

Section 5 – Comunicazione Politica

Chairs: Giuliano Bobba, Claudia Padovani

Panel 5.5 Narratives of Europe by left- and right-wing populist parties. New topics for old conflicts in contemporary political communication and discourse.

The conflict with the European Union is one of the defining features of both left-wing and right-wing populist forces across Europe. Whether in government or in opposition, populist parties oppose supranational integration for a number of heterogeneous (but often interlinked) factors: to take back sovereignty at national level; to oppose the neoliberal-oriented and prolonged austerity therapy which marks the European political economy; to foster neo-nationalist projects by resorting to a strong sense of national identity vis-à-vis European integration. The case of the current Italian government, for instance, represents a formidable mix of all the above-mentioned elements. On the one hand, the populist executive formed by the Five Star Movement and The League entered in open conflict with European institutions, and signally the Commission, with respect to government budget and deficit (or, the extent of fiscal austerity); on the other, The League resorts also to a strongly nationalist and anti-immigration discourse ('Italians first!') which, not without ambiguity and contradictions, put the question of national identity and sovereignty on top of the political agenda.

Given the extent of socio-economic crisis across European countries, and the crisis of political legitimation of European institutions, it is likely that in the next few years the conflict between populist forces/parties and the EU will intensify and accrue as a continent-wide political cleavage. In this framework, while consistent bodies of literature enquired key aspects of populism (i.e. history and theory of populism, internal organization of populist parties and electoral performances, populist discourse), the question of the populist narratives of 'Europe' remains often overlooked. The panel proposal, thus, aims at shedding light on the discursive strategies through which populist parties 'construct' and define the European Union at domestic level and vis-à-vis the EU itself. In particular, we would encourage analysis of the frames, topics and communication style of populist political discourse especially after the 2008 crisis onwards. Potential research topics could be:

- General characteristics of the narratives of the EU in populist discourse;
- Comparative analysis of populist parties in relation to the EU;
- Differences/similarities of the narratives of Europe in left-wing and right-wing populism;
- Populists from outsiders to government force: the same old story(telling)?
- Narratives of the nexus neoliberalism/austerity, the European Union, and populist forces;
- Narratives of specific events, i.e. the already-mentioned struggle between the Italian government and the EU over budget deficit – but other topics could include immigration, foreign relations, religious issues, etc.
- More theoretical analysis of populist discourse;
- Specific research approaches to populism as Critical Discourse Analysis, Cultural Political Economy, and potential empirical application;
- Examples of potential research projects concerning populist narratives and the European Union.

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Chairs: Adriano Cozzolino, Diego Giannone