The greater propensity to vote for the PdL among people who left school early is an important factor among older people (born before 1955), but tends to diminish among subsequent generations, and disappears among people in their thirties. However, it starts increasing again among people in their twenties.

Among people with a higher level of educational attainment, people who lived through the events of 1968 and subsequent years tend to be more likely to vote for the left. By contrast, those born after 1966 are more inclined to vote for the right. The same trend can be seen among people who left school early, confirming the PdL's greater capacity to connect with young people in comparison with the Democratic Party (M. Maraffi, 2008).

Looking at their views on major social issues, centre-right voters (PdL and League) are more favourable to market economics (support for free enterprise, lack of confidence in trade unions) than those of the left. However, both clearly support state intervention in the economy. Positioning on economic issues appears to be a less determinant factor in explaining people's votes than ethical and social issues. There are greater differences in this area, and centre-right voters are considerably more traditionalist than centre-left sympathisers, who are more libertarian (C. Petrarca, 2008).

To conclude, it would appear that law and order issues are another important factor. Again on the basis of ITANES data, 4.7% of voters believed that immigration was the most pressing issue for the government in 2008. Rightwing voters accounted for 80.5% of people expressing this view (PdL, League and Right). Some 67% of the 12.8% of respondents who cited criminality as their main preoccupation were voters of the right. And contrary to what one may have imagined, the rightwing vote was also predominant among those who cited a lack of security due not to immigration or criminality, but because of the economic situation (although voters were more evenly split on this issue: 50.5% were

from the right, compared with 37.3% from the left). It is also interesting to note that voters see the centre-right as more capable of resolving economic issues than the centre-left. Among those who cited economic concerns, 81% of centre-right voters felt that the party they supported was capable of dealing with the problems, while only 64% of centre-left voters gave their coalition the same credit. The lack of confidence in the centre-left was even more marked among people who put immigration and criminality at the top of their list of concerns, even among its own voters (N. Cavazza, P. Corbetta and M. Roccato, 2008).

In conclusion, it appears clear that the centre-right is better placed than the Democratic Party to penetrate all social classes and groups; it is more heterogeneous and more "popular" (M. Maraffi, 2008, p. 96); moreover, it appears in the eyes of its voters as being more in tune with their aspirations and concerns. There would appear to be strong demand for a centre-right political offering in contemporary Italy. However, despite its electoral strength and Berlusconi's considerable support in public opinion – well above 50% according to pollsters across the board – the centre-right, and particularly the PdL, is currently going through a political and organisational crisis, which could lead to a restructuring of the party offering. As such, the capacity of the centre-right and the main party of government, the People of Freedom, to lay out for the future a political offering attuned to the aspirations of its perspective voters, remains an open question.

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