"AFRICA DOES NOT FIT IN EUROPE". A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANTI-IMMIGRATION PARTIES' DISCOURSE IN SPAIN AND ITALY

"TODA ÁFRICA NO CABE EN EUROPA" ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO DE LOS DISCURSOS DE LOS PARTIDOS ANTI INMIGRACIÓN EN ESPAÑA Y EN ITALIA.

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Abstract: *The politicization of immigration has moved the debate about immigration at the center of the run-up of elections, creating the breeding ground for the electoral breakthrough and success of right-wing populist parties.*

This article aims at disclosing the narrative of immigration and its politicization in VOX's discourse, comparing it to the Italian Lega party.

Clause-based semantic text analysis reveals that both parties share the classic characteristics of nativist populism: the representation of a virtuous and hardworking people, threatened by the invasion by some "others", immigrants, who intrude the sovereign,

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space of natives to exploit and commit crimes. In both cases, the concept of space is manipulated, representing countries as limited spaces, allowing to depict immigrants as a threat to legitimize negative political responses.

The study also identifies a novelty: the construction of the rescue NGOs as the new antagonist actor.

Key words: *anti-immigration discourse; political discourse; populism; far right parties.*

Resumen: *La politización de la inmigración ha llevado el tema la inmigración al centro del debate político-electoral, creando el caldo de cultivo para el éxito de los partidos populistas de derecha.*

Este artículo tiene como objetivo estudiar la narrativa de la inmigración y su politización en el discurso de VOX, comparándola con el partido italiano Lega.

El análisis revela que ambos partidos comparten las características clásicas del populismo nativista: la representación de un pueblo virtuoso y trabajador, amenazado por la invasión de algunos "otros", los inmigrantes, que se entran en el espacio soberano de los nativos para explotar y cometer crímenes. En ambos casos, se manipula el concepto de espacio, representando a los países como espacios limitados y a los inmigrantes como una amenaza, para legitimar las respuestas políticas negativas.

El estudio también identifica una novedad: la construcción de las ONG de rescate como el nuevo actor antagonista.

Palabras claves: *discurso anti-inmigración; discurso político; populismo; partidos de extrema derecha.*

INTRODUCTION

The politicization of immigration has moved the debate about immigration at the center of the run-up of elections in most western democracies, creating the breeding ground for the electoral breakthrough and success of a wide range of parties, able to successfully capitalized on the fear of the perceived "immigration crisis" (Chiaramonte et al., 2018).

These parties or movements are variously labeled as "extreme right" (Arzheimer, 2009), "far-right"(Golder, 2016), or simply "anti-

immigration parties"(Van der Brug et al., 2005) because they share a common (fierce) opposition to immigration.

A rich specific literature points out the centrality of immigration in these parties' appeal to voters (Meyer & Rosenberger, 2015). Nonetheless, most of these works are based on single case studies, since, as Rydgren (2005) notes, there is a tendency for analysts to regard these movements and parties as unique phenomena growing out of specific political, social, and economic conditions in each country. The clear commonalities amongst them, however, have brought to a shared consensus that they constitute one single family, defined by Mudde (2004) as populist radical right (from now on PRR). Thus, meticulous comparative research is, indeed, needed not to overstate what could be context-specific and, in particular, to allow some extent of generalization (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Accordingly, the main goal of this article is to disclose the narrative of immigration and its politicization in Vox's discourse, comparing it to the Italian *Lega* party.

The reasons for this choice are different. On the one hand, besides openly expressing their mutual admiration and inspiration, both parties can be defined as "political entrepreneurs of xenophobia" (Avanza, 2010). On the other, even if due to its newness Vox is still understudied, the ideological nature of the party has already sparked some debates (Ferreira, 2019) between those scholars who see the organization as the Spanish expression of the populist radical right (Climent and Montaner, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Dennison and Mendes, 2019) and those who consider Vox as a tougher version of traditional conservatism (Ferreira, 2019). *Lega*, on its side, being a long-established party, has been studied from many perspectives (Cervi, 2019) and it is widely considered a paradigmatic example of PRR in Europe (Tarchi, 2015). Moreover, while Italy has been defined as "the promised land of populism" (Tarchi, 2015), Spain is witnessing a new —and for many analysts unexpected— rise of this form of politics.

The paper is organized as follows: after describing the main characteristics of PRR parties and their discourse, we justify the inclusion of Vox and *Lega* into this party family and analyze a selection of discourses by the two leaders using quantitative and qualitative clause-based semantic text analysis to display the existence of a common pattern of representation of immigration and proposal of "solutions", besides contextual differences.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. PRR

According to Mudde's conceptual approach (2004), PRR parties' main features are nativism, authoritarianism, and populism: all these characteristics are necessary to classify a particular party as a member of the PRR family.

Their most important common denominator is nativism: a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, an exclusionist, ethno-nationalist notion of citizenship, reflected in the slogan "own people first" (Betz, 2003; Rydgren, 2005). This nativist stance implies that exclusively members of the native group (the nation) should inhabit states and those non-native elements (persons and ideas) threaten the homogeneous nation-states (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Authoritarianism is the belief in that society should be organized according to strict rules and non-conformity should be harshly punished, and it is expressed through the subsequent partiality towards 'law and order' issues (Muddle, 2007).

Finally, populism is understood as a "thin centered" ideology that considers society to be

ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elites"(Mudde, 2004, p. 543). As a "thin centered" ideology, it lacks the main characteristic of "full" ideologies —such as fascism, liberalism, and socialism—, the ability to provide a blueprint for societal change (Stanley, 2008) and needs to be attached to other ideological elements, which are crucial for the promotion of political projects that are appealing to a broader audience (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

1.2. PRR discourse

Scholars have increasingly identified a few core attributes of populist discourse, the first being anti-elitism, under which the sacred will of the common people, is in conflict with a conspiring elite (Hawkins et. al., 2019).

People are represented as a unique body, a homogeneous entity whose will, the expression of *volonté generale* (Mudde, 2004), is sacred and infallible (Canovan, 2005).

The definition of the elite and the specific elites targeted by populist claims can vary —elected politicians, business leaders, intellectuals, etc. —, but they are invariably portrayed as having betrayed the public trust, therefore guilty of the undesirable situation the people live in (Kriesi, 2014).

Besides, under a nativist notion of citizenship, this characteristic appeal to the people becomes an appeal to *our people*, the "pure" people (Betz, 2003). Accordingly, PRR parties distinguish *our people*, from "others", aliens who do not belong to "us", and are consequently considered enemies, accused of conspiring —together with or with the direct or indirect help of the élite— against the people (Canovan, 2005).

Exactly as for the elites, the selection of whom to identify as "other" depends on the contextual discursive opportunities (Koopmans & Statham, 2010), however, a vast strand of literature has shown that in recent decades most right-wing populists in Western Europe, have capitalized on the growing concerns on immigration, activating people's grievances against immigrants (Cea D'Ancona et. alt., 2014).

Last, but not least, as noted by Meny and Surel "populism advocates the power of the people, yet it relies on the seduction by a charismatic leader" (2002, p. 17). A recurrent populist trope, is, in fact, also entails the representation of a salvific leader.

1.3. PRR and immigration

As Brons (2015) points out, the labeling of certain individuals or groups as "others" helps setting boundaries that shape people's identity. Thus, within the nativist master frame, immigrants represent a sort of natural "other"(Cervi & Tejedor, 2020).

In particular, by labeling a specific group as "the Other", it can be presented as a source of danger and, thus, as both a metaphorical and an actual threat to the "us" and accordingly problematized and politicized.

Furthermore, by presenting immigration as a threat, actions against it can be presented as urgent and needed.

In this way, when traditional parties choose not to include immigration in their political agenda —both to avoid conflicts or because it is not considered salient— populist radical right parties may become "issue entrepreneurs" (Hobolt & de Vries, 2015, p. 1161),

being the first to catalyze negative emotions against the constructed immigration threat, making the issue of immigration salient and prominent in voters' minds (Petrock, 1996).

Consequently, if traditional parties keep avoiding the issue of immigration, or do not treat it as an emergency/problem, PRR parties can become "issue owners" (Petrocik, 1996) of the fight against immigration, presenting themselves as the only party/politician that really understand the gravity of the situation and therefore the best option to solve the problem (Walgrave et. al., 2015).

1.4. *Lega* and Matteo Salvini

Lega Nord was born as an ethno-regionalist party defending the secession of the Northern regions of Italy, becoming one of the most successful regionalist parties in Europe, participating in right-wing government coalitions led by Silvio Berlusconi in 2001-2006 and 2008-2011(Cervi, 2020a).

Under Salvini's leadership, starting in 2013, the party relinquishes regionalism to adopt Italian nationalism - symbolically renouncing to the suffix "Nord", to become only *Lega*-veering to the right, to line up ideologically with other European PRR parties (Brunazzo & Gilbert, 2017).

Although anti-immigration discourse was not new to the party, it is in the 2018 electoral campaign, that immigrants become the main target against which directing people's grievances (Cervi, 2020b), transforming the fierce opposition to immigration into Salvini's personal trademark (Cervi, 2020b).

The strategy works: *Lega* becomes the most voted party of the center-right coalition, allowing, on June 1, 2018, the creation of an all-populist coalition government with *Movimento Cinque Stelle*. Matteo Salvini is appointed Minister of the Interior and Vice President of the Council of Ministers (Chiaramonte et al., 2018).

The 2019 European elections mark both the party's and Salvini's triumph. Coming from 6.2% in the 2014 EU ballot, *Lega* wins the European elections in Italy with 34, 3% of the votes and obtains 28 seats. After this astonishing victory, in August 2019, Salvini resigns in a failed attempt to trigger early elections. After the emergence of a new coalition government, the party is currently in opposition (Cervi, 2020a).

1.5.   Vox and the Spanish exception

While Italy seems to be the ideal ground for populism, Spain has proven immune to the appeal of right-wing populism for years.

According to Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015), although demands for populist radical right parties in Spain were not absent, three supply-side factors were impeding both PRR's electoral success and persistence: the electoral system, the strategy of competition of the mainstream right, and the cleavage structure of the country.

Besides the disproportional effects of the Spanish electoral system, which benefits large parties and geographical concentration, the Popular Party, which has ruled the country for most of the last two decades (1996-2004 and 2011-2018), has traditionally been successful in its strategy of including far-right-wing voters in its political project.

Moreover, the recent memory of the Francoist regime has historically represented an obstacle to the emergence of openly authoritarian parties and movements (Casals, 2011).

Last, but not least, the existence of a crucial center-periphery conflict has somehow obscured the immigration debate, which has traditionally lacked political saliency (Cea D'Ancona, et. alt., 2014).

Accordingly, many authors (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Dennison & Mendes, 2019) understand the irruption of Vox can as the end of the so-called Spanish exception.

The party emerged in 2013 as a radical schism of the conservative Popular Party, was founded by Alejo Vidal-Quadras, the first leader, José Antonio Ortega Lara, and Santiago Abascal, the current leader.

After running for the first time for European elections in 2014, without getting representation and in the 2015 and 2016 elections, reaching respectively 0.23% and 0.20% of votes, in 2017 Vox tripled the number of its affiliates in Spain, in coincidence with the terrorist attack of Barcelona, and the independence struggle in Catalonia.

Consequently, in October 2018, the party gathered a crowd of 9000 people in an arena in Madrid; in December 2018, in the regional elections of Andalusia, the party obtained its first electoral success (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019).

Obtaining 12 seats, the party became a fundamental piece to form a right-wing government led by the Popular Party, *de facto* allowing the first-ever change in the government in the region, uninterruptedly governed, since 1978, by the Spanish Socialist

Workers' Party (Barquero, 2018).

In the general elections of April 28, 2019, Vox entered for the first time in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, with 24 seats, increased to 52 seats in the second voting, on November 10, 2019.

Since Vox has emerged so recently as a force in the Spanish political arena, academic analyses are still rare. The ideological nature of this organization has already generated debates between scholars who see Vox as the representative of the radical populist right in Spain (Climent & Montaner, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Dennison & Mendes, 2019) and those that argue that Vox is merely a tougher version of traditional conservatism (Ferreira, 2019).

In particular, while there is a shared agreement on nativism and authoritarianism, some scholars (Ferreira, 2019) see populism as non-prevalent

Vox's political ideology is grounded in traditional conservativism, retrievable in the party's positions against same-sex marriage, abortion, gender quotas, gender violence legislation, and through a strong anti-feminist message.

Authoritarian nationalism is expressed both in the display of patriotic pride and in the party's understanding of the "separatist threat", against which it calls for extreme measures, such as the suspension of the autonomy for Catalonia and the constitutional prohibition of any party seeking independence (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Their exclusionist vision of the nation expresses nativist stances that translate into a hard opposition against immigration, mainly against Muslim immigration.

As for populism, Vox' fundamental sharp dichotomization of the social into an "Us", constructed along national and identity lines, versus a series of "Them", constructed in various (and sometimes contradictory) ways, —internal ("separatism") and external enemies (immigration, especially Muslim immigration)— expressed through an intense hostility to anything perceived as threatening to national cohesion, for the ultimate, authoritarian, purpose of achieving a mono national and monocultural state (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), allows us to ascribe the party into the populist family.

Therefore, considering populism, as we do, as a discursive manifestation of a "thin-centered" ideology (Mudde, 2004), acknowledging that populism is more a 'matter of degree' (Pauwels, 2011), and, as Mudde himself suggests, remembering that PRR parties represent a "populist form of radical right" not a "radical

right form of populism" (2018), we align with Climent and Montaner, (2020), Turnbull-Dugarte (2019), and Dennison and Mendes (2019), considering that Vox fits into Mudde's classification of a populist radical right party.

2. METHODS

Comparative research is the key to allow some extent of generalization (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Understanding the comparative method as a method for identifying and explaining similarities and differences between cases using common concepts (Mair, 1997), this work aims at disclosing the narrative of immigration and its politicization in Vox's discourse, comparing it to the Italian *Lega* party, understood as a paradigmatic PRR party (Tarchi, 2015). Attending Sartori's (1991) recommendation to compare *per genus et differentiam*, we compare two parties that belong to the same party family but operate within divergent political contexts. Specifically, even though both Italy and Spain share an authoritarian fascist past, the first, as previously stressed out, has been widely recognized as "the promised land of populism" (Tarchi, 2015), while the second is witnessing a new —and for many analysts unexpected— rise of this form of politics. Therefore, it can be expected that the two parties might show similar discursive strategies, but also some contextual differences concerning both the political and discursive opportunities (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

As Kazin (1995) points out, discourse is "the most basic and telling" (p. 1) characteristic of populism. Discourse can be retrieved in all domains of politics, however, during electoral campaigns, not only the intensity in political communication increases but, representing the most relevant ritualized performances of modern democracies, campaigns reveal discursive strategies more explicitly (Bernhard & Kriesi, 2019).

For this reason, we concentrate on the discursive strategies displayed by the two parties in three different electoral campaigns that occurred in the last two years: the campaign for the last European elections, that coincided in both countries on May, 26th, 2019; the campaign for the last general elections, held on the 4th of March 2018 in Italy and on the 10th of November 2019 in Spain;

and two regional campaigns (Abruzzo's regional election elections of 10th of February, 2019 for Italy and Andalucía's elections, of 2nd December 2018 for Spain).

Selecting the same type of elections, held within a relatively limited time frame, presents the advantage of sharing comparable contextual conditions and presumably similar salient public debates, such as, for example, immigration.

Aligning with the methodological choices made by Hawkins and colleagues in constructing the "The Global Populism Database" (2019), four main criteria have been followed in the collection of the speeches: comparability (same type of election, actors, *momentum*, target, and format), variety (in terms of format: public meetings, media interventions, etc.), availability and relevance (measured through media resonance).

Consistently, we opted for a mixed sample of speeches that share the following characteristics: they are 1) speeches given by the leaders, considering the importance of the figure of the leader within populist movements; 2) in similar *momenta* of the campaign, concretely the opening and the closing speeches of each campaign, that not only represent the same *momentum* but also are the most symbolically relevant; 3) with different but comparable formats (public meetings, debates, media interviews, etc.); 4) intended for a general target (discourses targeting specific groups have not been included) and 5) "famous" (Hawkins et. alt, 2019), understood as the most resonant in the media.

Furthermore, since our attention is placed on anti-immigration discourse and both the countries have been involved in the same case of migration, the so-called Open Arms case, that took place in August 2019, the specific parliamentary intervention of each leader has been included, together with a media intervention on the topic.

The resulting total *corpus* is composed of 28 speeches, 14 for each politician (for the complete list, see Annex I).

Textual analysis is widely recognized amongst the best-developed technique to measure the rhetoric of politicians (Hawkins et alt., 2019); in particular, as suggested and proven by Paris Aslanidis (2018), clause-based semantic text analysis appears to be a particularly fitting instrument for measuring populist discourse.

Thus, following Franzosi's (2009) model, clause-based semantic text analysis has been implemented, to the *verbatim* transcription of

the selected speeches. The total *corpus* of 127.465 words (Santiago Abascal 66.198 words; Matteo Salvini 61.267 words) has been analyzed using a standardized codebook, including qualitative and quantitative variables.

Clause-based semantic text analysis is based on recombining the original text into a set of clauses, termed "semantic triplets" (Franzosi, 2009), which represent the basic grammatical structure of the discourse, pinpointing the following analytical categories: "Subject-actor", "Verb-action" and "Object-actor".

This method allows coders to isolate both the words and their position, revealing the main subjects, actions, and objects in the statements and the relationships among them. In such a way, not only it is possible to retrieve general themes emerging in the clauses, and the way they connect, it is also possible to code and analyze qualitative variables (i.e. adjectification, linguistic qualifiers, etc.).

Finally, inspired by Caiani and Della Porta (2011) approach, frames have been reconstructed and re-aggregated using Kuypers' model (2010) that distinguishes a Describing a Diagnostic and a Solution frame, allowing displaying how the social phenomenon of immigration is problematized.

3. RESULTS

First, the macro-topics retrieved in the selected discourses have been quantitatively analyzed. As shown in Figure 1, Santiago Abascal and Matteo Salvini's speeches show a very similar thematic distribution. Salvini dedicates more time to immigration, which, counting 37% of his speaking time, is the most frequent topic, followed by "National political class" (the category in which we counted mentions to political élite not related to immigration). Abascal, on his side, dedicates 30% of the time to immigration and 30% to the political class. Salvini also talks more about Europe (counted as European affairs non-related to immigration), and only dedicates 3% of his time to the Italian nation and history. Abascal, instead, dedicates 13% of his time to talk about the Spanish nation, history, and 15% to other topics (predominantly feminism and "separatism").

Figure 1

MAIN TOPICS
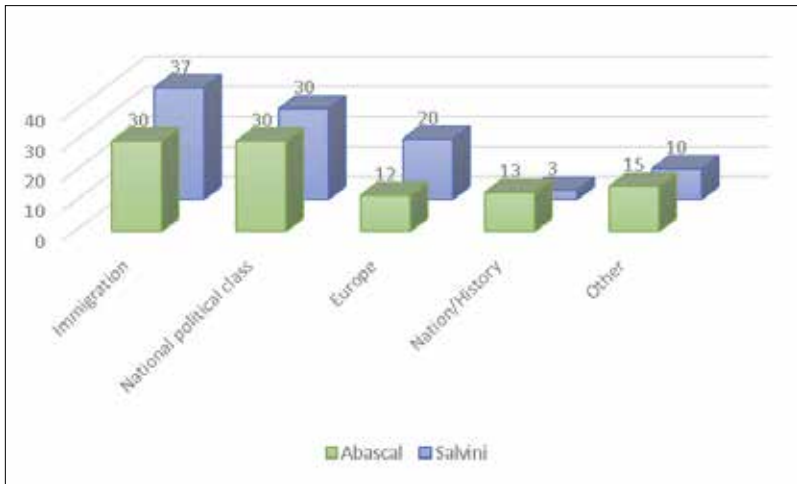
Source: elaborated by the author.

Our findings show a great similarity in the narrative dynamics and are consistent with the main characteristic of populist discourse. The main retrieved actors are Italian/Spaniards, as "the People", the "Us" actors; "Immigrants" and the "elites", representing the "Them" actors; and, interestingly we have isolated a third opponent "Them" actor, represented by rescue NGOs.

3.1. The "Us" actor

Table 1 displays clauses and linguistic qualifiers of the "Us" values.

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Table 1

THE "US" VALUES

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Variable	SALVINI	ABASCAL
Subject	*The people*	*The people*
Definitions	Friends; People; Us; Workers; Italians; Families; Home.	España Viva; *Patria* (Homeland); Compatriots; Spaniards; Home; families; Workers. Historical figures (*Fernando III El Santo, Isabel la Católica*, etc.);
Positive adjectives	Good, normal; hard-working; honest; *per bene.* **First**	*Españoles al cuadrado*; proud of their identity; great history. **First**
Negative adjectives	Tired; angry; Poor; *Terremotati* concerned; worried	Hopeless; worried; in need; unemployed
Positive actions	Work hard; do their best; want; need; has understood	Hope; need; deserve
Object	Salvini; *Lega*; normality, order	Order; protection; Vox
Negative actions	Are fed up; suffer; have enough; don't know how to earn a living	Suffer; have enough; don't know how to earn a living
Objects	Political class, politicians; Boldrini; Immigrants; *Barconi*; **Invasion**	**Invasion**; Political class, politicians; Left

Source: elaborated by the authors.

In Salvini's discourse, the "Us" value is represented by the "people" identified as the Italians, openly referred to as "us". The belonging to the "pure" people is stresses out by defining Italians as "friends" "homes"or "families" and describing them as "good" and *per bene*, "honest".

This description, not only perfectly embodies the "virtuous and homogeneous people" (Canovan, 2005), characteristic of populist discourse, but allows the speaker to establish what is "normal", therefore good (us, the hard-working Italian people), and what is "not normal", thus wrong (them, the parasitic others).

Under the classical paradigm of populist discourse, Italians are portrayed in distress, both because of the political élite and the immigration "invasion".

Abascal's definition of "Us" seems to be based on a mix of identity and patriotism.

Spaniards are identified with Spain itself (*La España viva*), which, in turn, is framed through a wide recall to foundational myths —mainly those related to the historical figures related to *La Reconquista*, to underline the pride of Spanish identity—.

Thus, even if "families" and "workers" are also present, "Homeland" is the most frequent qualifier to define both Spain and Spanish people, together with "*Los españoles*" (Spaniards) and "compatriot".

In this vein, people can be categorized according to their degree of *hispanidad* (Spanishness).

> *"Los andaluces son as españoles al cuadrado"*
> "Andalucian people are "squared" Spanish (two times Spanish)"
> (Santiago Abascal, 11/11/2018. Public Meeting, Seville)

Perfectly aligning with Salvini's portrait, Abascal depicts Spaniards suffering: people are in trouble because of the political élite and because of the immigration "invasion".

3.2. The "them" actors: immigrants as the "others"

Table 2

IMMIGRANTS. THE MAIN "THEM" ACTOR

Variable	SALVINI	ABASCAL
Subject	*Immigrants*	*Immigrants*
Definitions	Supposed refugees; *barconi*; Immigrants; *clandestini* (illegals); Those; mass; Boldrini's resources/friends **Invasion**	Foreigners; Immigrants; Muslims; mass **Invasion**; *Avalancha*
Positive adjectives	*Giovani, belli e palestrati* (Young, beautiful, and well trained)	Hispano-American brothers; Legal; Christian

Variable	SALVINI	ABASCAL
Negative adjectives	Criminals; delinquents; animals; drug dealers; not normal	Criminals; incompatibles; rapists; *manadas* (pack).
Positive actions		come here to integrate, contribute, adapt, accept
Objects		Homeland; Spain
Negative actions	Invade; Intrude; Steal; rape; exploit; sell drugs; bring war Terrorism	Invade Steal; rape; exploit; come in without permission Terrorism
Objects	Home; Italy; people; geographical names	Home; Spaniards; geographical names

Source: elaborated by the author.

Immigrants, as expected, personify otherness.

Salvini clearly reifies immigrants, by identifying them with *barconi*: the illegal ships that transport immigrants through the Mediterranean Sea, shown and spectacularized by the media. In this way, immigrants can be labeled as illegals, *clandestini*, as people who try to sneak into the country, therefore almost automatically positioned outside the Italian "normality".

Under this discursive dynamic, refugees become "supposed", discriminating between "real refugees", fallaciously defined as people who "run away from a war", and thus deserve to be helped, and illegals who just try to sneak in, thus not normal, or openly "criminals", dangerous intruders, that come to take benefit from the previously defined "us".

In the same vein, even if less frequently, the politician distinguished between legal and illegal immigrants.

> *"Ci sono milioni di immigrati regolari che non meritano di essere confusi con questi"*
> "There are millions of regular immigrants that do not deserve being confused with these ones"
> (Matteo Salvini, 18/05/2019. Public meeting, Milan)

Abascal's definition of immigrants is also based on a distinction, but his distinction draws on identity lines.

> *"No se adapta igual a vivir entre nosotros un compatriota
> hispanoamericano que alguien que venga de un país islámico"*
> "A Hispano-American compatriot does not adapt the same as
> someone who comes from an Islamic country"
> (Santiago Abascal, 27/11/2018. Radio Interview, COPE)

All the discourse on immigration is grounded on the sharp distinction between those who share Spanish linguistic and cultural traditions (especially Catholicism), described as the welcomed immigrants who come to integrate and help the country grow, and those who appear ontologically incapable/unapt to integrate.

The first category is represented by Latin Americans, defined alternatively as "brothers", "compatriots", or "friends"; the second is embodied by "Muslims", portrayed as a threat to the Spanish way of life, as their religion and culture are seen as incompatible with Spanish values.

> *"Sabemos lo que tienen en la cabeza… son incompatible con
> nuestra manera de vivir"*
> "We know what they have in their mind…they are incompatible
> with our way of life"
> (Santiago Abascal, 23/10/2019. Public meeting, Malaga)

Although originating from different premises, the strategies of criminalization seem very similar to the ones used by Salvini. Immigration is linked to terrorism and criminality. While Salvini's most quoted criminal activity is drug smuggling (present in 10 discourses), Abascal focuses his attention on group rape, *las manadas*, retrieved in all the discourses (hot-topic in Spanish media, mainly because of one controversial case of gang-rape, involving a member of the police), accusing politician not to give enough importance to the topic.

> *"Nadie ha denunciado la plaga de violaciones en manada
> cometidas por extranjeros…las victimas solo tienen importancia
> cuando su autor es hombre y español"*
> "No one denounced the plague of gang rapes by foreigners…
> victims only matter if the author (of the rape) is a man and a
> Spaniard"
> (Santiago Abascal, 29/08/2019. Extraordinary plenary session for
> the Open arms case. Spanish Congress)

Finally, as previously mentioned, both politicians refer to immigrants as a "mass of people" and as an invasion of "illegals" that intrude and damage the "pure" people.

3.3. The other "them" actors: Political Élites

Table 3 shows the presence of anti-elitist stances, proving that the depiction of the political élite is almost identical in both cases: they lack positive qualities; they are disconnected from the true needs of the people while paying excessive attention to the need of the immigrants.

TABLE 3

POLITICAL CLASS. THE OTHER "THEM" ACTOR

Variable	**SALVINI**	**ABASCAL**
Subject	*Politicians*	*Politicians*
Definitions	Them; Political class; Boldrini; The Left	"*Los Progre*"; The Left; *ofendiditos*; Pablo Iglesias; Manuela Carmena
Positive adjectives		
Negative adjectives	Inept; Useless; crazy; Irresponsible; Guilty; "*Fuori*"; Incompetent; Radical-chic; ***Buonisti***; Live on Planet Mars	Criminals; totalitarian; guilty; crazy; **cosmopolitan arrogance**
Positive actions	Like; Defend; Love; show tenderness	Like; Defend; Love; show tenderness
Object	Immigrants; Illegals	Immigrants; *Manadas*
Negative actions	Have no clue; Do not care; Exploit	Hate; Manipulate
Objects	Home; Italy; people; geographical nouns	workers, Spaniards; Homeland

Source: elaborated by the authors.

The political class is constructed by both politicians as the main responsible for the immigrants' invasion.

> *"Abandonan a los españoles más débiles priorizando a los extranjeros"*
> "Politicians are guilty of having accepted Islamic invasion"
> (Santiago Abascal, 23/10/2019. Public meeting, Malaga)

> *"Penalizzano i pensionati e i giovani che son costretti a fuggire all'estero privilegiando gli immigrati"*
> "They penalize retired and young people that need to go abroad to find a job, to favor immigrants"
> (Matteo Salvini, 13/02/2018. TV interview, "8 e mezzo", La7)

Interestingly, the selection and personalization of political adversaries seem to answer to opportunistic discursive opportunities rather than on the effective power of the opponents.

Salvini's discourses, for example, mention Laura Boldrini, president of the Chamber of Deputies between 2013 and 2018 (position without any executive function), three times more than Matteo Renzi, the leader of the most important leftist party at the time, that is to say, Salvini's main competitor. In the Spanish case, the recurrent retrieved actors are Pablo Iglesias, leader of *Unidas Podemos* party, and Manuela Carmena, Madrid's major.

These "enemies", all positioned in the extreme side of the leftwing spectrum, are represented as "radical chic" who "earn a lot of money", "don't care about the people" (in the case of Abascal they "hate" people) who love immigrants better than their own people.

Immigrants themselves are nick-named "Boldrini's friends" or "Boldrini's resources" (see Table 2) —since the politician has been quoted saying that immigration is a resource for the country— by Matteo Salvini who re-interprets and popularize an old neologism, *buonista*, "do-gooder", to define this immigrant-loving élite.

> *"Boldrini è buonista e razzista perché favorire un'immigrazione fuori controllo danneggia gli italiani vittime di reati."*
> "Boldrini is a do-gooder and a racist (against Italians) because favoring an out-of-control immigration hurts Italians who are victims of crime."
> (Matteo Salvini, 13/02/2018. TV interview, "8 e mezzo", La7)

Abascal, on his side, uses the Spanish translation of Salvini's *buonista*, without getting the same success in popularizing the term. Nonetheless, he is successful in popularizing the term "*Progre*" (progressist, someone from the left), comparable to radical-chic, to describe his political enemies. This term is often accompanied by the adjective *ofendiditos*, which somehow means touchy, someone who is too sensitive and it is used to infantilize those (normally left-wing politicians), who easily get offended by Vox's lack of political correctness.

Within this framework, Pablo Iglesias' name is often distorted into Pablo Mezquitas (*Iglesias* means Churches and *Mezquita*s Mosques) to underline his supposed love for Muslim immigrants, and Manuela Carmena is portrayed as someone who has romantic feelings towards immigrants.

> *"La alcaldesa de Madrid se emociona cuando les ve saltar la valla"*
> "Madrid's Major gets emotional when she sees them (immigrants) jumping the wall"

> *"¿Quieren que vengan? Pa la casa de Pablo Iglesias!"*
> "They want them in? Send them to Pablo Iglesias' home!"
> (Santiago Abascal, 25/5/2019. Public meeting, Madrid)

3.4. The "them" actors: NGOs as the new "Them"

Another relevant "them" appears in the analysis: NGOs.

Although specific literature points out that the actual relationship between NGOs and governments tend to depend on context and opportunities (Cusumano, 2018), in the last years NGOs have been portrayed positively by mainstream media, and, accordingly, perceived as "heroes that save lives" by the public opinion. As Cusumano and Villa (2020) stress out, specifically during 2015 and 2016, Italian media portrayed NGOs in a very positive light, defining them as "heroes" or even "angels of the sea". Martínez Lirola (2020) depicts an almost identical situation in Spain.

Both politicians strongly break this mainstream vision by unabashedly depicting NGOs as dangerous criminals.

Table 4

THE NEW "THEM" VALUE. RESCUE-NGOS

Variable	SALVINI	ABASCAL
Subject	*NGOs*	*NGOs*
Definitions	Foreigners; **Soros**; smugglers	Pirate-ships; Friends of mafias; **Soros**
Positive adjectives		
Negative adjectives	Doubtful; Criminals; Pirates; Intruders; mafia;	Criminals; Pirates; mafia; smugglers; oligarchy; ideological
Positive actions	Make money	Make money
Object	Immigrants; Illegals	Immigrants
Negative actions	Intrude; Invade	Intrude; Invade
Objects	Home; Sovereign Italy; geographical nouns	Sovereign States

Source: elaborated by the authors.

The discursive fabrication of the NGOs as enemies in Salvini's discourse appears very similar to the discursive construction of immigrants: first, they are categorized as foreigners, not Italian, therefore *per se* as entities intruding and challenging Italians' sovereignty. Subsequently, they are defined as "doubtful", suspicious of having sinister intentions and of receiving money from certain sources, allowing to frame them as part of a left-leaning conspiring élite.

To strengthen this vision, Salvini connects rescue NGOs with George Soros, openly adhering to a recurrent conspiracy theory suggesting a left-wing complot to fill Europe with immigrants to foster a (supposed) ethnic substitution (Oliver and Wood, 2014).

> *"Non può un Paese farsi dettare le regole dai Soros di turno"*
> "A country cannot take orders from Soros"
> (Matteo Salvini, 18/05/2019. Public meeting, Milan)

By constructing NGOs as part of a conspiracy held by the elites against the people, both NGOs and volunteers can be presented as

criminals. Accordingly, the act of rescuing human beings becomes a "criminal war act"; Open Arms is referred to as a "criminal ship who has broken the laws of the Italian Republic" and the volunteers as "criminals who cooperate with immigrants traffickers who use immigrants money to buy weapons and drugs" deserving to be "sent to jail".

Abascal discourse on NGOs is so similar to Salvini's one to appear almost copied.

After being portrayed as doubtful, NGOs are explicitly referred to as "pirates", cooperating with immigrant smugglers and mafias, intruding and attacking states' sovereignty, and "ideological", thus responding to an oligarchy whose main purpose is to fill Europe with immigrants.

> *"Extraña alianza que va desde los oligarcas progres y los caciques de Bruselas hasta la extrema izquierda"*
> "Strange Alliance among leftwing oligarchs, Brussels' Lords and the extreme Left"
> (Santiago Abascal, 31/10/2019. Public meeting, Barcelona)
> *"La oligarquía quiere imponer la llegada masiva de inmigrantes"*
> "The oligarchy wants to impose massive immigrants' arrivals"
> (Santiago Abascal, 29/08/2019. Extraordinary plenary session for the Open arms case. Spanish Congress)

Exactly as in the case of Salvini, George Soros is quoted every time that the politician mentions NGOs to extent of being defined as the real owner of the Open Arms vessel.

> *"Soros es el verdadero dueño del Open Arms"*
> "Soros is the real owner of the Open Arms (vessel)"
> (Santiago Abascal, 29/08/2019. Extraordinary plenary session for the Open arms case. Spanish Congress)

3.5. The relationship framework

The isolation of the items corresponding to the "Us" and the "Them" actors allows understanding the relationship between them.

Following Kuyper's model (2010), we can distinguish among a Defining, a Diagnostic, and a Solution frame to reconstruct the narrative of immigration.

3.5.1.   *The defining frame: Italians/Spaniards first*

The defining frame represents the main values at stance and provides a definition of the problem. In both cases, the main values can be found encapsulated in the fundamental nativist stance "Italian first", or "Spanish first".

The "pure" people, who should be sovereign in their territories, are depicted as deprived of this power by the elites, who have abandoned them in favor of immigrants.

Accordingly, people are in distress. The situation of "emergency" is emphasized by the use of crisis-enhancing linguistic qualifiers. Of note in Salvini is the recurrent mention of the "five million Italians who in poverty" (sentence retrieved in all the discourses).

Abascal, even though starting from identity and pride (Spaniards deserve), relate Spaniards experiencing unemployment, job losses, and lack of public help (that allegedly goes to immigrants).

> *"Quando saremo un paese senza cinque milioni di poveri potremo aiutare tutto il mondo"*
> "When we will be a country without 5millions poor people, we will help everybody"
> (Matteo Salvini 30/1 2019.Public meeting, Ortona)

> *"¿Cuantos jóvenes estáis en paro mientras la administración tira el dinero?"*
> "How many young people are unemployed while the administration waste money (on immigrants"
> (Santiago Abascal, 17 /11/ 2018. Public meeting for the opening of the Campaign, Seville)

3.5.2.   *The diagnostic frame: Africa does not fit in Europe*

As Table 3 displays, immigrants are depicted as a mass, an overwhelming quantity of people perpetrating an "invasion".

The image of the invasion works both physically and metaphorically. First, both the countries and Europe itself are represented as limited spaces, unable to host this alleged "avalanche" of people, because they physically "do not fit".

> *"La inmigración es un hecho natural, pero no toda África cabe en Europa o en España"*

> "Immigration is a natural fact, but Africa does not fit in Europe
> or Spain"
> (Santiago Abascal, 22/05/2020. Tv interview, Espejo Publico,
> Antena3)

> *"Tutta l'Africa non ci sta. Punto."*
> "All Africa does not fit in Europe. Period."
> (Matteo Salvini, 24/05/2019. Radio interview, RTL102,5)

Besides the spatial problem, since autochthonous people are struggling with poverty, this "invasion" also becomes an unbearable economic burden. Italian/Spaniards, who, according to the nativist stance should be a priority in their own country, should come first and resources should be allocated to immigrants only once all the people's problems have been solved.

> *"La sanidad para quien estén pagando: los españoles!"*
> "Public healthcare for who is paying for it: Spaniards!"
> (Santiago Abascal, 22/05/2020. Tv interview, Espejo Público,
> Antena3)

3.5.3. The solution frame: immigrants out (and populist leaders in).

After establishing the situation, an invasion of immigrants, and showing how elites have abandoned the people, the solution appears quite clear. The first and most urgent issue, since "there is no room for everybody", is to "stop the invasion".

In both cases, the leader uses the metaphor of "closing the door".

> *"Quien entra en nuestra casa dando patadas por la puerta, se va
> por donde ha entrado"*
> "Who gets into our house kicking the door, goes out from the
> very same door"
> (Santiago Abascal, 31/10/2019. Public meeting, Barcelona)

Besides, as political élite are portrayed as unwilling to solve the problem, or even responsible for it, the populist leader has the chance to present himself, as the only one that understands the people's needs, that genuinely loves the motherland and its people, and thus the savior, the only option to protect the country.

"España quiere que su hogar sea defendido y aquí estamos"
"Spain wants his home defended. Here we are"
(Santiago Abascal, 17 /11/ 2018. Public meeting for the opening
of the Campaign, Seville)

"Io per l'Italia darei la vita"
"I will give my life for Italy"
(Matteo Salvini, 18/05/2019. Public meeting, Milan)

4.   CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of our analysis allow concluding that on the one hand Abascal and Salvini's discourses prove to be very similar, on the other both display the main characteristics, tropes, and repertoires of populist radical right discourse.

Immigration is almost identically dramatized as an "invasion" or "avalanche" of "others" trying to intrude the people's sovereign spaces, their homelands, represented as too geographically limited to host all those "others". Following a nativist vision, immigrants are depicted as "illegals", thus a dangerous threat against which people should be protected. Implementing the classic anti-elitist "master narrative" the (evil) elites are presented as preferring immigrants over sovereign people, and consequently responsible for both the "invasion" and people's distress. This emotionally charged representation of a critical situation allows the leaders to present themselves and their movements as the saviors who come to restore order and normality by "closing the door" to those intruders.

The differences seem to lie only in the construction of each actor.

Vox's definition of "us" is grounded on a nativist understanding of Spanishness (*la hispanidad*) that draws on classical patriotic pride and a mythological representation of the homeland, while Salvini sketches a more common sense based representation of what Italians are, engaging with what Urbinati describes as Italian *gentismo* (2015), related to the populist assumption of the inherent virtuosity of the "people".

As a consequence, while *Lega*'s "rhetoric of exclusion" (Wodak, 2015) capitalizes on "interest-based threats" (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015), catalyzing people's economic and security anxieties against

the dangerous "intruders", Vox's distinction between "acceptable" and "non-acceptable" immigrants, is built upon "identity-based threats" (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015).

However, a closer look allows us to state that in both cases the "others" are constructed as "empty signifiers" (Laclau, 1996), emptied of their content and therefore capable of functioning as a point of identification for disparate groups. In other words, the dramatized construction of immigrants and immigration is geared towards the exploitation of contextual discursive opportunities (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

Accordingly, it can be noted how not only Vox's anti-immigration discourse emerges in a moment in which Spain experiences an increased media coverage of this issue (Cea D'Ancona et. al., 2014), but also even the discussed party's seminal distinction between "acceptable" and "non-acceptable" immigrants, appears triggered by electoral opportunism.

On the one hand, it is related to a colonial vision of Latin America that neglects differences by considering *latinos* as a monolithic group, reducing their diverse affiliations, identities, and cultures to a mere output of Spanish colonization (Gil Araujo, 2010). On the other, Spanish historical and cultural bonds with Latin America, together with preferential migration regulations (Cea D'Ancona et. al., 2014), have attracted many Latin American immigrants to Spain, that, since the early 2000s, have represented the main incoming flow to the country (Cea D'ancona, & Valles-Martínez, 2015). Those same regulations offering Latin-Americans special legal statuses, not only, as explained by Cea D'Ancona and Valles-Martínez (2015), have resulted in a positive change in perceptions and attitudes toward them, but provide the opportunity to ask and obtain Spanish citizenship more easily (for example having a Spanish grandparent) than other immigrants, transforming them into a potential source of votes.

On the other, looking at this strategy within the wider party's vision about the unity of Spain, the attacks against non-Hispanic immigrants allow to place *hispanidad* —and specifically Spanish language— at the center of the debate, responding to the broader nationalistic effort (against anything deemed enemy of Spanishness, such as "Muslims", but also "separatism").

Salvini, on his side, identifying all immigrants with *barconi* —the ships that transport immigrants through the Mediterranean Sea—

offers a distorted vision of immigration in Italy, canalizing people's attention on the most "spectacularized" immigration, that is to say, the one more often portrayed by the media, especially during the so-called "migration crisis" (Cervi, 2020a).

Most of the immigrant population living in Italy, in fact, comes from other European countries, such as Romania (Mariani, Pasquini and Rosati, 2020), but these immigrants are completely ignored in Salvini's discourse. The same happens with Latin Americans, which are not as visible as in Spain, thus not even mentioned.

These results align with the findings of other studies in diverse political contexts (Meyer and Rosenberger, 2015; Hogan and Haltinner, 2015), showing how different right-wing populisms display similar discursive patterns. Therefore, our results suggest that more comparative research should be dedicated to investigating how, and under which circumstances, different minorities are opportunistically tackled as "others" and politicized, responding to changing contextual and electoral discursive opportunities (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

On another level, the study identifies the construction of rescue NGOs as new antagonist actors. As previously pinpointed, previous studies (Cusumano, 2018; Cusumano & Villa, 2020) have already illustrated how the actual relationships between government, elected officials, and NGOs highly depend on the specific context and the power balance amongst them; however, Matteo Salvini appears to be the first to systematically and seamlessly criminalize all rescue NGOs, utilizing this negative representation as a political weapon and a justification for a negative political response (Cusumano & Villa, 2020; Cervi, Tejedor, & Alencar Dornelles, 2020).

As seen, Abascal implements such an analogous strategy referring to the Open Arms case to appear almost copied from Salvini's. A similar trend is also detected in other countries: Kröger (2020), for example, highlights how Brazilian President Bolsonaro openly blamed NGOs for the burning of the Amazonian Forest. In this vein, further research is needed to confirm whether these attacks against NGOs are contextual coincidences, or, as it seems, have become a sort of new constant in the discursive strategies of right-wing populists worldwide.

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Annex I

Campaign	Type of speech	Date	Place/Channel	Source
European Election (26/05/2019)	Public launch of the campaign	8/4/2019	Milan, press conference	La Repubblica Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPfMlzgPsmQ&ab_channel=LaRepubblica
	Tv Interview	08/05/2019	La7	La 7 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PulCwQDfx0M&ab_channel=La7Attualit%C3%A0
	Radio Interview	24/05/2019	RTL102, 5	RTL102, 5 Available at: https://play.rtl.i/t
	Public meeting for the closing of the campaign: Meeting of the European Rights	18/05/2019	Milan, public square	La Repubblica Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2yYxKqgztI&t=899s&ab_channel=LaRepubblica
National Elections (4/3/2018)	Public meeting for the opening of the campaign		Bormio	Matteo Salvini's Facebook page Available at: https://bit.ly/3bHs4oj
	Cara a cara electoral 8 e mezzo	13 Febbraio 2018	"8 e mezzo", La 7	La 7 Available at: https://www.la7.it
	Manifestazione piazza Duomo	24 Febbraio 2018	Milan, public square	Lega's You Tube Channel Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9GTHvi_qkk&t=6649s&ab_channel=LegaSalviniPremier
	Public meeting for the closing of the campaign	1/3/2018	Roma, public square	Matteo Salvini's Facebook page Available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=10155582365918155&ref=watch_permalink
Abruzzo's Regional Election (10/2/2019)	Press conference for the opening of the campaign	4/1/2019	Chieti	Matteo Salvini's Facebook page Available at: https://bit.ly/3oHSrhv
	Public Meeting	30/1 2019	Ortona, public square	Ortona Live Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kS5gftjaeIQ3
	Public Meeting	2/2/2019	Giulianova, public square	La TV dal Bollino Verde Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuQniv-wh2c&ab_channel=LaTVdalBollinoVerde

Campaign	Type of speech	Date	Place/Channel	Source
	Closing of the campaign Press Conference	8/2/2019	Pescara, public square	Agenzia Vista Available at: https://www.you tube.com/watch?v=UFzekBM fklo&t=94s&ab_channel=Vista AgenziaTelevisivaNazionale
Open Arms case Parliament intervention	Intervention at the Senate	20/08/2019	Senato della Repubblica Italiana	Senato della Repubblica Available at: http://webtv.senato.it/webtv _live
Open Arms case Media intervention	Interview	15.08.2019	SKY TG24	Matteo Salvini's Facebook page Available at: https://www.facebook.com/ watch/?v=2519820078038026

Campaign	Type of speech	Date	Place/Channel	Source
European Election (26/05/2019)	Public launch of the campaign	10/5/2019	Madrid, public square	Vox YouTube Channel Available at: https://cutt.ly/ ljkhN2K
	Radio Interview	25/04/2019	Libertad Digital Radio	Libertad Digital Available at: https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=JWUzlbPb174&ab_ channel=LibertadDigital
	Tv Interview	22/05/2019	ESPEJO PUBLICO	AtresPlayer Available at: https://cutt.ly/ ljkjzeE
	Closing of the campaign	25/5/2019	Madrid	Vox YouTube Channel Available at: https://cutt. ly/7jQCef5
National Elections (10/11/2019)	Public meeting for the opening of the campaign	31/10/2019	Barcelona	El País Available at: https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=SU9tcb4PLTE&ab_ channel=ElPa%C3%ADs
	Electoral Debate	5/11/2019	RTVE	RTVE Available at: https://www. rtve.es

Campaign	Type of speech	Date	Place/Channel	Source
	Public meeting	23/10/2019	Malaga, Palacio de Ferias y Congresos	Malagaes YouTube Channel Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTlPdua55aU&ab_channel=malagaes
	Public meeting for the closing of the campaign	8/11/2019	Madrid, public square	Vox YouTube Channel Available at: https://cutt.ly/ZjkjWDS
Andalucia 's Regional Election (2/12/2018)	Launching of the campaign	17 /11/ 2018	Seville	Vox YouTube Channel Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdw0vn0ym2o
	Public Meeting (presentation of the candidates)	11/11/2018	Seville	Vox YouTube Channel Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUre13I_OQw&ab_channel=VOXEspa%C3%B1a
	Radio Interview	27/11/2018	COPE radio	COPE Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN20vIGGcYE
	Closing of the campaign	1/12/ 2018	Sevilla	Vox YouTube Channel Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2CPTL6K1LI&ab_channel=VOXEspa%C3%B1a
Open Arms	Congress Intervention	29/08/2019	Congreso de los Diputados	Canal Parlamento Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrNifJc0ecg&ab_channel=Congresodelos Diputados-CanalParlamento Transcription available at: https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L13/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-13-PL-8.PDF
	Interview	23/9/2019	Il Giornale	Il Giornale https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/mondo/leader-vox-pressioni-bruxelles-allontanare-salvini-1756699.html