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Two Faces of Euroscepticism in Contemporary Italian Politics: League for Salvini Premier (*Lega per Salvini Premier*) and Five Star Movement (*MoVimento 5 Stelle*)

Abstract: This article analyzes two distinct models of Euroscepticism within contemporary Italian politics: the regionalist-sovereign model represented by the League for Salvini Premier and the participatory-deregulatory model embodied by the Five Star Movement (M5S). It traces the League's evolution from regional separatism to a form of hard Euroscepticism, a shift propelled by both leadership decisions and major European crises. In stark contrast, the M5S's Euroscepticism was initially moderate and driven by its grassroots membership before it eventually moved toward a pro-European, reformist stance. The analysis argues that Euroscepticism is a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon whose intensity and form vary significantly across different political groups. By examining these two Italian cases, the paper illustrates broader European trends, demonstrating that Euroscepticism can function either as a temporary political strategy or as a core ideological tenet.

Key words: euroscepticism, League, Five Star Movement, Italian politics

Introduction

The rise in Eurosceptic sentiment, while perceptible at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, has intensified markedly in recent years. Eurosceptic slogans are now common in both EU member states and non-EU countries. Within EU societies, Euroscepticism typically manifests as a reluctance toward EU institutions and the laws they implement, as well as an objection to limiting the sovereignty of member states in favor of supranational institutions. In non-EU countries, it often appears as an anti-Occidental stance, characterized by hostility toward anything associated with “the West” or “Brussels.” In both forms, Euroscepticism is framed as a sovereignty-driven, anti-internationalist trend that champions the preservation of the nation-state. Given the increasing forces of globalization and the deepening of European integration, Euroscepticism continues to attract new adherents. Eurosceptic parties are increasingly joining ruling coalitions across Europe, and their rhetoric and expressed views are influencing groups once considered neutral or even mainstream. Consequently, Euroscepticism has become an increasingly vital subject of inquiry not only for political scientists but also for sociologists, legal scholars, linguists, and cultural experts.

Euroscepticism's significance as a social and political issue, and not merely a research topic, was first recognized in 1999 following the electoral success of Jörg Haider's Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Although the FPÖ achieved only the third-highest vote share in the parliamentary elections, it was its inclusion in a coalition that enabled

the center-right Austrian People's Party to form a government, despite the overwhelming victory of the Social Democratic Party of Austria. The EU initiated an unprecedented boycott against Austria, a country co-governed by Eurosceptics from the FPÖ (Black, Connolly, 2000), thereby propelling Euroscepticism into the heart of academic, political, and journalistic discussions. Subsequently, Eurosceptic parties gained wider popularity, as evidenced by their improved electoral results.

Italy was one of the countries where Euroscepticism emerged as a particularly meaningful phenomenon at the turn of the century. By the late 1990s, criticism of the European Union was becoming an increasingly essential part of the electoral platform and narrative of the Northern League party (LN, *Lega Nord*), which has been known as the League for Salvini Premier (LSP, *Lega per Salvini Premier*) since 2017. In the second decade of the 21st century, moderate Eurosceptic slogans also became central to the anti-globalization movement that formed around the Five Star Movement (M5S, *MoVimento 5 Stelle*). In 2018, both parties formed a coalition and appointed the government of Giuseppe Conte, which, although it collapsed after a year, clearly demonstrated the critical electoral role Euroscepticism had assumed in Italy.

This article aims to provide an in-depth understanding of Italian Euroscepticism by presenting two models that continue to influence contemporary Italian politics. The first, the regionalist-sovereignty model, is represented by the League. A characteristic feature of this model is its criticism of centralization by both the Italian Republic and the EU institutions. The second, the participatory-deregulatory model, is represented by the M5S. It is based on the protection of individual freedom and a drive to increase public participation in political life. The interpretive framework for both models of Italian Euroscepticism will include three interconnected dimensions: the programmatic, the political and organizational, and the narrative. This detailed characterization of both models will facilitate an analysis of their potential social base and the socio-political and international context that made the development of this phenomenon in Italy possible.

Literature Review

Although Euroscepticism was a recognized research topic at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, it is still considered to be insufficiently studied. A significant factor is that Euroscepticism remains a phenomenon *in statu nascendi*, constantly changing and evolving into different forms.

Paolo Marzi (2024) analyzed over 400 articles on this topic published in international journals between 1995 and 2020. He identified that scholarly research on Euroscepticism developed in two stages. During the first period (1995–2010), authors focused on qualitative research of different political parties in selected countries. In the second stage (2010–2020), publications based on quantitative and comparative research predominated. Furthermore, research on Euroscepticism has been dominated by studies concerning France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain (Marzi, 2024) – notably, the Italian case is among the five most popular subjects in European research on this topic. The most important monographs dedicated to Italian Euroscepticism include the works of Sergio Fabbrini & Simona Piattoni (2007) and Bruno Mascitelli & Marco Brunazzo (2020).

The most insightful analyses of specific aspects of Italian Euroscepticism can be found in articles by Lucia Quaglia (2004, 2008), Fabio Serricchio (2012), Eleonora Poli & Mark Valentiner (2014), Paolo Franzosi, Francesco Marone, and Eugenio Salvati (2015), Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas (2015), Daniele Pasquinucci (2016), Marco Brunazzo & Mark Gilbert (2017), Victoria Vdovychenko (2018), Nicolò Conti, Francesco Marangoni, and Luca Verzichelli (2020), Marco Brunazzo & Bruno Mascitelli (2020), Jean-Pierre Darnis (2020), Nicolò Conti, Danilo Di Mauro, and Vincenzo Memoli (2022), and Medini Hegde (2023). This article is a continuation of European research on Italian Euroscepticism, while also serving as an example of qualitative and comparative research.

Materials & Methods

This text is the result of qualitative research on two parties identified with Italian Euroscepticism: the League for Salvini Premier and the Five Star Movement. Given the qualitative nature of the study and the specific challenge of examining manifestations of political thought, the primary method applied was content analysis. A conventional approach to content analysis was employed, where systematic reading of the texts was accompanied by labeling. This labeling was a two-stage process: the first stage involved identifying themes, and the second involved identifying concepts. The labeling was an open process and was not conducted based on pre-established assumptions about the content. Computational methods were deliberately not used to avoid superficial observations and to ensure that the broader social, political, and cultural contexts of the phenomena being analyzed were captured in each case. The study adopted a theory of interpretation and meaning, and the main interpretive method was thematic analysis, supplemented by formal analysis and historical-cultural analysis.

The empirical basis for this research consisted of key political statements from Italian political groups identified as Eurosceptic – the League and M5S – as well as from their activists, primarily their political leaders, meaning the individuals serving as the head of the party at the time. The selection of these key statements was a three-stage process. The first stage involved identifying the importance of a given topic within a specific document through a systematic ordering of the content. It was assumed that more significant topics would be placed in the initial chapters, with the level of importance decreasing in subsequent chapters. The second stage was to assess the value of detailed thematic threads within specific chapters or distinct content fragments. Here, the first and last paragraphs were considered the most important. The third stage involved examining the frequency of specific concepts within these fragments.

The most substantial sources of expression considered were ideological and manifestos to documents, electoral platforms, and official political statements made by the leaders of these parties, which have shaped or are shaping the policies of both groups. The selection of materials was purposive; therefore, the analysis was exclusively limited to statements that included *expressis verbis* references to Euroscepticism, the problem of interest to us. The analysis was supplemented with elements of a behavioral approach, particularly concerning the activities of both political parties at the national and European levels, primarily in the context of their electoral successes and participation in government. The

behavioral analysis was based on a confrontation of the political actions and decisions of the party with the declared attitudes that emerged from the content analysis.

Over a decade of activity by both parties, effective campaigns in national and European elections, and experience in co-governing allow for conclusions to be drawn and for possible trends in the relationship of both movements toward Eurosceptic demands and slogans to be observed. The years 2013 and 2024 were chosen as the timeframe for selecting the materials. In 2013, the M5S officially entered national parliamentary elections, while Matteo Salvini took over the leadership of the LN. The year 2024 marks the most recent elections in which both parties participated: the elections to the European Parliament.

Regionalist-Sovereignty Euroscepticism

The Northern League – since 2017, the League for Salvini Premier – was established as a confederation of regional, northern-Italian organizations with autonomist and separatist tendencies that initially held a positive attitude toward European integration. It defended regional identities by designating the central government of the Italian Republic as its main enemy. It was only after 1998, when Italy joined the Economic and Monetary Union, that the party transitioned from a pro-European to a Eurosceptic position. This shift was primarily connected to the LN's internal problems and changes in the Italian political landscape (Ignazi, 2018, pp. 196–199). Criticism of European institutions, co-occurring with a sense of self-identification with Europe, became a hallmark of the LN, differentiating it from numerous other political groups in Italy (Huysseune, 2010, pp. 64–69).

The programmatic basis for the LN's Euroscepticism was developed reactively – as a response to current social, economic, and political events and in the context of its alliance with other parties of the Italian center-right. The final shape of the LN's Eurosceptic program was established in the second decade of the 21st century after Salvini took power in the party (2013) and transformed its character into a nationwide one, accompanied by the name change mentioned earlier (2017). The peak of its Eurosceptic identity was reflected in the manifesto documents published for the parliamentary elections in 2018 and 2022, as well as for the European elections in 2024. During the campaign period before the 2019 European Parliament elections, the League was at the forefront of promoting Eurosceptic content on social media, a strategy that coexisted with the regionalist demands the party had championed since its inception.

Table 1

Manifesto Documents of the League (2018–2024)

	Title of document	Kind of elections	Date of elections
1	2	3	4
1.	Common Sense Revolution. Elections 2018. Governance program (<i>La rivoluzione del buonsenso. Elezioni 2018. Programma di governo</i>)	Parliamentary	4.03.2018
2.	Governance program. Political elections 2022. Sunday the 25th of September (<i>Programma di governo. Elezioni politiche 2022. Domenica 25 settembre</i>)	Parliamentary	25.09.2022

1	2	3	4
3.	For Italy. Program for a right-center government. Political elections in 2022 (<i>Per l'Italia. Programma per un Governo di centrodestra. Elezioni politiche 2022</i>)	Parliamentary	25.09.2022
4.	More Italy, less Europe. Manifesto. European elections 2024 (<i>Piu Italia, meno Europa. Programma. Elezioni europee 2024</i>)	European	8–9.06.2024

Source: Own work.

In these documents, the League presented itself as a group opposed to the development of European integration and the creation of new common policies. It advocated for a return to the organizational structures that existed before the Maastricht Treaty, a transition that was to be accompanied by Italy's transformation into a federal state. Salvini eventually sidelined the factions that longed for Padanian separatism, and the demand to restore Italy's full sovereignty in its relations with Brussels took the place of the separatist idea (*La nuova...*, 2020). Article 1 of the League's statute states that the party "promotes and supports the freedom and sovereignty of nations at the European level" (*Statuto...*, 2017). Criticism of the EU, however, concerned not only its administrative and bureaucratic growth and the stripping of states' competencies but also the activities of the Eurozone and the perceived incompetence of EU institutions in addressing migration. The Euroscepticism emerging from the League's manifesto documents is, therefore, not only regionalist but also sovereignty-driven. The authors of the documents emphasized the importance of nation-states and their democratically legitimate governments, contrasting this fact with the non-democratic character of some EU institutions.

The embodiment of the League's political-organizational dimension of Euroscepticism was primarily found in events of the second decade of the 21st century, both at the national and European levels. Before 2018, the League cooperated with right-wing groups on the Italian political stage, usually within coalitions formed by Silvio Berlusconi's parties. Within those coalitions, the League had little room to express its Euroscepticism. The alliance with the neo-fascist CasaPound Italia in 2014, however, paved the way for the League's entry into the European Parliament. The League's MEPs joined the Eurosceptic faction Europe of Freedom and Democracy, which included, among others, the British UK Independence Party led by Nigel Farage. It was then that Salvini began to cooperate with other prominent European Eurosceptics, such as Marine Le Pen and her National Rally party, as well as Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party. Importantly, some of the League's new allies combined their Euroscepticism with an open pro-Russian stance.

As it turned out, the League's adoption of a tough Eurosceptic attitude and its transformation into a nationwide party gained it popularity. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, the League was supported by over 17% of Italians, its highest result ever (Zanetti, 2023b, p. 69). After the elections, the League and the M5S formed a government, and their shared Eurosceptic demands were undoubtedly a unifying factor. The agreement signed by both parties introduced a list of demands related to a Eurosceptic diagnosis: reform of Union policy, renegotiation of European treaties, loosening of budget discipline, tightening of migration policy, increasing regional autonomy, and reform of the mechanism for managing European resources by Italians (*Cosa prevedere...*, 2018). However, it was the 2019 European elections that brought even greater

success, with the League gaining 34% of the vote, which translated to 28 – and after Brexit, 29 – mandates. The representation of Salvini's party was as numerous as that of Angela Merkel's party. In the new term of the European Parliament, the League was part of the Identity and Democracy group, which gathered far-right Eurosceptic parties. The parties continued their cooperation, which resulted in the signing of a declaration concerning the future of Europe in 2021. In 2022, League candidates ran in elections within a center-right coalition with the Brothers of Italy and Forza Italia and, after the elections, formed the government of Giorgia Meloni. However, after the 2024 European elections, members of the League joined the new Eurosceptic and far-right group Patriots for Europe. It was also joined by, among others, the Hungarian Fidesz, the Austrian FPÖ, the French National Rally, and the Spanish Vox. As can be seen, the League under Salvini's leadership became an efficient coalition party whose capacity and ability to govern are easily combined with populist and Eurosceptic elements. Therefore, it is insufficient to define it as a "regionalist populist party" (McDonnell, 2006, pp. 137–140); it may be more accurate to define this party as an "institutionalized populist movement" that manages to effectively keep "one foot in and one foot out of government" (Albertazzi, McDonnell, 2006, pp. 965–969).

The programmatic as well as political and organizational dimensions undoubtedly allow for the interpretation of the League as an example of a "hard" variant of Euroscepticism (Szczerbiak, Taggart, 2008, pp. 353–360). However, it must be remembered that the LN's shift toward Euroscepticism, as mentioned earlier, occurred at the end of the 1990s and was accompanied by a slow retreat from northern-Italian separatism. The process would not have been possible without certain internal and external factors. The most important of these include the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the demand for Turkey's accession to the EU, and the increase in illegal immigration in the Mediterranean Sea region. It was only during the second and third periods of Berlusconi's rule (2001–2006) that Eurosceptic sentiment increased in Italy (Quaglia, 2008, pp. 59–63). It is important to recall that, in the post-war period, Italians were considered one of the most pro-European nations. In the first decade of the 21st century, a significant narrative change began to influence the League. Its activists were among the first Italian politicians to verbalize hostility toward the EU. Whereas the enemy for the LN was once Rome, it was now Brussels. A decade earlier, the party had protected the business interests of northern Italy in relation to the government; now, it declared protection for the business of the Italian state in relation to EU institutions (Brunazzo, Gilbert, 2017, pp. 625–629).

De facto, the LN's original regionalist-separatist identity was set aside and was replaced with a Eurosceptic regionalist-sovereignty identity, along with its corresponding demands, slogans, and symbols. League activists began to define the EU as a "European Superstate" whose competencies had expanded at the expense of nation-states. Therefore, the Eurosceptic narrative includes the slogan of a "Europe of Nations," understood as a community of free and sovereign European states that cooperate without the agency of supranational institutions. Until 2018, the League had also promoted the idea of "monetary sovereignty," which included, among other things, abandoning the common currency, reducing the European budget, and abolishing a common foreign policy (Pawłowski, 2019, pp. 1–2). Since 2017, politicians connected with the League have repeated the slogan "Italians above all," echoing Donald Trump's slogan *America First*

and simultaneously offering strong support to the sovereign-oriented movements shaping the right side of the European political scene. The Eurosceptic narrative is, therefore, accompanied by a nationalist and security-focused one. This is why, in statements by League activists, helping illegal immigrants is defined as “human trafficking” perpetrated not only by smuggling gangs but also by non-governmental institutions that cynically invoke humanitarian law (Sofia, 2018). The League has emphasized that the EU and its institutions cannot cope with this problem and that nation-states are paralyzed by “Brussels bureaucrats and ideologists.” Eurosceptics like Salvini *de facto* became the leaders of a “populist rebellion” against Brussels (Brunazzo, Gilbert, 2017, p. 6), which aims to eliminate the alleged “democratic deficit” in the EU (Szczerbiak, Taggart, 2008, pp. 349–355). The regionalist-sovereign Euroscepticism of the League, as it was shaped, proved to be not only an effective player on the Italian political scene but also an influential one at the European level.

Participatory-Deregulatory Euroscepticism

The research on the Five Star Movement’s Euroscepticism is based on the party’s manifesto documents. From 2013 to 2024, six manifesto documents were created for both national parliamentary and European parliamentary elections. These documents constitute the foundation of the M5S’s ideological-political identity and, significantly, they demonstrate its evolution, particularly when analyzing the presence of Eurosceptic content and slogans.

Table 2

Manifesto documents of M5S (2013–2024)

	Title of document	Kind of elections	Date of elections
1.	<i>5 Star Movement Manifesto (Il Programma del Movimento 5 Stelle)</i>	Parliamentary	24–25.02.2013
2.	<i>Seven Points for Europe (Sette punti per l'Europa)</i>	European	25.05.2014
3.	<i>Elections Program of 5 Star Movement (Il Programma Elettorale del Movimento 5 Stelle)</i>	Parliamentary	4.03.2018
4.	<i>5 Star Movement Manifesto for the European Elections 2019 (Il Programma del Movimento 5 Stelle. Elezioni europee 2019)</i>	European	26.05.2019
5.	<i>On the right side. Heart and courage for the future of Italy. Manifesto. Political elections 25th of September, 2022 (Dalla parte giusta. Cuore e coraggio per l'Italia di domani. Programma elettorale. Elezioni politiche 25 settembre 2022)</i>	Parliamentary	25.09.2022
6.	<i>Italy deserves its fighters in Europe. European elections 8–9 June, 2024. Manifesto (L'Italia che conta protagonisti in Europa. Elezioni europee 8–9 giugno 2024. Programma elettorale)</i>	European	8–9.06.2024

Source: Own work

In fact, none of the documents prepared for the national parliamentary elections contained themes that would suggest the M5S is a Eurosceptic group. The first of these documents, the 2013 manifesto, was even written in a pro-European spirit, with slogans about energy transformation, support for renewable energy sources, diversifying

the energy production market, and promoting public transport, which fit perfectly with EU goals. Eurosceptic elements were included in the programmatic documents prepared for the European elections. However, it is worth noting that alongside Eurosceptic demands, there also appeared pro-European ones that clearly favored a deepening of European integration. Since its very beginning, a dissonance has been noticeable within the M5S between a pro-European and a Eurosceptic attitude. Among the *Seven Points for Europe* from 2014 (Di Salvo, 2014), two can be considered Eurosceptic: the demand for a referendum on Italy's membership in the Eurozone and the demand to abolish the so-called fiscal pact. The other five points effectively advocated for the development of European integration (e.g., accepting Eurobonds, intensifying cooperation among Mediterranean countries) or a revision of its character (e.g., abolishing the balanced European budget). The M5S combined these slogans with the ideas of participatory democracy, e-democracy, and deregulation; therefore, this form of Euroscepticism can be defined as participatory-deregulatory. Eurosceptic themes completely disappeared from the M5S's manifestos from 2019 and 2024, replaced by a model of the EU as a community of increasingly cooperative states. The party advocated for new common European policies (e.g., migration policy, anti-corruption policy) as well as for Brussels to initiate the realization of pan-European goals (e.g., full-time employment, implementation of a minimum European wage, common actions against the negative outcomes of globalization, development cooperation, and actions to enhance democracy). If we accept the division of Eurosceptic parties into a "hard variant" and a "soft variant" (Taggart, Szczerbiak, 2003, pp. 207–225; Szczerbiak, Taggart, 2008, pp. 353–360), then the M5S would have to be considered an example of Euroscepticism in the "soft variant."

Ideological identity and programmatic demands typically determine the political and organizational dimension of a given political party. Simultaneously, potential Euroscepticism in the programmatic dimension should translate into cooperation between the party and other Eurosceptic organizations, including working with them during elections or legislative sessions and forming coalitions or joint governments. In the case of the M5S, a specific paradox arose in this matter. Although – as indicated above – its manifestos largely featured a pro-European character rather than a Eurosceptic one, since its very beginning, it closely cooperated with strongly Eurosceptic groups (according to the previously applied nomenclature: Eurosceptic in the "hard variant"). The M5S's Euroscepticism was especially visible during the campaign for the 2014 European elections (Franzosi, Marone, Salvati, 2015, pp. 115–119), when, together with the LN, the party promoted the demand for a referendum on Italy's membership in the Eurozone. The very idea of a referendum fitted into the participatory-deregulatory model promoted by the M5S. However, it is worth emphasizing that the M5S never presented an official attitude on this issue; therefore, the demand to leave the Economic and Monetary Union was never expressed by it *expressis verbis*. Supporting this demand, as well as the criticism of migration and European bureaucracy, was one of the reasons the M5S was not accepted into the faction of the European Green Party and the ALDE Group in the European Parliament. Finally, in 2014, the M5S joined the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group, in which the strongest link was the highly Eurosceptic British UKIP (Ignazi, 2018, p. 305). However, in reality, with reference to its manifesto, the M5S was closer to

the European Green groups (Franzosi, Marone, Salvati, 2015, pp. 118–123). It is worth mentioning that important party decisions, including membership in European Parliament factions, the first years of the M5S required the approval of registered members and followers on a special Internet platform. This form of innovation was supposed to fit into the participatory ideas promoted by the M5S. The Istituto Cattaneo examined the voting records of the M5S in the European Parliament and found that its MEPs voted the same way as UKIP in only 20% of cases, the same as Le Pen's National Rally in 36% of cases, and the same as the LN in 40% of cases. Interestingly, almost 71% of M5S MEPs voted identically to socialists and 74% to the Green group. It was only in 2024 that the M5S was admitted to a faction created by the European left in the European Parliament, which includes groups defining themselves as progressive, pacifist, and ecological, and whose platforms refer to slogans of international peace, environmental protection, and social justice (Dianda, 2019; Negri, 2024). The conclusion on Euroscepticism also found justification in the alliance formed with the League in 2018, which resulted in a parliamentary coalition and the appointment of a joint government led by Giuseppe Conte. Although both parties undoubtedly agreed on the issues of migration policy, decentralization, and deregulation, other later-emerging discrepancies caused the coalition to fall apart after one year. It turned out, therefore, that the M5S's cooperation with Eurosceptic groups was, first and foremost, a pragmatic choice and not based on any real Eurosceptic identity or anti-European demands of this party.

The third dimension for analyzing the potential Euroscepticism of the M5S is its narrative. Political parties that include Eurosceptic demands in their manifestos, which are then transferred to the political and organizational dimension, also make use of a Eurosceptic narrative. The political statements of their leaders and activists should, therefore, contain a range of slogans unequivocally demonstrating unwillingness toward the EU or European integration, hostility toward European leaders and the so-called European establishment, and an emphasis on the ineffectiveness or even incompetence of EU institutions.

In fact, it was not until 2017 that Beppe Grillo – the founder of the M5S – argued that “Europe has no future, it is a ship of fools,” that it is an artificial “bag” in which 27 subjects are combined with “frustrating and unnatural prisons,” and that it possesses an “indigestible nature” and is “regulated by banks.” The Union was presented as a symbol of centralization and overregulation, as a creature hostile to individual initiative and reluctant to increase social engagement. Grillo and other M5S leaders also argued that no such thing as a European identity exists and that the only nation fighting for its identity in the EU is the Germans (Colletti, Mazza, 2017). M5S activists repeatedly presented the EU as a tool in the hands of Germany's foreign policy or, more broadly, of northern countries striving to transfer their economic model to southern countries. The Economic and Monetary Union, the European Central Bank, and the common Euro currency were also considered such tools of influence (Bettiza, 2014).

However, in recent years, Eurosceptic themes have almost completely disappeared from the narrative of M5S politicians, and their place has been taken over by the slogan of a “third way.” First, the M5S supported a specific “third way” between thoughtless “Europeanism” and Eurosceptic “sovereignty.” Second, the M5S also announced a “third way” policy on migration, which means finding an indirect path between un-

compromising opposition to accepting immigrants and thoughtless openness that could endanger the safety of Italians and Europeans. For the M5S, the best solution is to create a common EU migration policy. This demand – to provide the EU with new competencies and form a new community policy – does not allow us to speak of the M5S as a Eurosceptic group. It must be remembered, however, that until 2019, the M5S's leaders, against European Committee suggestions, supported Salvini's hard political line on migration, agreeing, among other things, to close Italian ports. As can be seen, during the first years of M5S activity, critical slogans against the EU appeared more often and were justified by the ideas of participatory and deregulatory democracy. "Greater transparency" was demanded from EU leaders and European institutions. Despite criticism of European institutions for their inability to cope with the continent's problems, such as migration, it was also emphasized that "the borders of Italy are the borders of Europe," and that European solidarity and transnational cooperation should be expected. As can be noticed, the Eurosceptic narrative was an element that constituted the M5S during its formation and first years of activity. Because of other manifesto demands, it could be called participatory-deregulatory Euroscepticism. The Eurosceptic narrative, however, was systematically rejected from year to year and has now been replaced by a pro-European, reformist narrative.

Conclusion

In accordance with the set goal, two models of contemporary Italian Euroscepticism were introduced. The first was defined as regionalist-sovereign Euroscepticism, represented by the League. The second was named participatory-deregulatory Euroscepticism, with the M5S as its reflection. The influence of both groups on contemporary Italian politics has been, and remains, substantial. There is nothing to indicate that both parties will disappear from the Italian political stage anytime soon – especially since the League is currently part of the center-right coalition governing Italy and supporting Giorgia Meloni's government, which, halfway through its term, still enjoys high social trust.

Although there was a significant discrepancy between the two models of Euroscepticism, both undoubtedly gained strength from the increasing Eurosceptic sentiment among Italians at the beginning of the 21st century and the weakening trust in the activities of EU institutions. This was undeniably influenced by European and global events such as the financial crisis of 2007–2008, the Eurozone debt crisis, and the refugee crisis, including the EU's ineffective migration policy. Significantly, the Euroscepticism of Italian political groups is part of a wider trend that has been observed in European countries since the turn of the century, with examples found in virtually every country. Neither the developed countries of Western Europe, playing a leading role in European integration, nor the countries of Eastern and Central Europe or the Mediterranean area, are free from Euroscepticism. Increasingly, as can be seen from the examples of the Italian Eurosceptic groups, these parties are gaining direct influence over governance, and their indirect impact on public discourse, the narratives of mainstream parties, and political programs is undeniable.

The text, using the examples of the League and the M5S, has shown that Eurosceptic groups can vary substantially. Euroscepticism, therefore, does not have to have the same core programmatic, organizational, or narrative basis in all groups of this kind. The most similarities are likely found at the narrative level. Moreover, as this analysis has shown, Euroscepticism does not have to be a permanent, inherent feature of political groups. Both Italian examples effectively demonstrated that Euroscepticism can be a temporary and fleeting feature. In the case of the League, Euroscepticism actually appeared in parallel with the elimination of separatist demands and took over their place. In the case of the M5S, Euroscepticism was rather poor and moderate from the party's very beginning and finally disappeared. This party can in no way be considered Eurosceptic nowadays. A scrutiny of these Italian examples should also lead us to an analysis of examples from across Europe. In some of them, Euroscepticism seems to truly constitute an element of a given political environment's hard identity – then we can speak of Euroscepticism in the “hard variant.” In this model, clear Eurosceptic manifesto elements can usually be perceived, which strongly position the party in the political-organizational field of Eurosceptic groups and movements, but, most importantly, drastically shape the Eurosceptic political narrative of a given party. Euroscepticism in the “soft variant” may only entail a few Eurosceptic manifesto demands and narrative themes. It may also be argued that Eurosceptic elements can constitute only a sign of political demagoguery, having a negligible impact on actual political decisions. This distinction between the two types of Euroscepticism can serve as a foundation for future research, including the development of detailed criteria for classifying specific political groups and movements. While this was not the objective of the current study, the potential conclusions could be significant not only for research on Italian Euroscepticism but, more importantly, for understanding Euroscepticism in other European Union member states.

Both Italian examples of Euroscepticism also lead us to the conclusion that the presence of Eurosceptic elements in a political party's manifesto, activity, or narrative can have a two-fold source. In the case of the M5S, Eurosceptic elements had their source in society, specifically in the followers of these groups who participated in decision-making through online voting. This form of Euroscepticism can be defined as “grassroots” Euroscepticism. Eurosceptic content is transferred from society/followers to the party/leaders. In this way, the party absorbs only realistic Eurosceptic social sentiments. In the case of the League, the Eurosceptic direction resulted from decisions made by the group's leaders, especially by Salvini. It was he, after the party's transformation, who decided on a manifesto-narrative change toward the “hard variant” of Euroscepticism. This form of Euroscepticism could be defined as “top-down.” Ultimately, in both cases, it was the electorate that decided on the maintenance, revision, or abandonment of the Eurosceptic path through their votes in elections. This aspect of Euroscepticism research would also require further development through an analysis of specific cases of parties operating throughout Europe, especially during periods of heightened Eurosceptic sentiment and increased support for such groups. Observing and analyzing the Italian experience in this regard may be useful for broader research on political narratives and attitudes toward European integration in other EU member states. It is important to remember that Italy was one of the first European countries where Eurosceptic parties gained tangible influence over governance.

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**Dwie twarze eurosceptycyzmu we współczesnej polityce włoskiej:
Liga (*Lega per Salvini Premier*) i Ruch Pięciu Gwiazd (*MoVimento 5 Stelle*)**

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule poddano analizie dwa modele współczesnego włoskiego eurosceptycyzmu: regionalistyczno-suwerenistycznego – reprezentowanego przez Ligę – oraz partycypacyjno-deregulacyjnego – reprezentowanego przez Ruch Pięciu Gwiazd. Zaprezentowano proces przekształcania Ligi

z ruchu separatystycznego w ugrupowanie twardo eurosceptyczne, co dokonało się poprzez strategiczne decyzje jej liderów, reagujących na europejskie kryzysy. Przedstawiono również eurosceptycyzm Ruchu 5 Gwiazd, który początkowo miał umiarkowany i oddolny charakter, by z czasem przejść na pozycje proeuropejskie o charakterze reformistycznym. W tekście ukazano, że eurosceptycyzm jest zjawiskiem dynamicznym, zmieniającym się w zależności od kontekstu politycznego, a jego intensywność i formy różnią się między konkretnymi ugrupowaniami eurosceptycznymi. Włoskie przykłady wpisują się w szerszy europejski trend, w ramach którego eurosceptycyzm bywa zarówno strategią polityczną, jak i trwałym elementem tożsamości ideowej.

Słowa kluczowe: eurosceptycyzm, Liga, Ruch Pięciu Gwiazd, polityka włoska

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