



Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right

THE RIGHT-WING CRITIQUE OF EUROPE

NATIONALIST, SOVEREIGNIST AND RIGHT-WING
POPULIST ATTITUDES TO THE EU

Edited by
Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas and Francesco Berti



The Right-Wing Critique of Europe

The Right-Wing Critique of Europe analyses the opposition to the European Union from a variety of right-wing organisations in Western, Central and Eastern Europe.

In recent years, opposition to the processes of globalisation and the programme of closer European integration, understood as a threat to the sovereignty of individual member states, has led to an intensification of Eurosceptic sentiments on the Old Continent. The results of the European parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2019, the Brexit referendum and electoral results in different European countries are all testament to the considerable growth of radical populist-nationalist and conservative-sovereignist movements and parties. The common idea that binds these groups, both in Western Europe and in Central and Eastern Europe, is a hostile attitude towards the idea of (an ever-more integrated) united Europe. These parties reject not only the project of building a European federation, but also the current model of the European Union and the values underlying its attitudes. They are united by their criticism of EU policies, in particular those concerning security, emigration, multiculturalism, gender equality and the rights of minorities, as well as economic liberalism and the common currency. However, this criticism manifests itself with varying degrees of intensity, and not all parties fit the classic definition of Euroscepticism but instead represent its mild form, Eurorealism. The authors bring together reflections on the organic and complex critique of the European Union, its policies and cultural and ideological character. The book provides a comparative analysis of this criticism at the transnational level.

This book will be of interest to researchers of European politics, the radical right and Euroscepticism.

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**Edited by
Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas
and Francesco Berti**

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5 Giorgia Meloni's new Europe

Europe of sovereign nations in the Brothers of Italy party manifestos

Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas

Introduction

The Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, FdI), the Italian conservative-sovereign party, is an extremely interesting phenomenon on both the Italian political scene and in European politics. The group, established in December 2012, is attracting growing public support in the country, but is also among the most significant far-right European parties, one which is critical of the European Union (EU) and its policies. Regardless of its declared ties with the post-fascist party Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI) (which operated on the Italian political scene from 1946 to 1994), FdI has steadily increased its popularity: starting with the 2014 European Parliament election (3.7%), through the 2018 parliamentary election (4.3%), and the 2019 European Parliament election (6.5%), and attracting 16.2% of the votes in the regional elections at the end of September 2020.¹ At the end of 2019, Giorgia Meloni, the current party leader, who is one of the most popular politicians in Italy according to public opinion polls by Ipsos, was also included by the English daily *The Times* as among the most significant personalities able to meaningfully influence European politics in 2020.² The aim of this chapter will be to analyse the Fratelli d'Italia's vision of Europe based on their press materials, party programmes and Giorgia Meloni's public appearances, with a particular emphasis on their concept of the European Union and its policies from 2014 to today.

'In defence of God, fatherland and family' – sovereignty according to Fratelli d'Italia

The Fratelli d'Italia group was officially established on 21 December 2012 by three former members of The People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) party: Giorgia Meloni, ex-minister for youth policies in Silvio Berlusconi's 4th government; Ignazio La Russa, defence minister; and Guido Crosetto, under-secretary in the Ministry of Defence. The party initially used the name Fratelli d'Italia – Alleanza Nazionale to emphasise its historical ties with National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN) and Italian Social Movement – National

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Right (MSI-Destra Nazionale), thus not distancing itself from neo-fascist traditions.³ As noted by the political scientist Piero Ignazi, FdI is a party with a clearly defined identity, referring to the tradition of MSI, filtered into AN.⁴ Its main programme points, such as national pride, which often takes on a nationalistic character, an active role of the state in the economy, sensitivity to the problems of Southern Italy and social rights, refer to this political culture. FdI is also characterised by its strong leadership.⁵ Until 2014, Ignazio La Russa, who had been the leader of the MSI Fronte della Gioventù youth group in the 1970s, and subsequently a close associate of Gianfranco Fini, was the party's chairman. The current leader of the party, Giorgia Meloni (born in 1977), although she has repeatedly declared 'she was never a fascist for anagraphic reasons',⁶ willingly quotes the long-time MSI secretary Giorgio Almirante during her speeches, proposes replacing the 25 April holiday, which commemorates the fall of fascism, with another anniversary which 'does not divide Italians so much',⁷ and in 2017 she strongly criticised a bill that intended to make proclaiming fascist propaganda a crime (*Legge Fiano*).⁸ The party's logo also refers to neo-fascist traditions, with its three-colour flame or torch reminiscent of the historical symbol of the MSI.⁹

The party's programme was fine-tuned at the second FdI congress, which took place on 3 December 2017 in Trieste (the so-called *Tesi di Trieste per il Movimento dei patrioti*),¹⁰ at which Giorgia Meloni announced her intention of creating a 'patriot movement'. In addition to strict identity slogans related to extreme right-wing culture, and not only those identifying with MSI and AN, FdI presented itself as a national conservative and sovereign party. In its programme, the group refers to the principles of national sovereignty, freedom, democracy, justice and social solidarity, and strongly emphasises its attachment to the national tradition. As Meloni declared during the Atréju demonstration in September 2019, FdI is a sovereignty party because it wants to 'defend God, the Fatherland and the family'. Similarly, in a speech on 3 February 2020 at the National Conservatism Conference, organised in Rome by the Edmund Burke Foundation and Nazione Futura, the party leader referred to the programme slogans of a former US president, Ronald Reagan, while presenting her *Manifesto for a New Europe*: 'Defence, Fiscal, Social'. In Meloni's opinion, more than any other president in US history, Reagan represented the words of the Preamble to the US Constitution: 'We the People', symbolising the principle of national sovereignty. As she emphasised, the nation is a commonality of traditions and values that create its distinctive identity. At the convention, Meloni also presented three main elements of the political and economic revolution on which the new Europe should be based: 1) 'a patriotic soul' (sovereign), striving to defend its national interests and sovereignty of the people (the nation); 2) economic freedom and the correct relationship between the state and taxpayers; 3) social values which should uphold religious and moral values, understood as 'the noblest objective of every political action'. All these values can be included in the mottos: 'God, freedom, nation' or 'God, fatherland, family' which are – as

Meloni has accentuated— key in the life of every nation as places where they are ‘kept and passed on to future generations’.¹¹

Fratelli d’Italia defends the traditional family model, emphasising its criticism of gay marriage and the same-sex adoption of children. They attack the new notion of gender particularly strongly, believing that its supporters are trying to impose a cultural model in schools. The party’s programme is also characterised by an extensive social programme, establishing, among others, the introduction of the ‘family rate’ (*quoziente familiare*), i.e. the dependence of the tax rate on the number of family members, the establishment of free nurseries, family benefits (such as allowances of EUR 400 per month for children up to 6 years of age), paid parental leave for mothers of children up to 6 years of age, and the introduction of a reduced VAT of 4% on children’s products. In addition to demographic issues, they have an avowed desire to combat unemployment, especially among young people, and the protection of jobs by creating the right conditions for Italian companies to operate, produce and compete in the world. To this end, they proposed the introduction of a limited *flat tax* for companies based in Italy and employing Italian workers. As they declare, in terms of economic policy they are not supporters of protectionism, they support the free market, but oppose ‘rampant globalism’ without rules, which supports primarily economic powerhouses and great international financiers. For a model, Meloni points to the policy of US President Donald Trump, who managed to develop the American economy by guaranteeing the freedom of business operations, reducing taxes and bureaucracy, as well as public investments in the field of infrastructure and defending national economic interests. Following the example of Trump’s policy, Meloni emphasises that priority should be given to Italians when granting social benefits, housing and access to nurseries (*Prima gli italiani*). The FdI leader believes the welfare system in Italy should be reformed in order to guarantee benefits for the weakest members of society, in particular those with disabilities, and to lower the retirement age to 60 years, while increasing minimum pensions. At the same time, she has called for the elimination of the *reddito di cittadinanza*, the Five Star Movement’s (M5S) flagship project, as, according to Meloni, it does not promote the creation of new jobs, does not fight poverty, but only causes ‘citizens dependence on politics’ and penalises those employed on regular employment contracts.¹² As she stressed on numerous occasions during the 2019 European Parliament election campaign, this amount should be allocated to help companies and enterprises that employ Italians or to limit the increase of the VAT rate in Italy. In the party’s programme, FdI also attach great importance to the observance of the principles of loyal international competition, in particular defending *Made in Italy* against the illegal use of Italian trademarks by foreign companies (*Italian sounding*). To achieve this, they even propose the introduction of ‘civilisation tariffs’ (*dazi di civiltà*) against countries that do not respect Italian standards for wages, health and safety at work and environmental protection.

An important point in the FdI programme is the goal of rebuilding and restoring the authority of the state, one with a strong central executive, while reducing bureaucracy and simplifying the entire administrative machine. They are in favour of a presidential republic, with direct elections for the president or the head of government, which will guarantee national unity while maintaining local autonomy.¹³ As Meloni has repeatedly emphasised, while not denying the importance of a united state, Italy's national identity is made up of the historical wealth of its various local communities. Thus, a strong government cannot be synonymous with a centralised and forceful state apparatus. FdI also attach great importance to ensuring security and order in the state. They have called for the strengthening of police numbers, an increase in the salaries of security service officers, as well as the introduction of an appropriate legal framework aimed at punishing attacks and other acts against them. Considerable controversy was garnered by FdI's proposal in 2018 to remove the provision recognising torture as a crime (*legge sulla tortura*) from the Italian penal code. According to the party's politicians, it prevents officers from the security forces from properly performing their work. The group also supports the use of the army in the fight against terrorism and organised crime. It promotes a ruthless policy against illegal immigration, even proposing a blockade of the Mediterranean Sea with the use of the Italian navy to stop the illegal influx of immigrants. It has even proposed banning NGO ships which rescue migrants from accessing Italian ports. It should also be noted that FdI opposes the introduction of *ius soli*, emphasising that the acquisition of Italian citizenship is not a right but a privilege. Only those who know the language and respect the laws, culture, and historical and religious traditions of Italy can be granted citizenship.

In international politics, FdI attaches great importance to relations with the Arab Mediterranean countries, in particular with Libya, which is considered to be the main point of reference for Italian interests in terms of security, border control and energy supplies. As they emphasise, after the Arab Spring, it is in Italy's interest to seek cooperation with the above-mentioned countries to stabilise the situation in North Africa and the Middle East, and above all to support governments that choose to fight terrorism. It should also be noted that for FdI, Italy is primarily a part of the West, natural allies of other European nations and the United States, and in terms of military cooperation it is a part of NATO. While the pro-Atlantic choice is essentially in line with the political tradition of the (post-fascist) right in Italy,¹⁴ the positive assessment of Russia and Vladimir Putin is something new in the FdI programme. In Meloni's view, Russia should be a part of a broader West in a common struggle to defend its shared identities and values. The party leader highly rates Putin's policy, who – like Donald Trump – attaches importance to national pride and identity at a time when these values are ignored in many countries. FdI also supports the economic and strategic cooperation of the EU with Russia, stressing that it can ensure lasting peace and stability on the continent, and help in the fight against terrorism.

'Europe-nation' or sovereign nation states in a sovereign Europe

In *Tesi di Trieste*, Fratelli d'Italia pointed out the importance of the common tradition of the Italian nation, its culture of remembrance, as well as sovereignty and freedom. Great importance was attached to the idea of identity, to rebuilding the idea of fatherland in contemporary politics, after a long period when this value was diminished or even denied. Similarly, identity cannot be separated from the common national tradition which plays a very important role in the lives of individual nations. It is thanks to the rediscovery of a common tradition, the sense of national belonging, that the values of the fatherland can be rebuilt. As underlined in the party's programme, this task is particularly difficult to accomplish in Italy, as only since Carlo Azeglio Ciampi's presidency have the importance of symbols, ceremonies and secular rituals through which the national community manifests itself (including the national anthem, which until recently was considered provisional) been rediscovered and emphasised.

As they claim:

While all other member states have a developed sense of national belonging, clearly defined national interests which they intend to defend, a certain framework of national myths and symbols, Italy lacks these elements or they have been discovered relatively recently.¹⁵

Referring to the statement of the historian Ernesto Galli della Loggia about the death of the fatherland in the wake of the crisis in 1943, related to the dismissal of Mussolini and the division of Italy into a fascist part and one controlled by the Resistance, it was argued that during the entire period of republican Italy no political entity dared to openly follow the national interest and to cultivate feelings towards the fatherland. FdI believes that patriotism and the feeling of belonging to a single fatherland are the only ways to build greater social and generational cohesion. Love for one's fatherland is a necessary condition for feeling respect for the homelands of other nations, and for creating a dialogue necessary for the common development of various European nations. It is also the only chance for Italians to come out of the state of 'limited sovereignty', cultural, political and economic subordination, and to heal the wounds of the civil war (1943–1945) that characterised the birth of republican Italy. This issue concerns not only domestic but also European politics. As highlighted in *Tesi di Trieste*, the main problem of the current EU model is the deliberate omission of the national identities of individual member states. The EU forgets that nations are 'living organisms' and tries to deny them, instead of trying to emphasise their richness and the common source from which the idea of Europe was born. The only chance for the existence of a nation, and also of Europe, is to constantly affirm the will to belong to a common fate. Referring to the aforementioned concept of the daily referendum of Ernest Renan and the concept of the Italian philosopher

Giovanni Gentile, who proclaimed that living together, cultivating the same customs, as well as tradition and language are the 'matter' of which the nation is made, FdI emphasises that the nation must be aware of this matter. At the same time, however, it should accept the awareness of the content 'creating its own spiritual being' in order to fully become a nation.¹⁶ The same is true for a confederation of states, where a 'free choice' is particularly needed to justify giving up some part of national sovereignty. This concept was developed by Giorgia Meloni in the *Manifesto for a New Europe*, presented at the previously mentioned Conservative Convention in Rome on 3 February 2020. As she declared, today's EU is trying to implement 'the Soviet plan to destroy national and religious identities'.¹⁷ Referring to an idea from *The Virtue of Nationalism* by Israeli philosopher Yoram Hazona, the FdI leader emphasised the need to restore conservatism to its traditional environment, that is, the idea of national belonging. Meloni stressed that Fratelli d'Italia's vision of Europe is opposed to what the 'Brussels techno-bureaucrats' are trying to impose on them, striving to strip nation states of their prerogatives, trying to grant full sovereignty to the EU. As she noted: 'we fought against and defeated communism not to have it replaced with a new internationalist regime, but to allow independent nations to defend their freedom, identity and sovereignty again'.¹⁸ Referring to the words of Pope John Paul II from the encyclical *Memory and Identity*, the leader of FdI noted that the very concept of the fatherland contains a deep connection between the spiritual and material aspects. Democracy without value turns into demagoguery. In the opinion of Meloni, John Paul II, the 'patriot pope', who proclaimed that 'there is no Europe without Christianity', was well aware that belonging to one nation and shared historical memory is the source of every human being's freedom. The values Meloni refers to are: the family, understood as 'natural society', inextricably linked with human nature; the right to live in peace and dignity in one's fatherland; as well as Christianity and the Christian identity of Europe, which are the subject of constant attacks from the sides of 'distorted secularism'. As Meloni emphasised, this secularism, on the one hand, fights against the symbols of the Christian tradition, and on the other, opens up to the most intransigent forms of Islam. Europeans cannot be deprived of the roots that individual nations have formed over the centuries, because they are all descendants with a common history. Denying tradition leads to the disintegration of Europeans, depriving them of their sense, direction and power to act, as well as destroying the spiritual structure of European civilisation. This weakness of the cultural identity of European nations also makes them defenceless against the attack of radical Islam. Hence, the FdI leader criticises the model of Europe that denies its Judaeo-Christian and classical roots and tries to subordinate the identity and principle of autonomy of individual nations to radical universalism. This universalism supports the principle of multiculturalism, which allows for an uncontrolled flooding of Europe by immigrants from outside Europe. This problem was already outlined in the party's programme in 2017.

As noted in *Tesi di Trieste*, ‘Blinded by absolute damnation of “hatred of foreigners”, with the absence of understanding of the growing hostility of Europeans towards migrants, the ruling castes are not aware of the hatred that an ever-growing proportion of foreigners (and even descendants of second- and third-generation migrants) harbour towards the societies that took them to their bosom’.¹⁹

The resurgence of aggressive and intolerant nationalisms is one consequence of this, as well as the theories of white racial superiority, which appeared to be long gone. The antidote to this danger should be the cultivation of patriotic feelings, based on defence and emphasising the cultural diversity of Europeans, the multiplicity of their cultures and different lifestyles. This is in contrast to the standardisation required by ‘wild globalisation’. In this concept, FdI refers to the ideas of the philosopher Renato Cristin, presented in the book *I padroni del caos*, which was not by accident considered the party’s manifesto. As Meloni declared, the theme of defending identity, which is the leading theme of the book, is also the focal point of the FdI programme and is at the root of all the problems that Italy faces without the help of Europe. The only true Europe can be one composed of free and sovereign nations. In order to rebuild Italy and – going further – to rebuild Europe, the ideas of European spirit and European identity must be reappropriated.²⁰ In this way, FdI’s postulate of rebuilding European identity is connected with a radical criticism of multiculturalism, which leads to abandoning one’s own identity in favour of cosmopolitan universalism, one devoid of both barriers and roots. FdI also criticises the tendency to exaggerate political correctness and the so-called ‘other’s rhetoric’ by which it understands the ‘tendency of Europeans to accuse themselves and to extol “the alien”’.²¹ In their opinion, this leads to the degradation of their own identity and the development of anti-identity, anti-European, and anti-Western ideology. As they emphasise, the process of Islamisation is taking place on the European continent through a ‘gentle invasion’, i.e. the mass immigration of a Muslim population, which takes place with the support of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, as well as by financing mosques, centres of Islamic culture and strengthening Islamic influence in the economic, cultural and informational spheres. In FdI’s opinion, this phenomenon constitutes a threat to the Greco-Latin-Christian identity of Europe, and questions the principles of equality, democracy, freedom and secularism of the state on which the whole of Western civilisation is based. Therefore, the party calls for limiting Islamic immigration to Italy and Europe, stressing that whoever wants to live in Italy must accept and respect Italian culture and identity. They also refuse to remove symbols of the Christian tradition from public places in the name of ‘misunderstood secularism’.²²

It should be noted that FdI looks with interest towards the Visegrad Group countries, which they believe defend the spirit of a true and historic Europe. As highlighted in *Tesi di Trieste*, in central European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia or Austria, a vision of Europe as an alternative to the oikophobic-xenophilic progressivism of the

West emerged. At the same time, the Visegrad Group has become a symbol of opposition to the extensive bureaucracy of the EU: 'when eurobureaucrats say "more Europe", it means "more Brussels" and less national consciences; however, when defenders of the European spirit and way of life say "more Europe", it relates to the greater identity of each of its nations and the continent as a whole'²³. Therefore, 'more Visegrad, less Brussels!' became one of FdI's mottoes. Giorgia Meloni returned to this concept in an interview with Gino Coala on 11 November 2018 for *Liberio Quotidiano*, where she declared her intention to establish an alliance between FdI and conservatives and sovereigntists from the Visegrad Group countries:

They are a model of how to be in Europe and not have to give up one's own national sovereignty. (...) We want to focus on relations with the Visegrad Group countries which defend Europe's borders against uncontrolled immigration.²⁴

According to Meloni, it is with them that FdI must conduct a dialogue, and not with the Franco-German treaty that 'has taken over Brussels'.²⁵ The model for the Italian right should be the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who 'acts in the interest of his people, defends Europe's Christian roots by opposing the imposed islamisation'.²⁶ It should be noted that Meloni also declared her support for the Spanish far-right party Vox, as well as for the policies of its leader Santiago Abascal. As she emphasised during the parliamentary elections in Spain in November 2019, she admires Abascal's fight against secessionism in the name of a strong and united Spain. In the opinion of FdI's leader, all movements promoting independence and separatist slogans in Europe lead to the weakening of nation states, thus pursuing the interests of big capital, lobbyists and international speculative financiers. A fatherland, where sovereignty belongs to the people and not to supranational structures, is the last bulwark defending citizens against the onslaught of mondialism and globalisation. For this reason, defending the fatherland of Italy means, in Meloni's concept, the protection of Italian identity, freedom and sovereignty.

'Europe of nations' versus 'Europe of technocrats'

The Fratelli d'Italia programme clearly refers to Charles de Gaulle's vision of a Europe of fatherlands, a Europe of nation states bound by a common cultural tradition. Like de Gaulle, FdI is against a 'technocratic Europe', based on an extensive system of EU bureaucracy that tries to create a European super-state. FdI present themselves as patriots and Europeans because they believe in a Europe of nations, a community of nations, with different languages and traditions, but which nevertheless emphasise their relationship and connections.²⁷ They advocate a foreign policy based on the political will of sovereign states and on international cooperation, one which respects the

subjectivity of states. They also highlight the primacy of the Italian constitution and Italian legal norms over community legislation. These beliefs were expressed, among others, in a draft bill tabled by FdI in February 2019 in the Italian Parliament removing references to the EU from the Italian constitution because, as Meloni argued, it constitutes a restriction on Italian sovereignty.²⁸

FdI declare that they do not share either the idea of 'naïve European federalism', which preaches the need to abandon one's own sovereignty, or the two-speed Europe model. As highlighted in *Tesi di Trieste*, the historical and cultural process which has become increasingly dynamic since the 1960s, has led to the creation of a Europe (both institutionally and nationally) characterised only by a myth of apparent integration based on a common goal, namely the defeat of nationalisms and an extensive bureaucratic apparatus. One can discern that the criticism of European federalism, combined with the vision of a united Europe based on a confederate model, fits into the Italian post-fascist right's vision of Europe. It arose as early as in the late 1970s in the *Eurodestra* programme, developed by the MSI leader Giorgio Almirante together with Jean Louis Tisier-Vignancour of Parti des Forces Nouvelles and Blas Piñar of Fuerza Nueva.²⁹ As Almirante pointed out in an interview with Michele Rallo in 1978, 'Europe must not become a collection of semi-sovereign states, devoid of a unifying element, left to the slaughter by political and financial speculations of foreign powers'.³⁰ His idea of the 'Nation of Europe' (*Nazione Europa*) meant a united Europe that leaves the individual characteristics of the nations that make it up intact. This concept found its fundamental expression in the idea of Europe as 'United in Diversity' (*unità nella diversità*), which was adopted in the Treaty establishing the Constitution for Europe in 2004.³¹ It should be noted that the then leader of AN and Italian Foreign Minister, Gino Fracanzani, worked on the creation of the treaty. Fracanzani, in an interview with Carlo Fusi in 2003 entitled *L'Europa che verrà*, supported a confederal model for the EU. This would be one which emphasised the diversity of the various European nations which together formed a harmonious whole, and he compared them to a 'mosaic, in which the particular elements retain their distinctive features and identity but together form one, common image'.³²

The project to create a European confederation of free and sovereign nation states in place of the current European Union was developed in a 9-point programme prior to the 2019 European Parliament election. FdI declared that their model of Europe is not a current supranational entity, ruled by bureaucrats and technocrats, who are not directly elected by citizens and who try to impose their will on European nations, but a community of states that can cooperate in key issues and at the same time make autonomous decisions in internal national affairs.³³ As Giorgia Meloni frequently emphasised during the campaign, earlier European treaties should be revised and a new pact establishing a confederation of free and sovereign states created. This would lead them to cooperate on key strategic issues, ranging

from security to migration, from the common market to foreign policy, while reducing an overly complex bureaucratic machine, one incapable of representing the interests of the member states and their citizens. As the FdI leader pointed out, the challenges of world politics mean that the relations between European nations should be ever stronger. Only a united Europe will be able to effectively compete with the United States, China, Russia and India. The current model of the EU, where 'bureaucracy, technocracy and lobbyism prevail', means that it is unable to respond to the needs of individual European nations. Hence, as declared by the leader of FdI, the capital of Europe should not be Brussels, 'which is the seat of lobbyists, but Athens or Rome, where the European civilisation was born'.³⁴

It should be noted that FdI's critical attitude towards the EU not only manifests itself in negating the federalist model, but also in criticising the dominant role of Germany and France in European politics. In their opinion, 'Europe has become the playground for France and Germany',³⁵ because these countries use European institutions to pursue their own interests, to the detriment of other member states, especially Italy. It should be noted that FdI also criticises the harsh austerity policy imposed on Italy by the EU, which, in their opinion, has led to impoverishment of society, the crisis of Italian companies and the consequent rise in unemployment. According to FdI, the current direction of the EU policy should be changed in order to increase expenditure on public investments, primarily in the sphere of infrastructure, transport, internet network, expansion and modernisation of construction, as well as increasing national security. Similarly, the criticism of FdI in relation to EU policies manifests itself in the issue of the common European currency. This problem was already raised in the programme developed before the 2014 European Parliament election, entitled *Head held high in Europe (In Europa a testa alta)*, where FdI called for Italy's 'controlled abandonment of the Eurozone'.³⁶ In the programme before the 2019 European Parliament election, although efforts were made to moderate this postulate, it was noted that the issue of exchanging the lira had turned out to be particularly unfavourable for Italy. A proposal was also presented for the EU to launch compensation measures for countries that, like Italy, had suffered damage related to the introduction of the common currency.³⁷

FdI is also very sceptical about the European Central Bank's (ECB) monetary policy, seeing it as one which penalises the Italian economy. In their opinion, the scope of the intervention of the Central Bank and the competences of national central banks should be re-discussed, so that the banking system becomes a support tool for enterprises and families, and not an element serving international financial speculation. It should be noted that FdI was particularly sceptical about the EU financial assistance programme for the Italian economy in light of the COVID-19 crisis. Giorgia Meloni strongly criticised the decision of Giuseppe Conte's government to seek help from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) because, as she stressed, the ESM could make Italy even more dependent on the Franco-German axis. The FdI leader was in favour of

applying to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and launching 'Special drawing rights' (SDR), while supporting the proposal of former finance minister Giulio Tremonti to issue state vouchers (the so-called *bond patriottici*) in imitation of vouchers granted to Italians in 1948, that would be purchased by the ECB as special forms of long-term loans.³⁸

'Together with the conservatives to change Europe' – Fratelli d'Italia and EU policies

On 6 November 2018, Meloni announced her intention to run for the European Parliament along with a group of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR): 'Together with the conservatives to change Europe'.³⁹ As she emphasised, the Italian right has been a part of the conservative group since 2009, hence this affiliation is a natural one.⁴⁰ According to the FdI leader, the European conservatives are the only true democrats because, by defending a sovereign nation state, they also try to defend the sovereignty of their citizens. Hence, only conservatives are able to build a true 'Europe of nations and identities'.⁴¹ In an open letter written with Jan Zahradil and published in *Corriere della sera* on 15 May 2020, Meloni announced that the choice of affiliation in the EP was also connected to shared values and ideals contained in the 2009 *Prague Declaration*. As she pointed out, the current model of the EU, 'a bureaucratic superstate that regulates and controls against the will of individual nations, has not worked'. Meloni stressed that the group of conservatives is ready to challenge the 'Brussels Europe' to create a Europe that would defend European 'identity, borders and the real economy'. According to the FdI leader, this new Europe should defend its borders against uncontrolled immigration, the security of its citizens against threats posed by Islamic fundamentalism, while maintaining a social market economy, capable of supporting enterprises without imposing additional taxes, and guarding the freedom of the individual by fighting against cultural relativism, in the name of defending a common Christian civilisation based on the family.⁴² Similarly, after meeting with the leader of the Law and Justice party Jarosław Kaczyński, which took place in Warsaw on 3 April 2019, in the presence of Ryszard Legutko, the vice-president of the ECR in the European Parliament, Meloni announced on Twitter:

We will jointly build a Europe of sovereign nations that remembers its identity and believes in the real economy. We are strengthening our position in the party of European Conservatives and Reformists and we are tightening cooperation with the pro-independence members of Visegrad.⁴³

Meloni also returned to this vision in an interview with Lorenzo Lamperi in *Affari Italiani* on 15 June 2019, in which she presented FdI's position in the new European Parliament, focusing on the role that the Conservatives

and Reformists group can play in the process of changing Europe.⁴⁴ As she emphasised, it is the foreign policy and defence of external borders, as well as the fight against terrorism, that should be left to the discretion of Brussels, while sovereign member states should assume all of the competences regarding internal policies. It should be noted that Meloni also presented the idea of building a broader alliance which would encompass the European People's Party (if she moves further to the right, closer to the political line of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán) and the populists Matteo Salvini and Marine Le Pen, where the conservative group should play a key role as a bridge between the sovereigntists and the European People's Party (*popolari*). As she pointed out, the growing importance of populist parties and groups in Europe, from the British Brexit referendum, to the results of elections in France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, means the defeat of traditional parties based on the vision of a federalist Europe. Meloni, making a distinction between the 'identity populism' characteristic of patriotic movements in Europe, and 'demagogic justicist populism' (*populismo giustizialista*), which was particularly widespread in Italy, noted that identity populism can be an antidote to the development of a society devoid of traditional ties and common national affiliation. FdI shares many features with the populist agenda: despite some differences resulting from different national characteristics, movements of this type are characterised by criticism of the technocratic nature of the EU, the bipolar EU policy, based on the alliance of Christian Democrats and Socialists, defending the Christian roots of Europe, opposing Islamisation, uncontrolled immigration, defending small and medium-sized enterprises against the international power of financiers and large international corporations. Emphasising the differences between the FdI programme and the policies promoted by Matteo Salvini and Marine Le Pen, Meloni highlighted that it is not enough to reject the current EU model, but one needs to propose an alternative programme. Unlike the populists, FdI do not intend to limit themselves to a 'sterile fight against the system', but to translating the above-mentioned slogans into concrete reform proposals that they intend to implement in policy at the national and European level.⁴⁵

Conclusions

There is no doubt that FdI's idea of Europe allows the party to be classified as Euro-realistic or representing so-called 'soft Euroscepticism'.⁴⁶ Their vision of the European Union is based on a confederation of sovereign and free nation states, bound by a common cultural tradition which is based on Greco-Latin-Christian roots. FdI opposes the federal model of the EU, calling it a 'technocratic Europe' based on an extensive system of EU bureaucracy that is trying to create a European super-state. Like the other European parties that make up the European Conservatives and Reformists, they attach great importance to the national traditions and identities of individual member states. They are critical of the policy of multiculturalism, considering it a threat to European

identity, as well as a means to Islamise Europe. The party's Eurosceptic attitude is most clearly manifested in its postulate to leave the eurozone and in its criticism of the Franco-German axis as dominant in Europe and pursuing its interests at the expense of other member states.

Notes

- 1 'PiazzaPulita, sondaggio Index: Giorgia Meloni sorpassa il M5s, balzo per Fratelli d'Italia dopo le regionali', *Liberio Quotidiano*, (2 October 2020), www.liberioquotidiano.it/news/politica/24735840/piazzapulita-sondaggio-index-giorgia-meloni-sorpassa-m5s-balzo-fratelli-d-italia-dopo-regionali.html accessed 12 October 2020.
- 2 Massimo Rebotti, 'Giorgia Meloni ora preoccupa Salvini: sondaggi, viaggi in Usa e maxi cene con i fan', *Corriere della Sera*, (Milano, 16 February 2020), www.corriere.it/politica/20-febbraio_15/viaggi-usa-sondaggi-maxi-cene-fan-l-agenda-giorgia-che-preoccupa-matteo-d4f7c06c-5033-11ea-a036-d715f3c65007.shtml accessed 2 July 2020. At the end of September 2020, Giorgia Meloni was chosen as the president of European Conservatives and Reformists.
- 3 Roberto Chiarini, 'La Destra italiana. Il paradosso di un'identità illegittima', (1991), 185, *Storia contemporanea*, 584–585.
- 4 Piero Ignazi, 'Msi-An. La nostalgia al binario morto', in P. Ignazi, *I partiti in Italia dal 1945 al 2018*, (il Mulino 2018), 109–135.
- 5 Ignazi, 'Qualcosa di nuovo, a destra. Dal declino di Berlusconi all'ascesa di Meloni', *La Repubblica*, (Roma, 8 January 2020), 34.
- 6 Pierluigi Battista, 'Lavacri e nostalgie gli Msi e i conti con il passato mai fatto del tutto', *Corriere della sera*, (Milano, 22 March 2016), www.corriere.it/politica/16-marzo_22/lavacri-nostalgie-ex-msi-conti-mai-fatti-tutto-il-fascismo-168974dc-efa6-11e5-9957-88f22239b898.shtml accessed 2 July 2020.
- 7 During the celebration of the 25 April in 2020, Meloni proposed turning the holiday into a commemoration of the victims of all wars and the COVID-19 epidemic. See 'E' polemica sul 25 aprile. Fratelli d'Italia propone di trasformare la festa di Liberazione nella giornata per ricordare i caduti di tutte le guerre e del Covid 19 con la canzone del Piave al posto di Bella ciao', *La Repubblica*, (Roma, 18 April 2020). www.repubblica.it/politica/2020/04/18/news/fratelli_d_italia_sul_25_aprile_ricordiamo_i_caduti_di_tutte_le_guerre_e_del_covid_la_canzone_del_piave_al_posto_di_bella-254391375/ accessed 2 July 2020.
- 8 Giorgia Meloni's speech, in which she compared Mussolini to Fidel Castro, was especially controversial as she stressed that Mussolini also did 'good things', and that only the introduction of an authoritarian system and some measures, such as racist laws and involving Italy in the war are blameworthy 'Meloni (AN): "Mussolini come Castro". E i giovani di Polo e Unione si dividono', *Corriere della sera*, (Milano, 9 December 2008). www.pressreader.com/italy/corriere-della-sera/20061209/281930243491674 accessed 2 July 2020.
- 9 From February 2014 to 3 December 2017, the party's official name was Fratelli d'Italia – Alleanza Nazionale. At the second congress in 2017, the party's symbol was also modified: the white, red and green flame with the MSI inscription remained, while any references to AN have been removed. Massimo Rebotti, 'Meloni cancella AN dal simbolo. "Non siamo più solo il partito della destra". Ma resta la fiamma

- missina', *Corriere della sera*, (Milano, 4 December 2017), www.corriere.it/political/cards/fiamma-disegno-almirante-nuovo-logo-fratelli-d-italia/via-an-piu-fiamma-simbolo-fratelli-d-italia_principale.shtml accessed 12 July 2020.
- 10 Filippo Del Monte, 'Fratelli d'Italia: A Trieste nasce il Movimento dei patrioti', www.centro-destra.it/wordpress/fratelli-ditalia-nasce-movimento-dei-patrioti/ accessed 27 June 2020.
 - 11 Francesco Storace, 'Giorgia Meloni mette sul piatto dei Conservatori il Manifesto per la Nuova Europa dei valori', *Secolo d'Italia*, (4 February 2020) www.secoloditalia.it/2020/02/giorgia-meloni-mette-sul-piatto-dei-conservatori-il-manifesto-per-la-nuova-europa-dei-valori/ accessed 20 June 2020.
 - 12 'Cancellerei il Reddito di cittadinanza', <https://tg24.sky.it/politica/2019/05/24/elezioni-europee-giorgia-meloni-tribu.html> accessed 15 April 2020.
 - 13 A presidential system has been a fixed topic on the agenda of the post-fascist right, starting with MSI through AN. Marco Tarchi, *Cinquant'anni di nostalgia*, (Rizzoli 1995), 233–234.
 - 14 As declared by Gianfranco Fini in a book interview by Carlo Fusi *L'Europa che verrà*: 'Europe and the USA are two faces of the same coin, called the West. The West is a category that includes Europe and the United States of America, because they share the same values, because nations are closely related to each other and it is not only thanks to emigration from the Old Continent towards the other side of the Atlantic. To think of a hostile European policy towards the United States would be to deny that we are one another's children, that Americans are descendants of Europeans, but at the same time that Europe is to some extent a daughter of the United States'. Gianfranco Fini, *L'Europa che verrà. Il destino del continente e il ruolo dell'Italia*, (Fazi Editore 2003), 33. See also Marco Tarchi, *Recalcitrant Allies: the Conflicting foreign Policy Agenda of the Alleanza Nazionale and the Lega Nord*, in Christina Schori Lang (ed), *Europe for the Europeans: the Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right*, (Routledge 2016), 187.
 - 15 'Una filosofia dell'identità', in *Tesi di Trieste*, www.fratelli-italia.it/le-tesi-trieste/ accessed 20 June 2020.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 Storace, (n 11).
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 'Una filosofia dell'identità', (n 15).
 - 20 Ibid.
 - 21 As Cristin wrote: 'a newcomer is by definition reliably good, or at least a carrier of positive values that Europeans should adopt and absorb in order to integrate with foreigners [...] the process of migration seeking to replace old nations with some transnational project is controlled remotely – or at least supported – by some elite'. According to the quoted philosopher, this leads to a complete uprooting, replacement of European peoples by semi-stateless people who correspond to the old will (emerged with Marxism and agreed with the catholic left's messianism) to create a new humanity, which cleanses the Western man of his traditional thinking and his alleged historical guilt. See 'Nowa Europa i władcy chaosu. Rozmowa z Renatą Cristiną', (14 February 2020), *Teologia polityczna*, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/liberalizm-i-wladcy-chaosu-rozmowa-z-renata-cristim-1> accessed 28 June 2020.
 - 22 'Patrioti per difendere la nostra identità dal processo di islamizzazione dell'Europa', in *Tesi di Trieste*, (n 15).
 - 23 'Una filosofia dell'identità', in *Tesi di Trieste*, (n 15).

- 24 'Patrioti per difendere la nostra sovranità nazionale in Europa', in *ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 'Meloni a Budapest, asse con Orban: no all'immigrazione e piani per la natalità', *Corriere della sera*, (Milano, 1 March 2018), 8.
- 27 Patrioti per difendere la nostra sovranità nazionale, in *Tesi di Trieste*, (n 15).
- 28 Emanuele Bonini, 'Far-right party seeks to kick EU out of Italian constitution', www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/far-right-party-seeks-to-kick-eu-out-of-italian-constitution/ accessed 4 July 2020.
- 29 Simone Paoli, 'Euroright. The Extreme Right in the European Integration Process, 1979–1989', in Lucia Bonfreschi, Giovanni Orsina and Antonio Varsori (eds), *European Parties and the European Integration Process 1945–1992*, (Peter Lang 2015), 319–325.
- 30 Michele Rallo (ed), *Amirante. Intervista sull'Eurodestra*, (Thule 1978), 7.
- 31 Fini, (n 14), 38.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 'Dall'Unione Europea alla confederazione europea di Stati sovrani' in *Programma Elezioni Europee*, www.flipsnack.com/fratelliditalia/programma-europee.html accessed 18 June 2020.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 'Faremo rispettare l'Italia in Europa', in *ibid.*
- 36 'Scioglimento concordato dell'Eurozona', in *ibid.* Meloni also returned to the issue of Italy's exit from the Eurozone in 'Manifesto per un'Europa dei popoli', presented in March 2017 cf 'Ecco il "Manifesto per un'Europa dei popoli": 7 punti per costruire l'Europa delle Nazioni', www.giorgiameloni.it/2017/03/25/manifesto-uneuropa-dei-popoli-7-punti-costruire-leuropa-delle-nazioni/ accessed 15 June 2020.
- 37 'Contro la finanza speculativa e le distorsioni dell'Euro', in *Europa a testa alta*, www.fratelli-italia.it/programma-europa/ accessed 12 July 2020.
- 38 'Włochy nie liczą już na Europę. Początek italexitu', (7 April 2020), *Rzeczpospolita* www.rp.pl/Koronawirus-SARS-CoV-2/304079888-Wlochy-nie-licza-juz-na-Europe-Poczatek-italexitu.html accessed 10 June 2020.
- 39 Antonio Pannullo, 'Meloni: "Con i Conservatori per cambiare la Ue. Pronta a candidarmi"', *Secolo d'Italia*, (6 November 2018), www.secoloditalia.it/2018/11/meloni-con-i-conservatori-per-cambiare-la-ue-pronta-a-candidarmi/ accessed 15 April 2020.
- 40 After the 2009 European election, Alleanza Nazionale joined the nationalist-conservative Union for Europe of the Nations group. AN received nine seats, making it the largest representation in the UEN group. The second largest party was Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (7 seats). Daniele Pasquinucci, *Uniti dal voto? Storia delle elezioni europee 1948–2009*, (FrancoAngeli 2013), 326. See also Gino Coala, 'Giorgia Meloni, l'alleanza in Europa con i Conservatori di Fitto: "Così batteremo la sinistra e Macron"', *Libero quotidiano*, (Milano, 11 November 2018), www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/13397616/giorgia-meloni-alleanza-popolari-conservatori-trionfo-elezioni-europee-fitto.html accessed 15 April 2020.
- 41 'Ecco il "Manifesto per un'Europa dei popoli": 7 punti per costruire l'Europa delle Nazioni', www.giorgiameloni.it/2017/03/25/manifesto-uneuropa-dei-popoli-7-punti-costruire-leuropa-delle-nazioni/ accessed 15 June 2020.
- 42 'Meloni, i Conservatori e l'idea di Ue: "Sia una comunità di Stati sovrani"', *Corriere della sera*, (Milano, 15 Maggio 2019). It should be noted that FDI declared

their willingness to join the ECR group before the European elections in 2014. The results of the aforementioned European elections, in which they got 3.66% of the votes, did not secure them seats in the European Parliament at the time.

- 43 Maria Pankowska, 'PiS brata się z postfaszystami z Włoch. Dołączają do frontu Europy "Ojczyzn"', <https://oko.press/pis-brata-sie-z-postfaszystami-z-wloch-dolaczaja-do-frontu-europy-ojczyzn/> accessed 15 June 2020.
- 44 'Meloni: "Così va cambiata l'Europa. Governo, quanti errori in politica estera"', (15 June 2019) [www.affariitaliani.it](http://www.affariitaliani.it/politica/geopolitica/giorgia-meloni-fratelli-d-italia-governo-europa-intervista-610662.html) accessed 15 April 2020.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, 'Theorising Party-Based Euroscepticism: Problem soft Definition, Measurement and Casuality', in Szczerbiak and Taggart (eds), *Opposing Europe?: The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*, (Oxford University Press 2008 vol 2), 238.