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Giordano, Benito

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# A political-economic geography of Italian regionalism: the Northern League (Lega Nord), 1984-96

## Benito Giordano

## PhD thesis

## University of Durham
## Department of Geography

## 1997

# Benito Giordano

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## Abstract

This thesis contributes to the debates surrounding the resurgence of regionalism in contemporary Europe by examining the situation in Italy. The main theoretical perspectives of regionalism are examined as well as the historical development of the Italian national-state and the significant transformations it has undergone in recent years. The main focus of the study is the Northern League (Lega Nord)(LN) regionalist political party, which has risen to political prominence in Italian politics over the last ten years. The LN's claims for greater regional autonomy and its attempts to invent an identity for the North of Italy, or 'Padania' (as the LN calls it) have brought to the fore questions about the future structure of governance in Italy. The LN's claims for the secession of 'Padania' are a direct challenge to Italian national unity and identity.

The LN claims to be the party of the North of Italy (or 'Padania') but its electoral support is not uniform across the whole of the territory. The thesis explores how and why the party's level of electoral support varies geographically, which involves examining the historical and electoral development of the LN; its organisational structures; how the party communicates its political rhetoric; and how the party's discourses have evolved over time. The LN is analysed in three case-study areas within Northern and Central Italy in order to understand how different geographical contexts help or hinder the success of the party. The first case study area is the province of Varese, which is symbolically important for the LN and where the party is electorally strong; the second area is the autonomous province of Trentino where the LN is confronted with a distinct set of institutional and political structures; and the third is the province of Macerata in Central Italy where the LN is electorally weak.

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# Preface

## 1. Introduction

As we reach the end of the millennium and look forward to the new one, it is apparent that a complexity of key economic, political, cultural and geographical transformations are taking place. In recent years the world in which we live has undergone rapid and profound change, which has, in some ways, drastically altered the global order. In particular, the demise of the Communist bloc, and consequently of the Cold War geo-political structure; the rise in importance of the European Union and other supranational bodies; and the intensification of economic and cultural globalisation processes, are all very significant changes. In the midst of these changes, it is apparent that the nation-state, which has been the building block of the world order for much of the twentieth century, now faces new challenges and threats to its legitimacy and purpose. It is in the context of these transformations that the resurgence of regionalism within Europe must be understood as a potent force, which manifests itself in different ways in different countries and regions.

The objective of this thesis is to contribute to, and further advance, the debates and discussions surrounding regionalism in Europe by examining the situation in Italy, where the resurgence of regionalism has been particularly marked in recent years. In particular, the focus of the study is the Northern League (Lega Nord) (LN) regionalist political party, which has risen to prominence in Italian politics over the last ten years. The LN's demands for greater regional autonomy are part of a wider trend amongst regionalist parties in Europe. However, the LN is distinct from the majority of other regionalist parties because it is not based in an area that has historic claims to nationhood. Instead, the LN has attempted to invent an ethnicity for the North of Italy to accompany its political project.

Political regionalism is not a new phenomenon in Italy and there have been a number of examples of regionalist political parties during the history of the Italian Republic. The most important of these are the irredentist regionalist movements in the French

and German speaking areas of Northern Italy, as well as on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. The relatively rapid rise of the LN has renewed and intensified the debates surrounding Italian regionalism. The political rhetoric of the party has changed and modified throughout its short history, but the fundamentals of its project have remained the same. This is based upon hostility towards Southern Italians and the central Italian state as well as the articulation of an (alleged) Northern Italian ethnicity and identity. Furthermore, the LN has developed a distinct style of politics, which is based upon the charisma and aggressive image of the party leader, Umberto Bossi, as well as the use of cultural symbolism, graphic political propaganda and a whole set of slogans new to Italian politics.

The political aim of the LN is the protection of Northern Italian economic and cultural interests and in order to do this the party proposed the creation of a federal Italian state, which would give greater autonomy to the North of Italy. More recently, however, the party has rejected its federalist discourse in favour of the secession of a place it calls 'Padania' (which corresponds to Northern and Central Italy). This hard-line shift in the LN's rhetoric has been accompanied by the party gaining its best ever national electoral result. In the 1996 elections, the LN gained just over ten per cent of the vote, and it was the largest party in the regions of Lombardy and Veneto. The LN has developed into an important political force in Italy and it has been the main instigator of debates surrounding the future of the Italian nation-state. Moreover, the LN has brought to the fore questions about Italian national unity and their alleged fragility and the party has articulated a new, and politically more contentious 'Northern question', which is superimposed upon the long standing 'Southern question' in Italy.

Accounting for the rise of the LN is a complicated task. The party has benefited from (and been implicated in) the transformations which have altered the face of Italian politics, economy and society during the last decade or so. Italian citizens were becoming increasingly resentful at emerging economic and political problems. This was especially the case in the North of the country, where there were widespread fears that the years of 'economic boom' were coming to an end. In the midst of this scenario, the LN was successful because it was able to exploit the problems facing the

people of the North of Italy as well as interpret and modify their concerns for its own political advancement. The rise of the LN also relates to a mix of other factors, both cultural and institutional. As the next section discusses, explaining the geography of the LN allows a fuller understanding of the party's political rise through problematising why the party's political discourse has been more successful in certain areas but not in others.

## 2. A political-economic geography

The LN, by virtue of its name, has a specific geographical focus to its political project. It is apparent, however, that although the LN claims to be the party of the 'North' (or 'Padania' as it now calls it) support for the party is not geographically uniform across the whole of the territory. In certain regions of the North of Italy, especially Lombardy and Veneto, the LN has a relatively high level of electoral support but within each of these regions there is still a variation in the electoral support for the party. In addition, the LN is organisationally strong, in terms of the distribution of its party offices, in certain areas of the North of Italy, which more or less correspond to the areas of stronger electoral support. On the other hand, in other areas of the North of Italy (and especially in Central Italy), the LN gains significantly lower levels of electoral support, which correspond to the areas where the party is less well-organised. Therefore, understanding the distinct electoral, as well as organisational geography of the LN, is crucial in order more fully to explain its rise to political prominence.

The main aim of this research is to examine how and why the success of the LN varies in different geographical contexts. Undoubtedly, geography is of vital importance, in a number of ways, to the structure, discourses and successes of the LN and also to regionalist political parties more generally. Firstly, geographical context is important in influencing how political and group identities are conditioned and produced because different identities are associated with particular places. This is the result of the interaction between a number of different factors, such as the symbolic, historical, cultural and linguistic specificities, which exist in certain places. Secondly, there are geographical variations in both the resources which political groups are able to mobilise as well as how political institutions, socio-economic conditions and cultural contexts are distributed territorially. These differences can either constrain and/or

assist the growth of regionalist political parties, in particular places (Painter 1995:165). Therefore, understanding the different geographical contexts in which the LN operates is vital in understanding why its political discourses are more popular in certain areas and not in others. Undoubtedly, this determines the overall success of the LN and also the ways in which its political discourses have had to be modified to reflect dominant political-geographical contexts.

One of the reasons why the development and electoral success of the LN varies geographically is because in certain areas the discourses and rhetoric of the LN have been viewed more favourably and generated more political support. Understanding why this is the case involves exploring a number of factors within particular geographical contexts, such as issues of uneven economic development and the importance of different political sub-cultures and identities present in certain places. By utilising what might be termed a 'political-economic' geographical approach, it is possible to understand the different socio-economic, political, institutional and cultural factors, which interact in particular places, to produce the different socio-political contexts for the LN.

The 'political-economic' approach utilised in this research builds upon a number of contemporary developments in human geography, which stress the interlinkages between the economic, political and social spheres in order to more fully understand contemporary geographical processes. The traditional 'political-economic' approach recognises the inter-connectedness between the geographical, the political and the economic, as Peet and Thrift (1994:3) explain:

> "the term 'political economy' is used to encompass a whole range of perspectives which sometimes differ from one another and yet share common concerns and a similar view point. The term does not imply geography as a type of economics. Rather economy is understood in its broad sense as social economy, or way of life, founded in production. In turn social production is viewed not as a neutral act by neutral agents but as a political act carried out by members of classes and other social groupings."

The traditional 'political-economic' approach also emphasises the importance of space to the ways in which economy, politics and society are constituted in particular places. Moreover, spatial relations are understood as inseparable from and interlinked to

social relations, so that it is not only the spatial that is socially constructed but also the social which is spatially constructed. This approach recognises the geographical differences that exist between places and how these influence the meaning, and significance of place in different areas. Furthermore, geography influences how the symbolic importance of place varies for different social groups, in different contexts (Massey 1984:4-5).

The importance of the connections between spatial and social relations is vital in how politics and political processes are understood in human geography. This is because, as Painter (1995:20) argues, political geography is concerned with the relationship between space and political processes, which means that:

> "if the idea that social relations are always inherently spatial is applied within political geography too, then the assumption that politics and geography are separate interacting phenomena becomes untenable. This implies that there can be no politics which is not geographical."

The traditional 'political-economic' approach provides a way of conceptualising the links between the economic and political 'spheres', which cannot be viewed or studied as separate from each other. However, by incorporating the recent trends within contemporary human geography, which stress the importance of the cultural and the social in understanding conceptions of both the 'economic' and the 'political', the traditional approach can be enriched. By incorporating the newer trends within human geography into the traditional 'political-economic' approach, it is possible to examine different perspectives and issues, which the older conceptions of 'political-economy' were less able to do. This is particularly important for the study of regionalism which cannot be fully understood by only examining the economy and socio-economic structures and how these influence the political 'sphere'. Instead, to more fully understood the resurgence of regionalism it is necessary to examine the political, economic as well as social and cultural spheres and the interactions between them.

Current trends in human geography stress that the traditional divisions between the separate sub-disciplines within the subject are inappropriate for an understanding of contemporary geographical processes (Painter 1995, Gregory et al 1994). This is because in the midst of the contemporary social transformations associated with the

processes of globalisation, it is problematic to view the economic, political and cultural 'spheres' as distinct from each other. It is more important and useful to study the interactions between the different 'spheres' in order to fully understand geographical processes and outcomes in particular places (Gregory 1994). This is especially important for analysing the LN because it is not possible to reduce the growth of the party to any one particular variable or factor. In certain areas, the growth of the party has been influenced by issues of economic restructuring and the political backlash against this. However, in other areas the LN has benefited from the decline and crisis of particular political sub-cultures and identities associated with certain political parties. On the other hand, in other areas it is the complex interaction of these and other factors, which has contributed to the electoral growth of the party.

A second important development in contemporary social and cultural geography is a focus upon the ways in which meaning is communicated. This recognises that meaning is by no means fixed or constant and is culturally, historically as well as geographically variable (Barnes and Duncan 1992:6). Moreover, the process of ascribing meaning varies geographically and is socially produced by dominant groups in society in order to advance and maintain their own interests and status. The political implications of this are important because certain issues can be given a particular meaning in certain social and geographical contexts, which may be different in other areas. This is particularly relevant to the LN and its political project because the LN has ascribed certain issues and terms with specific political meanings. According to the LN, the 'South' of Italy signifies a homogenous geographical unit, which is synonymous with 'corruption', 'Mafia' and 'inefficiency'. This has gained widespread political support in the North of Italy, however, it is a view of the 'South' that is clearly contestable.

Contemporary debates in human geography stress the importance of discourse analysis, which involves understanding how groups of meanings gain wider social and cultural significance to form dominant social and political discourses. Therefore, incorporating discourse analysis is another way in which the traditional 'political economic' approach can be enriched. According to Painter (1995:2) the term 'discourse' refers to:

"a range of meanings, or meaningful statements, which come to be linked together in a broader framework. The framework, or discourse, provides a particular 'mode of thinking' which allows us to understand things in a certain way. For example, a discourse might identify some issues as more important than others, or some forms of behaviours as better than others. They are not (necessarily) more important or better in any absolute sense, but they are made to seem so by the discourse."

Discourses form the frameworks for understanding the world, and they set out the limits within which ideas and practices are considered to be natural or normal in society. However, these limits are by no means fixed and are constantly redefined, challenged and transformed over time. The (re)production of discourses is linked to the dominant institutions of state and society, which create, endorse and modify existing discourses as a way of legitimising their continued existence and power (Barnes and Duncan 1992:8, Duncan and Ley 1993, Foucault 1981, Thrift 1983). The concept of discourse and the ways in which these are produced and communicated is particularly useful in an analysis of contemporary political-geographical research, as Agnew (1995:156) argues:

"Much of the geographical research connecting 'place' and 'politics' has tended to privilege the social and economic causes of support for political movements at the expense of examining the political-geographical claims and arguments of the movements themselves."

An important factor in the political rise of the LN has been its ability to incorporate different meanings, symbols and metaphors into a relatively coherent set of political discourses, which the party has managed to successfully communicate in a number of different ways. Therefore, an important aspect of the research reported here examined the political discourses and rhetoric of the LN, in order to understand how these have influenced and affected the success of the party.

A fourth important strand of contemporary human geography concerns the issue of identity formation (Pile and Thrift 1995, Philo 1991, Massey 1994). In particular, there is concern with understanding how different identities develop among contrasting social groups in particular places and how these are created and maintained over time (Painter 1995). Geographers are particularly concerned with how contemporary economic and cultural transformations associated with

globalisation are impacting on conventional conceptions of identity and in particular how modern communication technologies are creating more complex and contradictory forms of cultural identity (Morley and Robins 1995).

The impacts of contemporary social and economic restructuring processes are affecting the legitimacy and importance of the nation-state, which is turn in modifying conventional national political identities and affiliations (Camilleri and Falk 1992, Dunn 1994, Held 1994). This has given rise to more complex political and cultural identities and a recognition that it is possible to have multiple identities, which vary according to social and geographical context (Anderson 1996, Hooson 1994). In certain places this has given rise to new forms of social-political movements, such as regional autonomist and environmental movements (Castells 1997, Lyman 1995, Smith 1991). Considering issues of identity formation and political affiliation is another important way in which the traditional 'political-economic' approach can be enriched to encompass more wide-ranging and important contemporary debates.

With the emerging social and cultural complexity associated with the processes of globalisation, new forms of identity, both political and cultural, are being constructed. The spatiality of restructuring ensures that certain places are affected in different ways and the socio-political reactions to such changes are variable. The LN is a good example of a political regionalist party which has developed a new and distinct political identity in response to the impacts which globalisation has had upon Italian economy and society. The ways in which the party has created and maintained this political identity is linked to the nature of its political discourses and how they have been communicated. Utilising a 'political-economic' approach, which encompasses contemporary trends and issues in human geography, provides an effective way of analysing the complex political discourses of the LN. This approach allows an examination as to how and why, in different geographical contexts, the LN does not have the same impact or success. The next section discusses the ways in which the research was carried out.

# 3. Methodology

Prior to discussing the different methodologies utilised in this study, it is important to outline the personal context for the research, which influences my perspective on the LN and its politics. As a first generation Anglo-Italian, born in the UK, my perspective on the LN incorporates both the British as well as the Italian. My father is a Southern Italian immigrant to the UK and in part the stimulus to carry out this project stemmed from my desire to find out more about Italy. This was a desire to study more about a culture, society and environment which was relatively unknown to me, apart from holidays, which involved experiencing life in the Italian South. An enduring geographical question which these experiences posed, was the extent to which the way of life, culture and society of the South of Italy was the same elsewhere in Italy. Therefore, undertaking the research was as much a personal geographical exploration as an academic one, however, I did not anticipate the impacts which being Italian would have upon my fieldwork. This was not because my father was from the South of Italy (although, this did cause some problems) but mainly because of my name. The name 'Benito' has a specific political and historical significance in Italy, but little did I know that it would both constrain as well as assist my work on the LN! On the one hand, my name was of assistance because certain groups and political parties identified with it more readily, which helped me to gain greater access, however, other groups were more interested in the reasons why I had the name, and whether this was because of my political affiliations!

The first main focus of the research involved analysing the LN as a political entity, with the aim of understanding its changing strategies and rhetoric over time. This incorporated examining the party's complex political discourse and how the party elite developed and constructed particular discourses over time, with the use of symbols, literature and powerful speeches to maximise its political exposure. Understanding the development of the discourses of the LN was carried out by analysing sources such as party journals and magazines, speeches of representatives of the party, the symbols used to represent the party and its main policy objectives, as well as attending party events. In addition, it involved studying the political organisation of the party in terms of how it is arranged and structured. This is particularly important in relation to the

geography of support for the League in terms of the distribution of party offices and supporter networks and how these are used and organised by the party to maintain and develop electoral bases of support.

The second strand of the research involved analysing the geography of support for the LN, exploring why different people affiliate with the LN in certain areas and why support is strong in such areas. This is vital in order to understand the different factors which influence or constrain support for the LN in particular areas. The LN has a particular electoral geography of support, with some areas much stronger than others. Therefore, in order to understand why this is, the research explored how and why in different geographical contexts, different social groups affiliated with the party's discourse. Clearly, this relates to the interaction between the socio-economic, cultural, political and institutional spheres in certain areas, although to overcome these the LN has been able to modify the nature of its political rhetoric and discourse. How the party is able to do this was another aspect of the research.

To examine how different geographical contexts impact on and influence the discourses of the LN, three separate case-study areas were chosen. The three different areas were selected on the basis of electoral and socio-economic data so as to have contrasting levels of electoral support for the party. The first area was the province of Varese, in the region of Lombardy, in which the LN is relatively electorally strong. Conversely, the second case-study area is the province of Macerata, in the Marche region of Central Italy, which has a very low level of electoral support for the LN. The autonomous province of Trentino was chosen as the third case-study area; firstly, this is because it has an intermediate level of electoral support for the LN and also because it has a contrasting set of institutional, political and socio-economic structures due to its constitutional autonomy from the central Italian state. This means that it constitutes a contrasting geographical reality when compared to the other case-study areas as well as the majority of other provinces across Northern Italy.

Figure One :- Map to show the locations of the three case study areas studied
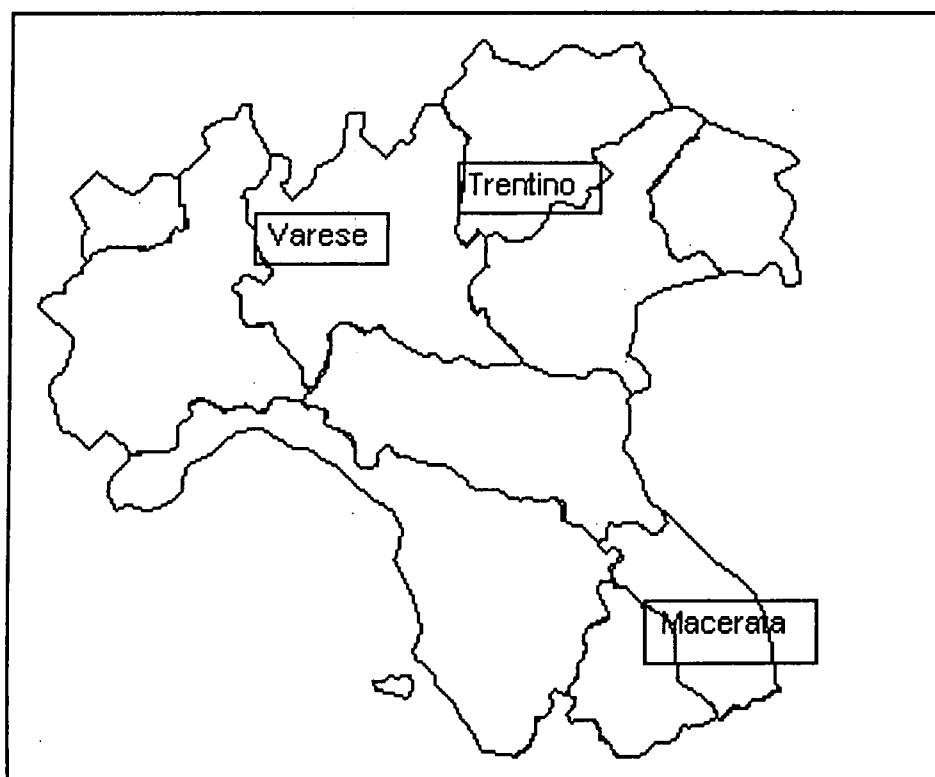
Within each of the three-case study areas intensive interviews were carried out with LN party activists, representatives and supporters. All the interviews were conducted in Italian. The research was carried out during the period from January 1996 to August 1996. The interviews were largely semi-structured and on a one-to-one basis, although some group interviews were carried out. The interviews explored a range of issues; the most important being why and for what reasons people supported the LN. In addition, other issues related to the structure of the party in the local area; the role that the interviewees carried out in the party and their views on the different discourses of the party. The number of interviews carried out with LN supporters varied in each of the case-study areas, due to differences in electoral support and organisational structures.

In Varese, there were many more LN supporters and representatives than in the other two case-study areas and so it was possible to carry out a greater number of interviews. In addition, because the party was very well-organised and developed in the province it was possible to examine aspects of the party which could not be explored in the other two areas. In particular, the LN has gained political power both at the commune and provincial level in Varese. Therefore, it was possible to interview LN local politicians in order to examine the extent to which the party has been successful at the local political level. Moreover, the LN has developed a network of youth groups (*Gruppo Giovani*) in Varese, for youth supporters of the party. Consequently, it was possible to carry out interviews with members of these groups, in order to explore their views of the party and why they support it. Overall, around 50 interviews were carried out with supporters, representatives and key-informants in Varese.

In Trentino and Macerata, on the other hand, because of the lower levels of electoral support for the LN, fewer interviews were carried out. It was possible to interview key-informants within the party but there were fewer party supporters and activists. In Trentino, twelve interviews with key informants and supporters were carried out, while in Macerata the figure was five.

A third strand of the research in each of the case-study areas was to explore how specific socio-economic, political, institutional and cultural contexts facilitated or hindered the growth of the LN. The rationale behind this was to explore whether there is a link between geographical context and the growth of a specific political sub-culture associated with the LN. As Amin (1997a:6) argues:

> "Interestingly, only at the margins has research in English explored the connections between the institutions of the business systems and local political subcultures [in Italy]."

The aim of this aspect of the project was to contribute to this developing area of research. There was not the time or the resources within this research project to do a full institutional audit within the three different provinces. Instead, the focus was to analyse and understand the LN and its discourses, structures and strategies and to combine this with an analysis of the specific socio-institutions and political-economies of the three different provinces to see how these have influenced or constrained the growth of LN. In each of the case-study areas this involved carrying out intensive semi-structured interviews with a number of different key-informants from a variety of institutions and organisations. These included Trade Unions, other political parties, the Church, private enterprise, local newspapers, industrial associations and Chambers of Commerce, within each of the three areas. In Varese, a total of 24 interviews were carried with these different groups; in Trentino, the number carried out was 37; while in Macerata, ten interviews were carried out. The aim was to understand the specific socio-economic, political and cultural contours of the three areas and how these have influenced the growth and development of the LN.

The information gained from the interviews with both LN supporters and representatives as well as different socio-institutional key informants is presented in the thesis as extracts from notes taken in the field. The reason for this is that the interviews carried out were not tape recorded. Instead, extensive notes were taken both during and after the interviews in order to record the information. There are several reasons why this method was used; firstly, it was apparent that both the supporters and (in particular) the party activists of the LN were very hostile to outsiders and particularly to journalists. The interviews explored relatively sensitive political and social issues and so it was apparent that the use of a tape recorder was

not appropriate in these circumstances. This allowed a greater amount of in-depth information to be discussed than would have been the case in the presence of a tape recorder. Moreover, this allowed a greater degree of trust and reciprocity between interviewer and the interviewees to develop over time, which was conducive to facilitating informative discussions. The same can be said for the interviews which were undertaken with the different socio-institutions in the three provinces. Finally, the use of a tape recorder is not an established research tool in Italian social science.

The extracts presented in the thesis represent the notes which were taken in the field. There is an inevitable personal filter implicit in this method, and because the interviews were carried out in Italian there is the added issue of translation. However, the intention of the interviews was to gain as much information on the themes and issues related to the different aspects of the research. The aim was not to analyse the text of the interviews and the expressions used, not least because this would have been very difficult bearing in mind the interviews were carried out in Italian. It would have been practically impossible to analyse the Italian language and the colloquialisms used and then translate these into English, whilst maintaining the linguistic and cultural meaning. Instead, what is presented are extracts from the interviews undertaken, used to demonstrate some of the findings from the research.

The thesis is structured into eight chapters. The first of these deals with the issue of the resurgence of regionalism in Europe and explores some of the theoretical perspectives which help to account for this complex phenomenon. Chapter Two focuses on the historical development of Italy, which is fundamental in conceptualising the resurgence of regionalism in contemporary Italy. Chapter Three concentrates on the growth and electoral development of the LN, discussing how the party's discourse and rhetoric has evolved and changed over time. Chapter Four examines in more detail the organisational structures of the party as well as its key discourses and why different social groups affiliate with them. This issue is discussed in greater depth in the three case-study chapters. Chapter Five focuses on the province of Varese, Chapter Six on Trentino and Chapter Seven on Macerata. The final Chapter pulls together the main findings of the empirical research and discusses some of the wider conclusions and issues, relating the findings on the LN to an understanding of the importance of regionalism in contemporary Europe.

# Chapter One : The Complexities of Contemporary Regionalism

## 1. Introduction : the resurgence of regionalism

All over Europe, from the former Yugoslavia through Italy and Scotland, regional autonomy parties are loudly denouncing the perceived injustices of existing nation-states (Newell 1994). The resurgence of regionalist political parties has had a considerable, though variable, impact on contemporary European politics in recent decades and there are numerous examples of such parties across Europe. For example, in Spain the Catalonian Nationalist Party and the Basque separatist party, ETA are the main regionalist parties. In the United Kingdom, there is the Scottish National Party as well as the Welsh National Party (*Plaid Cymru*). In Belgium, the *Vlaams Blok* and *Volksunie* regionalist political parties strive for greater regional autonomy for Flanders. In France, there are several examples of regionalist political parties, such as the Corsican National Party, as well as smaller regionalist parties in the areas of Savoy, Breton, Occitan and Alsace (Kellas 1991:86). In Italy, there are several regionalist parties such as the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (SVP) in South Tyrol, as well as the *Union Valdotaine* in the Valle d'Aosta region. However, it is the emergence in the last ten years or so, of the Northern League (Lega Nord) (LN) political party, in the North of Italy, which has given a new impetus to Italian regionalism.

The fundamental question is why is the resurgence in regionalism occurring in contemporary European nation-states at the end of the twentieth century when it was assumed that the phenomenon would fade with the processes of modernisation. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the reasons why the resurgence of regionalism in Italy, as well as across Europe, has taken place. Firstly, this involves defining what regionalism actually is, which allows a further understanding as to why the resurgence has taken place. The second section of the chapter focuses on the different theoretical approaches to understanding regionalism; the third section discusses the challenges facing the contemporary nation-state, which are bound up with the resurgence of

regionalism. The fourth section discusses some of the implications and outcomes of the changes and transformations to the nation-state in Europe and how these are influencing regionalism.

The crucial question is what exactly does the term regionalism signify? The problem is that regionalism is a complex phenomenon and as such is hard to define specifically. Clearly, regionalism can be understood in different ways, such as a threat to, or protest against the State, carrying dangers of incohesion, fragmentation, and/or separatism, or alternatively as a mechanism for modifying State authority with the aim of gaining greater autonomy (Jones and Keating 1995:9). In addition, a key question to ask is whether regionalism is a new political perspective, a temporary phenomenon, or a serious and lasting consequence of and challenge to the deficiencies of the nation-state and hence a new form of modernity (Hueglin 1986:440). In the midst of the contemporary challenges faced by the contemporary nation-state, regionalist political movements take on a new significance since they are able to give meaning to place and reconstitute social and political relations within places (Keating 1996:52). Therefore, in some cases, regionalism can be understood as a socio-political project with aspirations to restore past ethnic and cultural identities and autonomies. In other cases, regionalism can be seen as an invention of the present, often being based upon distorted histories and contemporary claims to specific ethnic identities. On other occasions regionalism combines both of these factors in order to gain legitimacy. Keating (1996:53) argues that:

> "for the most part, the peripheral nationalisms [or regionalisms] of developed western societies represent attempts to come to terms with the changing constellation of power and to reconstitute politics on a territorial basis which is legitimised historically but which can be used to confront contemporary political and economic realities."

In the 1950s and 1960s there was general consensus amongst academics and policy makers alike that the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation associated with post-war economic growth would eradicate the potent force of regionalism and nationalism. As Agua and Gates (1986:1) point out:

"studies of the political development of modern industrial states have followed a centralist and deterministic paradigm in which successful modernisation is equated with the triumph of the centre over the periphery, with the integration of local institutions, social networks and political culture into a remarkably uniform social system."

It was thought that the diffusion of industrialisation and technology from the central core of states would encourage the spread of the centre's universalist values, erode regional languages and promote the development of central state bureaucratic systems. In spite of inevitable opposition to these processes from certain sectors of society, which Lipset (1975) calls 'revolts against modernity', the outcome would be the development of relatively homogenous nation-states. Clearly, this has not been the case because marked regional economic differences persist, as well as distinct languages, cultures and identities, in the majority of nation-states, and in particular in those states which are the most industrially and economically advanced (Keating 1996:43-44).

Undoubtedly, the resurgence of regionalism is related to the enduring importance of regional diversity within contemporary nation-states. Regional differences are not only evident in socio-economic terms but also in, political, linguistic and a whole range of other ways. It is the interaction between these differences, within diverse regional contexts, which influence contemporary regionalism. Understanding the diverse expressions of regionalism in Europe requires an analysis of a combination of driving forces, influences and factors, as the next section examines.

## 2. Understanding contemporary regionalism

It would be a mistake to assume that all versions of contemporary European regionalism have exactly the same driving forces. Clearly, regionalist political parties and movements form a heterogeneous category in terms of their structures and specificities of demands, for example, there is little in the way of a common economic policy or a universalistic view of the structure of society and not all are linguistically or ethnically based (Urwin 1982:426). Consequently, this diversity of forms of regionalism raises several issues about the nature of the phenomenon and how it can best understood. Firstly, the question is to what extent are such regionalist movements similar or different? Indeed, what are the key features, demands, and

driving forces behind them? Are there any common ingredients of such occurrences of regionalism? To what extent are such movements part of a wider socio-political trend, which is reacting against increasingly centralised bureaucratic states? Do they represent new forms of political expression and open up new avenues for forms of emancipatory democracy? Or do such movements represent a regressive move towards increased xenophobia and forms of exclusion?

This section addresses some of the key issues and questions in order to understand more fully the nature and significance of contemporary regionalism. Firstly, there is a discussion of how best to define the different forms and examples of regionalist political projects. Secondly, the fundamental components of contemporary regionalism are analysed as well as the different theoretical approaches to regionalism and nationalism. Thirdly, the impact of contemporary societal transformations upon the resurgence of regionalism is examined in order to comprehend in more detail the phenomenon of regionalism.

## 2.1 Defining regionalism

It is not possible to construct a single model or theory explaining all the different cases of regionalism (Jones and Keating 1995:9). In addition, regionalisms differ in their character as well as their strength, depending on the conditions in particular local societies and the impact on them of national and international forces (Keating 1988). Furthermore, although it is the resurgence of regionalism in recent decades that is of most interest it is important not to forget that regionalism is one of the oldest problems which exists in Europe (Schiera 1992).

Bearing in mind the issues outlined, it is useful to differentiate between two categories of regionalism. Separating out the diversity of contemporary manifestations of regionalism into broad categories allows the phenomenon to be more easily understood and analysed. Although the categories are by no means the only ones that could be used, they are useful because they allow distinctions to be made between the various types of regionalism. The categories used here are 'institutional' and 'autonomist' regionalism. The former relates more to the processes of 'regionalisation' which have taken place within and between European states, whereas

the latter refers to the forms of minority, separatist and ethnic regionalisms which have gained increasing exposure in recent decades. Also, it must be pointed out that the two categories are not mutually exclusive because there are often many links between the two, for example, often the processes of regionalisation within a state develop into, and provide legitimisation for, forms of 'autonomist' regionalism.

### 2.1.1 Institutional regionalism

In the 1960s, many European states adopted regional development policies as an extension of schemes of national and sectoral planning. These schemes were justified on both political and economical grounds; firstly, because it was argued that such schemes would facilitate development in peripheral regions and so ultimately enhance national output. In political terms, it was another way of legitimising state power by providing financial and infrastructural support to peripheral regions, which in turn (it was hoped) would translate into support for central political authority from the periphery (Keating et al 1995:2). There are several examples of such regional schemes across Europe, for example, in Italy, the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (the 'Fund for the South') was set up to provide aid and assistance to the Italian South in order to promote its socio-economic development.

The overall results of these regional development schemes were variable; in some European countries the outcome was a fair degree of regional economic convergence, however, in others divergence between the periphery and the core remained marked. Consequently, over time regional development became increasingly politicised and conflicts developed between central governments and peripheral regions, mainly because in certain countries such regions had gained a greater degree of power. The consequence was that certain peripheral regions were becoming more assertive in a variety of ways, in order to gain greater funds and assistance from central government. However, in certain peripheral regions the demands placed upon the centre went much further than simple financial support; in some cases, new social forces emerged and historical claims for regional and national distinctiveness were reasserted (Keating 1995 et al:2). Thus, in certain cases the processes of regionalisation has helped to legitimise and give scope to the emergence of forms of autonomist and ethnic regionalism, which have asserted different kinds of pressures and demands upon central governments.

Another perspective on institutional regionalism is formulated by Ohmae (1995:5) who uses an economic-institutional definition of regionalism. Ohmae uses the term 'region states' which may lie entirely within or across the borders of a nation state but these have very little to do with ethnic or nationalistic identities. According to Ohmae, what defines 'region states' is not the location of their political borders but the fact that they are the right size and scale to be the true, natural business units in today's global economy. This line of argument is very much related to the economic processes of globalisation and how these impinge upon the stability and legitimacy of contemporary nation-states. Ohmae argues that the nation-state is increasingly a nostalgic fiction and it makes even less sense today, for example, than it did a few years ago to speak of Italy or Russia or China as single economic units. Instead, these countries are made up of a combination of different territories, which have vastly different economic needs and roles within the global economy (Ohmae 1995:12). In particular, in relation to Italy, Ohmae (1995:16) poses the question:

> "what sense does it make, for example, to think of Italy as a coherent economic entity within the EU? There is no "average Italy". There is no large social group or economic group precisely at the midpoint represented by such averages no constituency specially advantaged by - and, therefore, eager to support - split-the-difference political compromises. There is, instead, an industrial north and a rural south, which are vastly different in their ability to contribute and their need to receive. In economic terms, there is simply no justification for treating Italy as a single-interest entity."

This is certainly a provocative statement, even if it is somewhat generalised in its view of the Italian economy but it exemplifies Ohmae's economic focus on regionalism. Thus, in an ever increasingly globalised economy, Ohmae (1995:80) argues that it is geographical units like northern Italy; Baden Würtemberg; Wales; San Diego/Tijuana; Hong Kong/southern China; the Silicon Valley/Bay Area in California, which more accurately constitute the territorial dividing lines of the world map. These dividing lines are based purely on economic status and strength within the global economy and are not political units (Ohmae 1995:89). However, Ohmae somewhat over simplifies the case for economic regionalism not least because the economic units he quotes are not complete homogenous units but actually contain a significant degree of internal economic differences themselves. In addition, Ohmae makes no mention of ethnicity and cultural difference and their impacts upon regionalism, which are complicating

factors. Indeed, the next section focuses on the importance of ethnicity, culture and identity upon contemporary regionalism.

## 2.1.2 Autonomist regionalism

'Autonomist' regionalism is a much more complex phenomenon to define because of its diverse nature. It is, however, precisely this type of regionalism which has gained the most attention and interest in recent years not least because of the growth of regional political movements such as the Scottish National Party and of course the Northern League (Lega Nord) in Italy. The complexity of this form of regionalism is related to the fact that it borders on what might also be termed 'nationalism'. Both regionalism and nationalism are very closely related especially when linguistic or cultural characteristics define a particular region and there is also a regional political movement striving for greater autonomy (Kellas 1991:87). Indeed, some writers treat nationalism and regionalism as the same subject, and it is certainly very difficult to draw a line between them in some countries. For example, Keating (1988) uses the term 'regional nationalism' to describe regional political movements. This has the advantage of rooting these movements in territory, and distinguishing them from non-territorial movements for self-government (Keating 1996:54).

Other commentators utilise other terms to define examples of 'autonomist' regionalism, such as 'stateless nations', 'separatists' and 'secessionists', which is testimony to the complexity of the issue. Piccone (1991:8) and Biorcio (1993:43) use the term 'regional populism' as another way of defining contemporary regionalism. They argue that since the end of the 1980s there has been a resurgence of populism in the more industrialised European countries and new populist political organisations have come from many ideological directions. One element of this growth has been in political movements seeking regional autonomy such as the Lega Nord in Italy, or the Flemish *Vlaams Blok* (Biorcio 1993:44/45). Piccone (1991:8) argues that new populist political formations such as the Lega Nord in Northern Italy, which is the paradigmatic expression of this phenomenon, warrant careful scrutiny precisely because, within the context of contemporary societal transformations, they articulate the same democratic spirit that gave rise to the original American Constitution and the Swiss Confederation, and provide a concrete alternative to a moribund liberalism.

The difficulty in defining regionalism is quite apparent, however, in spite of this there are certain common components which are fundamental to the majority of regionalist political movements. The next section outlines the nature of these elements and the importance of them to contemporary regionalism.

## 2.2 The components of contemporary regionalism

There are a number of key components and elements in the different manifestations of contemporary regionalism. However, these vary according to the specific geographical, political, socio-economic and cultural contexts of each of the different regionalist political projects. The three most important components are the views and opinions of the central state, another is the identification with some piece of territory as a source of regional and political identity and another is the development of some kind of group identity (Urwin 1982:427).

The first of these components relates to the reaction against what is perceived as inefficient state centrality, which has fuelled a number of regionalist tensions and problems. Indeed, Miglio (1991-1992:41) claims that:

> "from Canada to what was Yugoslavia, from Belgium to the ex-Soviet Union, the unitary State is increasingly in crisis because its 'static nature' and its size can no longer satisfy the various needs of its citizens by coercively homogenising them. These needs multiply and particularise relentlessly and to a hitherto unknown extent, giving birth once again to micro-nations as the appropriate natural locations in which to find recognition and satisfaction. Consequently, an entire phase of the history of the modern State - from the seventeenth through to the twentieth century - is coming to an end. No longer may the State be considered an imposing entity which will always endure, unitary and immobile, across the centuries as a trans-historical reference point."

The reaction against state centralism seems to be a common theme amongst the rhetoric of regional political movements. This is mainly because of the concentration of political authority and resources at the centre, which has hindered the development of sufficient power to the regions away from the centre. Thus, the centralism of the modern state has, in certain cases, engendered the perception of geopolitical distance, socio-cultural difference, and socio-economic dependence between certain regions and the central state (Hueglin 1986:448).

The importance of territory is paramount for regional political movements, and any group that is not territorially concentrated will find it much more difficult to mobilise support (Urwin 1982:427). One of the reasons for this reinvention of territory relates to the processes of economic globalisation and the increasing recognition that territory is an important element in economic adaptation. The key point is that what matters politically is not so much the changes in the global economy as their impact in particular places (Keating 1996:48). Therefore, territory is an important resource for regional political mobilisation but also as a rhetorical tool in regionalist political projects in relation to the processes of globalisation.

Another crucial element in the mobilisation of support for contemporary regionalist claims is the (re)creation of some form of 'group' identity. Indeed, more or less all contemporary regional movements lay claim to some form of group identity (Urwin 1982:428). What constitutes a 'group' identity is variable; for some regional movements ethnicity, language and a common heritage form the basis of the group identity. Political mobilisation is easier where there is linguistic distinctiveness because language is a key political resource for any regional movement and one which easily leads to potential conflict (Urwin 1982:428). Saussure (1974) asserts, in relation to the issue of identity in language, that it is wholly a function of difference. This difference is defined not by the positive content of language but negatively, by relation to others. The precise characteristic is in being what the others are not (Saussure 1974:117). On the other hand, language is not the only factor upon which a regional sense of 'identity' is built; there are in fact a range of other factors which constitute a sense of identity, the most notable being religion. However, it is apparent that whatever factor constitutes group identity the main factor is that it is really difference which is constitutive of identity (Morley and Robins 1995:45).

Schlesinger (1987:235) also offers a useful perspective in relation to identity formulation. He argues that:

> "identity is as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion, and the critical factor for defining the ethnic group therefore becomes the social *boundary* which defines the group with respect to other groups...not the cultural reality within those borders."

How the 'group identity' is formulated and maintained is also a key issue. Clearly, 'group identity' is not abstract but is a matter of the relative power of different groups to define a particular identity, and their abilities to mobilise different definitions through their control of cultural institutions (Morley and Robins 1995:47). Consequently, it is the dominant cultural groups which can sustain a particular identity through the control of state institutions. Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) refer to this as the 'invention of tradition', arguing that tradition is a malleable concept which can be modified over time from generation to generation. In addition, Wright (1985) argues that tradition is very much a matter of present-day politics, and that powerful institutions function to select particular values from the past, and to mobilise them in contemporary practices. It is precisely through such mechanisms of cultural reproduction that a particular version of the 'collective memory', and thus a particular sense of national identity, is produced and sustained over time (Morley and Robins 1995:47)

The important issue is what transforms a territorial base and a group identity, (however this may be defined), into a regionalist political response. It is clear that resources, such as linguistic identity, only constitute a potential for regionalism (Urwin 1982:429). Clearly, one important catalyst is economic change, which can create conflicts between different regional groups and in turn it is conflict which can make regional political mobilisation more potent in certain circumstances (Urwin 1982:428). There are two contrasting scenarios in which economic conflicts may cause regionalist tendencies. Firstly, it may well be a question of inconsistency between economic strength and/or potential and cultural status. Secondly, a potentially significant regional territorial challenge, in contemporary Europe, comes from those regions with a superior economic status. It is from these regions, such as Northern Italy, Catalonia or Flanders, that the resurgence of regionalism has been the most pronounced in recent years. Furthermore, such demands for greater autonomy present central governments with new challenges precisely because of the economic superiority of such regions, which have the economic power to counterbalance the political resources of the centre (Urwin 1982:429).

The prevalence of economic catalysts in mobilising territorial and regional claims and conflicts should not be under-estimated. Although economic change in the broadest sense may be necessary, it is not solely sufficient, but when combined with a cultural and ethnic base regional political mobilisation becomes a serious threat (Urwin 1982:430). This is even more the case when a regionalist movement has a degree of institutional and political power at the local or regional level. This gives the regionalist party greater capacity for financial and bureaucratic decision making and also to gain recognition both nationally and internationally (Keating 1996:54).

Having outlined the difficulties involved in defining what regionalism is and the different ways it manifests itself, it is apparent that there is a need to consider conventional approaches to nationalism, which is the phenomenon most closely related to regionalism. The approaches to nationalism are completely valid and very useful in order to understand contemporary regionalism. This is because nationalism and regionalism are interchangeable terms; in certain cases nationalism is used to label a particular example, whereas in other cases regionalism is used. It is more useful to emphasise the compatibility of the two terms rather than try to differentiate between them, as the next section discusses.

## 2.3 Theories of nationalism and regionalism

Nationalism has been one of the most powerful political forces of the modern age and consequently there is a wide ranging debate on its meaning and content and over the historical specificity of the term. Nationalism is a doctrine of self-determination and is a way of linking the individual to the collective, bridging the past with the future, tradition with modernity, and reconciling the universal with the particular. It also links the discrete domains into which modernisation divides human existence; the political, the economic, the social and the cultural, but nationalism cannot be divided in a simplistic manner into economic, political, or cultural nationalism. It is the inter-relationship among these which gives every nationalism its particular meaning (Keating 1996:1). Also, nationalism can take psychological, cultural or political forms and usually all three; nationalist ideology can be left-wing, right-wing, constructive of new states or destructive of existing states, it can protect or destroy freedom, establish peace or lead to war (Kellas 1991:33). The conventional literature

has focused on the growth of nationalism and nationalist movements and tried to explain the reasons why nationalism has been such a potent force in the history of the nation-state. In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, no single overarching theory has been developed. Hroch (1995:60) argues that all defensible conclusions still remain no more than partial findings, and all 'theories' should be taken as projects for further research.

Anderson (1983:15) defines the nation as an imagined political community, which is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. He argues that:

> "The reason for this is that the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in each of their minds lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1983:15)."

Deutsch (1966) argues that a people or nation is a 'community of social communication', which is derived from the development of a 'high culture' with universities, art literature and music. It is the diffusion of such cultural and social artefacts which facilitates the feeling of community and nation over time. Both of these perspectives are of value because they avoid seeing nation and nationalism as being simply 'natural' givens but instead as cultural constructs, which can be modified over time with the passing of generations. In particular, Anderson's 'imagined community' is very useful because it takes into account the psychological, emotional and social processes involved in the construction of nation and nationalism. This is very relevant in relation to contemporary regionalism because it is often the case that regionalist movements try to create or enhance a feeling of 'imagined community' in order to strengthen their political legitimacy and promote a sense of 'group identity'. For example, in the case of the LN, the party is trying to promote a 'group identity' based upon a common ethnic and cultural identity related to a place called 'Padania', which has never existed geographically or historically.

Another important contribution to the theoretical debate surrounding nationalism is provided by Hechter (1975) who formulated his theory of 'internal colonialism'. This can be seen as a landmark contribution to nationalism; Hechter's basic line of argument is that modernisation and increased contact between ethnic groups within a state will not necessarily bring about ethnic unity, but will be just as likely to lead to

ethnic conflict. The main reason for this is that the economic, political and cultural inequalities between the regions in a country will relegate peripheral regions to an inferior position, leaving the core region dominant. Consequently, Hechter argues, the reaction to this in the peripheral regions will be hostility to the core, and if these regions are also national in character, this will take the form of nationalism. Thus, Hechter saw Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalism as the result of 'internal colonialism' by the English core (Kellas 1991:39). The complex economic, political and cultural transformations currently underway, however, render the 'internal colonialism' thesis more difficult to apply. Contemporary regionalism and nationalism is not only confined to those regions which are relatively economically peripheral but also to those regions which are relatively economically superior but may have less political power and influence. In addition, contemporary regionalisms are not always based upon a clearly identifiable 'national' or 'regional' identity within certain areas because contemporary identities are not only narrowly based simply on ethnicity but are manifest in different ways.

Mughan (1979) refines the 'internal colonialism' thesis by analysing the nature of power relations between core and peripheral groups. He divides power resources into two categories : *de jure* and *de facto*; the former derive from the constitution of the state (for example, the right to vote), while the latter concern the qualitative differences between people (for example, their wealth, education, and so on). According to Mughan (1979) It is when these two types of power resource do not correspond for any one ethnic group that conflict develops. Thus a rich ethnic group which is not strong in political power will rebel, and try to change its political position. In particular, Mughan uses the example of Belgium to show how the rising economic power of the Flemish in a state dominated by French-speakers has led to Flemish nationalism and demands for the reconstruction of the Belgian state along 'consociational' lines based upon ethnicity and language. The French-speaking Walloons, for their part, also became nationalist when their primacy in *de jure* constitutional and cultural power was shown to be out-of-step with their declining economic *de facto* power (Kellas 1991:63).

Another important perspective on regionalism and nationalism is espoused by Rokkan and Urwin (1982) who reject the 'diffusion' model of Deutsch, but also do not endorse the 'internal colonial' model of Hechter. Instead, they argue that the key issue that can lead to occurrences of nationalism is the mismatch between cultural, economic and political roles:

> "there is no simple centre-periphery polarity across culture, economy and politics. Peripheral predicaments and politicisation emerge out of the incongruity between cultural, economic and political roles, an incongruity which has existed on the continent as long as there have been states. While this remains unresolved, the potential for territorial problems remains, irrespective of the waxing and waning of individual parties and movements" (Rokkan and Urwin 1982:192).

The argument of Rokkan and Urwin builds into a more complex analysis of centre and periphery relations, which takes into account the political and cultural aspects of regionalism and nationalism rather than just the economic. This is in stark contrast to the theory of Gellner (1983) whose theory of nationalism stresses the primacy of material conditions in shaping political thought and social change. He proposes a fundamentally economic reason for the rise of nationalism, which led to the creation, in the nineteenth century, of a number of nation-states. According to Gellner, it was the development of the 'industrial society' which was one of the main stimuli for the growth of nationalism because industrialisation required particular forms of polity and culture to facilitate economic growth. The breakdown of the feudal state, and the emergence of centralised 'sovereign' authority was important for the development of nationalism, for it provided a strong state structure from which a homogeneous nation-state could be shaped. Therefore, Gellner's theory deals with the reasons why industrialising states adopted a national form in order to prosper, and the nationalism which was associated with that, however, it says little about the primordial roots of nationalism, and its powerful emotional appeal. Furthermore, it has very limited use in relation to contemporary nationalism and regionalism, which often is occurring in strongly industrialised nation-states (Kellas 1991:42-44).

Another way of theorising the different forms of nationalism is provided by Keating (1996:3) who argues that the literature on nationalism has often recognised two ideal types - the 'ethnic' and the 'civic'. The difference between the two is based on the

question of who constitutes the nation; ethnic nationalism presents membership of the national community as given (or ascriptive), whereas civic nationalism sees individuals voluntarily constituting themselves collectively. This division of nationalism into two is very useful because it allows the diversity of the phenomenon to be more fully understood.

Firstly, ethnic nationalism sees nations and nationalism as constituted by distinct ethnic groups. Undoubtedly, ethnicity and ethno-nationalism has been a very important defining feature of twentieth century politics. In essence, this is 'exclusive', since it excludes from membership of the nation those people who do not share a common ethnicity, which usually means a supposed common descent (Kellas 1991:51). Another proponent of the importance of ethnicity in relation to nationalism is Smith (1986). He argues that modern nations simply extend, deepen and streamline the ways in which members of *ethnie* (Smith's term for ethnic groups) were associated and communicated together. Smith (1986:216) claims that:

> "it is clear that modern nations and nationalism have only extended and deepened the meanings and scope of older ethnic concepts and structures. Nationalism has certainly universalised these structures and ideals, but modern 'civic' nations have not in practice really transcended ethnicity or national sentiments...In terms of ends, as opposed to means, there is a remarkable continuity between nations and ethnie, nationalism and ethnicism; continuity but not identity."

This perspective is controversial and problematic because it is difficult to define exactly what ethnicity is and on what basis it is constituted. Moreover, it ignores the fact that ethnicity is also constructed and as such becomes modified over time. For example, in the nineteenth century, ethnicity was based loosely upon the concept of 'race', but in recent decades the use of race in this context has largely been abandoned. Instead, ethnicity is presented as a form of ascriptive identity, that is an identity which people are given rather than choose and is used as a basis for social relations and political mobilisation (Keating 1996:3). Furthermore, there are different perspectives on how actually to define ethnicity in relation to nationalism, which further complicate the issue. For example, 'primordialists', such as Smith (1986), believe that ethnic identities are deep-rooted and are the cause, albeit not in a strictly determinist manner, of mobilisation around the theme of nationalism. On the other

hand, 'situationists' see ethnic self-identification as the product rather than the cause of mobilisation so that individuals define themselves collectively in 'ethnic' terms in order to extract resources in systems where rewards are to be had from such self-identification, or where necessary to defend themselves from persecution or oppression. So much so that many people can claim different ethnic identities in different contexts, for different purposes (Keating 1996:4).

Although ethnicity has been and still is a very powerful force in contemporary politics, not every ethnic group identifies itself as a nation or makes claims for territorial self-government. Also, most nation-states, in turn, comprise several different ethnic groups and so nearly every claim for territorial autonomy based on ethnic identity leads to a counter claim by other groups within the society which assert that they too deserve the rights of self-determination. There are, of course, extreme cases of contemporary societal fragmentation along these lines, for example, in the Lebanon or the Balkans, but there are plenty of others where one ethnic group comes into direct conflict with another. Therefore, ethnic nationalism cannot serve as a universalist doctrine since the boundaries of the ethnic groups are always in contention (Keating 1996:4-5).

Civic nationalism, on the other hand, is a different mode of nation-building, which is based upon common values and institutions, and patterns of social interaction. Instead of ethnicity the bearers of national identity are institutions, customs, historical memories and rational/secular values. Anyone can join the nation irrespective of birth or ethnic origins. The base for civic nationalism is a territorially defined community, which is inclusive of all social groups within a particular territory. There needs also to be a structured set of political and social interactions guided by common values and a sense of common identity. The best example of civic nationalism is the United States of America, based as it is upon a founding doctrine in the constitution, which allows for the assimilation of immigrants. Thus, civic nationalism tends to start from the individual and build to the nation, rather than deriving individual rights and duties from common nationality (Keating 1996:5). In this vein, nationalism can be seen as an essentially political phenomenon, so that nations can be said to 'exist' only insofar as they have acquired, or have manifested some sort of aspiration to achieve statehood

or some sort of recognition of sovereignty or political subjectivity (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:11).

Ultimately, although the distinction between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism is useful, it is necessary to bear two things in mind. Firstly, these categories are ideal types, which are abstractions against which to measure reality and as such must not be taken as descriptions of any given movement. Secondly, the two categories are normative and value laden. It is in the doctrine, the bases of their appeal and the strategies of nation-building that civic and ethnic nationalism differ (Keating 1996:7). Any given regionalist or nationalist movement may contain both civic and ethnic elements in its origins and use both types of appeal in its rhetoric and doctrine. So certain nationalist movements may make both types of claim depending on the circumstances and the audience and certainly leaders of civic movements may seek to invent an ethnic identity as a mechanism for political mobilisation. This is in fact what happened with the Lega Nord in its early years and also in its most recent phase of development, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

These theories are important to an understanding of both regionalism and nationalism; each of them aims to explain how the phenomenon came to dominate world politics in the modern period and it is apparent that developments in history are closely related to the emergence of nationalism in different parts of the world at different periods (Kellas 1991:50). However, the fundamental question to ask is whether it is necessary to formulate new or rearticulated ways of understanding nationalism and regionalism in relation to the changing economic, cultural, political and social transformations currently taking place. The next section discusses this in more detail.

## 2.4 Regionalism and contemporary societal transformations

Conventional approaches to regionalism and nationalism are still valuable in understanding the contemporary manifestations of the phenomenon. However, it is apparent that the processes of contemporary societal transformation, which are not only economic, but also political and cultural, have enormous resonances for collective organisation and identity in the late twentieth century. Therefore, the answer would seem to be that in fact it is necessary to rearticulate the theories of

regionalism and nationalism in relation to the epochal transformations currently underway. Indeed, one of the most serious transformations which is underway relates to the nation-state and consequently nationalist identities, which for so long have been the fundamental principle for political attachment in capitalist societies. The nation-state is now being increasingly challenged and the resurgence of regionalism has to be understood in relation to the changing nature of the nation-state as well as the emergence of both enlarged (continental European) and restricted (local, regional, provincial) conceptions of citizenship (Morley and Robins 1995:74).

Mingione (1993:309) argues that the results of current societal transformation tendencies reflect an increasingly complicated patchwork, where the processes of globalisation are accompanied by the erosion of the socio-economic importance of the nation-state but its continued political centrality. Moreover, there is a complex revival of conflicting, new and old particularistic (familial, clannish, localist) fragments of identities which become condensed at various levels of reference (ethnic, linguistic, religious, communitarian). As a result of these changes, Mingione (1993:305) sees localism, regionalism, ethnic and sub-national attachments as challenging the social order everywhere, but to different extents and in different ways, depending on the particular variant followed and on the specific fragmentation patterns shaping each society. Furthermore, Mingione points to what he sees as the increased fragmentation of society, which derives from the result of three broad factors. First, the employment structure is moving rapidly towards a more fragmented, heterogeneous and polarised state with increased divisions between high and low income and irregular, part-time, temporary employment. Second, there are contradictions between present trends towards globalisation and the increasing importance of local, sectional and particularistic (ethnic-, kinship- and friendship-oriented) interests. Third, political instability is induced by a decreasing capacity of existing political organisations (that matured within the 'Fordist-welfarist' age) to govern and manage this new complexity (Mingione 1993:306).

In relation to the processes of globalisation and the international restructuring of the global economy there are several distinct geographical transformations currently underway. This not only means a changing and evolving role for the nation-state, but

also an increase in importance of supra-national bodies (such as the EU) and yet also a new salience for sub-national territories, such as regions. However, this reconfiguration is not only related to territorial changes but also, and perhaps more importantly, to cultural and imaginary spaces as well. Thus, the concept of 'national identity', is becoming more and more problematic as local and regional cultures and identities are becoming more important and revalued in a way than perhaps they once were (Morley and Robins 1995:107-108. Hobsbawn (1990:182) argues that the nation-state is in retreat, and that any future history of the world:

> "will inevitably have to be written as the history of a world which can no longer be contained within the limits of 'nations' and 'nation-states' as these used to be defined, either politically, or economically, or culturally, or even linguistically. It will see 'nation states' and 'nations' or ethnic/linguistic groups primarily as retreating before, resisting, adapting to, being absorbed or dislocated by, the new supra-national restructuring of the globe."

Alternatively, not all commentators view contemporary changes in the same way, arguing that the nation-state is not about to disappear or that it is to be replaced by another geo-political form or structure. Perhaps the most notable is Fukuyama (1992), whose argument is based on the premise that liberal democracy may constitute the 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the final form of human government', and as such constitutes the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992:xi). He claims that:

> "all countries undergoing economic modernisation must increasingly resemble one another: they must unify nationally, on the basis of a centralised state, urbanise, replace traditional forms of social organisation (like tribe, sect and family) with economically rational ones, based on function and efficiency, and provide for a universal education of their citizens" (Fukuyama 1992:xv).

For Fukuyama, the demise of the Communist bloc and the end of the Cold War symbolise the 'victory' of liberal democracy over all other forms of government. Yet, ultimately, his argument resembles that which was outlined earlier, and is also wrongly based on the assumption that the processes of modernisation somehow inevitably lead to increased homogenisation within nation-states. However, contrary to the end of the twentieth century constituting the 'end of history', it is arguable that the complexity of current transformations constitute a reformulation of history and the creation of a new post-communist world order. The expectations that liberal

democracy and the market economy would be adopted all over the world, especially because of the processes of economic and cultural globalisation, have been flawed. Instead of a world completely homogenising, there have also been clear processes of fragmentation as well as globalisation. One example of this fragmentation is the resurgence of the 'national question' in both Europe and the ex-Soviet Union. This has had its most terrible and disastrous effects in the former Yugoslavia, which has been violently torn apart by warfare and conflict. Thus, both the processes of globalisation and fragmentation pose different and new challenges to the contemporary nation-state (Jenkins and Sofos 1996:9).

At the end of the twentieth century, in light of the ending of the Cold War combined with the processes of economic and cultural globalisation, as well as the rise in importance of supra-national institutions, the nation-state faces a whole range of challenges both new and old. Williams (1983) claims that in the development of modern industrial societies, it is now increasingly apparent that the nation-state in its classical European form is at once too large and too small for the range of real social purposes. Consequently, the politics of place and space become crucial in the midst of these transformations. The key issue is what are the political implications and responses to globalisation and (dis)integration and if the nation-state really is in decline, what kind of geo-political structure will replace it? Will new regional identities be (re)formed to replace nationalist ones and will these be constituted in a regressive and exclusive way (Morley and Robins 1995:59). The next section examines in more detail, the challenges and transformations which contemporary nation-states are undergoing, allowing a greater understanding of the context for the resurgence of regionalism.

## 3. The challenges to the contemporary nation-state

The current epoch appears to be a time of bewildering transformation and change in the structure and organisation of modern Western economy and society. Indeed, terms such as 'structural crisis', 'transformation' and 'transition' have been used to describe the present situation, while other terms such as 'post-Fordist', 'post-industrial', 'post-modern', 'fifth Kondratiev' and 'post-collective' have been used to point to a new emerging age of contemporary capitalist development (Amin 1994:1). The processes

of economic, political and cultural restructuring are still very much ongoing and their outcomes are still uncertain but it is apparent that the nation-state, for so long the basis of the contemporary political order, faces a number of new challenges and problems.

What seems to be emerging is a complex new articulation of spatial scales - of the global, national, regional and local spheres, associated with the increasing trans-nationalisation of accumulation (Robins and Gillespie 1988). In the context of this emerging global-local interface, economic and political governance at the national scale would seem to be becoming increasingly problematic (Morley and Robins 1995:73). Moreover, Meny (1986:3) argues that at this stage in its history the Western state appears both weak (it no longer has control of economic and social phenomena) and overloaded, as a result of the increasing number of demands made upon it. This crisis testifies to the fact that the state is no more than a construction which must be seen as one particular innovation, anchored in space and time (Badie and Birnbaum 1979:243). Harvey (1989:108,358) sees the contemporary nation-state as:

> "a territorial entity struggling to impose its will upon a fluid and spatially open process of capital circulation - geopolitics and economic nationalism, localism and the politics of place, are all fighting it out with a new internationalism in the most contradictory of ways."

It is important to consider what the term 'nation-state' actually signifies, which is not a simple task. The problem arises because of the association with the three ideas of ethnicity, nation and the state and the consequent division of the world into national units. Yet these three are analytically quite distinct categories, which do not necessarily always coincide, the main reason being that nations are not necessarily either ethnic groups or states and that states are not always made up of single nations. The conditions in the contemporary world are further altering the congruence between 'nations' and 'states' (Keating 1996:3). The compound word 'nation-state' does in fact imply an identity of nation, in terms of a community which may claim the right to self-government, with the state, as a system of political action. Hobsbawn (1990:9-10) insists that a nation is a social entity only insofar as it is related to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the 'nation-state', and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it. Very few contemporary nation-states are however completely homogeneous because most of them contain other groups which

have their own national aspirations (Connor 1978). Therefore, perhaps a better way of explaining this diversity and incongruence between nation and states is to use the term 'national-state', which takes into account the fact that often states contain more than one national group.

States and nations have been around in different forms for a very long time, but the development of the modern nation-state, as the building block of the world geo-political structure, occurred within the last two to three hundred years. Prior to this, Europe was made up of empires, city states and other forms of social, political, economic and religious authorities (Keating 1996:23). The development of the nation-state is closely related to the rise of nationalism and the political revolutions of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After the French Revolution nationalism became a revolutionary ideology and the concept of the nation evolved to signify a community based on political equality and democracy (Kellas 1991:27). The drive towards nationalism intensified in the nineteenth century and nationalist movements took root across Europe during that period. Some of these were directed towards national unification, such as in Italy and Germany; some to throwing off the rule of multi-national empires, as in the cases of Greece, Belgium, Poland, Hungary and Serbia; and some to breaking away from long established kingdoms, such as in Ireland and Norway (Kellas 1991:31). Therefore, from the nineteenth century, the nation ceased to be the property of the monarch or part of a fixed social hierarchy and instead became associated with the population as a whole (Carr 1945).

The development and growth in importance of the powers and responsibilities of the nation-state continued during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to encompass most notably popular sovereignty and liberal democracy. Today, the nation-state has come to represent the concentration of authority within territorial boundaries and the imposition of common values within society. The essence of the nation-state is its claim to sovereignty and to ultimate authority within a territory. Moreover, the nation-state has sometimes but not always been the basis for the construction of a set of civic values, which include liberal democracy. The nation-state is also a focus of identity, the expression of cultural values and the means of socialisation into common norms. In addition, nation-states have provided the basis for the development of

welfare-state systems, which have facilitated the distribution of wealth within territories. This is also linked to state economic management, which has taken various forms but has been key in legitimising the role and purpose of the state. Finally, the nation-state has traditionally been the main instrument for internal and external security (Keating 1996:24).

In the contemporary era, together with the traditional roles and responsibilities of the nation-state, a whole series of other and newer challenges has to be overcome. Thus, the nation-state is undergoing a series of changes; it is not threatened with extinction but the meaning of sovereignty is being transformed (Camilleri and Falk 1992). The state is retreating in some areas and has lost its influence in others. This has had differing impacts on the concept and meaning of the nation itself. This is because the nation is identified with the state and so any weakening of the state causes a weakening of the nation. Yet the weakening of the state does not necessarily have to have a negative effect on the idea of nation and indeed in some cases it may be positive because it may facilitate the recognition of multiple, dual or multi-dimensional identities (Keating 1996:24). For example, citizens within the European Union can have a regional, as well as national but also European identity.

Held (1996:408) argues that there are four main 'disjunctures' which are affecting the roles and power of contemporary nation-states. The first disjuncture relates to the functioning of the world economy and the internationalisation of production, finance and other economic resources, which is arguably eroding the capacity of the state to control its own economic future. The result of these processes of internationalisation appears to be a diminution of state autonomy, and a disjuncture between the idea of a sovereign state determining its own future and the conditions of modern economies, marked as they are by the intersection of national and international economic processes. The second disjuncture relates to the diminishing power and role of nation-states as autonomous actors in the world order because of the growing importance of hegemonic power blocs, which sometimes operate to undercut a state's authority and integrity. The third disjuncture is related to the development of international and trans-national organisations which appears to have led to important changes in the decision-making structure of world politics. New forms of multi-national politics

have been established by the interaction of nation-states, intergovernmental organisations and trans-national pressure groups. The result is a tension between the sovereign state, centred on national politics and institutions and decision-making at the international level. The fourth disjuncture relates to the alleged gap between the idea of citizenship in a national political community, which bestows upon individuals both rights and duties, and the development of international law which subjects individuals, governments and non-government organisations to new systems of regulation (Held 1996:409-412).

All of these challenges, combined with the rapid structural changes occurring in global communication technologies, which render national boundaries ever more obsolete and insignificant, pose very serious threats to the contemporary nation-state. Not all states are equally integrated into the world economy and so some will be affected in different ways and to a greater or lesser extent than others (Held 1996:414). However, there are certain common areas in which contemporary nation-states are being challenged by the current transformations, which are discussed in more detail in each of the following sub-sections.

## 3.1 The nation-state, democracy and the welfare state

In Western Europe, the nation-state has served as the basis for the development and consolidation of liberal democracy, it has also provided the structure for the development of democratic representative institutions as well as for civil rights and liberties through citizenship and the formulation of law. Yet, as a result of the complex transformations underway, the role of the nation-state as the framework for democracy and rights is increasingly under challenge. The challenges and changes which the contemporary nation-state faces are causing what Jessop (1994:264) calls the 'hollowing out' of the nation-state. According to Jessop there are two contradictory trends involved in 'hollowing out' because while the national state still remains politically important and even retains much of its national sovereignty, its capacities to project its power, even within its own national borders, are decisively weakened both by the shift towards international, flexible (but also regionalised) production systems and by the growing challenge posed by risks emanating from the global environment. The result is a loss of autonomy which creates in turn both the

need for supra-national co-ordination and the space for sub-national resurgence. However, in spite of these challenges Jessop (1994:274) concludes that a key role still remains for the nation-state as the most significant site of struggle among competing global, triadic, supra-national, national, regional and local forces.

Jessop (1994) argues that Keynesian national growth strategies centred on mass production and consumption, aimed at boosting output and productivity in domestic industry as well as domestic demand have broken down. The challenges to this kind of macro-economic policy stem from a reduction of industrial and regional policies designed to maximise output and retain full employment as well as the rationalisation of domestic welfare state spending and income redistribution policies combined with the loss of control of trade and exchange rates. The result has been the reduced ability on the part of national governments to sustain and control domestic markets, for the benefit of national firms as well as its citizens. Faced with these tendencies, contemporary economic policies are seen to be increasingly forced in the direction of reducing the size and nature of spending on the welfare state, as they reject the possibility of a virtuous circle of growth based around the 'national economy' as an integrated system of production and consumption.

## 3.2 The nation-state and the economy

Although the internationalisation of world trade is not a completely new phenomenon, what is new in the current epoch is the massive increase in quantity and speed of money and capital flows across national boundaries. Consequently, this raises several important questions about the ability of nation-states to control their own economic destinies. Held (1988:13) argues that:

> "the internationalisation of production finance and other economic resources is unquestionably eroding the capacity of the (nation) state to control its own economic future."

One of the key roles and functions of the nation-state has been in the sphere of economic management, which has also been one of the main ways in which nation-states have been able to legitimise state activity through the pursuit of greater national economic prosperity. State responsibilities for economic management have taken various forms. The most fundamental contribution has been to establish unified and

integrated national markets by breaking down internal economic divisions and creating a common currency. In the mercantilist era, states encouraged the promotion of exports and safeguarded home markets mainly through tariff protection. With the advent of the Keynesian revolution in the post-war period, states assumed even greater responsibilities. The aim was to ensure full employment, rising living standards and the reduction of regional economic imbalances, which was to be achieved through the implementation of various measures. For example, fiscal and monetary policies were undertaken at the macro-economic level; public ownership of key national industries, such as steel, coal, energy and transport was a common feature as well as policies to encourage investment in various key fields and domestic companies (Keating 1996:32).

In the midst of current transformations the role of the nation-state in economic management is faced with a variety of significant challenges. According to Keating (1996:24,33) the state's power and competencies are being eroded in three different ways and 'dimensions'. The first dimension, is 'from above', as the state's power is being eroded by global economic change and continental integration. The second dimension is 'from below', as the state is being challenged by a reassertion of sub-state identities and the emergence of policy issues with which it is ill-equipped to deal. Moreover, there is growing appreciation of the importance of local and regional factors in fostering the conditions for attracting capital and stimulating entrepreneurship and also recognition of the fact that even where economic change has a global cause, its impacts are felt in specific places. The third dimension is 'laterally' because of the state's declining ability to mobilise collective action and consciousness and because of the revived faith in markets and privatisation from both the political parties of the right and also those of the social democratic left.

In spite of the serious challenges faced by nation-states with regard to economic management, the state still has many responsibilities in the economic sphere and it has not abandoned its concern with the economy. States are constantly striving to develop new and innovative ways of meeting the challenges of the global economy and maintaining international competitiveness. The difference is that the goals of state intervention have changed, no longer can states be only concerned with domestic economic issues but instead they have to have a global focus (Keating 1996:33).

## 3.3 The nation-state, national culture(s) and politics

Nation-states have for so long been both the sustainers, promoters and protectors of national identity and culture. However, in light of current transformations the maintenance of national sovereignty and identity is becoming increasingly difficult, as the unities of economic and cultural production and consumption become increasingly trans-national (Morley and Robins 1995:59). Throughout the twentieth century states have utilised both mass and elite communication means to sustain national identity. Most notably the use of national television and radio networks as well as the press have been the most efficient forms of promoting a sense of national 'imagined community'. Often broadcasting has been regulated, with rules as to national content so as to monitor the kinds of output presented and with the aim of producing programmes which are consistent with and in favour of the 'national interest' (Keating 1996:28-29).

According to Keating (1996:29), such national cultural communication strategies are , facing contrary pressures. He argues that there are three dominant trends at work. Firstly, along with the processes of economic globalisation there are also processes of cultural globalisation, which are no less important or powerful. One of the outcomes has been the growing emergence of American cultural hegemony and the imposition of English as the 'world' language. Secondly, there is a complementary process of the reassertion of local, regional and minority languages and cultures in different places. This has taken various forms from the reintroduction of minority languages, to expressions of folkloric traditions. Consequently, defining 'national culture' has become much more problematic and also the source of intense political debate in several European countries. Thirdly, technology plays a big part in the changing nature of national cultural identities, however, its effects are ambivalent. On the one hand, national boundaries are dissolved by new technological innovations, such as cable and satellite television. Yet, on the other hand, consumption of these can either be individual or collective and so it does not necessarily promote a feeling of collectivity between different people and groups.

Appadurai (1990) notes the rise and juxtaposition of what he terms global 'ethnoscapes' (the continual movement of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles and

'guestworkers' across the world); of global 'mediscapes' (the instantaneous world-wide distribution, by a diversity of electronic and non-electronic media, of one and the same pastiche of standardised commodities, generalised human values and interests, the cult of consumerism, and de-nationalised ethnic or folk motifs); and of global 'ideoscapes' (key concepts and values from the Enlightenment world-view, such as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'sovereignty', 'rights' and 'citizenship', now all evoked by states and counter-movements in different local contexts to legitimise their existence and political aspirations). The result is that defining the scope and content of national culture and identity becomes much more problematic and complex; increasingly cultures and identities are constructed out of an inter-mingling and juxtaposition of different influences and flows. In some cases, there are cultural flows which have become 'de-territorialised', that is separated from their original local and national settings, which often reappear in places as new influences blending in with existing local myths, memories and beliefs (Smith 1990). The key question is whether the recognition of different national cultural identities will lead to regressive forms of discrimination on the part of dominant national cultural groups, or to competition and conflict between different groups, or alternatively to a genuine openness, respect and harmony amongst different cultural groups. Already such cultural pluralism has resulted into new political demands for representation and autonomy amongst different groups, which is in part reflected in the resurgence of contemporary regionalism.

## 3.4 The nation-state and civil society

A whole series of new challenges face the nation-state but that is not to say that it has faded away, or even retreated but it is one among a number of competing institutions and sources of authority and power. The state has seen its hierarchical control conceded to an extent because of the increase in importance of non-state actors, within complex networks and policy communities and across national borders (Mlinar 1992). One of the outcomes of this is that systems for policy making are becoming more and more divorced from territorially defined institutions, systems of representation and democratic legitimisation. Furthermore, these institutions and systems may no longer correspond to forms of collective identity, which creates further problems and issues for the state. Most crucially, it brings into question the whole purpose of politics as a

means of reconciling economic needs with social and cultural ones and the nation-state as the institutional form which not only provides the mechanisms for this but legitimises the outcomes. This has various impacts and outcomes; one is an increase in political apathy and disenchantment with the political process; a second is increased xenophobia and the desire to restore the power of the state; and a third is the increase in support for separatist and autonomist movements. Moreover, a more potent outcome is that of the potential for social fragmentation in relation to the transformation and weakening of the state (Keating 1996:40).

The reactions and responses to these changes are more difficult to predict yet there are already several clear trends emerging. One is the individualisation of social relations, which has taken various forms. In the realms of public administration, citizens are increasingly viewed as consumers, which serves to create a blurring of the public and private domains. In the work-place, influences such as the changing nature of production technologies have contributed to transforming traditional work practices and the nature of work. In addition, the importance of the Church in Europe is another example of an important institution undergoing a decline in affiliation. Local communities are being bypassed by the new forms of communications and media technologies, which put individuals directly in contact with the global marketplace. Moreover, politics is increasingly framed in individualist language rather than in terms of class and or collectivist issues (Keating 1996:41).

Secondly, there is an emerging trend towards the growth of new social movements, which are in part the result of reactions towards the state and its difficulties in resolving social, economic and political issues. Moreover, the institutions of civil society are becoming more and more the arenas for political action. Camilleri and Falk (1992) argue that the growth of new social movements, which challenge the dominant logic's of state and market, are in fact evidence for a new type of politics. There have been various labels used to describe this phenomenon such as 'alternative movements', 'new protest movements', 'new politics', 'new populism', 'neo-romanticism', 'anti-politics', 'disorderly politics' or 'counter-institutions', all of these labels emphasise the rupture and discontinuity with existing politics and the emergence of new forms of political representation and structures (Offe 1985:826).

If the role of the nation-state is being modified the key question is what forms of political governance and regulation can be elaborated in these changing circumstances within the EU? Perhaps the easy answer is to argue that the nation-state, although changing, will still be the most important structure of governance and society. On the other hand, in light of the increased uneven regional economic development within the EU, the 'region' is becoming recognised as an important institutional arena for economic and political development. Within the EU a new situation is emerging in which regional scale governance is viewed as a potential way forward to meet the challenges of the next millennium. However, the future role of the 'region' within the EU is still emerging, as the next section examines.

## 4. Regions, economy and institutions within Europe

These are times of major economic and institutional transformation in Europe, with uncertain regional implications. The outcome of the complexity of these changes is far from clear; one possibility is that processes such as globalisation and European integration, under the auspices of neo-liberal policies, might undermine regional economic integrity owing to the trans-regional nature of these processes. Yet, another very different possibility is the rise of a 'Europe of the regions' as an outcome of an alleged structural shift towards a decentred economy and decentralised institutions within Europe (Amin and Thrift 1995:41). One thing is clear, the structure of European governance has to face up to a whole range of new challenges to meet the demands of the economic, institutional, and political processes currently at work within Europe.

Hallin and Malmberg (1996) argue that there are at least three different processes which have combined to bring the 'regional question' to the fore of both academic and political debates in recent years. The first is related to the emerging belief within the EU that actors at the regional level are tending to become more important as a political force in an increasingly integrated EU. Consequently, the notion of a 'Europe of the regions' has become popular in relation to the process by which national political centres are believed to be increasingly by-passed by direct interaction between the regions and the EU. Secondly, there is the increased trend towards globalisation associated with growth in international trade, increasing

dominance of large multi-national corporations, and the emergence of global financial markets (Dicken 1992). Yet, this is to a degree counterbalanced by a process in which the local economic, institutional and cultural arena is gaining increased importance in economic and political terms (Amin and Malmberg 1992, Amin and Robins 1990, Storper 1995). The third reason for the increased attention being paid to regional issues in Europe is the actual process of economic integration itself. The drive towards greater European unity and especially the implementation of policies designed to reduce barriers to free-trade in pursuit of a level European 'playing field' have raised questions about diverging regional economic imbalances in Europe.

The question is what impacts will such processes have upon regionalism within Europe? Will greater institutional devolution to the regional level encourage or appease the growth of regionalist political movements? Will increasing regional economic divergence lead to greater regionalist tensions, from richer and/or poorer European regions? What will be the outcome of the processes of greater European integration in relation to regionalism? Clearly, only time will tell what the answer to such questions will be, however, certain scenarios are already emerging and providing indications to the challenges which lie ahead.

An important starting point is to examine the trends in European regional economic development, which clearly has an important impact upon regionalism within Europe. The gap between rich and poor regions within the EU continues to widen. This is despite the wide-ranging attempts by national governments as well as the EU to implement regional policies which aim to ameliorate this divergence. Even though Europe becomes ever closer integrated economically and politically, this has not led to a reduction in social disparities and facilitated sustained economic growth. The contemporary problems of economic stagnation, mass unemployment, increased social exclusion and political polarisation within the EU serve to intensify the divisions between member states, regions and social groups. It is significant that regional differentials in productivity, unemployment and employment appear to have increased during the last decade, which has been the period in which efforts to integrate the European economy have been the most intense (Amin and Tomaney 1995:10).

Within the EU, during the 1980s the trend towards regional economic convergence, which had began during the 1960s, was more or less reversed. Thus, there was a decisive shift in the European economy away from an era of full employment to one of structural mass unemployment. Furthermore, since the 1980s there has been a steady increase in the productivity and unemployment disparities between Europe's prosperous and less favoured regions. The European Commission noted in its fourth report on the social and economic situation of the European regions that regional disparities worsened appreciably from the mid-1970s through to the early 1980s (CEC 1991). Although there are certain problems in using statistical measures of regional economic performance, the emerging picture is clearly one of increased economic divergence. Data for European Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1994 showed a three per cent fall in the EU average, mainly as a result of the incorporation of the new German *Länder*, which have a very low per capita GDP (Eurostat 1994a). Moreover, the regional disparities in GDP per capita levels are marked; in the less favoured regions of the EU such as Greece, Portugal and Southern Italy the GDP levels are below 60 per cent of the EU average. However, a small group of regions in Europe's 'hot' or 'blue' banana of prosperity have a per capita GDP of over 125 per cent of the EU average (Brussels and Antwerp; Stuttgart, Obermayern, Mittelfranken, Bremen, Hamburg and Darmstadt; Ile de France; Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna; Groningen; Greater London) (Amin and Thrift 1995:42).

Regional disparities in employment, within the EU, are wider than those in GDP (Eurostat 1994b). This is mainly because the labour market situation has deteriorated markedly during the early 1990s. In fact, unemployment levels in the 1980s were already high in comparison to the 'golden years' of full employment in the 1960s and early 1970s. In spite of the economic improvement in some European regions there is no evidence of a trend towards the elimination of disparities. Economic disparities within member states such as Spain, Italy and the UK have increased significantly over recent years (Amin and Tomaney 1995:13-14). It is apparent that regional inequality remains entrenched in Europe and seems to be intensifying rather than diminishing. The problem is put into perspective when it is recognised that regional GDP per capita disparities in the EU are twice as high as in the US, and unemployment disparities three times higher than in the US (CEC 1991).

Amidst this scenario of uneven regional development a number of serious issues and questions must be raised. Primarily, the most fundamental issue is what are the political implications of such regional socio-economic disparities? Already such divisions are intensifying regionalist political conflicts in certain member states. In particular, the socio-economic differences between the North and South of Italy have fuelled the electoral growth of the LN in the North of Italy. Moreover, it is likely that such conflicts will become more widespread in Europe unless real political, economic and institutional change can redress the socio-economic differences between the core and peripheral regions of Europe.

The institutional, economic and political processes of European integration have had wide-ranging impacts upon the political economy of the EU as well as upon the resurgence of regionalism. Primarily, institutional developments in EU regional policy have done very little to reduce regional disparities, which continue to intensify and have significant implications on regionalism. Amin (1997b:2) argues that contemporary EU economic policy, largely inspired by neo-liberal values, is exacerbating the regional problem. The basic aim behind the '1992' project was to remove trade barriers, reduce national purchasing preferences, and harmonise standards across the member states, in the hope that the increased market opportunities would provide large firms with sufficient scale economies. Amin and Tomaney (1995:178) argue that the intensified competition resulting from the creation of the Single Market can only accentuate the process of cumulative causation in which centres of innovation enjoy a virtuous circle of growth, while poorer regions remain locked into trajectories of dependent development or cannot gain the resources necessary to stimulate endogenous growth.

It would seem that the regional challenge within Europe is intensifying, which would suggest that there is a need for alternative approaches to the structuring of governance, economies and institutions within the EU. The drive towards contemporary regionalism is in part a reaction to the processes of uneven economic development and institutional change within Europe. On the other hand, regionalist political parties have forced the issue of greater regional autonomy onto the mainstream political agenda. Although the regional question in Europe is a long way from being answered

there are certain new institutional developments which offer a different vision of Europe. This is more focused upon the regional and supra-national scales rather than just the national scale and in part is a recognition of the importance of regionalism within the EU. One of the most important institutional developments in relation to the region is linked to the reforms of EU regional policy, which has shifted towards supporting regionalism itself.

The European Commission itself has emphasised a more 'programmatic' approach to regional development focusing on the formation of Regional Development Plans in the poorer regions of the EU (Amin and Tomaney 1995:179). Increasingly, the allocation of EU regional funds has become tied to the abilities of regions to demonstrate their institutional capacity. This involves an interaction between different regional and local institutions, such as those involved in education and training, to those involved in transport, communication and planning (as well as a wide-range of others), to develop, co-ordinate, implement, and evaluate long-term, integrated regional development plans (Amin 1997b:2). In addition, a significant corresponding institutional development was the creation, in March 1994, of the Committee of European Regions (COR), which has further legitimised the process of reorganisation of governance within the EU. Although it is in its infancy and has few real powers, the COR represents a significant theoretical shift of power within the EU because it gives sub-national governments (both local and regional) within member states, a direct link to EU decision making and policy formulation. Consequently, such institutional changes at the EU level, cause Amin and Tomaney (1995:179) to argue that the approach of the European Commission itself has been to enhance the legitimacy of regionalism.

Even though such regional institutional developments within the EU are relatively new and very much on-going, as yet they have had little actual policy impact. However, in different ways, such developments represent a wider trend within the EU towards what some see as an emerging political and governance project, which is commonly referred to as a 'Europe of the Regions'. In other words, there is increasing recognition that the concept of a 'Europe of the Regions' is a potentially important 'political fix' for the drive towards economic and monetary union and the changing

role of the state within the EU. In part, this concept derives from the recognition of the fact that, within the EU, there has been the transfer of some power downwards to regional and local governments and upwards to the EU level and also because of the fact that in the future this trend is likely to continue. However, it is also a recognition of the need to construct different institutional and political structures, which strengthen the political alliance between the regions and the institutions of the EU and promote local democratic, economic and institutional strategies to flourish in a federal supra-national setting (Marquand 1994). Such a project would involve the implementation of a form of European federalism, which Dunford and Perrons (1994) call 'federal fiscalism'. This would give greater fiscal powers to the European level so as to secure the pooling of revenue across the EU and facilitate the redistribution of income and welfare to areas which would be most in need. This would require a significant level of devolution and restructuring of state authority downwards to the region and upwards to the European level, within a federal structure (Amin and Thrift 1995:45-48).

Despite the emerging recognition of the potential importance of the 'Europe of the Regions' concept along with Euro-federal institutional and political structures, it must be said such developments are still in their infancy. Not least because in different EU countries the development and recognition of the regional tier varies greatly. In some member states, especially those with federal structures, the region has greater powers, whilst in others with more centralised structures, the region has much less power (Keating et al 1995:7). In addition, European nation-states are still very important in guiding and influencing the directions of change and the processes of European integration and regionalism, even though they might not have complete control over future directions and events (Keating et al 1995:11). However, the principle of the 'Europe of the Regions' is important because it has given legitimacy to the demands and claims of a number of regionalist political parties. In particular, the LN has used the principle as a way of justifying its political project and claims to be part of a wider European trend towards increased regional power and devolution.

Keating (1996:51) argues that the principle of a 'Europe of the Regions' is not to be the basis for a new European political order. Instead, he argues that what is emerging

within Europe is a complex political order in which European politics is becoming more regionalised; regional politics is increasingly Europeanised; and national politics is both Europeanised and regionalised (Keating et al 1995). According to Keating (1996:51), the emerging scenario is one of a mosaic of overlapping spheres of authority, which is more reminiscent of pre-modern Europe rather than the nineteenth century nation-state. Anderson (1996:149) uses the term 'new medievalism' to describe the contemporary political situation in Europe, he argues that:

> "within Europe there is now complex mixture of old, new, and hybrid forms - 'territorial', 'trans-territorial', and 'functional' forms of association and authority co-existing and interacting. For some purposes, 'territoriality' and 'territorial contiguity' are becoming less dominant as modes of social organisation and control, and 'non-territorial' or 'trans-territorial' authority is regaining some of the importance it had in medieval times. But for other purposes state sovereignty defined by the same old territorial boundaries seems as firmly rooted as ever."

In the midst of Europe's evolving political landscape, certain developments already point to the emergence of a form of a 'Europe of regions'. The most notable example of this, is known as the 'Four Motors of Europe' project, which created a co-operation network between four of Europe's economically strongest regions: Baden Württemburg, Rhône Alps, Lombardy and Catalonia (FAST/MONITOR 1991). Therefore, this raises questions about which regions have the ability to instigate greater inter-regional networks of co-operation and exchange; it would seem that the richest, core European regions are best placed to take advantage of such developments because of their existing institutional thickness and capabilities at the regional level.

The importance of regional and local institutions cannot be underestimated and Europe's core regions, such as Emilia-Romagna and Catalonia, have a myriad of different institutions, which are not only based in formal political spheres but also in a number of other regional and local institutions. These represent local economic, political and social interests in the regions and range from trade associations, large and small-firm lobbies and producer services agencies, and other intermediate institutions such as commercial media as well as a wide range of others (Amin 1997b:6/7). This 'institutional thickness' ensures that there is a high degree of interaction amongst the various institutions, which have a common aim or goal for the

region (Amin and Thrift 1994:14). Amin (1997b:9) argues that within such regions associational life is active, politics are contested, public authorities and leaders come under scrutiny, public space is considered to be shared and commonly owned, and there is a strong culture of autonomy and self-governance which seeps through the whole of local society. Putnam (1993) argues that such regions with a high level of civic engagement in public affairs, as well as high levels of participation in associational life, have 'social capital', which facilitates a degree of democracy and better socio-economic results.

The key question is what are the implications of such institutional strength (and weaknesses) for the drive towards contemporary regionalism within Europe. It seems likely that such self-sustaining regions will seek even greater autonomy in light of the economic, political and institutional challenges which face the nation-state. This is a trend which has already begun, for example, in Flanders, Catalonia and Northern Italy, where the drive for greater regional autonomy is particularly strong. However, the situation is a complex one because regional institutional thickness does not necessarily lead to a greater drive for autonomy and regionalism. On the other hand, it is apparent that a political regionalist project can gain much greater legitimacy and importance if it is able to embed itself amongst dominant regional, local and civic institutions. Therefore, exploring and understanding the strategies and ways in which regionalist political parties aim to develop linkages with key economic, political, and civic institutions is vital in order to understand the power of contemporary regionalism within Europe.

The ways in which a regionalist political movement is able to develop linkages with different institutions is dependent on a wide range of factors. Clearly, this depends upon the structure of regional and national governance and economies as well as other factors such as the nature of the political aims and rhetoric of a particular regionalist party. This is because a region is not merely a 'container' but is derived from the complex interactions and associations which develop between economic, socio-cultural, political and institutional actors within a given place (Hallin and Malmberg 1996:330). However, the question is not only whether institutions are important for regionalist parties but also to what extent is regionalism important for regional and

local institutions. The question is whether a strong regionalist political movement is able to become embedded within the social, economic, political and cultural institutions of a region and as a result give the region greater exposure, autonomy and a greater 'voice'? On the other hand, can contemporary regionalism flourish by gaining widespread support within civil society but not necessarily becoming embedded within the formal institutions of a particular region?

## 5. Conclusion

In the 1990s, in the context of the emerging new world (dis)order, the resurgence of regionalism within (and outside) the EU is a challenge to governments at every scale. This chapter has focused upon contemporary regionalism and the crucial question of why there has been a resurgence of regionalism in recent decades There is no easy and straightforward answer to this question. However, by discussing the different definitions, elements and theoretical approaches to regionalism, it is possible to understand the phenomenon more fully. Indeed, understanding the motivations and constructions of regionalism is of paramount importance in order to develop and legislate for it effectively. Undoubtedly, the transformations underway within European society, associated with the processes of globalisation, the rise of the EU and the challenges faced by the nation-state, provide the context for the resurgence of regionalism. The question remains whether existing political forms of representation are becoming increasingly obsolete in relation to the vast technological, economic and cultural changes that are taking place, and whether the challenge of regionalism is positive in terms of opening up new avenues of political discussion and thought?

The rest of the thesis focuses upon the Italian situation, which is one example within the EU where regionalism has raised serious questions about the existing structure of government and society. The development of regionalist parties is not new in Italy and the specific socio-political, economic and cultural situation, is in many respects, different from the majority of other countries in the EU. However, examining the reasons for this resurgence of regionalism in Italy is important in understanding the different manifestations of regionalism elsewhere in Europe. The resurgence of regionalism in Italy is based upon the Northern League (Lega Nord) (LN), which has

risen to political prominence in just over a decade. The rise of the LN and its demands for the secession of 'Padania' (North-Central Italy) from the rest of country have brought into the question the whole legitimacy of the Italian nation-state. The specific history of Italy, being a relatively young nation-state, means that issues of national unity, identity and solidarity, are of particular importance in the context of contemporary regionalism. It is to a discussion of the nature of the Italian national-state upon which the next chapter focuses.

# Chapter Two : Towards an Understanding of the Italian 'national-state'

## 1. Introduction

Any discussion of contemporary Italian regionalism cannot be fully understood without reference to the origins of the Italian national-state. The fundamental point, as Ritaine (1994:75) argues, is that the territorial question in Italy is dominated by the belated and artificial nature of national unity. In addition, Italy's development has been accompanied by the creation of a whole set of socio-economic and political structures which are relatively distinct when compared to the majority of other European nation-states. One of the enduring features of both Italian economy and society is the schism between the North and South of the country. This division dates back to the Unification of Italy and has never really been resolved since. In fact, throughout the twentieth century the North-South schism has widened, even though the South has experienced some modest development in recent decades. The North, on the other hand, has undergone one of the most remarkable growth phases in Western European economic history; it has become one of the most economically advanced regions in the whole of Europe and so economically the gap has continued to widen. By the mid 1980s, per capita income was more than 80 per cent higher in the North (Putnam 1993:158). Undoubtedly, the dualism between the North and South of Italy is the central issue of modern Italian history, and the 'Southern Question' has been a persistent feature of debates surrounding the development of contemporary Italy. However, in recent years, this schism has taken on a renewed political significance, especially in relation to the claims of the LN. This has given rise to what some commentators have called the 'Northern Question' (Diamanti 1996a).

This chapter will explore the key themes and issues in the development of contemporary Italy. This is a complicated task yet one that is very important in relation to the resurgence of regionalism in Italy. Firstly, there is an analysis of the events leading up to and after the development of Unified Italy. Secondly, the

transformations that Italy has undergone during the last fifty years is explored; and thirdly, the most recent period of political change in Italy is discussed.

## 2. The Formation of 'Italy' - Unification to Unity?

For a millennium and a half, from the fall of Rome until the middle of the nineteenth century, Italy was, in the dismissive words of the Austrian statesman Metternich, merely 'a geographical expression' (Putnam 1993:121). Compared with other European nation-states, such as France, Spain and Britain, Italy was unified much later. Yet, the very description given to the process, the 'unification' of Italy suggests the consolidation of an existing entity rather than the creation of a new one (Keating 1988). The fact that Italian unity came late is crucial because in some respects national identity has remained a superficial phenomenon and Italy remains a country organised around a plurality of poles and regions (Poche 1992:71). The extent to which Unification facilitated feelings of nation-hood is critically contested and the issue of national identity and unity is still very important and controversial in contemporary Italy. Indeed, it is precisely this issue which has powerfully resurfaced in recent years.

It is important to stress that the processes of Unification in Italy were achieved due to a number of factors both within and outside Italy. Also, there are different historical interpretations and perspectives that account for these processes which are beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, the main aim of the discussion here is to outline the key historical events surrounding the Unification of Italy (see Figure Two) and to demonstrate their importance for contemporary regionalism in Italy.

Figure Two : Italy at the time of Unification

(Source : Duggan 1994:131)
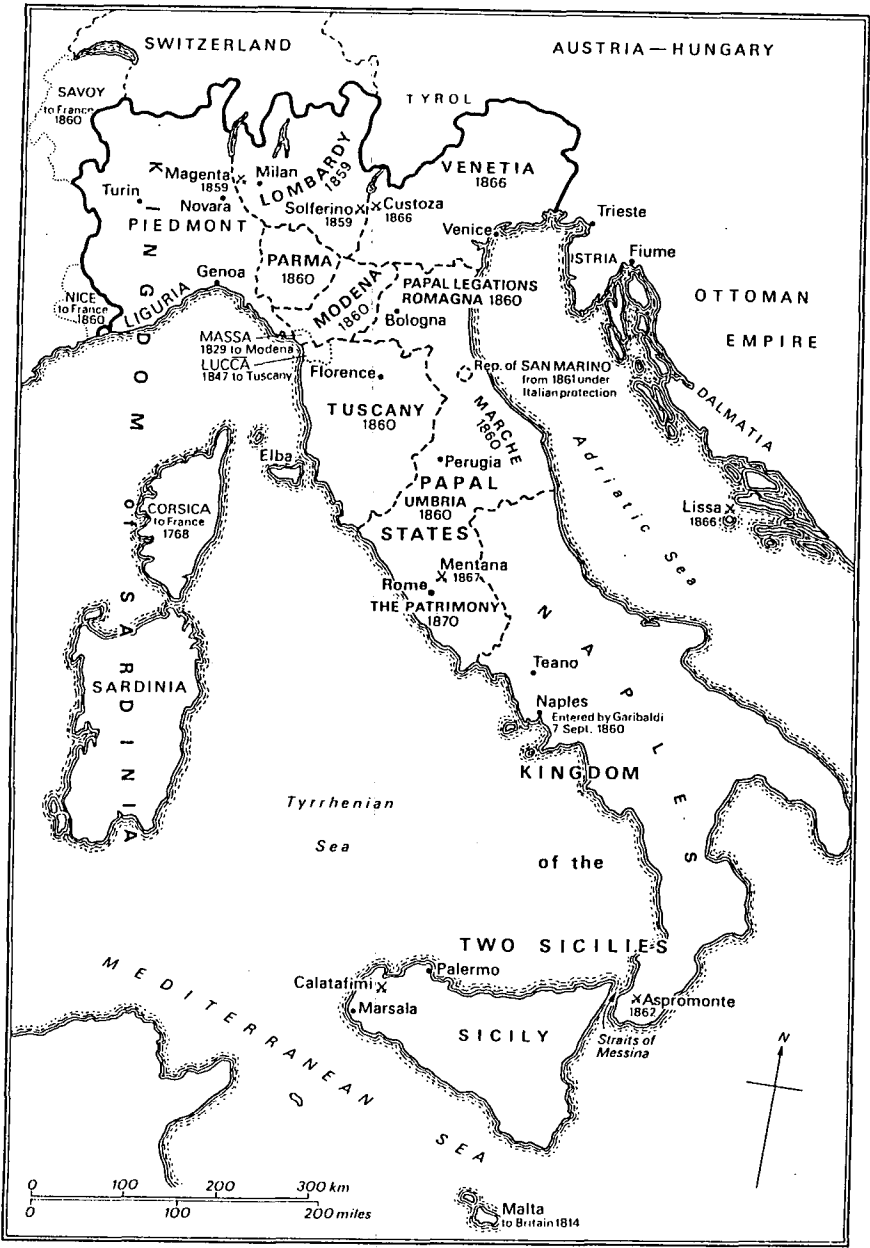
Before Unification, Italy was divided politically into four main spheres of control: the possessions and dependencies of the Austrian Empire, the Papal States in the centre of the peninsula, the Kingdom of Piemonte and Sardinia in the north-west and the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily in the south (See Figure Two). Furthermore, there were a number of small territories that maintained a degree of independence among the main rival powers (Keating 1988). Keating (1988:41) argues that the strong sense of localist sentiment both facilitated and hindered the process of unification in Italy:

> "Localist sentiment was strong, though as it was attached to small territories, towns and villages rather than to the states and dynasties, it eventually served to make the political unification of the peninsula easier, albeit doing nothing to promote national integration."

Undoubtedly, strong regional and local identities have historically been very strong in Italy and are still very much a part of contemporary Italy. Indeed, when the Italian state was proclaimed in 1860, linguistic variegation was so pronounced that no more than ten per cent of all 'Italians' (and perhaps as few as 2.5 per cent) spoke the national language (Lepschy 1990). Although a standard Italian language based on the dialect of educated Florentines had developed, very few people spoke it and so it remained an artificial second language to the majority of the population. Moreover, there was a plethora of local dialects spoken in different places, some of which are still spoken today. In addition, French was widely used in Turin, Latin in Rome and Castilian and Catalan in Naples, Sicily and Sardinia (Keating 1988).

The creation of the Italian national-state was accompanied by the intellectual movement of the *Risorgimento* which consisted of philosophers, soldiers and state figures such as Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour. However, as Keating (1988:40) explains, the influence of this movement on the actual process of state-building was limited, and the ideology of nationalism never penetrated more than a tiny fraction of the population until well after the establishment of the state. The main impetus for the unification of Italy came from the Piemontese monarchists who understood that regional differentiation was the principal obstacle to the process of unification. In fact, *'Fatta l'Italia, dobbiamo fare gli italiani'* ('Having made Italy, we must now make Italians') was their slogan. As a result, the Piemontese rulers concluded that the

highly centralised Franco-Napoleonic model of governance was the most apt and so a strong central authority was seen as the necessary remedy for the weak integration of the new Italian national-state (Putnam 1993:18).

At the time of Unification other political commentators, such as Cattaneo, called for the establishment of autonomous regional or federal governments within the new state, which might have better matched the regional diversities within the country. Yet the prevailing view of the time was that decentralisation was incompatible with prosperity and political progress. The centralisers won the debate and a strong Prefect system, modelled on the French system, was imposed on the nascent Italian state with the centre controlling the personnel and policies of all local governments (Allum 1973). However, in order to maintain political support the new Italian leaders developed the practice of *trasformismo*, in which patronage deals were struck with local notables. In effect, support for the national governing coalition was bought by adjustment of the national policy to suit local conditions (or at least to suit the locally powerful) (Putnam 1993:19). The role of the Prefects was to conciliate with local elites, especially in the South of Italy, and so vertical networks of patron-client ties developed and became a means through which the effects of administrative centralisation were reduced (Clark 1984:58-61).

The decision to implement a centralised system of governance within Italy instead of a more decentralised structure has influenced the whole development of the Italian national-state. Significantly, the system of governance within Italy has not changed drastically since its original inception; it is still based on the strength of the central government, which is represented at the local level by a network of Prefects. Today, as at the time of Unification, there are increased demands for the implementation of a federal structure of governance and the devolution of greater power to the regional and level in Italy. The LN has been one of the chief protagonists in the debates surrounding the future of the state and structure of government in Italy.

Putnam (1993:158) argues that at the time of the Italian Unification, neither the North nor the South of Italy had really been touched by the industrial revolution. As late as 1881, roughly 60 per cent of Italians worked on the land (slightly more in the North),

while fewer than 15 per cent (slightly more in the South) worked in manufacturing, including cottage industries. In the North, farms were more productive, and thus per capita income was probably 15-20 per cent higher there at the time of unification than it was in the South of Italy. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the North of Italy had already begun to trade with the rest of Northern and Central Europe and so gradually the region began to move ahead economically, whereas the South actually became less urban and less industrial between 1871 and 1911. This trend continued and by 1911 the North-South gap had widened appreciably so that Northern incomes were about 50 per cent higher than those of the South (Clark 1984:31).

The impetus for the creation of the Italian national-state did not really come from the Italian people but was largely achieved by a process of political manoeuvring and compromise on the part of the Kingdom of Piemonte. Also, the top-down imposition of the newly formed centralised structures of the Italian state did not really generate a great deal of popular support. Consequently, identification with the nascent nation-state remained rather weak and this is one of the reasons why regional differences are still marked in contemporary Italy and the state remains a distant reality for many Italians. The events which led to the Unification of Italy were part of a wider trend towards the creation of nation-states in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the next section discusses.

## 2.1 The geo-politics of Italian Unification

During the first half of the nineteenth century Italy was geographically and politically situated between two of the main powers in Europe at that time, the French and the Austrians. At the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815 (following the defeat of Napoleon) the restoration of Italy was strictly defined and controlled by the Austrian empire which gained control of the Lombardy and Veneto regions of Italy. The only Italian state that remained relatively independent of Austria was the Kingdom of Piemonte. Thus Piemonte, especially due to its proximity to France, became an important buffer between the two powers; a factor which would become key in successive years.

Throughout Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century there was opposition to the restoration of pre-Revolutionary governments. Between 1848 and 1849, in Italy, as well as France, Spain and Germany there were revolutionary conspiracies and insurrections. In Italy, Piemonte twice declared war on the Austrian empire and was defeated on both occasions. Nevertheless, the revolutions of 1848-9 did mark a turning point for Piemonte; it maintained its own constitution granted by Austria in 1848 and, from then on, its political development diverged markedly from the rest of Italy (Riall 1994:14). Shortly afterwards, a parliament was established in Piemonte, albeit one that had limited power, although it soon began to exercise authority and facilitate political change. In 1854, Cavour became prime minister of Piemonte and he instigated far-reaching economic and financial reforms as well as skilfully negotiating the interests of the Kingdom abroad. The increased power of Piemonte combined with the success of its economic and political reforms ensured that the political climate and balance of power within Italy was altered (Riall 1994:14).

In 1859, ten years after the initial uprisings, Piemonte fought a successful war against the Austrians. Cavour had conspired with Napoleon III of France in order to gain French support for the war; Piemonte gained Lombardy and Tuscany from the Austrians in 1860 and Nice and Savoy were ceded to the French (Keating 1988:42). In the South of Italy, the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily was annexed by Garibaldi whose popular nationalism had attracted volunteers to fight for the nationalist cause. This effectively united Southern Italy with the Northern state of Piemonte when Garibaldi finally handed over these possessions to King Victor Emmanuel II of Piemonte (Keating 1988:43). However, the amalgamation was not problem free as there was a period of unrest and conflict between Southern activists. In March 1861, Victor Emmanuel II, was declared King of a unified Italy, after the Papal states fell to the Piemontese army. However, it was not until after 1870, following the withdrawal of French troops from Rome and the occupation by the Italian army that the city finally became the capital of Italy (Riall 1994:15).

It is important to place the events taking place in Italy in the context of the broader changes that were going on more generally in European state and civil society at the time. Indeed, the processes of Italian Unification appear to be part of a broader

European trend that witnessed the decline of the large multi-national Empires and regional states, and the emergence of the modern European nation-states based upon the idea of national sovereignty and independence (Riall 1994:16). In particular, the war in the Crimea caused the two imperial powers of Austria and Russia to fall out and so it seemed that the international climate had turned against the multi-national Empires (Riall 1994:69). Consequently, in much of Europe, nationalism was emerging as one of the dominant political ideologies and liberal public opinion had begun to promote national self-determination as the dominant model for political development. This was especially the case in Italy, with Cavour the Prime Minister of Piemonte, expressing the problems of Austrian oppression upon Italy. Thus, national unity seemed to offer an explanation for the problems that the country faced, notably the divisive presence of Austria and of the other controlling powers.

The other important impetus for Italian Unification came from Mazzini (and his followers) who was the main proponent of Italian political nationalism. He developed and produced a series of journals, newspapers and professional organisations based in Northern Italy, which aimed to spread the doctrines of popular sovereignty and national self-determination for Italy. Mazzini believed that Italy, as Riall (1994: 67) points out:

> "had been called upon by God to become a nation, and it was only by becoming a nation that it could fulfil its mission as an inspiration for other nations to do the same."

Italian Unification was not without its problems. Firstly, there was no consensus as to how the Italian nation was to be defined; secondly, there were clashes with the Catholic Church which did not agree with the secular message of Italian nationalism; thirdly, moderate liberals had envisaged the creation of a wealthy North Italian state not a unified Italy comprising the relatively poorer South. The problems were compounded by the fact that for the Italian elites, 'nationalism' was often a euphemism for 'regionalism' and enthusiasm for nationalist ideals masked their loyalty and sense of patria to the local scale as well as a resentment which undermined the processes of Unification. In spite of the enthusiasm for nationalist ideals there was, for example, resentment felt by Palermo liberals towards Naples, and jealously

between Tuscan and Piemontese reformers. The nationalism associated with the Unification offered no real permanent basis around which Italians (or Sicilians, Tuscans or Venetians) could unite, and no coherent political alternative to Italy's disintegrating Restoration governments (Riall 1994:74-75). However, Unification managed to create a liberated Italian state which was free from exploitation from dominant imperial powers.

The development of the Italian state after Unification is especially important in relation to the drive for contemporary regionalism; some of the challenges that exist today are related to the nature of decisions that were made when the unified Italian state was created. Politically, Cavour and his successors decided to 'Piemontise' the structure and workings of existing functions of government. Furthermore, a centralised political structure was implemented in the whole of Italy which was a very unpopular move especially in the former states. As Riall (1994:77) explains, this centralisation only served to emphasise rather than undermine regional rivalries and local resistance and thus further undermine the processes of unification. Economically, the new Italian state faced problems of slow economic growth coupled with growing regional economic divergence; some areas benefited from increased free trade, notably areas of commercial agriculture, yet others lost out especially areas of manufacturing industry in the South. Furthermore, this intensified the problems of national unity and the establishment of a political consensus that could unify the relatively wealthy North with the poorer South.

Gramsci (1966) argues that the reasons for the divergence between the North and South of Italy relate to the ways in which the socio-political integration of the South into the newly formed Italian nation-state took place. He argues that it was the moderate modernising northern elite which allied itself with the southern agrarian landlords and local notables (thus forming the so-called 'historical bloc'). It was this particular system of social integration, which had an inhibiting effect on the spread of capitalism in southern agriculture and industry. One reason for this was the fact that monetary consumption was restricted because of the poverty-stricken conditions of the southern landless peasants. Moreover, capital investment was made outside the regions of the South of Italy where better returns could be gained (Mingione 1994:34).

Therefore, this division continued to widen in the years after Unification up to the creation of the Italian Republic and it is this period in Italian history which the next section examines.

## 2.2 From Unification to Republic

During the period after Unification, Italy underwent further political, social and economic changes as the nascent Italian national-state began its process of modernisation. The problem remained that the newly formed national-state did not generate a great deal of commitment from the majority of Italian society. Hine (1993:12) argues that an ingrained provincialism persisted for decades after the unification of 1861 and the problems were intensified because of the lack of political cohesion of the new state. One of the main problems which Italy's liberal leaders faced was that of overcoming the long-standing and deep-rooted social, cultural and economic contrasts between different areas of the country (Hine 1993:14).

The challenges to the liberal Italian state intensified during the first two decades of the twentieth century with the growth of different political forces such as Socialism, political Catholicism, Nationalism and Fascism. All of these political movements posed serious threats to the legitimacy of the Italian government. However, it was not until 1922 when Benito Mussolini came to power that the parliamentary system was abandoned in favour of a dictatorial, Fascist state within the space of only two years. The Fascist period, under Mussolini, proved to be a difficult one for Italy; economically, the country suffered enormously and became bankrupt; military expansion proved problematic because of the inability of the economy to support exploits in Africa and also because Italy allied itself with Germany during the Second World War.

In 1943, Mussolini's Fascist government which had been in power since the 1920s, decided to enter the Second World War on the side of Hitler and as Ginsborg (1990:10) argues, this was a decision which proved fatal for Italian Fascism. Ginsborg explains that for the under equipped Italian army, the War proved to be a disaster especially with defeats in Greece and Africa and also because internally Mussolini's popularity declined drastically in the face of food shortages, Allied aerial

bombings, industrial action mainly in the North of Italy and rural discontentment at high taxation and the control of grain prices. These factors caused Mussolini's government to fall after which there followed a period of intense political turmoil which culminated in the signing of an armistice between Italy and the Allies, which effectively ended Italy's connection with Hitler's Germany (Ginsborg 1990:12). However, this did not mark the end of the conflicts, which actually intensified, especially in the North of Italy, as the German forces tried to maintain their control over Italian territory. Eventually, the Germans surrendered in 1945 in the face of the Italian Resistance forces and the Allies (Ginsborg 1990).

The events after the surrender of the Germans and the Allied victory are particularly important in the context of the ushering in of a new democratic era in Italy with the birth of the Italian Republic in 1948. This period was one in which Italy suffered immensely. However, from this hiatus came some of the motivations for the drive towards democracy and socio-economic growth in Italy. These were the need to instil political stability after the demise of Fascism; the need to improve the socially and economically impoverished nature of the country in the aftermath of the ravages of war; and ultimately to maintain the integrity of the Italian national-state, which was still only eighty years old. Between 1945 and 1948 various democratic government coalitions were created and during this period, as Ginsborg argues (1990:72), there was the gradual development on both the national Italian and international scale of two vast opposing fronts, one having its focal point in the employing classes, the Christian Democrats (DC) and the United States, the other centred on the working-class movement, the Communists (PCI) and the Soviet Union. This period saw the emergence of the Cold War global order and the 'East-West' polarisation of world geo-politics, which has only recently broken down with the demise of the Soviet Union.

Italy was a crucial component of the emerging Cold War within Western Europe. The Italian election of 1948 was important because the United States was fearful of the fact that the Italian Communists had a real chance of winning the election and thus Soviet hegemony would expand into Western Europe. In order to overcome this threat the United States government instigated a comprehensive aid programme for

Western Europe including Italy and Germany, which was known as the 'Marshall Plan'. The aim was to create socio-economic development, stability and to prevent continued severe economic hardship. Moreover, the aim of this aid in Italy was to combat the popularity of the Communists and to ensure a Christian Democrat victory in the 1948 elections (Ginsborg 1990:115). Indeed, George Marshall himself warned the Italian government and people that all help to Italy would immediately cease in the event of a Communist victory (Cazzola 1982). The Soviets, on the other hand, could not match the level of aid provided by the United States. This ideological confrontation and division has remained fundamental throughout the life of the Italian Republic and has had a profound effect on the course of political, social and economic events within Italy. Understanding this dualism is vital in relation to the resurgence of regionalism in the 1990s because it is only recently that it has begun, for a complexity of reasons, to be undermined and challenged. Thus, the nature of the Italian Republic will be explained in order to understand the context for the vast changes that it has undergone in the last decade.

## 2.3 The Italian Republic

Since 1948, Italy has become one of the most developed industrialised countries in the world and it has undergone a vast range of economic and social transformations, in a relatively short space of time. Yet, in spite of these transformations, Italy still remains a country of marked social, economic and regional contrasts. The situation is a complex one in which such advances have eradicated some of the problems that existed previously but new divisions have been replaced or modified with others. Increased material wealth has reduced levels of absolute poverty but consumerist values have affected the coherence and structure of family and community life. The influence of education, media and television have ensured very high levels of literacy and public services but social disorder, crime and secularisation have changed the structure of Italian society in different ways. Increased employment opportunities have improved living standards but have brought new problems, for example, Italy is now a country of immigration rather than emigration, which has created new challenges.

The most significant, enduring and persistent division in Italy, is between the relatively prosperous North, in which most social strata enjoy a reasonable standard of living and the relatively poorer South which remains beset by sharp income inequalities, high levels of both underemployment and unemployment, relatively poor public service provision and relatively high levels of crime and social disorder. Furthermore, superimposed on this North-South dualism there are smaller scale, localistic divisions that exist (in some cases that have existed for many years) in terms of wealth, dialect, culture and level of development. In spite of various measures to overcome and eradicate such divisions during the history of the Italian Republic, they remain quite marked. The crucial point is that the resurgence of regionalism can be attributed not only to the process of unification in Italy, but also to the nature and workings of the Italian Republic. Understanding how, and in what ways, this dual social setting between North and South has been maintained during the years of the Republic allows one to understand why the system has begun to fail in recent years.

Hine (1993:1-3) argues that the Italian political structure is different from any other Western democracy for several fundamental and distinctive reasons. Firstly, the absence of alternation in government in Italy is unique for a major European country, and is widely regarded as a major defect in the legitimacy enjoyed by the Italian State. Secondly, Italy has a form of party government, which is in certain respects a very strong one, which does not entail a direct causal link between electoral demand and policy output via well-defined parliamentary majorities. This is a significant contrast with countries such as France and the United Kingdom. Thirdly, the historical problems of political instability and the experiences of Fascism were the main influencing factors for the founders of the Italian Republic, who wanted to ensure that such events would not occur again. Consequently, both the Italian Constitution and electoral law were designed to disperse power rather than concentrate it. Up until 1993, the electoral system was based upon Proportional Representation, which ensured that it was very difficult for any political party to gain an overall and decisive majority. Fourthly, the pace at which economic development took place in Italy, transforming it from a largely agrarian to modern industrial society, was not matched by the development of an adequate and efficient bureaucratic administrative system and structure. In France and Britain such structures had developed over a far longer

period of time. Italy's social and administrative infrastructure was below the standard of the rest of the countries of Europe, and this largely remains the case today (Hine 1993:2).

In 1946 there were the first free general elections in Italy for over two decades. The voters were asked to perform a double duty, to decide by referendum between the Monarchy and a Republic, and to elect their representatives to the Constituent Assembly, whose principal task was that of developing the Constitution for the Italian Republic). The geographical outcomes of the referendum revealed a definite split between the North and South of the country, with the North and Centre voting for the Republic, whereas the South was equally strongly in favour of the Monarchy. The reasons for this were the very different experiences that the North and South of Italy underwent during the Second World War (Ginsborg 1990:98). Indeed, as Amendolo (1946) wrote at the time of the election:

> "There are large areas of southern Italy where everything seems to have remained as it was before, under Fascism; the political and state apparatus has not changed, and power remains in the hands of the same families."

The Monarchy was defeated in the referendum and Ginsborg (1990:99) argues that this result symbolised the single greatest achievement of the progressive forces in Italian society between 1945 and 1948 and was crucial in the shaping of the Italian Republic. Furthermore, the result for the Constituent Assembly proved to be decisive because the Christian Democrats (DC) were the most powerful party gaining 35.2 per cent of the vote, followed by the Socialists with 20.7 per cent and the Communists with 19 per cent. Thus, the hegemony of the DC was established and the aspirations of the Communists had not been achieved because they were unable to become the main party of the Left (Ginsborg 1990:99).

The main task of the Constituent Assembly was to draw up the new constitution of the Republic which would be the basis for the democratic, economic and social development of post-war Italy. As Ginsborg (1990:100) explains:

"The Italian Constitution embodies a fairly standard system of representative democracy, based on two Houses of Parliament, called respectively the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Chamber is elected once every five years by a system of proportional representation based on multi-member constituencies [This system was replaced in 1993 by a First-past-the-post voting system - see later in this chapter]. The Senate, originally elected once every seven years (later reduced to five), is elected on a regional basis through a mixed system of proportional representation and single-member constituencies."

The Italian system of Proportional Representation was an extremely 'pure' one, which protected minority interests but ensured that no one single political party could grasp complete power. However, Ginsborg (1990:100) argues that the problems of this system became ever clearer during the history of the Italian Republic because it made weak coalition government almost inevitable. This point is crucial in order to understand the nature of governance that ensued in Italy, which involved a breadth of interests in government coalitions that often slowed down the decision making process and meant that there was often a significant element of compromise in the implementation of legislation. In spite of this, Hine (1993:3) argues that the Italian system of governance has proven itself to be capable of implementing major policy initiatives, such as the currency reform in 1947 and the development of the state-holdings sector in the 1950s. However, Hine points out that other initiatives have generally taken an inordinately long time to materialise and especially points to the legislation regarding the creation of greater powers for the Italian regions in the 1970s, which took twenty years to implement.

The 1948 election was also very important in the context of the new Republic because it was the first election to be influenced to such a large extent by the ideological confrontations of the Cold War. After a vigorous election campaign, the American-backed Christian Democrats won the election in resounding fashion. They gained 48.5 per cent of the votes and an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies, 305 seats out of 574. The success of the DC exceeded its wildest expectations not least because their vote had increased by over ten per cent from 1946. The Popular Front (which comprised the Socialists and the Communists) gained 31 per cent of the votes which was a decrease of about eight per cent from its 1946 figure. However, as Ginsborg (1990:118) points out, the results for the two parties within the Popular

Front were quite different; the Communists increased its level of support from 106 deputies in 1946 to 140 in 1948, whereas the Socialists suffered a collapse, with its number of deputies declining by 74 to only 41. Ginsborg (1990:118) argues that from the 1948 election onwards, Communist hegemony on the Left of Italian politics has never been in dispute.

The Christian Democrats never regained an absolute majority in the national Italian elections following 1948, although they had a stake in every one of the post-war Italian governments, up until the landmark elections of 1994 (Kogan 1983:161). Thus, their ability to govern depended on the types of coalition they were able to engineer with the smaller centre-parties in the Italian Parliament, and after 1963 with the Socialists. Clearly, this was a significant achievement for the DC, which managed to maintain its hegemonic position by developing a complicated and elaborate web of social, economic and political networks that provided various kinds of benefits in return for votes. In the South of Italy, the party developed a large clientelistic system that provided various incentives such as public sector jobs, generous grants and subsidies in return for political support. Also, in the North of Italy, benefits were provided to party supporters. Caciagli (1982:288-9) argues that in this way the DC party was able to connect the periphery to the political centre through political notables in the Italian South and the cultivation of Catholic and middle-class constituents in the North. Also, the Christian Democrats increasingly used their influence over public institutions to provide distributive benefits and access to key policy institutions to supporters in the North.

Woods (1992:111) argues that the success of the Christian Democratic party was due to its ability to integrate a diverse range of social groups into a mass political party that occupied a shifting centre position in Italian politics against extremes on the left and right. Furthermore, Woods argues that the DC's system of patronage developed over time into a coherent and structured arrangement encompassing specific groups, for example, associations such as Catholic Action, Farmers' Organisation (*Coldiretti*) and the Confederation of Italian Trade Unions (CISL) as well as supporting an inefficient service sector of shopkeepers through economic and administrative policies in the North of Italy. This system of clientelism and patronage spread to the other

political parties, most notably to the Communist Party, who Woods (1992:111) argues had previously criticised this system of clientelism and patronage, but in the 1970s themselves began a similar system with what was called the 'historic compromise'. Thus, the Communist Party developed networks and ties with different social and economic groups, the most important being with Italy's largest labour union, CGIL.

This system of patronage was one of the main reasons for the intensification of social, economic and political divisions within Italy. The South became increasingly dependent on state transfers and on public sector jobs, whilst Northern businesses benefited from favourable economic policies. Ultimately corruption become an integral part of the whole system. One of the outcomes of this system of corruption was that Italy's public sector deficit increased steadily and became one of the largest in the European Union. It became apparent that the traditional party system could not be sustained, or even tolerated by the majority of Italians.

One way in which the party elite tried to decentralise power and thus bring government closer to the people whilst also appeasing the growing demands for greater regional devolution, was in fact the creation of the regional tier of government. Localist, and to a lesser extent regionalist identities, are marked in Italy, yet the Italian centralised system of governance prior to the creation of the Italian Republic did not give any real autonomy to the regions. However, with the creation of the Republic this changed as the Italian Constitution made specific reference to local and regional autonomy. The regions which gained greater autonomy immediately because of the Constitutional mandate were those located in the Italian border areas, which were threatened by separatism and ethnic problems, and the two Italian islands. Therefore, in 1949, in Sicily, Sardinia, Valle d'Aosta and Trentino Alto-Adige regional governments were created. These regions were designated with so-called 'Special Status'. The creation of the fifth Special region Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, which was complicated by the Trieste dispute with Yugoslavia, was postponed until 1964 (Putnam 1993:18).

The problem was that for more than 20 years, the constitutional provision for regional governments elsewhere in the country remained largely ignored. There are several

reasons for this; firstly, there was a fear on the part of the government dominated by the DC that giving power to the regions would reduce the power at the centre. This was especially the case with the regions of central Italy, such as Emilia-Romagna, where the Communists were dominant. Secondly, in the immediate post-war years the threat of Communism in Europe was very real and so there was a fear on the part of the Americans that a weak central government in Italy would provide a potential opportunity for the spread of Communism. However, by the mid-1960s much had begun to change mainly because of the vast social and economic transformations which were taking place in Italy. During the two decades from 1950 to 1970, the Italian economy grew faster than ever before in Italian history and faster than virtually every other Western economy (Putnam 1993:20). The problem was that the political and institutional development of the country lagged behind and it became ever more apparent that the central bureaucracy was unable to meet the demands placed upon it. This combined with an emergent interest in regional planning, a leftward drift in the governing coalition and the tumultuous events of 1968, which forced parliament to pass legislation for the creation of regional government in the other Italian regions (Putnam 1993:20).

By 1970, the legislation approving the creation of the Italian regions was approved, which allowed the first regional councils to be elected, which signified the creation of the so-called 'Ordinary regions' (which contained 85 per cent of Italy's population) (Putnam 1993:21). However, the new regional governments, which numbered 15, did not commence functioning until April 1st 1972 (Putnam (1993:3) (See Figure Three). The proponents of Italian regionalism were convinced that the creation of the new regional governments would instigate a wide-ranging radical social and political renewal of the country (Allum 1973:236). However, the initial enthusiasm for regional government quickly led to disappointment as it soon became clear that the regions had limited powers. As Allum et al (1970/71) argue "old wine in new bottles" was a common expectation when the Italian regions were created because of the experience of Italian institutional changes that had really changed nothing. The main reason for this was the fiscal and budgetary restraints which were placed on the nascent regional governments. However, in spite of these and other problems the regional governments have gradually gained increased legitimacy and responsibilities

during the life of the Republic. By the beginning of the 1990s, nearly one-tenth of Italy's GDP was being spent by the regional governments, which is only slightly below the figure for the federal American states. Furthermore, all regional governments had gained responsibility for such fields as urban affairs, agriculture, housing, hospitals and health services, public works, vocational education and economic development (Putnam 1993:3). Over the last two decades, Putnam (1993:25) argues, the region has become an authentic, autonomous, and increasingly distinctive arena in Italian politics.

Figure Three : The structure of Italian Regions

A key question is the extent to which the creation of the regional level of government in Italy has changed the practice of politics and governance in Italy. Moreover, what have been the implications of this institutional regionalism upon the drive for contemporary regionalism? Also, to what extent have the regional governments facilitated the growth of a sense of regional identity within the Italian regions? The Italian regional governments do play a part in the drive for contemporary regionalism but their significance varies from region to region. By the end of the 1980s, as research undertaken by Putnam (1993:53-55) shows, nearly all the northern regional governments (nine out of ten) were met with approval by the majority of their citizens, but none of the southern regions approached that goal. Also, citizens in the North of Italy differentiate between the central government, with which most of them are heartily dissatisfied, and regional and local government, with which most of them are reasonably content. On the other hand, in Southern Italy all three tiers of government are viewed with the same levels of dissatisfaction. Putnam (1993:55) concludes by arguing that whatever the shortcomings of Italian regional governments, it is apparent that the majority of the citizens of the North of Italy prefer to be governed from closer to home. Conversely, for the citizens of the South, being ruled at the local level is much the same as being ruled from Rome, and both levels of government are viewed as largely undesirable.

It is no coincidence that a political party, such as the LN, striving for greater regional autonomy for the North of Italy has risen to political prominence. It is the LN which has contributed to debates surrounding the need for further regionalisation and federalism in Italy. Both of these are now issues on the political agendas of most of the main Italian political parties, whereas ten years ago this was not the case. Moreover, the LN has given an even greater political significance to the increasing socio-economic divergence between the North and South of Italy. In combining the calls for federalism and institutional change with the socio-economic situation between the North and South of Italy, the LN has managed to pose a real challenge to the Italian central government. This is a challenge which will not easily go away because the schism between the North and South of Italy is still very marked. In part this is due to the specific nature of the socio-economic development of the Italian

Republic, which has given rise to a particular set of economic structures and linkages between the North and South of Italy, as the next section discusses.

## 2.4 Socio-economic transformations of the Italian Republic

The drive towards regionalism in the 1990s is inextricably linked to the socio-economic contradictions evident in Italy and to the particular characteristics of Italy's post-war development. As Hine (1993:33) explains this development involved an intense process of industrialisation concentrated into a far shorter time period than the majority of other countries in Western Europe. This means that marked differences exist between regions, not only between the prosperous North and backward South, but also a major difference within the northern half of the country between the older industrial region of the north-west, and the so-called 'third Italy' of the North-east and North-centre. Moreover, Hine (1993:34) argues that Italy's post-war socio-economic development can be broadly divided into three key phases. The 'economic miracle' from the early 1950s to early 1960s formed the first phase. The second, between the mid-1960s and 1970s was a transitional phase, and the third runs from the mid-1970s to the present. Of course, there is significant overlap between the three phases but in general it is possible to identify certain distinct themes throughout each period.

During the period of the 'economic miracle' the Italian economy underwent unprecedented and sustained growth and by the late 1950s it had overcome the chronic problems of the 1940s. Hine (1993:34) points out that in the two decades from 1951 to 1971, per capita income increased more than in the whole of united Italy's previous ninety-year history. This growth was based, to a large extent, on industrial expansion and export success in industries such as iron and steel, petrochemicals and motor vehicles and the development of large modern firms such as Fiat, Olivetti and Pirelli accompanied by the mobilisation of a growing urban working class. In addition, there were a significant number of small firms involved in manufacturing. Furthermore, an important element in this industrial take-off was the disparity in regional development between the North and South of Italy. The lack of employment opportunities in the South meant that the region provided a crucial source of cheap labour which sustained the economic boom. In fact, Mingione (1993:317) argues that basically it was a

generation of Southern Italian workers which facilitated the economic growth in Italy at that time.

Italy was one of the founder members of the European Economic Community in 1958, which was an important development for the Italian economy. This placed Italy at the centre of the growing socio-economic linkages within Western Europe and allowed it to export goods to other European countries (especially vehicles and chemicals) and created a cycle of export-oriented growth. Moreover, government investment was also a factor in the economic boom with major investment schemes implemented in transport, communications, agriculture and housing. In addition, the state-holding companies of ENI and IRI were created; these were basically multi-sectoral holding companies with interests in a wide range of activities, with the aim of ensuring controlled industrial reconstruction (Hine 1993:35-37).

Economic growth continued and brought with it significant social and economic transformations. However, the onset of recessionary periods in the 1960s slowed down levels of growth. The political responses to slower economic growth were significant. Hine (1993:42) argues that 1963 represented a major turning point in post-war Italy because politically it marked the beginning of a new phase in Italian government coalition building. The main difference was the emergence of the Centre-Left coalition, which formalised the political recognition on the part of the DC that rapid economic growth had increased the importance of social-welfare issues for the majority of people, and workers in particular. There were also greater demands on the part of workers for higher wage levels and standards of public services, which led to increasing trade union (TU) strength. All this contrived to make this period a conflictual and problematic one for the Italian government. Hine (1993:43) explains that these problems culminated with the so-called 'Hot Autumn' of 1969 when the labour movement rebelled against the employers and government in a bitter and sustained confrontation. Combined with the first oil crisis in 1973, which instigated further recessionary and inflationary pressures, this ensured that the social and economic tensions during the 1970s became increasingly severe.

After this period, between 1974 and 1984, Hine (1993:54) points out that there was a gradual adjustment to the dramatic political and economic changes of the first half of the 1970s, which witnessed a reduction in power of the trade unions. Hine suggests that new forms of industrial organisation were being sought in an attempt to reduce the levels of unionisation that had previously existed and increase flexibility. The most significant trend of this period, for the Italian economy, was the growth of small firms, especially in the manufacturing sector. The statistics emphasise this trend: for example in the 1981 census of industry, employment in manufacturing industry among large firms (500 employees or more) fell by 13.5 per cent over the period 1971-81. During the same period, manufacturing employment in small firms (employing fewer than 100) grew by 11.5 per cent (Hine 1993:54).

The geographical implications of these socio-economic transformations are particularly important; the development of small firms took place less in the industrial triangle (where traditions of trade unionisation were strongest and unemployment was lowest). On the other hand, the areas which underwent the real growth in small manufacturing firms was the so-called 'north-east corridor', an area stretching from the Veneto down the Adriatic coast through the Red Belt of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and the Marche (Hine 1993:54). It was this region which Bagnasco (1977) first called the 'Third Italy'; he drew attention to the fact that, alongside the familiar 'two Italies' of the northern industrial triangle and the underdeveloped *Mezzogiorno*, there in fact existed a 'Third Italy' based on a 'diffuse economy', which was relatively small scale, but technologically advanced, and based upon a diversity of highly productive manufacturing sectors. The rise of the 'Third Italy' has been widely debated and various explanations have been put forward for its development. For example, Piore and Sabel (1984) used the term 'flexible specialisation' to explain the numerous examples in north-central Italy of craft-like manufacturing firms, such as the high fashion textile firms around Prato, or the Brescia mini-mill steel producers, which are concentrated within so-called 'industrial districts' (Putnam 1993:160).

Undoubtedly, in the last several decades, Italy has undergone massive economic, social, political and demographic change. The significant industrial advancement of the country has been accompanied by the migration of millions of Italians from one

region to another and of course abroad; more than nine million of them (or roughly one-fifth of the entire population) migrated in the fifteen years after 1955 (Ginsborg 1990:219). However, the significant point is that the socio-economic gap between the North and the South of the country has continued to intensify. For example, Levy (1996:3) points out that if the average GDP in the European Union equalled 100, the GDP of Northern and Central Italy was 122, whilst that of the South was only 68.9. Indeed, Northern and Central Italy had a higher per capita GDP than Germany (113.8), France (108.9) and the UK (106.3). These figures highlight the socio-economic schism between the North and the South of Italy and the differences are even greater when one considers the fiscal transfers of the Italian state. In 1991, the South of Italy received 53 per cent of the capital transfers from the Italian state, yet it only paid 20 per cent of the national direct tax revenues, 29 per cent of all indirect revenues, and 16 per cent of national social security contributions (Levy 1996:3). In terms of the levels of unemployment, in the same year, they stood at over 15 per cent in the regions of Sicilia, Calabria, Basilicata, Camapania and Molise. However, in most of Piemonte, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and the Veneto it was below five per cent and in the rest of the North of Italy generally, it was between five and ten per cent (Graham 1994).

The so-called 'Southern Question' has been an enduring feature of the Italian national-state since its inception in the nineteenth century. However, the fundamental point is that in recent years this division has taken on a new and more potent political significance. Levy (1996:3) argues that no one even in the early or mid-1980s would have predicted that by the late 1980s and early 1990s a major movement claiming Northern identity as its distinguishing characteristic would be undermining the whole legitimacy of the Italian national-state. Yet, this is precisely what has happened with the growth in importance of the LN. It can be argued that the LN poses a serious challenge to the unity and integrity of the Italian national-state for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, the LN has raised important questions about the nature of Italian national identity and the very structure of the state itself. Poche (1992:71) argues that to understand contemporary regionalism and especially the rise of the LN it is important to acknowledge that Italy has never really become a real nation-state. Poche argues that the bureaucratic, centralised state inherited from the Savoy Monarchy (itself a direct descendent of the Enlightenment) has always remained remote from

popular consciousness and basic social organisation. Ritaine (1994:76) sums up this situation which is clearly bound up with the resurgence of regionalism in contemporary Italy:

"Marked by the original sin of an authoritarian centralisation, imposed against the diversified reality of the country, the Italian state, whatever her status has been in the course of the brief unitary history of the country (liberal monarchy, totalitarian dictatorship, interventionist and social democracy), has never succeeded in rooting itself on a long-term basis in the national conscience nor in becoming a structuring instrument of society. Confronted with extremely inveterate local characteristics by forms of social organisation which resist any intervention from outside, by a fabric of rival institutions, organised in the main by the Church which over the centuries has moulded and fashioned attitudes and has formed the backbone of the communities, the State, in the eyes of the majority of Italians, has not stopped appearing as both an exterior and abstract reality, an imported product devoid of national roots."

The key question is why regionalism has not been a persistent feature within Italy bearing in mind its fragmented origins and also why has it become such a potent force in recent times. These are issues which are bound up with the dramatic political, economic and social changes that have taken place in Italy in recent years. Indeed, the next section examines such changes which have shaken the very foundations of the Italian Republic and have raised serious questions about the future of Italian unity.

## 3. The Fall and Rise of the Italian Republic?

The alleged shortcomings of the Italian Republic - its political structure and system of governance - the lack of alternation of political control - and the apparent embeddedness of corruption - have all long been studied and denounced. Yet, for decades the Italian Republic maintained its political stability and the durability of its political elite was confirmed. However, quite remarkably this all changed within the space of a few years from the beginning of the 1990s; the years from 1992 to 1994 were amongst the most dramatic in the history of the Italian Republic. For example, in the course of 1993, the five ruling parties of the post-war period were wiped off the political map in an alarmingly short space of time (Ginsborg 1990:19). Pasquino (1995:vi) argues it is not possible to fix a precise date for the start of what he calls the 'Italian transition' but certainly it is possibly to say that it will be continuing for quite some time. Several events have been important, for example, 1989 with the fall of the

Berlin Wall, which caused the decline of Italian communism and subsequently Christian Democracy; the 13th of February 1992 when Mario Chiesa was discovered by Antonio Di Pietro, which started the *Tangentopoli* ('Kick-back' scandals); the national election of April 1992, when the LN made its first electoral gains based on the protest of the people of the North of Italy against the political system; the referendum result of 18th April 1993 when Italians voted overwhelmingly in favour of a new electoral system; the national elections of 1994, when Berlusconi's electoral alliances, *Polo per la libertà* in the North and *Polo del buongoverno* in the Centre-South won the election; and 1996 with the victory of the *Ulivo*, which was the first time in the history of the Italian Republic that a centre-left coalition (allied with the Reformed Communists) gained an outright electoral victory.

The whole history of the Italian Republic has been transformed in the space of a few years which various commentators have defined as a 'political earthquake' (Gundle and Parker 1996:1). Some question whether these political transformations constitute the creation of a new regime and the birth of the Italian 'Second Republic' (Cartocci 1995), whereas others have questioned whether new party labels and fresh faces have masked the resilience of influential forces and personalities from the 'First Republic'. The transformations which have occurred are related to very disparate elements. Ginsborg (1996:20) argues that viewed from different vantage points the changes which have occurred are quite diverse. For example, he argues that from the Palace of Justice in Milan, the changes signify a battle against endemic Italian corruption; from the Bank of Italy, the situation represents a crisis of the enormous Italian public sector deficit; for the regions of Lombardy and Veneto it is about the drive towards greater autonomy and perhaps even secession, based upon the politics of Umberto Bossi's LN.

Ginsborg (1996:20) maintains that is important to view the changes in the broadest possible sense taking into consideration a number of different spheres - economic, political, institutional and cultural, in order more fully to understand the situation. Similarly, Pasquino (1995:vi) states that the 'Italian transition' is not only a political transition but also a socio-economic, institutional, social and cultural one and it is not possible to define a particular event as the exact point of departure for the transition.

Therefore, it is important to contextualise and link the transformations to broader changes which have been taking place in the Italian Republic since its creation as well as the more recent dramatic events, as the next section explores.

## 3.1 Societal transformations within Italy

As Ginsborg (1996:28) argues:

> "the Italian version of the social change that has characterised advanced capitalist nations in the last 20 years is a fascinating one."

Although similar trends of social change have been apparent throughout the whole of Italy, there have been quite considerable differences between the North and South. Northern Italian society is marked by severe decline of both Catholic and Communist sub-cultures (Cartocci 1994), by ever smaller families, with very low fertility rates in most regions (Ginsborg 1994) and by an increase in the autonomy of women and their presence in the labour market. Family loyalties are still strong as is the desire to set up small family businesses. In addition, consumption patterns of a wide range of consumer goods are marked. Moreover, as Ginsborg (1996:29) argues, Northern Italian society is still characterised by strong localisms, a strong work ethic and a fair degree of opulence. This is combined with a scarce respect for regulations governing working conditions, contributions and taxation. There is also a growing intolerance towards the alleged inefficiencies of the central Italian state, as well as a growing resentment (even racism) towards Southern and 'Third World' (so-called 'extracomunitari') immigrants. However, Northern Italian society is by no means culturally homogeneous because there are certain areas (urban peripheries, zones of deindustrialisation) which have undergone different and contradictory processes of transformation (Ginsborg 1996:29).

Southern Italian society during the last 20 years, however, has undergone some of the same changes (especially increases in consumption) as the North, but with certain radical differences (Ginsborg 1996:29). Whereas in the North, employment opportunities are relatively stable, in the South the employment situation is much more precarious. In particular, the participation rates of southern females in both employment and also in education is lower than in the North. Youth unemployment is

an especially severe problem in the South, especially because of the difficulty of finding a permanent job. Although the size of southern families has declined, the average family size is still higher in the South than in the North (Mingione 1994:38). Undoubtedly, the South of Italy has undergone a considerable process of modernisation but it is apparent that it is still beset with certain problems.

It is such trends within Italian society, especially those which have reduced the traditionally strong bonds between civil society and political parties, which have had the most impact. The hegemony of the Italian political parties was maintained, to a large extent, through the complicated patronage and clientelistic networks which developed between various social groups and the political parties themselves. Thus, an important factor which accounts for the changes in the Italian political system relates to the changing relationships and weakening of the ties between political parties and social groups in Italy. In part, this stems from increased secularisation and the decline in importance of the Church throughout Italy. However, this has been more the case in certain areas of the North of Italy whereas in the South the Church still remains relatively more important. In addition, Woods (1995:192) argues that the erosion of links between Italy's major political parties and associational groups stems from the significant socio-economic changes which have taken place in Italy. The rapid economic expansion of the Italian economy in the 1950s and 1960s, accompanied by the shift in population from the South to the North and from rural areas to cities, along with increased secularisation and mass education dramatically transformed Italy. The result was that the Italian state was confronted with new demands and issues, which was especially the case by the 1980s when socio-economic modernisation in Northern and Central Italy outstripped political development. This had the effect of gradually undermining the effectiveness of the party-dominated state.

It is such broader changes that have taken place in Italy, over the last fifty years, which provide the context for the contemporary socio-economic and political changes. In particular, the changing nature of the links between the Italian electorate and the mass political parties is a significant trend, which caused a decline in the levels of support for the main parties. However, this decline was considerably accelerated by the events which took place in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of

Communism. This threw the system of Italian democracy into turmoil and effectively ended the First Italian Republic, as the next section examines.

## 3.2 Problems of Italian democracy

Ginsborg (1996:23) argues the failures and problems of the Italian system of democracy have frequently been described. The PR electoral system, which served to create weak coalition governments; the dominance of one party, the DC, with the Socialists in opposition; the colonisation of the state by the dominant parties and the absence of a feasible alternative in government, have all had grave but as yet non-fatal consequences for Italian democracy. This so-called *partitocrazia* ('party-ocracy') system, Poche (1992:73) argues, became increasingly obsolete with the growing complexity of the modern economy and society. This system of governance in Italy was no longer tolerable, Poche argues, for two reasons; firstly there was a general and continuous fall in the quality of public services; and secondly, there was a public employment policy which was characterised by the disproportionate employment of Southern Italians in the state sector. It is these structural features of Italian state policy which continue to exacerbate the division between state and society in Italy and which render the system of state and governance obsolete and unable to meet the demands of the modern economy (Poche 1992:73). Consequently, the equilibria which maintained the Italian state and economy could no longer hold and so at the beginning of the 1990s this system collapsed ushering in a new phase in the history of the Italian Republic.

The key point is that Italian democracy and governance was not only facing an internal challenge of legitimacy but also an external threat as well. The main reason being the end of the Cold War era in 1989. Woods (1995:192) argues that during the Cold War era the weakening of ties between the Italian political parties and society remained limited, however, with the end of the Cold War the gap between the Italian party system and civil society revealed itself to be significant. The collapse of the Communist system in the East sapped the legitimacy of Italy's political parties, especially the two dominant ones (DC and PCI), because ideological confrontation was crystallised in the party political system which related to the workings of the Cold War; the DC was backed by the US and the PCI backed by the Soviet Union. Thus,

the ending of the Cold War had a significant effect on Italian politics. As Annunziata (1993:444-445) argues:

> "What is now crumbling in Italy is, in effect, the political system created there almost single-handedly by the US government at the end of World War Two. The Italian crisis is nothing less than the symbolic equivalent of the fall of the Berlin Wall."

The signal that the Italian system of democracy was undergoing real change was the 1992 national election. Bull et al (1994:3) argue that the national elections of 1992 were the first compelling confirmation that a 'sea change' was taking place in Italian politics. The results of the election were very significant because the share of the vote for the three largest parties (DC, PDS, PSI) tumbled from 75.2 per cent in 1987 to 59.4 per cent in 1992. For the first time since 1948 the four party coalition failed to poll a majority of votes cast. The main party, the DC, saw the share of its vote fall below 30 per cent, which was the lowest result ever for the party (Gundle and Parker 1996:3). The tremors which this 'political earthquake' caused were very significant in several ways. Firstly, rapid progress was made towards the electoral reform of Italian democracy; secondly, the judiciary intensified its anti-corruption drive, exposing a massive network of corruption amongst elements of the political and economic elites. Basically, this led to the self-destruction of the traditional political parties within a short space of time (Bull et al 1994:11).

As Pileri et al (1993:88) explain, by far the most important reform in the aftermath of the 1992 election took place on April 18th, 1993. This was the date on which Italians opted, by an overwhelming majority (82.7 per cent), to reject the old electoral system, in favour of a First-past-the-post system. On the same day, Italians also voted to end state funding of political parties by a 90.3 per cent majority and to abolish state bank nominations and three key government ministries (tourism, state participation and agriculture) by a majority of 89.8 per cent. Pileri et al (1993:88) argue these results represented a clear mandate for substantial reforms and as Mario Segni (the chief campaigner for reform) argued, the results showed how a civilised nation can change its own political system constitutionally and without bloodshed (Independent, April 24 1993).

The significance of the referenda results was far reaching. As Bull et al (1994:6) explain the immediate political effect was the resignation of the Amato government. The Prime Minister in his resignation speech announced the 'death.of a regime' and explained he was making way for a 'transitional government' which would lay the foundations for a 'Second Republic' through electoral reform of the Chamber of Deputies. The demise of Amato was also important because he was replaced by Ciampi, the ex-Governor of the Bank of Italy, who was the first technocratic Prime Minister in Italy. The problems were compounded for the Italian political elite when it became embroiled in the corruption scandals, which became known as *Tangentopoli* ('Kick-back city'). The scale of this crisis was such that by the end of 1992 nearly one hundred members of Parliament were under investigation. This included some of Italy's leading post-war politicians, such as Bettino Craxi, the leader of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and Guiliano Andreotti, the leader of the DC (Gundle and Parker 1996:5/6). This culminated in the collapse of the political Italian system. Ginsborg (1996:25) argues that this collapse was caused not because of the strength of the opposition, or because of mass demonstrations but it because of the loss of honour of the political elite in the opinion of the Italian public. He argues that in a country where honour still counts for a great deal, discrediting of this sort weighed very heavily indeed on the politicians, and so the whole system was discredited.

The system of democracy in Italy and its main political parties, which had been in power since the creation of the Italian Republic, were discredited in the space of a few years. The speed and intensity at which these changes took place was heavily influenced by the decline of Communism in Europe, however, this was by no means the only factor. In fact, the scandals which revealed the endemic nature of corruption within Italian politics contributed to the demise of the First Republic, as the next section examines in more detail.

## 3.3 Corruption and the role of judges

The corruption scandals (or *'Tangentopoli'*) involved all the main Italian political parties and came about after judicial investigations which revealed the endemic and systematic nature of corruption in the Italian political and economic system. In 1994 large sections of the Italian political and economic elites were under arrest or facing

criminal indictment (Harris 1994). Corruption was not a new phenomenon in Italy, however, what was new was the disintegration of the two main parties of government (DC and PCI) as the corruption investigations picked up intensity (Agnew 1995). Subsequently, the whole political and economic system was thrown into turmoil and the Italian people were increasingly alienated by this system of corruption. Pileri et al (1993:88) argue that the *Tangentopoli* scandals called into question the foundations of the First Italian Republic. Basically, the mechanism for the corruption was simple: politicians received bribes, called *tangenti*, in return for favours, particularly concerning the award of large of public contracts to build roads, hospitals and schools (Pileri et al 1993:88).

The scandals were first unearthed on February 17th 1992 when Mario Chiesa, the Socialist President of the *Pio Albergo Trivulzio* (a Milanese charity for the elderly) was arrested with seven million lire ($5 600) taken from the owner of a cleaning service. It was the first half of a $11 200 'kick-back' for having been awarded a contract to clean the hospital. The case was vigorously pursued and led to many similar investigations. The judge, Antonio Di Pietro, who was at the time a little known member of Milan's Public Prosecutor's staff quickly gained national notoriety. After that point, the so-called '*Operazione Mani Pulite*' ('Operation Clean Hands') commenced, led by Di Pietro (Pileri et al 1993:89). Aided by Chiesa's collaboration, the prosecuting magistrates, exposed a network of corruption that had assumed the character of a well-organised system. Current and former legislators in the city of Milan belonging to the PSI, the DC, the PRI and even the post-Communist PDS, were arrested on charges of taking bribes on public works contracts and illegal financing of political parties. This was a significant and brave achievement on the part of the prosecuting judges, especially after two of Italy's top Mafia investigators Giovanni Falcone and Poalo Borsellino were violently killed by the Mafia in Sicily a couple of years previously (Gundle and Parker 1996:3).

The outcome was that the whole political system was thrown into turmoil. In addition, the corruption scandals swayed Italian public opinion against the corrupt political system because of the increased recognition of the fact that Italian business and industry could not be competitive within the EU, mainly because they could no

longer afford the hidden costs of political 'kick-backs'. Moreover, it was clear that with closer scrutiny from Brussels and the European Commission, the Italian public sector had to become more transparent to external observation and to develop projects of public value rather than useless projects, which were previously quite common as a way of gaining public and European funding and hence were a possible source of corruption (Pileri et al 1993:91).

The events led to the 1994 national elections, which Bull et al (1994:1) describe as the most significant in the Italian Republic's history since those held in 1948. The election in 1994 was the culmination of a four and a half year period of crisis and transition within Italian politics and society, entailing more or less the wholesale destruction of the existing governing parties and their fifty year hold on power in Italian politics. Out of the disintegration of the traditional political parties new political formations emerged. Bull et al (1994:10) argue that these new formations, such as the LN, the *Rete* and Mario Segni's *Movimento per la riforma popolare*, attempted to benefit from the demise of the old political formations, and heralded the end of the era of the traditional 'party apparatus'. On the left of the political spectrum, the *Alleanza Democratica* (AD), launched in the Spring of 1993, was designed to bring together all the progressive forces of the centre-left, including the PDS. The *Alleanza nazionale* (AN) launched in 1994, led by Gianfranco Fini, originated from the Italian neo-fascist party (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*, MSI) and aims to be a modern right-wing party.

By far the most significant new political formation to emerge prior to the 1994 election was Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI) party. Bull et al (1994:10) argue that Berlusconi launched FI as a result of the continued failure of the forces of the centre and right to forge an electoral coalition to stop the left, and that the party itself was the most original model for a new 'movement-party'. Basically, the party was structured along the lines of the supporters clubs of the football team AC Milan (owned by Berlusconi); it was run along business management lines similar to Berlusconi's multinational company, Fininvest; it was staffed by members of his publicity agency, Publitalia; and marketed using sophisticated opinion research techniques and the media magnate's three private television channels. The success of

FI was incredible and in the space of three months it became the largest political force Italy.

As Bull et al (1994:20) explain, on 26th January 1994 Berlusconi presented himself as a candidate to 'save Italy from communism' and in February, the Freedom Alliance (*Polo della Libertà*) was born with the LN and other smaller parties in the North of Italy; and the *Polo del Buon Governo* with the AN in the Centre and South of Italy. This alliance was based upon strong internal differences the component parts found themselves as much in competition with each other as with their opponents in other alliances (Bull et al 1994:20). The election of the 27-28th March 1994, carried out with the new electoral system, whereby 75 per cent of the seats were now from single-member majority vote districts and 25 per cent of the seats were elected proportionally, was won by the Berlusconi-led alliance (Agnew 1997). The FI was the largest party gaining 21.0 per cent of the vote and 95 seats in the Italian Parliament; the LN gained 8.4 per cent of the vote, which was a drop of 0.3 per cent from its 1992 result, however, because of the workings of the electoral alliance it gained the largest number of seats, 122. The AN's vote actually increased from 5.4 per cent in 1992 to 13.5 per cent in 1994, which meant it gained 109 seats (Bull et al 1994:27, McCarthy 1995:167).

As Bull et al (1994:41) argue, in many ways the outcome of the 1994 election confirmed the collapse of the old party system which became apparent in 1992 and which took on increasing momentum in the period thereafter. The victory in the general election of March 1994 saw the Italian electorate choose the most right-wing government since 1945 (Farrell and Levy 1996:133). Yet the hopes that the rise of Berlusconi signalled the creation of an Italian Second Republic, free of the problems of the First, were short-lived. The coalition government which Berlusconi had tactically forged was beset with problems from the beginning. It soon became apparent that the 'Italian transition' was far from over (Ginsborg 1996:27).

The key issue is that alongside the political changes taking place in Italy, there are others relating to the changing nature of the Italian economy, which are very much part of the ongoing 'transition' of Italian society and politics. In particular, the

structural problems affecting the Italian economy became increasingly apparent in the 1990s. This was partly because of closer integration within Europe, which meant that the Italian economy became more open to competition within Europe as well as from outside. Moreover, years of economic mis-management on the part of the Italian government meant that the Italian public sector deficit was one of the largest in Europe. The implications of these economic changes are far-reaching as the next section discusses.

## 3.4 Italian public sector deficit

One of the crucial developments which contributed to the Italian transition in recent years has been the growth of its public sector deficit. Italy's significant economic growth during the post-war years has brought with it many benefits, not least a rise in the standard of living enjoyed by the majority of its citizens. Between 1976 and 1990, Italy's GDP grew by almost 50 per cent, which was six percentage points above the EU average (Padoa Schioppa Kostoris 1993). However, the downside to Italy's economic growth was considerable, mainly because it was accompanied by an increase in its public sector debt. After a period of public spending surplus in the 1960s, followed by a slow deterioration during the 1970s, the situation worsened dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. The main problem was the high spending on pensions, as well as high and inefficient spending on health provision combined with low levels of fiscal income from the self-employed sector, particularly from small firms (Ginsborg 1996:21).

The situation was made much worse for the Italian economy with the drive towards closer economic and monetary integration within the EU. This has had several effects. Firstly, there was a realisation that Italy was a long way away from meeting the criteria of the Maastricht Treaty and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Italian public debt was 103 per cent when it needed to be not more than 60 per cent; the budget deficit stood at 9.9 per cent, which was almost three times the EU average and also set against a requirement for EMU of four per cent. Finally, inflation was at 6.9 per cent, which was well above the level required (Ginsborg 1996:22). Emergency measures were taken by the Italian government (led by Guiliano Amato) to try to redress the situation and reduce the public sector deficit mainly through privatisation

proposals. Also, Amato was forced to withdraw the Italian Lire from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) because of increased international currency speculation (Gundle and Parker 1996:4) .

The second impact of closer European integration is that the Italian economy became increasingly open to competition from other EU countries within the Single European Market, and also from South East Asia, within an increasingly globalised economy. This meant that the (unusually dominant) large Italian state and privately-owned corporations (such as ENI and Fiat) could no longer depend on a protected domestic market. The result was that external pressures upon the Italian economy began to upset the political economy of clientelism, which when combined with the high costs of supporting an extensive welfare system and of transfer payments to the depressed southern regions caused further problems. The measures instigated by Amato proved to be very unpopular, especially because taxes were raised and it became apparent that the government was unable to make much difference to the economic situation. This called into question the legitimacy of the whole system of Italian governance and democracy. In the opinion of most Italian citizens it was the mishandling of the Italian economy by the political elite which had created the problems in the Italian economy. Consequently, faced with higher taxes, increasing inflation and unemployment the Italian people began to question the whole structure of Italian democracy.

The considerable economic challenges facing Italy were an important factor in the political transformations which took place. Italy still faces the challenge of meeting the criteria of the Maastricht Treaty in order to be eligible to become part of the Single European currency. This has become an important issue in Italian politics and was one of the key issues in the most recent national Italian election, which took place in 1996. This election was the culmination of the political changes which have taken place in Italy since the start of the 1990s.

## 3.5 The 1996 national election

The 1996 national Italian elections were the third to have taken place in Italy in five years. The reason for this was the fall of Berlusconi's government alliance, in

December 1994, after only eight months in power. The main reason for this collapse was the internal differences between the LN, on the one hand, with its federalist ambitions, and the AN on the other, which remained ultra-nationalistic and hostile to the granting of greater regional autonomy. Moreover, the LN accused Berlusconi of procrastination in resolving his "conflict of interests' between his vast media empire and business interests on the one hand, and his political interests on the other. To replace the outgoing government, a technocratic government led by Lamberto Dini (Berlusconi's former Treasury Minister) was given the task, by the Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, of governing Italy during the period up to the election of a new government. After a relative successful period in office, Dini's technocratic government was dissolved, which paved the way for the national elections of 1996 (Bull et al 1996:619-623).

On April 21st 1996, Italians again went to the polls in another landmark election in the 'Italian transition'. The election was won by the centre-left alliance, *Ulivo* (Olive tree coalition) led by Romano Prodi. This was the first time in the history of the Italian Republic that the ex-communist party, the PDS, became part of the ruling government alliance. As Abse (1996:123) argues the left's victory in the election marks a watershed in Italian politics because it is its first victory this century, however, he also points out that Italy's new electoral system somewhat exaggerated the left's achievement, since the *Ulivo* plus the Refounded Communists, received only 43.3 per cent of the total vote, just slightly ahead of the right-wing alliance, which received 42.1 per cent of the vote. Therefore, above all the consequence of the 1996 elections is that Italian democracy became unblocked because there was a real alternation in political power from the right to the left of the political spectrum (Bobbio 1996).

The result of the 1996 election was significant for several other reasons. Firstly, the turnout in the 1996 election was down by 3.4 per cent from the 1994 turnout, which confirmed the long-term downward trend in turnout that had begun 20 years earlier in 1976. However, the 1996 turnout was still relatively high at 82.7 per cent. Secondly, and more importantly, the LN underwent an increase in its national percentage vote to 10.1 per cent, which was its best ever result. In fact, this went against all pre-election

predictions, as it was thought that the LN would lose support because it refused to join any of the pre-electoral alliances. Instead, the party chose to enter the election on its own and actually underwent an increase in support (Bull et al 1996:632).

Since the 1996 election, Italy has undergone a period of relative political stability. The Centre-left governing coalition has been relatively successful in running the country and the Centre-right has formed constructive opposition. However, it was the success of the LN which was the most surprising result of the 1996 election. The party has positioned itself at the centre of Italian politics and has a considerable level of electoral support. It is the largest party in the regions of Lombardy and Veneto. Therefore, it is the LN which perhaps poses the most serious threat to the stability of Italian politics and also the country itself. This is because the LN now endorses the hard-line rhetoric of secession and independence for 'Padania'. These claims cannot be ignored by the Italian government and it seems likely that reforms to the nature of the Italian state, which would give greater autonomy to the Italian regions, is the only way of appeasing the LN and the majority of the citizens of Lombardy and Veneto. As yet it is too early to proclaim that the transformation of Italian politics is complete and that the formation of the Second Republic is completely cemented. However, it seems that Italy has gone some way to resolving its political as well as economic crises.

## 4. Conclusion

The history of the Italian national-state is both fascinating and intriguing. As Lytellton (1996:37) argues, in retrospect, it seems surprising that the creators of the unified Italian state were able to impose a centralised system of government upon what were really a diversity of separate societies, which were marked by a high degree of local particularism. Undoubtedly, such strong local identities remain. Indeed, Lepschy et al (1996:75) point out the striking fact that in 1991, less than half of the Italian population only or mainly used the Italian language with friends and colleagues. The language used exclusively at home is, for more people, dialect (36 per cent) rather than Italian (34 per cent). They conclude by arguing that during the years of unification Italy was effectively a monolingual country, consisting of dialect speakers. However, today it is now largely a bilingual country. Paradoxically,

Lytellton (1996:49) argues that the limits of national integration minimised the occasions of regional conflict and he states that:

> "ironically, in the last forty years, the penetration of all parts of the nation by the mass media, the spread of a consumer culture, the threat to the autonomy of local cultures, and, above all, the massive South-North immigration have brought the regions of Italy into closer contact with each other, but have also created new tensions which help to explain the regionalist explosion of today."

The vast changes which have taken place in recent years in the political, economic, institutional and cultural spheres are very much interwoven with the resurgence of contemporary regionalism. There has been much debate as to whether or not the recent period in Italian history merits the description 'revolution' (Gilbert 1995). However, whichever word is used to describe recent events, it is clear that Italian politics has undergone a very rapid period of radical change. For example, the three national elections in five years; the 1993 referenda, which changed Italy's electoral system; the activities of Antonio Di Pietro and his fellow magistrates; and the emergence of new political forces, have all changed the political map of Italy out of all recognition. However, as Farrell and Levy (1996:132) argue, whatever the contributions of the other parties or events, the most important of the new forces in this period in Italian politics is the LN.

The LN has gained its greatest success in areas which were previously DC/Catholic strongholds, especially within the regions of Lombardy and Veneto. The majority of these are areas of considerable economic dynamism, which is predominantly based upon small and medium sized firms. One of the reasons why the LN has grown is partly due to the protest vote from the people of such areas, who have been hardest hit by the actions of the central government to increase taxes and cut down upon tax evasion (Ginsborg 1990:30). As Hine (1996:109) argues the rebirth of territorial politics in Italy in the 1990s has given unexpected new life to the debate on Italian regionalism. Moreover, he argues that for the first time since the *Risorgimento*, there is a real threat to Italian national political unity. The threat posed by the LN is a very real one, which cannot be ignored. It raises serious issues about the structure of governance within Italy, as well as the solidarity between the rich and poor Italian

regions. Calls for secession and the division of Italy by the LN challenge the very legitimacy of the Italian national-state and it remains to be seen what the outcome of such calls will be. The next chapter charts the rise to political prominence of the LN in Italian politics.

# Chapter Three : The Lega Nord

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the growth, discourses and structures of the Lega Nord (LN), showing how, in a relatively short, intense and turbulent history, the party has developed to hold a key position in Italian politics. As Diamanti (1996c:115) explains:

> "the phenomenon of the autonomist Leagues is the major source of electoral and political change to have emerged in Italy in the post-war period. The most significant aspect lies in their ability to break with the traditional bases of political identity and representation: religion, class and secularism. The Leagues and in particular the LN have replaced these with other elements revived from ancient contradictions in Italian society: contrasts between centre and periphery (Rome and the provinces), North and South, public and private, civil society and the traditional parties. Their success has come directly from their ability to present themselves as the expression of these contradictions, devising strategies and making proposals that provoked a disdainful, but totally inadequate response from the other political forces, both new and old."

The development and relative success of the LN cannot be reduced to any one single monocausal factor but is due to a number of factors and therefore it is inappropriate to try to find the 'independent variable' which can explain the growth of the party (Diamanti 1995:10). In its early days, the LN was generally seen as a protest group capitalising on the corrupt clientelistic practices of the Italian political establishment. After its first spectacular electoral successes, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it seemed to articulate a diffuse dissatisfaction with the political class but it was assumed that the LN would eventually dissipate like so many other earlier political outbursts (Pileri et al 1993:86). However, the LN has not simply disappeared or been integrated by other political forces, in fact far from it, because it has managed to become one of the primary forces of change within Italian politics. The reasons for the LN's evolution are to do with it's ability as a 'political actor', to take advantage of the contemporary socio-economic, political and societal transformations, which Italy is undergoing, and also because of its ability to interpret, modify and present these changes for its own political advantage and benefit (Diamanti 1996c:115).

This chapter is divided into two main sections; the first deals with the various phases of growth through which the LN has gone in its relatively short political life. The political rise of the LN began in the early 1980s, and each phase of growth since then has been accompanied by a shift in its political rhetoric and aims. Moreover, each phase more or less corresponds to the national elections, which have taken place in Italy since the beginning of the decade. The second section of the chapter examines in detail the electoral geography of the party and how this has changed and evolved over the last fifteen years or so.

## 2. Phases of growth of the LN

The relatively short history of the LN contains several different phases of growth; each phase can be considered as an important turning point in the development of the party. This section aims to outline these broad phases of growth for the party, which are crucial in understanding the complex nature of the LN 'phenomenon' in Italian politics.

## 2.1 Phase one : 1979-1987

In February 1979, Umberto Bossi met Bruno Salvadori, the leader of the *Union Valdotaine*[1] political party, which at that time was one of the main autonomist parties in Italy. It was during this meeting that Bossi agreed to start campaigning in his own province of Varese, on behalf of Salvadori's party, in order to spread autonomist ideas in the region of Lombardy. However, after the sudden death of Salvadori in June 1980, Bossi began to study in greater detail the Lombard culture and he became convinced of the need for greater autonomy for the Lombard people. Bossi continued to campaign and discuss his ideas for autonomy with a small group of friends and sympathisers in Varese and in March 1982 he founded the *Lega Autonomista Lombarda* political party. The symbol and name of this party were inspired by the historical myths surrounding the creation of the twelfth century *Lega Lombarda* that was formed out of the allegiance between the communes within Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia, which united in order to defeat the invading German emperor Frederick Barbarossa. The logo of the party was the profile of a Lombard knight, Alberto da

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[1] The *Union Valdotaine* political party has its main base of support in the autonomous region of Valle d'Aosta, the French speaking part of Northern Italy.

Giussano, who was the hero of the medieval *Lega Lombarda* (Lega Nord 1995, Leonardis de 1993/94).

Bossi realised very quickly that it was difficult for the party to follow the ethno-linguistic line, which was felt to be much stronger in the autonomous regions of Northern Italy. Lombardy, on the other hand, constituted a very different reality and could not be compared to Valle d'Aosta or Trentino Alto-Adige because of its lack of an ethno-linguistic minority. Consequently, Bossi chose to emphasise the dualism between Rome, portrayed as the symbol of centralism and the source of problems for Italy, and the Lombard 'people' who were alleged to be suffering at the hands of the central government. This was simplistic but at the same time it was an effective was of arousing political interest in the party (Lega Nord 1995).

In March 1984, in Varese, the *Lega Lombarda* (LL) was officially formed and in the European elections in the same year the LL joined forces with the *Liga Veneta* (Veneto League)(LV), *Arnassita Piemontèisa, Partito del Popolo Trentino-Tirolese* political parties, to form the *L'Unione per l'Europa Federalista*. This alliance did not really achieve a significant electoral result, mainly due to the lack of media exposure and media hostility towards the alliance. In the following year, 1985, the LL presented itself in elections within the province of Varese, both at the provincial level and in the two communes of Varese and Gallarate, obtaining its first elected representative in the commune of Varese. In the 1987 Italian national elections the success of the LN continued when Bossi was elected to the Italian Senate and Giuseppe Leoni (another co-founder of the LL) was elected as a Deputy to the Italian Parliament. This gave the party more publicity and it also enabled it to gain funding from the State, which helped to fund the growth of the party and meant that it ceased to be largely self-funded by party activists. In the European elections of June 1989, the LL joined together with the *Liga Veneta* and the *Piemonte Autonomista* to form the *Alleanza Nord* and two candidates were elected, Luigi Moretti and Francesco Speroni (Leonardis de 1993/94) (Farrell and Levy 1996:134). Thus, within ten years the LL had grown from a small group of friends into a formal political organisation, gaining a small but significant amount of electoral support.

It is important to note that the LL was not the only 'regional League' to have gained support in the North of Italy during the 1980s. Indeed, there were several other Leagues which gained as much, if not more, electoral consensus. The most important of these was the LV, which has a longer electoral history than that of the LL and which Diamanti (1995:45) defines as "the mother of all the [regional] Leagues". The main driving force behind the creation of the LV was a cultural association called 'la Società Filologica Veneta' in which the nucleus of the party activists operated. The main aims of this association were to spread the knowledge and awareness of the "lingua veneta" (the language of the Veneto region). From this association the LV was born and had its first electoral success, when combined with the Union Valdotaine party, in the European elections of 1979, when it gained 8 000 votes (Diamanti 1995:46).

There are several reasons, which explain the growth of the LV. Firstly, the relative success of the party was related to the crisis in the system of relations between society, economy and politics, in the Veneto region. Diamanti (1995:47) argues, that this was a crisis of the 'subcultura bianca' ('white subculture'), which refers to the connections between the DC political party and a large part of the population of the Veneto region. To a large extent this link between the DC and the people was mediated by the organisation and functioning of the Catholic Church. In short, relatively strong links existed between local socio-economic development, based upon small and medium sized firms, and the Church, which was able to regulate this local identity. The DC party managed to represent this dominant socio-political identity, presenting itself as the guarantor of local values, relations and interests. This system has been gradually changing since the 1960s largely because of the increase in secularisation amongst the people of the Veneto, as well as in Italian society as a whole (Pace 1985). This meant that the previously stable socio-political identity began to fragment and the LV was able to attract support from voters who had previously mainly supported the DC.

Secondly, the relatively widespread feeling of frustration amongst the majority of people of the Veneto, who were angry at being politically peripheral yet economically central to the Italian State, fuelled the growth of the LV. This perception of

marginality was particularly felt amongst the owners and workers of the small firm sector in the Veneto. These groups were fearful of the fact that the years of 'economic boom', which had brought a relatively high level of prosperity, could not continue indefinitely. This ensured a relative growth in the feeling of insecurity and anxiety in the society of the Veneto that had previously been protected by a relatively stable political and economic situation. Moreover, the process of secularisation in the region meant that the 'white subculture' was being slowly eroded and with it the traditional socio-political identities. Consequently, the LV was able to present an alternative socio-political identity, which aimed to offer a solution to the fears and worries of the people, namely by trying to gain greater political centrality and also to protect the relative prosperity of the region (Diamanti 1995:49-51).

The propaganda and messages that the regional Leagues utilised during the 1980s were focused upon stressing ethno-regional differences as the main way of mobilising political support. Furthermore, the two main political targets were the traditional sources of dissatisfaction and intolerance in Northern Italy: the State and the South (Diamanti 1996c:117). The LV, especially, concentrated upon expressing regional cultural differences and the idea of the 'region-nation' of the Veneto, based upon its deep-rooted history and identity dating back to the Venetian Republic. In Lombardy, a similar line was adopted by Bossi but this proved much more problematic because Lombardy is a much more heterogeneous region and it was only in the provinces, such as Bergamo, Como and Varese, where localism had always been relatively strong that the messages of the LL gained greater support (Natale 1991). The messages of the Leagues were direct, colourful and relatively crude, which did allow them to gain greater support because it further differentiated them from the traditional political parties yet ultimately, the stressing of ethno-regional differences proved to have a relatively limited electoral appeal.

## 2.2 Phase two : 1987-1990

The second phase in the history of *leghismo* relates to the emerging centrality and role of the LL and especially of its leader Umberto Bossi (Diamanti 1995:57). This was a crucial phase in the history of the LL because Bossi shifted the party's rhetoric away from an emphasis on 'ethno-cultural' regionalism to an emphasis on 'territory' as a

reference point for socio-economic interests (Agnew 1995:166). Bossi presented 'territory' as a 'community of interests', stressing the lifestyle of the 'Lombard' people as hard-working and productive which was in direct contrast and opposition to the state and people of the Italian South, which were regarded as centres of dissipation and dependence (Diamanti 1996c:118). According to the LL, the state was seen as favouring the South through public spending while the North relied largely on individual private initiative. For example, the LL made reference to statistics that 31 per cent of the South's economic product derived from state spending, compared to only 18 per cent in the North (Agnew 1995:166). However, what Bossi and the LL did not point out was the fact that, there are actually regions and areas within the South, which are economically successful, such as Abruzzo, so it is a mistake to assume that the 'South' is an economically homogenous region (Bottazzi 1990). In a national fiscal context, the North of Italy actually received 65 per cent of all state spending relative to 35 per cent for the South (Cartocci 1991). The LL persistently characterised the 'South' as a homogeneous socio-economic and geographical unit, which is a mistake because certain southern regions are more dynamic than others. This has been a deliberate and enduring misconception of the rhetoric of the LN.

This shift in direction proved to be a successful one for the LL because its support continued to grow. The other 'regional Leagues' continued to base their political rhetoric upon ethno-regional differences; this was the case for both the LV and the Leagues in the region of Piemonte, however, this proved to be less successful and in fact the support for the LV declined from its previous high in 1983. On the other hand, in the 1987 national election, the relative success of the LL was clearly evident with the election of Bossi and Leoni to the Italian Parliament. The LL was most successful in the areas of Lombardy most similar to those in which the LV had achieved its earlier successes in the Veneto region, namely the Lombard provinces of Varese, Como, Sondrio and Bergamo, all of which are traditional 'white' zones of strength for the DC party, as well as being areas of economic dynamism, based upon a considerable number of small and medium sized firms (Natale 1991).

The 'region' became the source of rhetoric for the LL, with Bossi calling for taxes, pensions, public administration and services for Lombardy to be controlled by the 'Lombards', within a regionally decentred structure. The LL claimed that this would allow greater efficiency and reduce the alleged waste and corruption within Italian system of bureaucracy (Diamanti 1995:63). The LL was also intolerant towards the growing immigration into Lombardy from *extracomunitari* (people from outside the EU) but also southern Italian immigrants. This clearly articulates the LL's sentiments of 'us' and 'them', which were very strong during this phase of growth of the party. As Woods (1995:198) points out, this sentiment is manifested in the LL's rejection of immigration from the Third World and what it sees as the unproductive and parasitic subsidisation of the South. According to the LL, Third World immigration was defined as a threat to the cultural authenticity of Italy as well as to the cultural specificity of individual regions and especially that of Lombardy.

Bossi developed a quite unique style of communication to present the arguments of the LL, which has been a persistent factor in the continued success of the party. As Agnew (1995:160) explains, Bossi has successfully presented himself as an 'anti-politician', using strong denunciatory and inflammatory language and inventing a whole new set of slogans for Italian politics reflecting what some commentators have called 'the politics of the bar'. For example, some of the party's early slogans were '*Somaro lombardo, paga*' ('Lombard donkey, pay'); '*Governo terrone, governo ladro*' ('"Southern" government, robber government'); '*Soldi dal Nord; mafia dal Sud*' ('Money from the North; *Mafia* from the South') (Allum and Diamanti 1996:153). In addition, the use of Lombard dialect was one weapon, which the party used to differentiate itself from the traditional Italian political parties. This resulted in the distancing of Bossi and the LL from the traditional political parties and personalities. Indeed, a new phrase, *celodurismo*, was introduced into Italian politics to describe the style and ideology of the LL.

Biorcio (1992) describes the LL as an example of 'neo-regional populism' because the party has combined and consolidated a whole set of values, antagonisms and intolerances from diverse social sectors. Moreover, it has developed a strategy of action and communication, by using territory as the common reference point for these

diverse interests. This involved the LL utilising non-traditional means of political communication, which was in part because of the lack of funding and access to conventional means. Instead, the LL resorted to informal and unconventional means such as public events, meetings, as well as spreading its politics into other public spaces, such as bars, shopping areas and commuter trains. Moreover, the party utilised a distinct symbolism, based on eye-catching symbols such as Lombard flags, banknotes, passports and wallets (Gallagher 1994:461). The recruitment of support through such unconventional means and especially in relatively apolitical arenas of civil society within the regions of Lombardy and Veneto, proved to be a source of initial success and growth (Farrell and Levy 1996:142). Paradoxically, the party's lack of conventional media coverage, actually worked to its advantage, because it became the most discussed political force in the Italian media and as such gained greater notoriety (Allum and Diamanti 1996:155).

## 2.3 Phase three : 1990-1992

It was clear that by the beginning of the 1990s the LL was attracting more and more support across the whole of the North of Italy. For example, in the 1989 European election the LL gained eight per cent of the votes in Lombardy, where it became the fourth party (behind the DC, PCI, PSI) sending three representatives to the European Parliament; and it gained as much as 15 per cent of the vote in the province of Bergamo and a significant presence throughout the rest of Northern Italy. This result was important because it meant the party had expanded out of its main heartlands, gaining support in provinces such as Brescia, Cremona and Pavia (Diamanti 1995:65). Furthermore, in the 1990 local administrative elections the LL became fully established, both in the Regional Council of Lombardy (with 15 of the 80 elected seats), and in Milan's commune council where it gained ten seats, while receiving as much as 30 per cent of the vote in some areas of the city (Poche 1992:76). This signified that the party was not only a phenomenon of the 'new industrial periphery' of the North of Italy but it had actually gained support in the urban metropolitan areas of the North of Italy (Diamanti 1995:65).

During this phase, the growth of the LL coincided with the process of disintegration of the Socialist Eastern Bloc, which had distinct implications upon the Italian political

scene (as was outlined in Chapter Two). The Italian Communist party lost its legitimacy and as a result the role of the DC, as the main anti-Communist party, was lost. The result was that the dominant political identities, which had largely been 'frozen' in relation to the workings of the Cold War, became more open with the electorate being presented with more choice. In addition, the Italian public sector deficit was getting larger and larger partly because of increased international competition and also because of the growing constraints being placed upon Italy from the EU. This meant that the tax burden had to be increased to try to stem the growth of the public debt; the rise in taxation hit the socio-economic groups who had previously benefited most from the Italian state's tolerance of the relatively widespread practice of tax evasion, namely the owners and workers within the small firm sector. This fuelled the resentment on the part of these groups towards the central state and traditional governing parties. The main beneficiaries of this resentment were the regional Leagues in Lombardy and Veneto (Diamanti 1995:72).

A key turning point in the history of the Italian 'regional Leagues' was in February 1991, at the first official congress of the Lega Nord at Pieve Emanuele (Milan). At this congress the Lega Nord (LN) was born out of the amalgamation of five other Leagues from the regions of Veneto, Piemonte, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Toscana, (later the LN expanded into the regions of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Trentino Alto-Adige, Valle d'Aosta, Umbria and Marche). Umberto Bossi, the leader of the LL, became the leader of the LN and with its creation the rhetoric and aims of the party shifted away from an emphasis on ethno-regionalism to one in which the LN aimed at becoming the party for the whole of the 'North' of Italy. To justify its political existence, the LN developed a federal rhetoric, which was based on the division of Italy into three macro-regions, the North, Centre and South. Professor Gianfranco Miglio, who is a well-known academic expert in Italian Constitutional affairs, especially federalism, joined the LN at that time. Miglio's influence on the LN was quite important because he offered intellectual legitimacy to the party and a more respectable electoral programme based upon the creation of a federal Italy (Agnew 1995:167, Miglio 1991-92).

For the LN, Miglio proposed a concise but clear project for a 'Provisional Federal Constitution' composed of ten articles. It prefigured both presidential and confederal arrangements and proposed an 'Italian Union' as a free association of three Republics (North, Centre, South) with the separate joining of the five 'autonomous regions' of Italy (Valle d'Aosta, Trentino Alto-Adige, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, as part of the North; Sicily and Sardinia as part of the South). The central government was to be composed of a Premier, directly elected by all the citizens of the Union, assisted by a 'Directory' made up of the presidents of the eight constituting units, able to act only by consensus in economic and financial matters (Poche 1994:46). Underpinning the LN's federal project was the assumption that within Italy there were in fact three distinct and separate 'societies', which were largely defined by their socio-economic differences. The best way to manage these was not with a strong central state but within a federal structure, which allowed them to be connected within the international political system. The LN used the territorial reference to the 'North' as an effective way of representing and integrating the problems and protests of the diverse social sectors within the North of Italy. This allowed the 'North' to be counterposed against 'Rome', the central state institutions, and the traditional parties and also the exclusion of the South from the North of Italy (Poche 1994:46).

In the 1992 elections, the success of the LN continued and the party gained its highest ever electoral result. The party won three million votes, which was 8.7 per cent of the national electorate and meant that it gained 81 Parliamentary seats (55 Deputies and 24 Senators). In Lombardy, the party gained over 23 per cent of the vote, (which meant that it was only one per cent behind the DC) and 18 per cent in Veneto (where other autonomist parties won a further eight per cent) (Diamanti 1996c:119). The bulk of the votes were acquired from the DC, which was in line with the trends from previous electoral successes. This opened up a significant fifteen percentage point gap, which had previously not existed, between the DC vote of 24 per cent in the North and 39 per cent in the South. In the city of Milan, the LN became the largest party, which further emphasised the fact that it had managed to gain support in areas outside its original strongholds. For example, in Piemonte and Liguria, where in previous national elections no LN candidates were presented, the party gained respective votes of 16.3 per cent and 14.3 per cent. In Trentino, the LN gained 13.9

per cent of the vote; in Emilia-Romagna the vote for the LN varied between six and 18 per cent, which was a considerable achievement in a region with a strong history of support for the Left in Italian politics (in Toscana the LN managed between two and four per cent of the vote) (Gallagher 1994:464).

The electoral consolidation of the LN was confirmed at the end of 1992 when the party emerged ahead of the DC and the PSI in local elections, which were held in the Lombard city of Mantua. In addition, the LN gained control of the cities of Varese and Monza, winning 37.3 per cent and 32.0 per cent of the vote respectively (Gallagher 1994:465).

Diamanti (1995:87) uses the analogy of a 'tram' to account for the continued success of the LN (and the other 'regional Leagues') because many 'passengers', with different frustrations, motivations and questions, were 'boarding' the party. In particular, the 'passengers', who increased in significant numbers during this period, included the owners and workers within the small firm sector, the young, and in general people who were angry at the functioning of the Italian State and its institutions. Thus, the LN, became increasingly influential within Italian politics not only because it provided an outlet and voice for the growing numbers of angry voters within the North of Italy but also because it actively contributed to reproduce and reinforce the problems and frustrations, which were the source of the widespread political discontentment. The LN can be viewed as an 'entrepreneurial' political party because of its ability to both represent but also reproduce the resentments and feelings of the diverse social sectors within the North of Italy (Diamanti 1995:87).

## 2.4 Phase four : 1992-1994

After the 1992 national elections, political instability increased within Italy for a number of reasons (see Chapter Two). Most notably, the biggest influence was the corruption scandals that became known as *'tangentopoli'* ('Kick-back city') that involved most of the major political parties and in particular the DC party. Agnew (1995:159) argues that although corruption was not new in Italy, its systematic nature was a surprise to many Italian citizens. However, what was new was the

disintegration of the two main parties of government (the DC and PCI) as the corruption investigations gathered pace. Subsequently, the whole political system was thrown into turmoil. Diamanti (1995:90) explains that the chief beneficiary of these changes was the LN, which gained support throughout the North of Italy. Several opinion poll's undertaken at the time showed that the LN had become the largest party in each of the main cities of the North, with estimates that support for the party had risen to over 30 per cent. The administrative elections of June 1993 were the first real confirmation of the LN's increase in support when the LN reached its electoral high water mark. The LN won control of some of the most important northern cities, in particular Marco Formentini of the LN was elected as mayor of Milan, the capital of the 'productive North' (Diamanti 1996c:116).

After the mid-June elections of 1993, the LN's forward march began to slow down, and in the early months of 1994 its vote started to contract (Diamanti 1996c:116). This trend continued following the referendum in April 1993, in which Italians voted in favour of electoral reform, and the creation of a mixed 'First-past-the post' and Proportional electoral system. At the time of the referendum, the LN favoured the creation of the new electoral system, mainly because it was doing well in the opinion polls and it was convinced that the new system would favour a party like itself with a relatively strong local appeal. However, as Gallagher (1994:466) argues, by promoting changes in the electoral laws, which emphasise strong government rather than broad representation of interests, the LN actually made it more difficult for itself to gain more power. Moreover, it ensured that it would be more difficult in the future for anti-system parties like itself to gain electoral success. Gallagher argues that the LN would have probably found it more, rather than less difficult, to break into mainstream politics if the majority electoral system had been in existence before 1992.

The rhetoric of the LN was also modified in this context as Bossi aimed to make the LN a mainstream political force, which was able to fill the hiatus left by the decline of the traditional parties. In aiming to become a national political force the LN not only needed to adapt its ideological position but to develop a new organisational structure. This meant the LN modified its name to the *Lega Italia Federale* (Italian Federal League) with the aim to spread the ideas of the LN beyond the North for the benefit of

the rest of Italy. In so doing Bossi adapted his own role, portraying himself as a prudent statesman responsible for the peaceful transition of the country's political system (Pileri et al 1993:94). Moreover, party rhetoric was also modified to no longer present an 'anti-system' image because the LN was operating in a political and economic environment in which it seemed all parties were in 'opposition' because of the massive changes that were taking place in Italian politics. Instead, Bossi presented the LN as the only party able to guide and transform the discontent of the people into a form of government, controlled by the 'North', for Italy, which up until then, the LN argued was controlled by a Southern political class (Diamanti 1995:94-96). This meant that the language and messages of the LN were also modified to try to make it more mainstream and less extremist. The anti-Southern rhetoric was toned down and Bossi rejected the claims that the LN wanted secession. In an interview Bossi stated that:

> "the accusations are false that the LN wants secession, both I and the LN have not asked for secession, but federalism, which does not signify secession" (Mannheimer 1993).

The LN shifted its rhetoric to endorse privatisation as its main policy objective alongside its federal reforms. As Agnew (1995:167) points out, the LN shifted from an emphasis on 'southerners' as one of the main causes of Italy's problems to an emphasis on the southern-based political economy, which the LN claimed was the root of all of the problems afflicting Italy. The LN saw privatisation as a solution to the problems of political corruption and as a recipe for the improved efficiency of the Italian economy. Diamanti (1995:97) calls this a sort of "neo-liberal auto-protectionism" that was aimed at benefiting the economically active sectors of the Northern economy, which were at that time the main groups of supporters of the LN.

The administrative elections at the end of 1993 represented an important turning point for the LN because for the first time in its history the party gained a result, which was worse than it expected. The party was unable to 'conquer' most of the major cities of the North of Italy, in fact the party was defeated in the cities of Genoa, Trieste and Venice and so the success in Milan was the exception to the general trend. Furthermore, the LN's results in the Centre and especially in the South of the country were negligible (Diamanti 1995:131). This proved that it was very difficult for the LN

to gain any support and overcome the hostility which it faced in the South of Italy and indicated the LN's persistent difficulty in appealing to a broader electorate beyond its traditional strongholds in the North (Pileri et al 1993:95).

The significance of the 1994 national elections was great because it marked the entry onto the political scene of a new political party that effectively took centre stage away from the LN. This was *Forza Italia* ('Go Italy') (FI), the political formation inspired and promoted by Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian media magnate and owner of AC Milan football team. The 1994 elections also had significant implications for the LN, in spite of the fact that its vote was similar in percentage terms to that of the 1992 election (Diamanti 1996c:116). The main problem for the LN was the entry of Berlusconi's FI onto the political scene. The FI combined 'Thatcherite' neo-liberalism together with classical Italian nationalism and targeted the centre-right of Italian politics. Confronted with this challenge, Bossi persuaded his supporters that the only possible strategy for the LN was to enter an alliance with the forces that he described as "not yet federalist, but no longer in favour of state centralism" (Poche 1994:46). The LN became a part of the alliance with the FI in the North of Italy called *Polo delle libertà* ('Freedom Pole').

Bossi anticipated that the alliance with Berlusconi would have been more beneficial for the LN because it would allow greater media coverage, and unlike other potential allies on the left, the FI was a completely new political formation and as such had no history and no territorial bases of support (Diamanti 1995:135). However, as Poche (1994:46) argues, this was a dangerous move because important sectors of public opinion did not understand why the LN had joined the alliance, not least because it meant the LN was combined with the nationalistic and anti-federalist AN party.

In the national elections of March 1994, the LN became part of the coalition government led by Berlusconi but it was evident that FI ended up reaping all the benefits of the victorious "alliance". The outcome, as Agnew (1995:170) explains, was that the LN's rhetoric of regionalism was drawn into the national framework, which the party had at its origins sworn to undermine. Although the LN gained 8.4 per cent of the national vote, which was only a decline of 0.3 per cent from 1992, its

vote had in fact stagnated or declined in all the regions of Northern Italy. Of the 211 electoral constituencies in the North of Italy, in only 31 (15 per cent) did the LN register a stable result compared to 1992. Meanwhile, in a further 166 (55 per cent) of the constituencies, the vote for the LN declined by at least one per cent; in only another 64 constituencies (30 per cent) did the support for the LN actually increase. In the Veneto region, the LN's growth increased by three per cent while the other 'regional Leagues' lost support. In the regions of Lombardy and Piemonte the overall support for the LN held up. In the other regions where the LN's development was more recent, for example, in Liguria and above all in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, the party suffered a decline in support (Diamanti 1996c:116).

## 2.5 Phase five : 1994-1996

In less than a decade the LN had been transformed from a regionally based autonomist party to a mainstream national political party at the centre of the Italian government. Clearly, this was a remarkably rapid progression from the periphery to political centrality. Paradoxically, however, the success of the LN in gaining a stake in government was accompanied by a relative decline in its political importance. This is because the factors which had ensured the LN's hitherto success, its territorial political identity and its opposition against the traditional political system, started to produce negative effects mainly because they became absorbed within the government alliance with Berlusconi (Diamanti 1995:147).

As Diamanti (1996c:123) argues, it quickly became clear that the LN was suffering within the alliance with Berlusconi because besides undermining the LN's support from the inside, his party was able to acquire external support, by appealing to social groups who were hostile to the LN, above all in the South. Moreover, the LN found itself indirectly allied to the AN, which meant that it was indirectly linked to its most hostile political opponents. This only served further to undermine and compromise the image and identity of the LN. The result was that shortly after the March 1994 elections, the support for the FI, according to its own polls, passed from eight per cent to 30 per cent, while that for the LN went in the opposite direction from 16 per cent to eight per cent. Ironically, it was clear that the LN's chosen electoral ally became its chief political opponent in a short space of time. (Diamanti 1996c:123).

The LN and Bossi had to pursue a different strategy in order to regain its electoral support, which clearly was not an easy task because Berlusconi had made an impressive entry onto the political stage. Initially, the LN aimed to legitimise itself as a national political force by demanding and occupying key Ministerial positions. The party gained six Ministers in the new government headed by Berlusconi, the most important of which were the President of the Chamber of Deputies and the Ministry of the Interior. These positions were awarded to two of the LN's most senior figures, Irene Pivetti, and Roberto Maroni, who was already President of the LN's Parliamentary group. Other Ministerial positions which the LN held were Minister of Industry (Vito Gnutti); Minister of Communitarian Politics (Domenico Comino); Minister of Accounts (Giancarlo Pagliarini); and Minister of Constitutional Reform (Francesco Speroni) (Lega Nord 1995). For the LN, the main aim was to instigate federal reforms as part of the government because it had control of the Ministry for Constitutional Reform.

The reforms proved to be very difficult to implement for a number of reasons and the situation was not easy for the LN because internal problems and divisions were quite strong. This was mainly because, as Poche (1994:48) outlines, other members of the party had gained a significant degree of political power and recognition; internally it was evident that Bossi's dominance was not as strong as it was previously. This led to internal disputes between Bossi and others, which caused the loss of several previously important figures in the party. For example, Franco Rocchetta, who was the historical leader of the LV, left the party claiming that he had always been opposed to Lombard hegemony within the LN.

By far the most publicised dispute was that between Professor Miglio and Bossi, which culminated in Miglio leaving the LN. Miglio accused Bossi of not really wanting to implement federalism but only to gain political power (Diamanti 1995:150). Poche (1994:48) argues it is not an accident that the Ministry of Reforms, coveted by Miglio, was assigned to Speroni, leading to the break between Miglio and Bossi. Poche also argues that this indicated that the LN's federalist discourse had been somewhat diluted because there had been a significant reduction in the importance of Miglio's project of three 'macro-regions'; and there was no longer any

real mention of 'Northern' group self consciousness and identity. Emphasis seemed to have shifted to a kind of 'economic federalism', with the celebration of the Northern small firm dynamism, which seemed to be a symbolic stand in opposition to Berlusconi's emphasis on state monopolies.

At the end of 1994, Speroni presented his own version of the 'Reform of the Constitution of the Italian Republic' to the 'Federal Assembly of the Northern League.' His proposal was for the creation of nine 'federated states', which in fact had little in common with Miglio's previous proposals. This project appeared to be a mere technocratic territorial division very similar to various decentralisation or regionalisation plans proposed during the 1970s but the actual content of federalism became increasingly vague although the word was deployed almost obsessively (Poche 1994:50).

The European elections of June 1994 confirmed the continued decline in electoral support for the LN. In less than four months after the national elections, the support for the LN had dropped to six per cent of the vote, while the vote for the FI had risen to 30 per cent. However, the LN suffered some of its biggest losses to the FI, especially in its previously relatively strong heartlands of support in the north of Lombardy and Veneto (Diamanti 1995:150).

From the Summer of 1994, as Diamanti (1996c:126) explains, the LN switched to an alternative strategy which involved the 'delegitimisation of its allies' - the principal target of which was Berlusconi. The LN presented itself as the opposition within the governing coalition performing a similar role as it had done previously but this time as part of the government. Berlusconi was the main target of the LN, which tried to present him as the main heir of the old system. Diamanti argues that the LN progressively moved from being an 'antagonistic ally' to an out and out opponent of the FI and AN. This trend saw its confirmation in the partial administrative elections of December 1994 when almost everywhere the LN appeared on the ballot paper separately from its government allies. The LN joined with other political forces and coalitions, particularly with the parties of the centre: with the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI) and the *Patto Segni* predominantly, but also with the PDS. In part, the

LN was successful in halting the haemorrhage of its vote and several of its own candidates were elected as mayor in various cities.

Bossi's reaction to the problems of his party within the governing alliance was twofold. Firstly, by undermining and criticising Berlusconi (and Fini) he was trying to show that further participation in the so-called 'Freedom Pole' would inevitably lead to the disappearance of all of the LN's distinguishing characteristics. Secondly, the problem was then to redefine the role and position of the LN within the general framework of the political system. This meant that Bossi repositioned the LN at the 'centre' of the political spectrum, although this was not the classical understanding of the term (Poche 1994:51).

The actions of the LN caused the collapse of the governing coalition, the fall of Berlusconi, and instigated a government crisis (as was discussed in Chapter Two). After the fall of the government, Lamberto Dini formed a government of 'technicians' to lead Italy and the LN was one of his principal supporters. However, as Diamanti (1996c:127) points out, this was a move, which brought to a head, for two reasons, the contradictions inside the LN which had been building up for months. Firstly, there was a section of LN parliamentarians who had affiliations to the centre-right and who basically viewed the LN as the federal wing of the FI. Roberto Maroni, the LN Minister of the Interior was a member of this faction within the LN, who was openly hostile to the split with Berlusconi. Secondly, this problem was compounded by the electoral pact which the LN and the FI had struck. In the March 1994 elections, the LN obtained eight per cent of the national vote, but thanks to the electoral pact with FI, the LN succeeded in obtaining 180 of the parliamentary seats. According to Diamanti, the problem for the LN was that more than half of the LN's electorate did not correspond to a distinct base of support and the electorate's political affiliations were in fact closer to FI than to the LN. The break with the governing coalition meant the exit of around a third of all the LN Parliamentarians (more than 50 out of 180), which included Maroni himself. As Diamanti (1995:161-162) points out, the regions from where most LN Parliamentarians left the party to join FI were those of weaker support for the party, for example, in Trentino, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Friuli. In the region of Piemonte, more Parliamentarians left the party than those who

actually remained faithful to it. This was obviously a very difficult period for the LN but one from which it was able to recover and regain its political prominence by the 1996 national Italian election.

## 2.6 Phase six : 1996 -

The most recent and ongoing phase in the dynamic history of the LN has seen the party return to an emphasis on the rhetoric and values from an earlier phase. The party has returned to organising its political project upon the two main themes which had prefigured its earlier growth and success - a political territorial identity and an anti-system stance and image. However, both of these are now articulated in a very different way than they were previously. The LN has 'created' the concept of a new territorial identity for the North and Centre of Italy, which it calls 'Padania'[2]. Moreover, the party has intensified its hard-line anti-system stance, which focuses on the division of Italy and the secession of 'Padania' from the rest of Italy.

Diamanti (1996a:73) explains, at the end of the experience of government within the *Polo*, the LN was constrained to face the new problem of political representation. The failure of Bossi to present the LN as a 'new' political force as well as the party which represented the whole of the North of Italy, resulted in an identity crisis for the LN. Furthermore, the LN's alliance with the centre-left parties from the beginning of 1995 allowed a majority for Dini's technician government, but it did not construct the way forward. Instead it was more of a 'political fix', which offered the LN the space and time to develop a new strategy and direction.

The solution proposed by Bossi was for the LN to present itself alone for the administrative elections of April 1995. This was the first real test for the party after its relatively traumatic period within government. To reconfirm its differences to the other political parties Bossi again used inflammatory and aggressive language as a means of reinforcing its newly re-formulated anti-system image. Diamanti (1996a:74) argues that the LN orientated its political messages specifically on the electorate of the

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[2] According to the LN, the 14 'nations' which constitute 'Padania' are Alto-Adige or Südtirol, Emilia, Friuli, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche, Piemonte, Romagna, Toscana, Trentino, Trieste, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta and Veneto. 'Padania' is the Latin term for the region surrounding the River Po in Northern Italy.

centre, presenting itself as the 'extremist of the centre', which was in contrast to the traditional image of the centre. In fact, the LN's electoral result, of around six per cent, was higher than expected but really confirmed the existence of a stable territorial base of support for the party in the area, which Diamanti defines as the *pedemontana*[3] zone of Northern Italy (Diamanti (1996b:74).

After the administrative elections of 1995, the LN intensified its hard-line rhetoric with Bossi endorsing the independentist stance, which had previously been used as a latent threat and weapon. This was also accompanied by political acts and symbols, which underlined the LN's endorsement of secession as one of its main political discourses. One of the most potent symbols of this was the creation of the so-called *'Parlamento del Nord'* ('Parliament of the North') in the Lombard city of Mantua. In effect this was an assembly which contained all of the party's national and regional Parliamentarians. The introduction of the secessionist and independentist rhetoric served to mark the distance between the LN and the other political parties. This was significant because the issue of federalism had become regarded by the majority of the mainstream political parties as a necessary political reform within Italy. This was mainly due to the actions of the LN, which had managed to put federalism onto the political agenda in Italy. Moreover, the hard-line stance ensured that the party gained greater media coverage, which had decreased significantly in the previous period. However, perhaps more importantly, the LN restored its links between its political organisation and territory; this was something that had been very important but had largely been lost with the LN's stake in government. This re-emphasis on territory was an attempt by the LN to create what Diamanti (1996a:81) defines as a "virtual territory and homeland" for the people of the North of Italy.

In the absence of a clearly recognisable common ethnic identity for the North of Italy Bossi decided to invent one, or at least give political meaning and significance to a place called 'Padania'. As Diamanti (1996b:56) argues 'Padania' is really an invention which does not have any real historical roots or a common identity. The

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[3] The term *pedemontana*, literally translated means 'on the edge of the mountains', and it refers to the geographical zone which covers the provinces of the north and north-east of Lombardy and in the north of the Veneto region.

term has sometimes been used in the work of certain Italian research institutions, such as the Agnelli Foundation, which has used 'Padania' to refer to the dominant socio-economic structures of the Lombard and Veneto regions of Northern Italy. Yet, the term was certainly not used to describe the existence of a specific cultural and/or ethnic identity. Clearly, Bossi's aim is to develop a common identity around which the diverse cultures, traditions, economies and interests of the North and Centre of Italy could be unified. The creation of the 'virtual Padanian homeland', within which the LN aims to represent the citizens of the North of Italy, has enabled the party to make its national political re-launch. More importantly, the party's secessionist discourse has facilitated a return to electoral consensus in the areas of the North of Italy where the party witnessed its first successes (Diamanti 1996a:81).

It was the results of the national election of April 1996, which signalled the re-emergence of the LN. The election was the first opportunity which the party had to test its newly formulated hard-line secessionist discourse. Again the party entered the election on its own without making any electoral pacts and Bossi presented the vote for the LN as a hypothetical referendum in which the people of the North were voting for the 'independence' of the North, whilst also voting against the Left and Right 'poles' in Italian politics, defined as *Roma-Ulivo* and *Roma-Polo* by Bossi (see Chapter Two). The main line of Bossi's argument was that the two main coalitions were basically the same because they simply wanted to maintain traditional socio-economic and political structures within Italy (Diamanti 1996a:82).

Before the election it was predicted that the vote for the LN would be lower than the 1994 level. In the weeks preceding the election the LN's vote was estimated generously at 20 Deputies and less than ten Senators (Scaramozzino 1996). The main reason was that it was thought that the majority electoral system would leave little space for those parties running alone in the election. The outcome of the election was a somewhat surprising result for the LN because the party actually realised the highest percentage vote in its history. The result was greater than any pre-election estimates and guaranteed the LN a strong presence in the Italian Parliament, with over 90 Parliamentarians and about 4 million votes, which was 10.1 per cent of the electorate. This was the electoral high point in the short but intense political history of the LN,

which actually re-launched the party and meant that it regained its position as one of the most important forces within Italian politics (Diamanti 1996a:81-83).

Diamanti (1996a:83) argues that the 1996 result for the LN is somewhat problematic. Firstly, although the party has a significant number of Parliamentarians, it does not have enough to gain overall power or even to influence power because the centre-left coalition *Ulivo* won the election with a significant majority, supported by the *Rifondazione Comunista* (Refounded Communists)(RC). Secondly, the result of the 1996 election clearly confirmed the continued persistence of a specific electoral geography or hinterland, for the party, which corresponds to the *pedemontana* region of Northern Italy. Furthermore, the result is interesting because it shows that the success of the LN occurred in the areas in which the party gained its original strength. Thirdly, the 1996 results show that the territorial concentration of the vote for the LN moved north-eastwards towards the Veneto region and away from the previous main focus of support, which was Lombardy. This could possibly create internal organisational problems for the party, as was evident in the past. Bossi continues to be politically central but he has a smaller Lombard power base to support his actions. Overall, the results of the 1996 election showed that the hard line secessionist rhetoric and strategy of the LN allowed the party to reinforce its political and electoral identity and deepen its support in the *pedemontana* area, but not to 'conquer' 'Padania' (Diamanti 1996a:83-84).

Understanding the political history and development of the LN is crucial in order to comprehend the nature of its political strategies and rhetoric. Each phase in the history of the party has been accompanied by the articulation of certain themes and policies, which have changed more or less in line with the changing socio-political situation within Italy. The party has tried to maximise its political exposure and take advantage of the changing contours of the Italian political situation. In part, the LN has been successful in not only adapting to the changing situation but also in pre-empting and actually playing a key role in the nature of the changes. Clearly, Umberto Bossi, the party leader, has been central to the LN's flexibility and therefore its relatively rapid rise to importance. Although the LN's electoral strength is relatively small at the national scale, at the regional and local scale within the North of

Italy its strength is much more significant. The next section examines the electoral geography of the party in more detail.

## 3. Electoral geography of the LN

The LN's history has been relatively short but has been demarcated by a succession of significant turning points that correspond, in large part, to the various elections which have taken place in Italy since the end of the 1980s. Moreover, each of these elections has assumed a critical connotation in the history of the party (Diamanti 1996c:116). The main period of electoral growth for the 'regional Leagues' took place between 1987 and 1992. In the 1987 national elections, the LL gained 0.7 per cent of the national vote, however, the real success came after the creation of the LN in 1991 (see Table One). The LN gained 8.7 per cent of the vote in the national elections of 1992. During the period from the 1992 to the 1994 national election, the vote for the LN declined slightly but in the most recent national election in 1996 the support rose to an all time high of 10.1 per cent (Diamanti 1995:21).

Table One : Electoral results for the LN in national Italian elections between 1987 and 1996
(Source : Diamanti 1996a)

| Year of Election | Percentage vote for LN |
|---|---|
| 1987 | 0.7[4] |
| 1992 | 8.7 |
| 1994 | 8.4 |
| 1996 | 10.1 |

This section examines each of the four main phases of electoral growth of the LN starting from 1987 up until the most recent national Italian election in 1996.

## 3.1 Phase one : 1987-1992

Before 1987, the LV made the most significant electoral advances of all the 'regional Leagues' in the Veneto region. After the LV's initial success in the European elections of 1979, and the regional elections of 1980 when the party reached 14 000 votes, its real electoral success came in the 1983 national elections when the LV gained 4.2 per cent of the regional vote in the Veneto. This ensured the election of a LV Deputy (Achille Tarmarin) and Senator (Graziano Girardi) to the Italian Parliament. This success was followed by a period of electoral stagnation and decline to 2.7 per cent in the 1989 European elections (Allum and Diamanti 1996:156). Diamanti (1992:123) points out, that the support for the LV was confined to a relatively well defined territorial area, which corresponded to the *pedemontana* area of the Veneto region. Indeed, two-thirds of the communes in which the LV received its highest votes were in the provinces of Verona, Vicenza, Treviso and Belluno. Over the last twenty years, this is the zone which has been characterised by relatively high economic growth rates and a high concentration of small and medium sized firms. It is also the area in which the DC has traditionally had strong political roots and bases of support.

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[4] The result of 0.7 per cent was for the *Lega Lombarda*.

By 1987, the electoral geography of support for the 'regional Leagues' had changed quite substantially (Diamanti 1995:32) (Agnew 1995:162) (see Figure Four). It is possible to delineate three territorial zones of support for the Leagues, across Northern Italy. The first of these corresponds to the *pedemontana* area of the Veneto region, where the support for the LV varied between four and 4.5 per cent. The second area is in the *alta Lombardia* (the northern half of the region of Lombardy), which includes the provinces of Bergamo, Varese, Como and Sondrio (see Chapter Five for a detailed analysis of the LN in the province of Varese). In this area, which Diamanti (1996a:84) defines as the *pedemontana* of Lombardy, the LL gained between five and seven per cent of the vote. The third zone comprises some of the provinces of the region of Piemonte, especially Torino, Cuneo, Vercelli and Asti, where the 'regional Leagues' of Piemonte gained between three and five per cent of the vote (see Table Two). The 1987 election was important because it confirmed the electoral centrality of the LL, whilst also signalling the relative decline of the 'Leagues' in the other regions of Northern Italy, especially the LV. This centrality was further accentuated in the European elections of 1989 and the administrative elections of 1990 (Diamanti 1995:32-34).

Figure Four : Percentage vote for the 'regional Leagues' which later formed the LN,
   1987 national election

(Source : Agnew 1995:162, Ufficio Analisi Statistiche Lega Nord 1995)

Table Two : The provinces of Northern Italy with the highest electoral results for the
‘regional Leagues’, in the Italian elections between 1987 and 1992
(Source : Diamanti 1995:33)

| National 1987 | | European 1989 | | Regional 1990 | | National 1992 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bergamo | 7.3 | Bergamo | 12.4 | Brescia | 24.2 | Bergamo | 27.6 |
| Varese | 7.2 | Varese | 9.5 | Bergamo | 23.1 | Brescia | 26.4 |
| Como | 6.3 | Como | 9.4 | Como | 19.7 | Varese | 25.9 |
| Torino | 5.5 | Sondrio | 7.9 | Sondrio | 19.7 | Vicenza | 25.9 |
| Cuneo | 5.1 | Cremona | 7.7 | Cremona | 19.7 | Como | 24.9 |
| Vercelli | 5.0 | Pavia | 7.0 | Varese | 18.7 | Treviso | 24.5 |
| Sondrio | 4.7 | Brescia | 6.9 | Pavia | 15.2 | Verona | 23.7 |
| Vicenza | 4.5 | Milano | 4.1 | Mantova | 12.4 | Belluno | 21.9 |
| Verona | 4.1 | Mantova | 2.8 | Milano | 12.1 | Sondrio | 21.7 |
| Treviso | 3.8 | Verona | 2.0 | Vicenza | 9.7 | Pavia | 21.3 |
| Asti | 3.4 | Vicenza | 1.9 | Verona | 9.3 | Cuneo | 20.6 |
| Belluno | 2.7 | Asti | 1.9 | Savona | 7.0 | Vercelli | 20.7 |

In terms of the actual electorate of the LN, it is interesting to note that up until 1987 there was a predominance of male voters between the ages of 20 to 50. Moreover, the LN's electorate tended to have lower levels of education and tended to work in the small firm sector either as owners or workers within the small firms of Lombardy and Veneto (Diamanti 1995:66). Woods (1995:197) argues that the LL's initial bases of support were similar to the *Poujadist* movement's in the 1950s, because it attracted supporters from similar occupations and backgrounds, such as shopkeepers, small firm entrepreneurs, artisans and commercial agents. In addition, Woods also argues that the support for the ‘regional Leagues’ came from middle-aged males between 40 and 65 with a medium level of education but as the movement grew organisationally and electorally, the social base of party support widened considerably.

## 3.2 Phase two : 1992-1993

The 1992 election was very important in the development of the LN, not least because it was the first time that the amalgamated party had entered a national election. This election signalled the re-emergence of patterns from the previous period of growth (see Figure Five). In particular, the Belluno-Treviso-Vicenza triangle of provinces in the Veneto region re-emerged as a heartland of support. Secondly, the 1992 result confirmed the highest levels of support for the party were in the provinces of the *alta-Lombardia*. Significantly, the support for the LN expanded into other areas of Northern Italy, most notably in the autonomous regions of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and Trentino Alto-Adige. Moreover, support also grew for the party in Emilia-Romagna, especially in the provinces of Piacenza and Parma, which border Lombardy and Veneto. This is significant because it shows the 'spread-effect' of support for the LN from the areas of highest support, namely Lombardy and Veneto, to the adjacent areas in neighbouring regions (Diamanti 1995:35).

Figure Five : Percentage vote for the LN, 1992 national election

(Source : Ufficio Analisi Statistiche Lega Nord 1995)
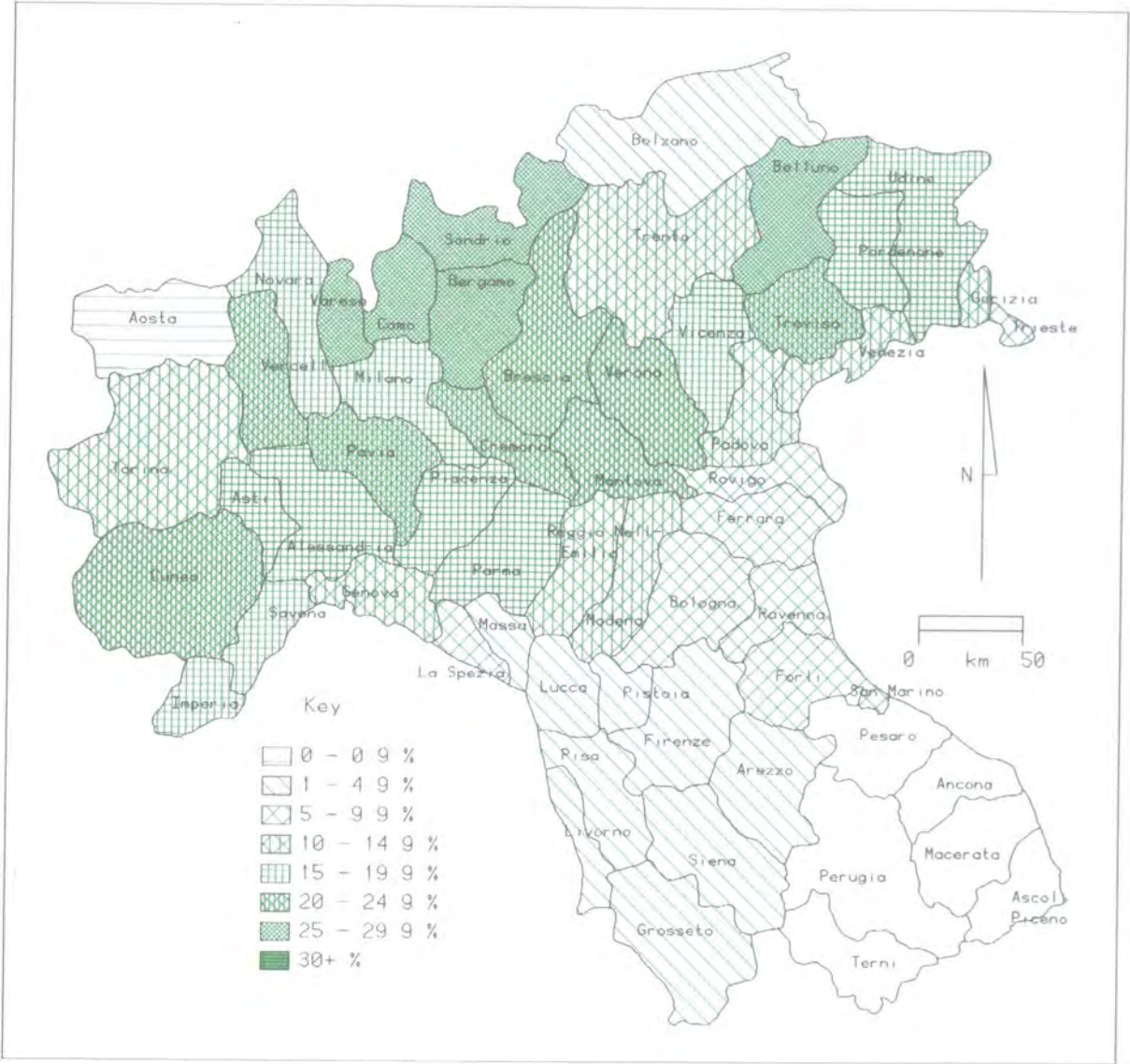
Natale (1991:104-105) argues that, within Lombardy, there is an extraordinary territorial uniformity in the vote of the LL. Moreover, he argues that the areas in which the LN gained its highest levels of support coincided with those which were previously zones of support for the DC (the so-called 'white zones'). Furthermore, Agnew (1995:164) argues that ecological analysis of the zones where the LN achieved its highest support in the years from 1987 to 1992, reveals some of the possible causes of its growth and also the limits to its appeal (see Table Three). Agnew (1995:164) points out that there are certain common socio-economic features between the areas in which the LN gained its higher levels of electoral support. Firstly, they had higher incomes on average from manufacturing industry; secondly, they had a higher growth in industrial incomes in the 1980s; thirdly, they had larger numbers of firms; fourthly, they had larger numbers of industrial employees; and fifthly, they had lower public transfers per inhabitant. Expansion in electoral support for the LN has been strongest in the areas where the growth of industrial districts has been strongest during the last 20 years and also where there are lower levels of public services (Diamanti 1995:42). The crucial point, which Agnew (1995:164) makes, is that the LN has not been able to gain any significant levels of electoral support in the socio-economically similar areas of Central Italy. This is partly because areas of Central Italy have retained their affiliation to the left in Italian politics, the so-called 'red-zones', which is especially the case in Emilia-Romagna. Moreover, it means that support for the LN cannot only be linked to the socio-economic settings of certain areas, which are relatively wealthy (this issue is explored in more detail in Chapter Seven in relation to the province of Macerata).

Table Three : Some of the economic and social characteristics of areas in Northern and Central Italy, where the LN was either weak or strong in the three elections between 1987 and 1992

(Source : Diamanti 1995:41, Agnew 1995:165)

| Election Characteristic | Natn 1987 | Regn 1990 | Euro 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Percentage Population growth, 1980-9** | | | |
| All provinces | -1.8 | -1.5 | -1.7 |
| LN, strong | -0.1 | -0.3 | -0.1 |
| LN, weak | -1.6 | -0.8 | -0.8 |
| **Percentage growth in industrial incomes, 1980-9** | | | |
| All provinces | 54.7 | 54.4 | 54.2 |
| LN, strong | 57.2 | 58.0 | 57.8 |
| LN, weak | 51.7 | 51.9 | 51.9 |
| **Industrial income 1988 (1000 lire per inhabitant)** | | | |
| All provinces | 6205 | 6481 | 6379 |
| LN, strong | 7773 | 7885 | 7611 |
| LN, weak | 6205 | 5642 | 5643 |
| **Industrial workplaces, 1991 (per 100 000 inhabitants)** | | | |
| All provinces | | 21 | 21 |
| LN, strong | | 22 | 24 |
| LN, weak | | 20 | 20 |
| **Service workplaces, 1991 (per 100 000 inhabitants)** | | | |
| All provinces | | 22 | 22 |
| LN, strong | | 21 | 21 |
| LN, weak | | 23 | 23 |
| **Industrial employees, 1991 (per 100 inhabitants)** | | | |
| All provinces | | 14.9 | 14.7 |
| LN, strong | | 16.8 | 18.1 |
| LN, weak | | 12.4 | 12.4 |
| **Employees in private services, 1991 (per 100 inhabitants)** | | | |
| All provinces | | 7.2 | 7.2 |
| LN, strong | | 6.6 | 6.2 |
| LN, weak | | 7.3 | 7.3 |
| **Public transfers per inhabitant, 1992 (per 1000 lire)** | | | |
| All provinces | | | 6611 |
| LN, strong | | | 6162 |
| LN, weak | | | 7165 |

In terms of the nature of the LN's electorate, Mannheimer (1991:125) points out that by the 1992 election it had changed and modified to more resemble the 'social average' of the population as a whole. He points that there was still a major presence of male voters (55 per cent); and there was little difference, in terms of education levels, between the voters of the LN and the population as a whole. This signifies that the electorate of the LN had developed to such an extent that it reflected the characteristics of the population of the North of Italy (see Table Four).

Table Four : Sociographic characteristics and social position of the sympathisers of
    the LN in Lombardy and Veneto (in percentage terms)
(Source : Sondaggio Poster political attitudes in some areas of Lombardy and Veneto,
December 1992 - January 1993, Diamanti 1995:100)

| Category | All | Sympathisers of the LN | Sympathisers of the LL | Sympathisers of the LV |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men | 48 | 51 | 56 | 48 |
| Women | 52 | 49 | 44 | 52 |
| Age | | | | |
| 18-35 | 41 | 45 | 49 | 39 |
| 36-50 | 28 | 26 | 26 | 25 |
| >50 | 31 | 30 | 25 | 36 |
| Education Title[5] | | | | |
| Obbligo | 44 | 51 | 47 | 59 |
| Superiori | 41 | 42 | 45 | 36 |
| Laurea | 15 | 7 | 8 | 5 |

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[5] In terms of the three education titles - *Obbligo* - corresponds to the qualifications gained on leaving school after the compulsory finishing age; *Superiori* - corresponds to A-Levels; *Laurea* - corresponds to degree level.

## 3.3 Phase three : 1994-1995

The Italian national election of 1994 was another turning point in the history of the LN (see Figure Six). The result for the LN of 8.4 per cent, which was 0.3 per cent lower than its 1992 result, showed that the party was able to maintain its level of support but that there was a redefinition of its social and territorial base of support (Diamanti 1995:139). In spite of the overall stability in the result for the party there was in fact a degree of mobility and change in the electoral geography. Of the 211 electoral constituencies in Northern Italy, in only 31 (15 per cent) was the LN's electoral support effectively stable; in 116 (55 per cent) it fell by at least one per cent, and in the remaining 64 constituencies (30 per cent) it actually increased. Therefore, the LN's vote was characterised by a widespread redistribution of support amounting to a concentration in certain well defined areas. In terms of the constituencies where the LN made the greatest gains and losses (plus or minus 3.5 per cent), both groups consist of 27 constituencies whose location is relatively clear-cut. Only four are in Lombardy, three in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, five in Piemonte, and 15 are to be found in the Veneto region. In the Veneto, the areas in which the LN gained support in 1994 were in fact those in which the LV registered its first successes in the mid-1980s, in the provinces of Vicenza, Treviso, and Belluno. There was a similar pattern in other regions; for example, in Lombardy and Piemonte, the LN made its strongest gains in the provinces of Bergamo, Sondrio and Cuneo, which appeared as LN strongholds as far back as 1987 (Diamanti 1996c:124).

Diamanti (1996c:124) shows that the 'areas of defeat' for the LN (i.e. the constituencies where the vote for the LN declined by 3.5 per cent or over) are those in which the LN had most recently gained support, at relatively low levels. For example, 14 of these were in Emilia Romagna, where the LN, although making widespread gains in 1992, had not really put down roots; the same is true for the five constituencies in Liguria where the vote for the party exceeded 15 per cent in earlier elections. Diamanti argues that the most surprising decline took place in the eight Lombard constituencies, where previously the support for the LN had fluctuated between 18 and 25 per cent. Half of these constituencies are situated in the province of Milan and half in the provinces of Cremona and Mantua; these are all areas where the LN's penetration dates from the early 1990s. Symbolically these areas were

important for the LN because they included the city of Milan, which in 1994 was taken over by Berlusconi's FI party (Diamanti 1996c:124).

Figure Six : Percentage vote for the LN, 1994 national election

(Source : Ufficio Analisi Statistiche Lega Nord 1995)
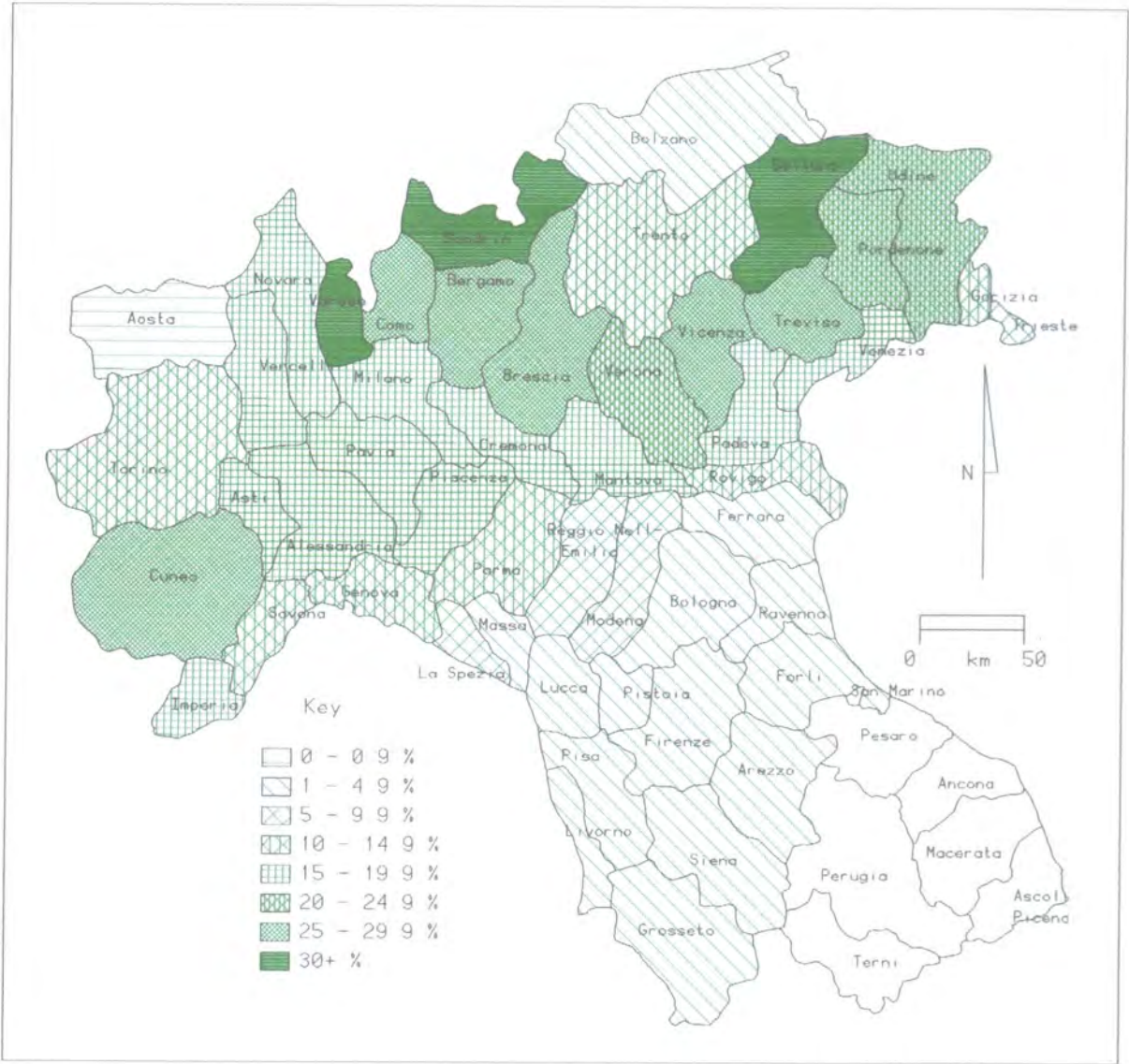
Diamanti (1996c:124) argues that the results of the 1994 elections indicate a sort of "march back to the past", with support for the LN largely being confined to the areas where the party first emerged electorally. The party lost support in the areas where it had not managed to gain a significant base of support, most notably in Central Italy; also those areas where it had gained higher levels of support more recently, for example, in the main metropolitan areas of Northern Italy, especially in Milan, but also in Liguria and Trentino. Indeed, the LN's electoral geography of 1994 was to a large extent a mirror image of its original profile because the constituencies in which support for the LN exceeded 25.5 per cent of the vote were situated in the provinces of Belluno, Treviso, Vicenza, Verona, Bergamo, Como, Varese, non-metropolitan Milan, and Cuneo. These were precisely the areas in which the LL and the LV first gained support, with the only exception of non-metropolitan Milan (Diamanti 1996c:125). This result further confirmed the similarity between the areas of support for the LN and those, which were previously areas of DC electoral strength. The party's support was still stronger in the highly industrialised, small business areas, of Northern Italy. Rather than the LN being the 'party of the North', it returned to being 'the party of the northern industrial periphery', as it was in the late 1980s. The 'other' North, Diamanti (1996c:125) argues, dominated by the role of large-scale urban and industrial agglomerations, and a more secular political sub-culture, moved away from the LN in another direction. This was towards the political rhetoric and ideals promoted by Silvio Berlusconi's FI party.

After the 1994 election, with the entry of the FI onto the political scene, it was evident that the support vote for the LN declined somewhat (see Figure Seven). The European elections of June 1994, confirmed that the LN had lost support largely to the FI. In every region of the North of Italy, between the March and June 1994 elections, the vote for the LN had declined and the national vote for the party had dropped to 6 per cent. However, during the same period the vote for the FI had risen to over 30 per cent (Diamanti 1995:150). The significance of the relative electoral decline of the LN was even greater, as Diamanti (1995:150) explains, because the LN began to lose support in its previously solid areas of support. This confirms the problems that the party had to confront during this period.

Figure Seven : Percentage vote for the LN, 1994 European election
(Source : Ufficio Analisi Statistiche Lega Nord 1995)



Key

- 0 - 0 9 %
- 1 - 4 9 %
- 5 - 9 9 %
- 10 - 14 9 %
- 15 - 19 9 %
- 20 - 24 9 %
- 25 - 29 9 %
- 30+ %
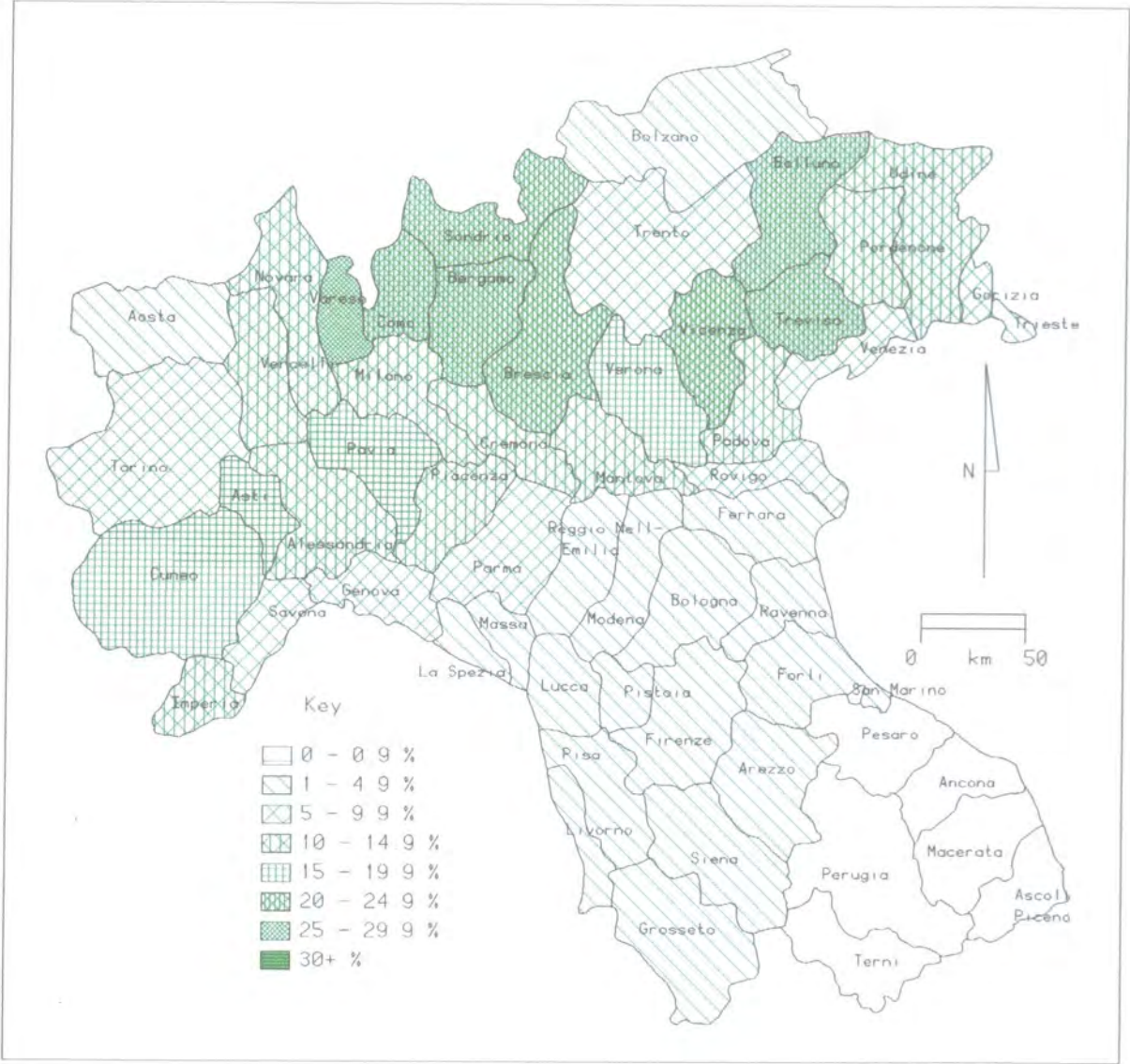
## 3.4 Phase four : 1996

The 1996 election is the most recent one in Italian politics and in many ways has been the most significant for the LN for several reasons. Firstly, the LN was able to recuperate the support which it had lost during the previous phase, and the party recorded its highest ever national electoral vote of 10.1 per cent. This meant the LN gained 90 Parliamentarians and was the largest party in Lombardy and Veneto with over 35 per cent of the vote. However, the 1996 result is also a problematic one for the LN mainly because it has not really been able to expand its support throughout the whole of North and Central Italy (or 'Padania'). Moreover, it reinforces the fact that the LN's support is limited to certain well defined geographical areas and that the North of Italy has become even more segmented politically than it was in 1994 (Diamanti 1996a:83-85).

In relation to the 1996 elections, Diamanti (1996a:85) argues that the electoral geography of the North of Italy has become much more complex. Instead of being divided between two 'Norths', there are in fact five separate electoral zones, which are relatively internally homogeneous, whilst at the same time very distinct from each other in terms of political orientation and socio-economic profiles (see Table Five).

Table Five : Typologies of the electoral constituencies of the North, based on the
   results of the 21 April 1996 : Electoral orientations
(Source : Laboratory of Social and Political Studies, University of Urbino using data
from the Minister of Interior and Institute G. Tagliacarne, Diamanti 1996a:87)

| | 'Open North' | 'North of the Left' | 'Profound North' | 'North of the Right' | Trentino Alto Adige | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Constituencies** | | | | | | |
| Absolute values | 97 | 21 | 31 | 22 | 8 | 179 |
| Percentage values | 54.2 | 11.7 | 17.3 | 12.3 | 4.5 | 100 |
| Urban constituencies | 30.9 | 61.9 | 3.2 | 63.6 | 25.0 | 33.5 |
| **1996 election** | | | | | | |
| **Majority part (%)** | | | | | | |
| Ulivo | 37.2 | 51.6 | 28.7 | 38.5 | 27.5 | 37.1 |
| Polo per la libertà | 35.9 | 35.0 | 28.5 | 45.9 | 24.0 | 35.2 |
| LN | 25.6 | 12.1 | 42.4 | 14.0 | 18.7 | 25.3 |
| others | 1.3 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 1.7 | 29.9 | 2.3 |
| **Proportional part (%)** | | | | | | |
| PDS | 15.0 | 25.9 | 8.3 | 17.7 | 8.6 | 15.2 |
| Popolari | 7.1 | 5.4 | 7.8 | 5.0 | 19.1 | 7.3 |
| FI | 21.3 | 18.8 | 17.5 | 28.8 | 13.6 | 20.9 |
| AN | 11.2 | 12.0 | 7.7 | 13.2 | 11.1 | 11.0 |
| LN | 23.4 | 10.5 | 40.4 | 12.4 | 12.6 | 23.0 |
| **1992 Election** | | | | | | |
| DC | 25.5 | 18.1 | 34.3 | 18.1 | 21.3 | 25.1 |
| PSI | 12.8 | 13.0 | 10.0 | 13.9 | 6.7 | 12.2 |
| PDS | 11.9 | 19.8 | 6.8 | 13.9 | 4.9 | 11.9 |
| LN | 19.8 | 12.9 | 23.8 | 17.5 | 8.8 | 18.9 |

The "profound North", as Diamanti (1996a:86) calls it, corresponds to the heartland of support for the LN; of the 31 constituencies in the zone, the LN gained an average vote of 42 per cent in the Majority and 40 per cent in the Proportional part of the election. This zone corresponds to the area in which the LN has always gained its highest levels of support since its creation. Diamanti (1996a:94) points out this zone covers the *pedemontana* region of Northern Italy, which goes from Pordenone, Belluno, Treviso, Vicenza in the north-east, to Brescia, Bergamo Sondrio and Varese in Lombardy and finally into the province of Cuneo in the region of Piemonte. As Table Six shows, this is one of the most densely industrialised regions in the North of Italy and has a number of small industrial firms and districts, a low level of unemployment and a lower level of urbanisation. This was one of the main zones of support for the DC, which got 34 per cent of the vote in the 1992 election (Diamanti 1996a:88).

Table Six: Typologies of the electoral constituencies of the North, based on the results
    of the 21 April 1996 : Socio-economic characteristics
(Source : Laboratory of Social and Political Studies, University of Urbino using data
from the Minister of Interior and Institute G. Tagliacarne, Diamanti 1996a:88)

|  | 'Open North' | 'North of the Left' | 'Profound North' | 'North of the Right' | Trentino Alto Adige | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban constituencies (%) | 30.9 | 61.9 | 3.2 | 63.6 | 25.0 | 33.5 |
| No. of firms per 1000 inhabitants | 75.4 | 65.2 | 80.7 | 68.9 | 91.5 | 75.0 |
| No. of employees (%) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Industry | 44.7 | 36.2 | 55.9 | 30.0 | 32.3 | 43.3 |
| Commerce | 21.8 | 22.6 | 18.6 | 24.8 | 30.3 | 22.1 |
| Services | 33.5 | 41.2 | 25.5 | 45.2 | 37.5 | 34.6 |
| Unemployed (as % of the active popn) | 9.9 | 13.3 | 7.5 | 10.1 | 5.5 | 9.7 |

The "North of the left", contains 12 per cent of the total number of constituencies and is where the *Ulivo* and RC parties gained over 50 per cent of the vote. Geographically, these are areas to be found in Piemonte and Liguria. The "North of the right" also contains 12 per cent of the constituencies, and this is the area in which the centre-right gained an average of 46 per cent of the vote (compared to *Ulivo's* 39 per cent). This area is based around the city of Milan and the province of Pavia as well as the west and east extremes of Northern Italy, (Imperia and Trieste respectively). Socio-economically both the North of the left and right are quite similar; both have relatively high levels of unemployment, urbanisation and tertiarisation (Diamanti 1996a:88-89).

The "open North" contains a wide aggregation of constituencies, covering over half of the total (97, or 54 per cent), in which the votes for the political forces are not that far from the average. This is the area in which electoral competition is the most marked because no political party is dominant. The LN is the largest party in the Proportional system but yet has the lowest number of actual seats, only nine, compared to the 49 constituencies gained by *Ulivo* and 39 by the *Polo*. The fifth region in Diamanti's classification is Trentino Alto-Adige, with its eight electoral constituencies, which are associated with the specificity of the regional parties (not only the SVP but also the *Partito Autonomista Trentino Tirolese* or PATT) and the ethno-linguistic divisions of the population within the region (see Chapter six for a full analysis of the LN in this context) (Diamanti 1996a:89-90).

The complexity of the result of the 1996 election is apparent, however, the LN was largely unable to expand its electoral support outside its heartland of support. Instead, rather than widening its support, the LN's support actually deepened in its political heartlands. This is an enduring feature of the electoral geography of the party in that it seems unable to spread its political support. Apart from this the LN is also unable to penetrate the main cities, in each of the regions of the North of Italy. For example, the party's support is lower in Milan, Venice, Turin, Genoa and Bologna, than it is in the provincial areas of the North of Italy. Thus, as Diamanti (1996b:56) argues, rather than being in control of 'Padania', the electoral consensus of the LN is concentrated in a well-defined area, which is not especially close to the River Po. In fact, Diamanti

calls this area *"pedemontania"*, which covers part of the north-east of Northern Italy, from Udine and Pordenone to the provinces of Belluno, Vicenza and Treviso (where the LV first gained its first electoral success) to the provinces of Brescia, Bergamo, Sondrio, Como and Varese in Lombardy, and finally to the province of Cuneo in Piemonte. This is an area which is relatively socio-economically homogeneous, based upon a concentration of small and medium sized firms, which in the last 20 years has become the so-called industrialised or 'opulent' periphery of Northern Italy (Allum and Diamanti 1996:152) (see Figure Eight). It is also the area in which the DC traditionally gained its most support, however, the DC has declined which has impacted the previously relatively stable socio-political identity (or 'white sub-culture') of such areas. Instead, Diamanti (1996b:56) argues that, in its place what has emerged is a "green sub-culture" of the LN, which is based on the protection of local social and economic interests in such areas of the North of Italy.

It is too early in the political history of the LN to determine whether or not it has developed into a new form of 'political sub-culture' within Northern Italy as it will take generations for such a conclusion to be made. What is clear is that the LN has been able to root itself into the political and civil spheres of life in particular areas of the North of Italy but this has not been the case across the whole of Northern Italy. What emerges from an analysis of the LN's electoral development is that the party has a very distinct geography of support. The LN is electorally strong in certain areas, notably the provinces in northern Lombardy and in the Veneto region and these are the areas where the LN has gained most support more or less throughout its history. On the other hand, the LN is electorally weak in other areas, especially in the provinces of Central Italy. The reasons for this relate to the ways in which the discourses of the LN have more impact in certain areas but not in others, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Figure Eight : Percentage vote for the LN, 1996 national election

(Source : Ministry of the Interior 1996)

# 4. Conclusion

The LN has undergone a relatively rapid rise to political prominence in Italy. The party was created out of the amalgamation of several 'regional Leagues' in Northern Italy and has developed into a national political party. This growth has involved a number of different phases in which the LN has changed its political rhetoric and discourses in order to take advantage of the political and economic situation in Italy. Initially the 'regional Leagues' stressed ethno-regional differences as a way of gaining electoral support, however, this proved to be problematic for a number of reasons. In 1991, after the formation of the LN, the party endorsed its federalist discourse, which was relatively successful in attracting electoral support. This was the period in which the party expanded its support into other regions of Northern Italy, outside of Lombardy and Veneto and also into Central Italy. Most recently, the party has rejected it federalist rhetoric in favour of the hard-line discourse of secession and independence of 'Padania' from the rest of Italy. At the same time, the LN has gained its highest national political result ever but the party's electoral support is not spread evenly across Northern Italy but concentrated in certain areas. Indeed, support for the LN has deepened in the areas in which it gained its initial successes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The reasons for this relate to the nature of the political discourses and rhetoric of the LN and how these have gained different reactions in contrasting geographical areas of Northern Italy. The reasons why the LN has been able to embed itself in certain areas relates to a number of factors; for example, the party's political structure, its rhetoric and the ways in which it aims to mobilise support. The next chapter examines this aspect of the LN in more detail and focuses on the structure and discourses of the LN.

# Chapter Four : The Structures and Discourses of the Lega Nord

## 1. Introduction

The contribution that the LN has made to Italian politics and society over the last decade or so has been significant in a variety of ways. The party has undergone a tumultuous political evolution, transforming itself from a small movement stressing the ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness of the regions of Northern Italy to a national, mass political party. It has developed a distinctive party structure and set of institutions as well as a dense network of party offices and a detailed electoral programme. Diamanti (1995:122) argues that the LN has thrown into crisis the relationships between the mass political parties, cultural traditions and civil society, in the North of Italy, precisely where these phenomena were most solid. Furthermore, the LN has shown that it has the capacity to fuse the contradictions within the Italian socio-economic, political and cultural systems, presenting itself as the 'vehicle' of change while at the same time it has been able to intensify the problems surrounding these contradictions. The main reason behind this has been a thin and malleable ideological base, combined with a flexible organisation and decision-making structure which is centralised around Bossi, as the charismatic leader who has proved that he has astute political instincts (Diamanti 1995).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the different ways in which the LN has managed to become one of the most influential actors in Italian politics, in recent years. Firstly, this involves an analysis of the party's structure and organisation in order to examine its distinctiveness from traditional Italian political parties. Secondly, the dominant political discourses of the party are analysed to understand the aims and content of the LN's political project and how these have influenced political support for the party.

## 2. The structures of the LN

The organisational and institutional structure of the LN has been a crucial element in its success. Woods (1995) points out that at the outset the party was nothing more

than a small number of supporters who travelled throughout the Lombard region to spread the movement's ideas. However, after the party's electoral successes in the 1990s, it underwent rapid institutional development. Also, party membership grew very quickly and so it went from having a few hundred supporters to a party with literally thousands of members. In order to incorporate such growth in support the party had to develop an institutional infrastructure to match. However, despite its political distinctiveness, the LN has developed an institutional structure which Farrell and Levy (1996:142) describe as a "traditional and Leninist-like party structure". In some ways this is surprising because on the one hand, the politics of the LN is obviously antagonistic towards the traditional Italian political parties, yet its organisational structure resembles many features of the other mass Italian political party structures (Diamanti 1995).

Diamanti (1995) suggests that there are three main ways in which the structures of the LN are in some ways similar to those of the traditional parties. Primarily, the LN has developed a strong link to territory and has undergone a very rapid growth in its number of party offices or *sezione*. Between 1990 and 1991 the number of local party offices in Lombardy almost doubled from 52 to 102; and by March 1993 there were LN party offices in all of the provinces of the North as well in Tuscana in Central Italy. Secondly, as with the major mass Italian political parties, the LN has developed a number of related institutions with the aim of embedding itself within the civil, institutional, economic and social spheres of Northern Italian society. Thirdly, the LN has tried to develop supporter networks to attract more and more activists to the party, which has mainly focused on attracting young people and those who have had no previous experience of formal politics (Diamanti 1995). Despite the apparent similarities in institutional structure that the LN has with the traditional Italian political parties, it is clear that there are distinct differences and it is these which have been important to the party's success. The main one has been its reliance on the party leader, Umberto Bossi, as the next section discusses.

## 2.1 The 'Bossi' factor

The key difference between the LN and the majority of other Italian political parties is that the real power and control is concentrated with the party leader, Umberto Bossi,

which has been one of the major factors in the growth and success of the party (Diamanti 1995). Bossi's role as party leader is a wide-ranging one; he has proved that he has an astute political 'nose' and has been able to guide the party in different directions to best exploit the political situation. Moreover, he has proved that he is an extremely effective and charismatic communicator, presenting himself as an "anti-politician" (Agnew 1995:160). In addition, Bossi is the continuity with the past for the LN; he is the person that has been with the party since the beginning and who has claimed in the past that "the LN is him and that the party is his life" (Bossi and Vimercati 1992). Indeed, in the absence of a distinctive ethnic or linguistic appeal, Gallagher (1994) argues, what proved to be the main integrating force for the LN was the personality and uncompromising message of Bossi. He argues that it was Bossi who became accepted as the embodiment of the North's refusal to transfer further wealth or political control to Rome and the South of Italy. Moreover, Gallagher (1994) argues that Bossi's highly personal leadership style was more attuned to a traditional movement rather than one claiming to be a force for modernisation.

Tambini (1994:235) argues that describing Bossi as charismatic is somewhat of a misnomer. He argues that Bossi has 'anti-charisma' because of his crude voice and vocabulary, as well as a reluctance to smile. Yet, it is his blunt opposition to the charisma of traditional post-war Italian politicians that fascinates his supporters. Tambini points out that Bossi has used relatively simple and raw language, and it is precisely because of this that he has succeeded in attracting the support of citizens which previous politicians merely confused. The LN's supporters have rewarded him with what, Tambini defines as, profound trust and little challenge to his leadership. The supporters also regularly compare Bossi to the LN's medieval hero, chanting "Umberto da Cassano = Alberto da Giussano"[1]. Indeed, Diamanti (1995:173) goes further and argues that Bossi has been "sanctified" by the supporters of the party, in a religious sense. This is because of the cult status and following which he has managed to generate.

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[1] The LN supporters are making a direct comparison between Bossi, who was born in the town of Cassano in the province of Varese, and Alberto da Giusanna, the leader of the 12th Century Lombard League.

Other commentators have been more critical about Bossi's role in the LN. For example, Piccone (1991-2:11) argues that Bossi's leadership style raises serious questions about the kind of direct democracy within a populist-federalist movement. Piccone argues that the LN's practice of election by acclamation is a problem, and is more typical of the recently defunct 'popular democracies' of Eastern Europe or, even worse, of Nazism and Fascism. The same can be said, Piccone argues, for the party's internal hierarchical structure, which is reminiscent of democratic centralist regimes. He states that while it is true that the LN does not have any Secret Police or any system of lavish rewards to enforce internal conformity, nor has it ever resorted to violence and coercion, the analogies are too close and too numerous for comfort. However, Piccone (1991-2) does concede that Bossi has helped to keep the movement together during crises, which have been relatively numerous in the history of the party.

In the 1980s, Tambini (1993-94) argues while the LN was growing quickly but had little power, there were few reasons for the varying aspirations of its supporters to come into conflict. Therefore, factionalism was not really a significant problem because Bossi was the dominant figure. However, this changed when the LN gained more and more electoral representatives, some of whom also gained higher media profiles as Ministers, such as Roberto Maroni and Irene Pivetti. Both of these figures became national political figures in their own right and to a certain extent upstaged Bossi as the central political figure of the LN. Moreover, Professor Miglio had also risen to prominence as the LN's principal federalist thinker. Bossi was reluctant to concede any real power to Miglio, which caused his departure. More recently, Pivetti has left the LN to form her own federalist political party because of disputes with Bossi over the controversial introduction of the LN's secessionist discourse and rejection of federalism.

Tensions have always been apparent within the LN, especially between its different regional branches. Traditionally, this has been most evident between the *Liga Veneta* (LV) and the *Lega Lombarda* (LL) and was especially strong when Franco Rocchetta was leader of the LV. This was because Rocchetta had always been against Lombard dominance within the LN and argued that Bossi was too dominant (Allum and Diamanti 1996). These tensions have largely been controlled, not least because

Rocchetta left the LV, but Diamanti (1996a) argues that there is strong possibility that such internal problems will resurface because of the results of the 1996 elections. The 1996 result indicated a shift in electoral concentration away from Lombardy towards the north-east of Italy and into the Veneto region. This may create problems especially because real power and control still remains with Bossi in the Lombardy region.

Gallagher (1994) argues that there are also internal factions within the supporters of the LN; there are those who have more hard-line tendencies and those who would prefer the party to become a party of reform and 'good' government. However, it is really only Bossi who manages to maintain the unity of the party and bring together the different factions of the party under the one banner. As a member of the LN explained:

> There are two main groups of supporters of the LN; firstly, there are those who belong to the 'federalist' group that basically endorse the introduction of federalism within Italy as well as wide ranging reforms of public administration. On the other hand, there are the 'independentists' or *'puri e duri'*[2] who are much more radical, and basically endorse the hard-line secessionist discourses of the LN. For this group federalism means much more than economic autonomy from Rome but increased cultural autonomy and separation, and a return to the cultural heritage of the North of Italy. They would want teachers in Northern schools to be only from the North of Italy and not from the South, and the pupils to study only about Northern culture and language[3].

Diamanti (1996a) argues that the importance of Bossi within the LN cannot be underestimated, yet in some ways he has inhibited the development of a group of politicians and party directors. Diamanti argues that Bossi has contributed to hinder this development in order to maintain his control over the organisation. Furthermore, in the most recent phase of the LN's growth, Diamanti argues that the dependence of the LN on its leader is greater than ever before. In this phase, the LN has placed much more emphasis on its supporters in an attempt to reconfirm its identity base and territorial links, which it had arguably lost during its brief period of government. One of the ways in which the LN has tried to do this has been the use of what Diamanti

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[2] Literally translated 'puri e duri' means 'pure and hard/tough'.

[3] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with William Malnati, LN commune representative for the commune of Malnate, in the province of Varese, 29/2/96.

(1996a:113) calls "military metaphors" to accompany the LN's secessionist discourse. These have been useful in giving the party a territorial base once again and also to emphasise the importance of young people within the party. Furthermore, this has served to differentiate the LN from the other political parties and to reconfirm its anti-system image. It has in some ways reduced the importance of the LN's elected representatives but increased the link between Bossi and its popular support (Diamanti 1996a).

Bossi's role within the LN continues to be a crucially important one. It is hard to envisage the party without him and his distinct leadership style, mannerisms and method of communicating. It remains to be seen what the LN would look like in a post-Bossi era. The key question is whether the LN would survive without Bossi or whether the party would fragment if he were to leave the party for any reason? While Bossi has been a vital element in holding the party together, Gallagher (1994) argues, it is possible that continued domination by one man is almost certain to prove a liability for the LN. On the other hand, the LN has developed into much more than simply the 'party of Bossi'; it has its own identity and well-developed organisational structures as the next section examines.

## 2.2 The LN's organisational structure

The LN has a complex hierarchical organisational structure, which is based upon a federal structure that is made up of the 14 separate 'nations' of 'Padania' (as the LN refers to them). As the LN Federal Organisation Secretary explained:

> Each of the 'nations' is linked within a federal structure, which better reflects the diversity of peoples within the North of Italy than the nation-state does at the moment. The LN rejects the concept of the Italian nation-state and the Italian Constitution, which talks about the rights of the Italian 'people'. However, it is wrong to use this term because 'people' refers to a community divided by its own traditions, language, culture and origins. In the Italian case, it is a mistake to use the term 'Italian people' because there is no such thing. Instead, Italy is made up of separate 'peoples', which each have separate languages, cultures, traditions and origins. On the other hand, 'Padania' respects the diversity of origins and traditions within Italy[4].

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[4] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Roberto Biza, Federal Organisation Secretary of the LN, 6/5/96.

The rejection of the Italian nation-state by the LN in favour of the creation of 'Padania' forms an important part of its current rhetoric, but the 14 'nations' of 'Padania' have the same boundaries as the Italian administrative regional and provincial boundaries. This would be seem to be quite contradictory because, according to the LN, the so-called 'nations' of 'Padania' have their own distinct traditions, culture and language. Thus, it would seem highly unlikely that these 'nations' would have congruent boundaries with those of the Italian State. After all it is precisely such boundaries which the LN rejects as part of the Italian national-state. This contradiction remains unresolved by the LN.

In terms of the party structure, each of the separate 'national' components of the LN form part of the LN's Federal Congress, which takes place annually and is the most important organisation of the whole party (see Figure Nine). The Federal Congress formalises the political line of the party and oversees its different activities. Moreover, every year the Congress undertakes the job of electing the Federal Secretary (and leader) of the party. The election of leader remains an enduring formality for the party because it is Bossi who remains more or less unchallenged for the leadership. The Federal President of the party is also elected by the Federal Congress and this role involves mediating between all sections of the party. The next most important organisation within the party is the Federal Assembly. This is composed of Bossi the leader, the Federal President, as well as the individual 'National Secretaries' and all of the regional and national Parliamentarians of the LN. The role of the Federal Assembly is to decide the future political line of action of the party in relation to the decisions taken by the Federal Congress.

There are other important organisations within the federal structure of the party. The first of these is the Federal Council, which again contains Bossi, as well as the President, each of the National Secretaries as well as the Federal Administrative Secretary of the party. This body determines the general line of action for the movement in terms of its organisation profile in light of decisions taken by the Federal Congress. In addition, it approves and monitors the financial accounts of the party as well as deciding how and in what ways party funds are spent. Also, it has the responsibility of ensuring that the party functions within the bounds of the law and to

investigate any internal party irregularities. Secondly, the Federal Political Secretary works with the Federal Secretary (Bossi) to implement the overall political line of the party. This also involves the Presidents of the two respective LN Parliamentary Groups of the Italian Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, as well as six other elected members. Finally, there is the Office of the Federal Secretary which contains the Federal Organisation Secretary. The role of this organisation is to oversee all the organisational issues of the party, such as party membership, co-ordinating with local and regional party offices and a whole range of other tasks (Lega Nord Italia Federale 1995).

Figure Nine : Federal structure of the LN

(Source : Agenda Lega Nord 1995)

FEDERAL CONGRESS

Federal Assembly

Federal Secretary    Federal President                        Party Lawyers

Federal Council

Political        Organisation                              Internal

Secretary       Secretary                                 Auditors

Study                    — Membership      Federal Admin

Groups                   — Local Government   Secretary

                         — Territory

NATIONAL OFFICES
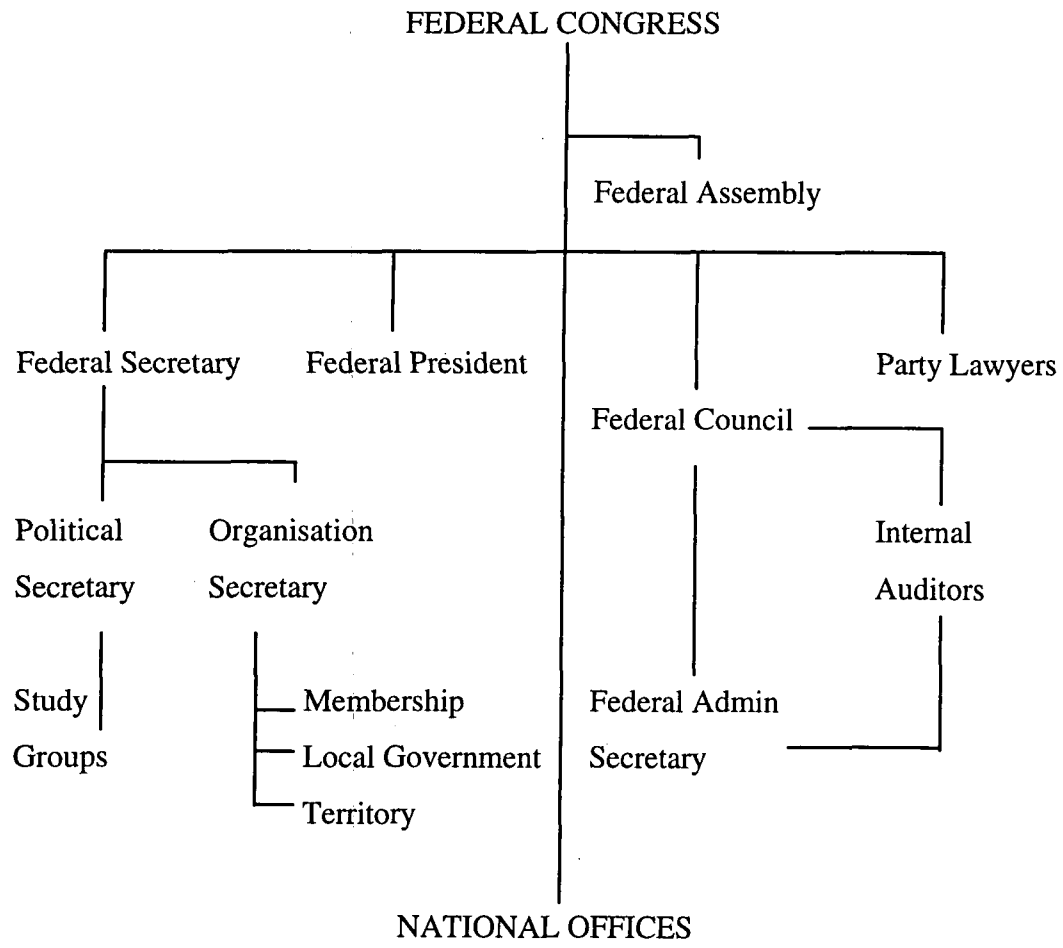
The structure within each of the 'nations' of Padania is quite similar (see Figure Ten). The highest position within each of the respective 'nations' is the National Political Secretary. Each of the 14 National Secretaries occupies a position on the party's Federal Congress in order to promote and represent the interests of their respective 'nation'. The National Political Secretary is also responsible for overseeing various study sectors which provide research and information in areas such as the economy, tourism and the environment. Secondly, within each of the 'nations' there are the National Organisation Secretaries which are responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing political affairs, such as public relations, administration and party membership within the respective 'nations'.

The structure within each of the 'nations' (see Figure 11) consists of the National Secretary and Council at the highest level, and then below that there are the Provincial party offices (which correspond to the Italian provincial administrative boundaries) and below this there are the Commune and Constituency offices. This is a hierarchical structure with each level accountable to the level above. Moreover, there is also a complicated network of inter-linkages between the various levels.

Figure Ten : National Organisational Structure of the LN

(Source : Agenda Lega Nord 1995)

NATIONAL SECRETARY

Political Secretary  (A)

Organisation

Secretary (B)

Local Govt
Sector
(A1)

Study Sectors  (A2)

(B1)——— Administration

Economy

(B2)——— Organisation

Industry

(B3)——— Membership

Environment

(B4)——— Public relations

Tourism, Sport
and Culture

Public Education

Figure 11 : National structure of the LN

(Source : Agenda Lega Nord 1995)

CONGRESS

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| National Secretary | National Assembly | Internal Auditors | Party Lawyers |

| Local Council | National Secretary | National Council |
|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Provincial Secretary | Provincial Assembly | Internal Auditors | Party Lawyers |

| Local Council | Provincial Secretary | Provincial Council |
|---|---|---|

Constituency Assembly

Constituency Secretary

| Provincial Reps | Work Groups | Constituency Representatives |
|---|---|---|

Party Office Secretary

Assembly of Party Office

| Commune Reps | Commission Components or Work Groups | Party Office Representatives |
|---|---|---|

The federal-hierarchical organisational structure of the LN is a relatively complex one. In certain ways it resembles the structure of the traditional Italian political parties, especially with its territorial presence at the local level. However, the key fundamental difference is that power within the party is most definitely concentrated with the leader. This does not mean that the grass-roots of the party is not involved in decision-making, because the organisational structure is based upon the inclusion of the mass of support at the local level. In spite of this, Bossi and his close advisors are the ones who decide the political line of the party. Thus, although the structure of the LN is based upon direct political involvement within a range of democratic groups at the local, provincial, regional and national level, it is questionable whether these have any great influence on the direction of the party political line. Control remains quite clearly in the hands of Bossi. This is ironic because the LN has an innovative and distinct political structure, which fits with its image as a new force in Italian politics. On the other hand, with power being concentrated in the hands of Bossi the political organisation of the party resembles a much more centralised form of political structure, which is almost dictatorial in nature. As an ex-LN Deputy explained :

> The fact that the LN is a democratic movement that gives a voice to its members irrespective of age and importance is a good thing even though it is Bossi who has the last word on every issue. The party is very open up to the highest level but it is Bossi who decides what happens. This often causes problems because there are differences of opinion, and sometimes very good people have left the LN because Bossi does not agree with them, such as Professor Miglio. However, this is how Bossi maintains his strong leadership of the party by remaining the most important figure within it; he is very autocratic which is in contrast to the openness at lower levels in the party[5].

Aside from the formal organisational structure of the party, there are a number of other organisations which form an important part of the structure of the LN. These are involved in a variety of different spheres within civil society, and their aim is to expand the level of support of the LN amongst different social and economic groups and further integrate and embed the LN into civil society. The next section examines in more detail the nature of these organisations.

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[5] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Elisabetta Bertotti, ex-LN Deputy and the youngest ever in the Italian Parliament, 9/7/96.

## 2.3 LN related organisations

The LN has developed a network of related organisations and institutions in the same way as the other mass Italian political parties have done. The aim is to integrate and embed itself within the different social and economic spheres of civil society. These institutions are an important way in which the party aims to expand its support and legitimacy within civil society. However, for the LN this has proved to be more difficult because the party is much younger than the other main political parties, which over decades have managed to embed themselves, in different ways, into the different spheres of Italian civil society. Perhaps one of the most important ways in which the traditional political parties have achieved this is through their close links with Italy's largest trade unions (TU) (see Chapter Two).

The LN has developed its own trade union in order to gain greater legitimacy within the workplace and to expand its base of support. The LN's trade union is called *Sindacato Padano* (Sin.Pa.) (up until recently it was called SAL (*Sindacato Autonomisti Lavoratori*). This again is a federal institution, which is composed of the individual trade unions within each of the 'nations' of Padania. As one of the representatives of the LN's TU explained:

> The LN's TU was born about three or four years ago and since then it has grown to be Italy's fourth largest after the three traditional TU's (CGIL, CISL and UIL). This is partly because we have joined forces with other smaller TUs across the country and in so doing we have made a larger group. Basically, the TU has a degree of autonomy from the LN but of course it follows its political line. It has a federal structure, like the rest of the LN, made up from the smaller TU's which represent each of the 'nations' within Padania. Within this federal structure there is autonomy for each of the individual TU's[6].

One of the main aims of the LN's TU is to create what the party defines as '*gabbie salariali*' ('wage zones'). Basically, this would entail the creation of wage differentials between the South and the North of the country, which the LN argues would better take account of the regional differences in the cost of living throughout

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[6] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Signor Turri, representative of the LN's trade union, 25/3/96.

Italy. The main reasons why the LN endorses such a policy is summarised by a TU party document:

> "In fact, although the wages of an engineer in Milan are the same as those of colleagues in Palermo or Matera they are not worth the same because of the higher cost of living in the North of Italy" (Sindacato Autonomista Lombardo 1992).

This is a provocative claim by the LN and one which has received criticism from the main Italian TU's. The main reason is that parity in wages between the North and South of Italy was one of the things for which the main TU's had fought very hard, in the last few decades. As a representative of UIL, one of Italy's largest TU's explained:

> The main TU's are against the idea of 'wage zones' on the grounds that in reality they already exist but also because the TU's believe that making the South of Italy a cheap labour location is not the way of developing it. Moreover, the TU's gained greater wage equality over 30 years ago and we are not about to give that up because of the LN. The solution for the South of Italy is not low wages because it is unfair and in the past lower wages were not the solution for the South. Nowadays it is impossible to compete with the low wages paid in South East Asia and across the Developing World. Therefore, we need to look to other ways to develop the economy of the South, for example, through infrastructural improvements and investment in education, training and people. The TU's want to protect workers and ensure that there are fair workers rights for all but not inequality in wages[7].

Although the LN's TU has grown in size and importance it has not really gained that much success. This is mainly because the three largest Italian TU's are so dominant in terms of size and influence amongst the workforce. On the other hand, the second main socio-economic institution of the LN has gained more success. This is known as the *Padani Imprenditori Uniti* (PIU) (formerly known as *Associazione Liberi Imprenditori Autonomisti* or ALIA). Basically, the PIU is an association which aims to represent the small and medium sized business interests of Padania. As a representative of the PIU explained:

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[7] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Signor Monori, General Secretary of UIL, province of Trento, 1/7/96.

PIU was the LN's institutional link to the small and medium sized firms of Northern Italy. It was created about seven years ago and it closely follows the political line of the LN even though it has a degree of autonomy. It also has a federal structure with representatives in each of the provinces of Northern Italy. It has a variety of functions; one is to act as a kind of advice shop for LN politicians informing them of the issues and problems affecting the business community. More importantly, it provides help and advice for small firms which might be experiencing problems and so is a way in which the LN aims to develop links between itself and the small business community[8].

As well as the socio-economic institutions of the LN there are also others which are aimed specifically at two social groups, Catholics and young people. The LN's *Consulta Cattolica* is the institution for the Catholic and religious community of LN supporters. It was created on September 2nd 1990 during a National Assembly of the LL; its main scope is to give opportunity and space within the movement to the followers of the Catholic faith. The person responsible for the *Consulta* is Giuseppe Leoni, who was one of the co-founders of the LL along with Bossi. The *Consulta* is a small but important institution for the LN because in the past its politics has been criticised by the Catholic Church. For example, Cardinal Martini of Milan, one of Italy's most important Cardinals, criticised the LN arguing that its appeal lay in its pandering to economic egoism and to a quasi-racist public sentiment within the North of Italy towards Southern Italians. Moreover, Martini claimed that any separation between the North and South of Italy would be 'morally unacceptable' (Agostino and Martini 1992).

The *Consulta* has the role of trying to represent the views of Catholics within the LN but also to attract supporters of the Catholic faith to the party, which in the past has proved problematic. As a *Consulta Cattolica* document outlines, the aim of the institution is to:

> "guarantee the sincere application of Christian principles in the political and social spheres of life, with the full respect of Church doctrines and with clear recognition in the policies of the LN to promote a spirit of order and social justice" (Lega Nord - Consulta Cattolica per il popolo 1996).

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[8] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Stefano Mangold, a LN director of PIU, 12/3/96.

Indeed, Bossi wrote in his book "Vento dal Nord" that:

> "in a secular movement such as the LN, the *Consulta* has the role of collecting the views of the Catholic world and to make them known within the structure of the LN. Italy is a Catholic country and I respect the religious choices of the people and I also want to involve such views in my political life" (Bossi and Vimercati 1992).

The success of the *Consulta* remains inhibited by the continuing opposition which the LN has received from the Church. This is especially the case in relation to the division of Italy, which the Church is against because it goes against the solidarity and unity of Italy. On the other hand, the LN has had remarkable success in gaining the support and arousing the interest of the young people of the North of Italy. The main way it has done this is by the development of a network of young peoples' supporter groups, known as the *Gruppo Giovani* (GG) (Young peoples' groups). In addition, there is also the *Federalismo : Libertà e Cooperazione* (FLC) organisation, which is the branch of the LN aimed at attracting secondary school students into the party[9]. Overall, the aim of these groups is to promote the messages of the LN amongst the young people of the North of Italy. As the co-ordinator of the Lombard region *Gruppo Giovani* explained:

> Young people are the most important part of the LN, we are the base of the movement. The LN is unlike the traditional parties because even its politicians are generally younger. We are young people who are determined to change the situation in Italy, it is not about politics because it is more important to us than that. For most of us it is our first experience of politics and that is why I was attracted to the LN. Young people are attracted to the anti-system image of the party, its hard line messages and the language used in the speeches of Bossi and the other leaders. The Gruppo Giovani (GG) have been set up specifically to attract young people into the party.
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> The GG has a federal structure, like the rest of the organisation and each 'nation' has its own head. However, at the federal level we do not have an official representative. Each province has its own organisation and autonomy to organise its own events but at the national level there are occasionally national events. However, in the areas of weaker support for the LN there are less organised GG's. Also, at the school and university level, the LN has set up the FLC organisation, which is aimed at attracting school and university students into the party[10].

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[9] As it is illegal for Italian political parties to use their party names and symbols within Italian schools, the FLC is the branch of the LN within schools.

[10] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Massimiliano Romeo, National Co-ordinator of the *Gruppo Giovani* in Lombardy, 25/3/96.

The LN has been able to attract a significant number of young people into the party, which is one of its distinctive features and also explains why it has grown so rapidly. One of the reasons for this has been the fact, as Ruzza et al (1992) argue, that the LN has created a 'community' through its widespread network of personal relations and activities, which has integrated individuals beyond purely political work. Indeed, one LN party activist explained his reasons for following and working for the party:

> Most LN activists are very passionate about the party and I am no exception. I would say that my life would have been nothing if the LN had not been created and thus allowed me to become involved in it. We are all very idealistic and hopeful about the future because the LN will change and modernise the country. All of us involved in the party share similar ideals about the importance of the LN for the future and that is what drives us. We all give up so much of our time for no rewards because we believe in the cause for which we are fighting[11].

The stigmatisation which the LN party activists have allegedly undergone in the past only serves to increase the feeling of internal solidarity and identity amongst them (Diamanti 1995). Luccini (1990-91) argues, this has led to the LN becoming a place for social interaction and the development of strong personal and friendship relations between party members. This means that the party is more than just a political institution but a social network of friends who spend their spare time together, which only serves to intensify the strong bonds between the members and the party itself. Ruzza et al (1992) argue that the LN appeals to informal groups of friends or seeks to form networks by bringing together people who might superficially know each other because of the small size of their communities and thus the LN takes on the role of a socialising agent for peer groups. This is echoed by a LN party activist who expressed similar sentiments to this:

> The Gruppo Giovani, as well as the LN in general, is more like a 'family' because we are all very close to each other and we all have similar views about the party and the vision for the future. We are all good friends and there is a very strong bond between us mainly because we spend so much time together. In fact, often we leave behind our old friends and form new ones when we join the party. Thus, for us the LN is more than just politics, it is a social forum to which we all contribute[12].

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[11] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Simone Isella, LN party activist, province of Varese, 19/2/96.

[12] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Massimiliano Romeo, National Co-ordinator of the *Gruppo Giovani* in Lombardy, 25/3/96.

The success of the LN in attracting a greater number of younger people into the party is reflected in the age profile of its Parliamentarians. For example, as Belotti (1993) points out, in the 1990 local elections, of all the candidates elected from the 'regional Leagues', almost a third were under 30 years of age, which was the highest percentage of all the parties. Moreover, there was the highest percentage (28 per cent) of people elected from manual occupational backgrounds. Diamanti (1995) argues that this shows the 'regional Leagues' facilitated the mobilisation of social groups which previously were marginalised and excluded by the traditional political parties and gave them a 'voice' and an opportunity to engage in formal politics. In addition, in the national election of 1992, 30 per cent of the elected representatives of the LN were aged less than 40 years old, which made them the youngest political group (Diamanti 1995). This trend continued throughout the 1994 and 1996 elections so that the Parliamentarians of the LN remain younger when compared to the other main parties, and almost a third of them are under 40 years of age.

The importance of young people within the LN is clear and it has been a specific strategy of the party to attract them to the party. The development of the institutional networks of young people's groups has clearly been important in attracting youth to the party. Moreover, one of the key differences between the LN and the traditional Italian parties is the opportunity for young people to gain political responsibility at an earlier age. This is in stark contrast to the other parties where experience and age are the pre-requisites for political responsibility. On the other hand, the LN gives greater responsibility at a younger age and so this is another factor which attracts young people to the party. As an ex-LN Deputy explained:

> The good thing about the LN is the fact that it encourages, allows and gives a lot of responsibility to young people; indeed this is very rare in Italian politics. This was the reason why I was elected as a LN Parliamentarian at such a young age [25] even though there were perhaps a couple of older and more experienced candidates. Supporting the LN is about having a passion for the movement and I was chosen because I was one of the founders of the party in the province of Trento and one of the ones who put most work into the party[13].

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[13] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Elisabetta Bertotti, ex-LN Deputy and the youngest ever in the Italian Parliament, 9/7/96.

The institutional structures of the LN constitute an important feature of the party and have assisted its development in different ways. The LN has developed into a mass political party with a specific organisational structure as well as a set of related institutions. However, although the party may resemble any other mass Italian political party, there are several key distinctions which ensure that the LN stands apart from the rest. For example, the party has developed a specific political language and a way of communicating it, which is quite unique in Italian politics. The party has developed a specific organisational structure, which is democratic and open but relies heavily on the leader Bossi. Also, the party has created a set of related institutions which have allowed the party to develop closer links and integrate within the different spheres of civil society. All of these combined ensure that the LN has become a potent political force within Italian politics. However, it is the discourses and rhetoric of the LN, which has proved to be a key element in the success of the LN. The flexibility of the party to modify its rhetoric, as well as the way it communicates its political messages in order to take advantage of the political situation, have been crucial to the success of the party. The next section examines this important aspect of the LN in more detail.

## 3. The discourses of the LN

The crucial strength of the LN has been its ability to reshape its political line, whilst at the same time maintaining its *zoccolo duro* (main core) of supporters and activists. This makes the party distinctive from the traditional Italian parties as well as other regionalist and autonomist parties. The party has changed or modified its political rhetoric on a number of occasions throughout its different phases of growth but its hard core of support has remained relatively strong. The LN has developed from a 'party of protest' to a 'party of government' and now it is once again more of a hard-line 'anti-system' party. One of the key reasons for this is Bossi, who is the main continuity with the past for the party. Bossi himself is quoted as saying:

> "the movement has reacted well to change. The *leghiste* know well that the original project has not changed and it is for this reason that the LN remains solid as a rock. And then there is me, as long as there is a leader such as myself nobody should fear to be let down" (Corriere della Sera 1993).

One of the key reasons for this has been the loyalty of a significant number of the LN party activists and supporters. This loyalty to the party would seem to stem from a number of different angles. Diamanti (1995:173) argues that the LN has created what he calls a "clan identity", which stems from the sense of belonging which prevails between party supporters, activists and representatives alike within the party. This is intensified because he argues the party members have a kind of "siege mentality", which emanates from the feeling that everything and everybody is against it. In the main this stems from alleged media hostility towards the party which has only served to intensify and consolidate this internal solidarity (Tambini 1993-94). Indeed, most LN activists and supporters show a fair degree of hostility towards the Italian media mainly because they feel that it is against the party. One LN party activist explained that:

> The Lega is not a political party but a 'movement', because it is about much more than politics. Following the LN is like a religion, a feeling that comes from within, and means much more than just supporting a political party. The LN does not have a particular ideology, like those of the parties on the Left or Right, it is a popular movement of the people of the North. Unlike the other parties, the LN does not only just represent one particular strata of society but includes everybody from workers and farmers to business people. The other parties are only interested in politics but the LN's mission is much more than that, it is to save the North of Italy[14].

This exemplifies the kinds of sentiments which the supporters and activists of the LN express in relation to the significance of the party. It is often referred to as a 'movement' rather than a political party, and there is almost a religious element to the following of the party. Diamanti (1995:124) describes this as one of the paradoxes of the LN because the party has benefited most from the increased tendencies of secularisation within Italian society and politics and yet the support of the LN is founded on what Diamanti defines as the "faith" of its supporters. One of the ways in which the LN has managed to maintain and generate this kind of support is because of its specific political communication style. As the next section discusses, the LN uses cultural and historic symbolism to communicate its political discourse, which has enabled it to a develop a distinctive political identity.

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[14] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with a LN party official in the province of Varese, 26/2/96.

## 3.1 Communication style of the LN

The LN has utilised different and often unconventional communication strategies to convey its political message. These include the use of Northern Italian dialect to distinguish it from the traditional political parties; face-to-face recruitment of political activists and supporters; the use of distinct cultural and historic symbolism as well as a range of other strategies. Significantly, the party uses a direct, provocative and graphical style for its political messages. The party very rarely uses the images of its political candidates on its party messages and slogans, which is a specific strategy on the part of Bossi. As an ex-LN Deputy explained:

> The LN uses direct slogans and no faces on its propaganda because Bossi says that no person is bigger or more important than the party and its messages. It is a successful way of campaigning and it also ensures that Bossi remains the key figure in the LN[15].

These different and rather unconventional communication styles have created a distinct socio-political identity for the party, that is really unlike anything that has existed in Italian politics since before 1945. Furthermore, such strategies have ensured that the party has a relatively strong internal identity, which is focused on key cultural and historical events and symbols. When combined with the boisterous communication style and language of Bossi, the distinctiveness of the LN's political style is clearly apparent. Undoubtedly, this has been a successful strategy for the party because traditional party politics in Italy were conducted using a complicated and confusing language and style. Consequently, Biorcio (1991) argues that the style of the LN immediately gained a positive reaction from the Northern Italian people, especially in Lombardy.

Diamanti (1995:121) points out that the 'regional Leagues' first used local dialects as the basis for their political projects, expressing them as 'national languages' which constituted different ethno-regional identities. As Ruzza et al (1992:65) argue, in the case of Lombardy, the local dialects were redefined as "the language of the Lombard nation" and during the night, party activists would rewrite street signs in dialect,

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[15] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Elisabetta Bertotti, ex-LN Deputy and the youngest ever in the Italian Parliament, 9/7/96.

creating occasional problems for non-natives to Lombardy. This was a convenient and powerful way of gaining exposure without having to provide specific political programmes. In addition, because Lombard dialects generally drop the last vowel from standard Italian it was relatively easy to make a political statement. Indeed, it is relatively common throughout most towns in Lombardy and the Veneto to see LN graffiti and political slogans daubed across walls, bridges, road-sides and in other places. It has proved problematic for the LN to base its political project exclusively on the protection of ethnicity and dialect, but it has proved a very productive (if occasionally illegal) way of gaining political exposure and coverage in a rather unconventional way. As Piccone (1991-2) argues the LN and especially Bossi deliberately chose to utilise such a strategy. This quote from Bossi shows that he readily admits that the linguistic choice had specific strategic objectives:

"I consciously gave a somewhat crude configuration to certain passwords and posed at the centre of our propaganda the question of dialect both in order to scandalise and to throw a smokescreen in front of the Roman parties which took us for a bunch of fools and postponed raising their guard" (Bossi and Vimercati 1992:42).

Another fundamental aspect of the LN's strategy combined with its strong language has been the use of cultural symbolism. The most important example of this is the political 'home' of the LN, which is a small village called Pontida, near the city of Bergamo in Lombardy. Historically, Pontida was the site of the swearing of the oath of allegiance between the various Lombard Leagues in 1167, which joined together in order to fight Frederick Barbarossa the conquering German Emperor (Tambini 1993-94). The LN has vested this event with a political significance in several ways; firstly, parallels are made by the LN between itself and the historical Lombard Leagues, which were successful in defeating the invading emperor. For the contemporary LN, the 'enemy' is the central Italian State and the aim is also to gain a 'victory'. Secondly, the LN conducts its main political events in the town of Pontida, on the (alleged) actual site where the oath was made in the twelfth century between the Lombard Leagues. In so doing the party generates all kinds of historical symbolisms and comparisons; Pontida has become a kind of 'political pilgrimage' for all supporters of the LN, who travel from all over Northern Italy to come to visit the site.

All of this contrives to give the LN a distinct identity and its role becomes more than simply a political one but also a social, cultural and historical one.

Another important symbol for the LN is the party logo (see Figure 12). This is a representation of Alberto da Giusanna, who was the Lombard knight who led the 12th century Lombard League to victory over the invading German empire (Poche 1992:76). It was the LL which first used the Lombard 'warrior' as its logo and this was maintained when the LN was created in 1991 (Tambini 1993-94:230). This is another highly evocative image and symbol for the LN, which has been important in giving the party a very strong image and identity. Tambini indicates that da Giusanna has been a familiar figure to all students of Italian history in this century, ironically because he had been chosen by the heirs of the *Risorgimento* as a symbol of an anachronistic reading of Italian (not Lombard) history. Furthermore, for the LN, da Giusanna symbolises the struggle against centralised bureaucracy because he fought against a centralised foreign power in the name of Lombard freedom (and just like the modern LN) he organised the various peoples of Northern Italy against 'imperial' domination. According to the LN, it is the Italian State in Rome which hinders the implementation of greater autonomy and self government for the North of Italy and so parallels are drawn between the historical and contemporary situations. As Farrell and Levy (1996:132) argue the LN has:

> "presented itself as the paladin of modernity, yet that paladin came bedecked in the armour of the Middle Ages; it constructed for itself a history, choosing the medieval protector of Lombardy, Alberto da Giussano, as its mascot, and the 19th Century *Risorgimento* theorist of federalism, Carlo Cattaneo, as the guarantor of its integrity."

Figure 12 - The party logo of the LN

By making reference to historical events and myths the party has been enable to create a sense of territorial identity, belonging and continuity with the past. This has especially been the case in the regions of Lombardy and Veneto. Tambini (1993-94:231) argues that referring to a territorially defined group has served a clear purpose in the LN's mobilisation and organisation of its anti-state protest. He suggests that this appeal has worked in various ways; firstly because the LN, since 1987, has mobilised massive support, by referring to an 'enemy', defined as the central Italian State combined with existing stereotypes of the South of Italy and Southerners. Secondly, Tambini (1993-94) argues that the articulation of a territorial identity allowed the LN to aim to defend the economic interests of the North of Italy. For the LN, the only way to stop the drain of Northern resources by Southern welfarism is the introduction of greater institutional and fiscal autonomy, as well as the recognition of the cultural differences between Lombards, Venetians and other Northern Italians.

Thirdly, the LN actually facilitated the "discovery of Lombardness", as Ruzza et al (1992:64) argue, because until recently most people who grew up in Lombardy were not too concerned with being 'Lombards' mainly because there is a strong localist tradition in Northern Italy, sustained by the distinctive dialects and indigenous literature. According to Ruzza et al (1992:64) a 'Lombard' identity is the ingenious creation of the LN and although it is relatively new, ethnic identities tend to appear timeless, even if they have been created yesterday (Anderson 1983). Especially in the early years, the party emphasised the alleged cultural distinctiveness of Lombardy, which was based on a strong work ethic and culture of enterprise. For example, as Tambini (1993-94:231) points out, two headlines in the LL party magazine in the mid 1980s read:

> "Today, like Yesterday, like Always, the LL means FREEDOM!" and "Italy is the State, But Lombardy is our Nation" (Lombardia Autonomista 1986).

Tambini (1993-94) points out that the appeal to a territorial and cultural identity helped to consolidate the growth of the party in its early period and the mythology and symbolism of the party also kept the rank and file tightly aligned behind Bossi. At

crucial points in the LN's history, Tambini argues, it was this mythology (not merely centralised control in Bossi's hands) that kept the movement from splitting.

It remains to be seen whether the LN will be able to create a 'Padanian' identity in the same way that a 'Lombard' identity has been (re)created. In many respects it is too early to say one way or another because the discourse of 'Padania' has only recently come to the fore in the party's rhetoric. However, if the party utilises similar cultural and historical symbolism to garnish its political rhetoric, 'Padania' may become a reality sooner rather than later. The party has already begun to produce publications on the history and culture of 'Padania'[16] and its current political rhetoric and project is very much aimed at legitimising the existence of a place called 'Padania'. In spite of the fact that the LN's discourse has been modified recently, it is apparent that there are certain fundamental discourses upon which the LN's political project has been built. The next section discusses the dominant discourses of the LN, which have been so important to the growth of the party.

## 3.2 Dominant discourses of the LN

The dominant discourses of the LN have been modified over time but it is apparent that certain themes have been consistent throughout the history of the party. The way that these themes have been phrased and presented by the LN has changed according to the changing political situation in Italy. However, the key discourses of the party have remained essentially the same and it is upon these which the LN has built its political project. Consequently, the fundamental reasons why people support the LN have remained more or less the same since the initial development of the 'regional Leagues' in the 1980s (Diamanti 1995).

The reason why the LN gained support, especially in the 'opulent periphery' of Lombardy, Veneto and to a lesser extent in Piemonte, was the fact that the populations in these areas were preoccupied with what was perceived as a 'threat' to their lifestyle and well-being (Allum and Diamanti 1996:152). This 'threat' was manifested in at

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[16] See Oneto, G (1997) : *L'invenzione della Padania, La rinascita della comunità più antica d'europa*, Foedus Editore, Bergamo. Gilberto Oneto is head of the *Libera Compagnia Padana*, (a cultural organisation linked to the LN), aimed at diffusing the awareness of 'Padanian' culture and identity. He is also the Minister responsible for Padanian Identity in the LN *'Governo Sole'*.

least three ways, as Allum and Diamanti (1996:152) argue, and it was the LN which was able to articulate and represent the fears and anxieties of the people in these areas. The first was the alleged inefficiencies and wastefulness of the Italian State institutions, which the LN argued contributed to the draining of resources from the North to the South. Secondly, the traditional Italian political parties became the target of mistrust and were blamed for the perceived degeneration of political life and the malfunctioning of Italian State institutions. The third 'threat' came in the form of immigration to these areas from people from the South of Italy (*'meridionale'*) and also from outside the European Union (*'extracomunitari'*). The result was that the territory of the North of Italy became the container within which these threats and intolerances were enclosed. This was fundamental for the LN with the 'North' being contraposed to the South of Italy and the Italian State and its institutions. According to the LN, the South (and especially Rome) is projected as the cause for all that is wrong with Italian society and politics.

It is such discourses and themes, which have remained a fundamental part of the political project of the LN. This is particularly the case with the anti-Southern discourse, which even though it has been modified, remains a crucial part of the rhetoric of the party. The controversial nature of this discourse is quite clear, however, it is apparent that this is one of the main reasons why people of the North of Italy affiliate with and support the LN. This has been the case throughout the history of the party. The aim of this section is to examine in more detail the key themes and discourses of the LN and to discuss in what ways these have mobilised and attracted support for the party.

### 3.2.1 Anti-South discourses

The anti-Southern sentiment in the discourses of the LN is the recurrent theme throughout the whole of the party's political project, although it is manifested in a variety of different ways. Most controversially in the early days of the party, Bossi deliberately manipulated the anti-Southern sentiment felt across Northern Italy and vested it with a political significance, as he outlines:

"we decided to exploit the anti-meridionalism widespread in Lombardy, as in other regions of the North, to attract the attention of the wider public and of the mass-media. I did give a somewhat crude twist to certain vital phrases" (Bossi and Vimercati 1992).

The anti-Southern discourses of the LN are expressed in a variety of different ways. The most prevalent is what the LN terms as the 'cultural' differences between the North and South of Italy. According to the LN, the economic differences between North and South are ascribed to the alleged contrasts in culture, mentality and attitude on the part of the majority of people in the South of Italy. Therefore, it is not only the inefficiency of the State bureaucracy system and the alleged bias towards Southern people within the public sector that the LN sees as a problem, but it is the mentality of the people from the South which is another area of contention for the party and its supporters. As a LN local councillor explained:

Years of support from the central State to the South has developed a kind of welfare reliance on state transfers and blocked any kind of enterprise or initiative. Also, the strength of the Mafia means that the people of the South are afraid and so the system does not allow enterprise to flourish. This mentality can be best be summed up by the expression *'Panem et Circenses'* ('Bread and Circuses') whereby the people of the South of Italy are given incentives, for example, in the form of jobs, houses and state transfers in exchange for their votes and support in elections. It is this mentality that causes problems in the North because most of the jobs in the state are occupied by people from the South who do not understand the work ethic and level of efficiency of the North[17].

According to the LN, the people of the North of Italy are different to those of the South; the society of the North is structured in a different way and the value systems and culture of the people of the North is different, if not superior to those of the South. The alleged superiority of the North in relation to the South is a recurrent theme within the discourses of the LN. For example, Franco Rocchetta, the former leader of the *Liga Veneta* endorsed this view of difference between the people of the North and South by claiming that:

"I have no more affinity with a Neapolitan, than with a Frenchman or an Armenian" (Rocchetta 1992-93).

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[17] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN councillor in the commune of Varese, 27/3/96.

In this instance the people of the South are seen as 'foreign' to the people of the North not only in terms of language, culture and values but also in terms of their attitude to work and employment. The South is consistently portrayed by the LN as an area in which the people have no real desire to work and are only interested in claiming state benefits. On the other hand, in the North, the LN claims that there is a strong work ethic, which is the reason for the economic dynamism of the Northern economy. As a LN local councillor argued:

> The mentality of the people of the North is distinct to that of the South. In the North there is a strong work ethic which could be described as almost Calvinistic in nature. In spite of the high levels of taxation and the burden of the South, Lombardy is still one of the wealthiest regions within the EU and one of the main reasons for this is the strong work ethic of its people. The South of Italy has a 'Mediterranean' work ethic which is based on corruption, a reliance on state transfers and a more relaxed attitude towards work. One reason for this is the years of support from the State that has been given to the South which has created a culture of dependency and welfare[18].

For the LN, the economic differences between the North and South of Italy are, in part, attributed to the contrasting historical experiences that the North and South underwent which in turn influence the structure of society, civic values, attitudes and mentality of the people. In so doing, the LN explains the socio-economic differences between the North and South of Italy by attributing them to the alleged cultural differences and mentality between the people of the two regions. Although this clearly misses the real and full explanation for the socio-economic differences between the North and South, it is a powerful discourse for the party and one which is seen as a correct interpretation by a good deal of supporters and activists of the party. For example, the LN Federal Organisation Secretary argued:

> We, the North, do not have a common history and culture with the South, we are different but that it is not to say we are better. In the North of Italy, and especially in Lombardy, there is a very strong work ethic and desire to improve the economy. For example, Lombardy awakes at between four and five o'clock every morning and works until eight or nine o'clock in the evening. The motorways are full from five o'clock onwards. Consequently, Lombardy is one of the richest regions in Europe and that is in spite of all the problems of the Italian state and the burden of the Italian South. On the other hand, in the

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[18] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN councillor in the commune of Varese, 27/3/96.

South of the country the people do not have this same work ethic, they work less and enjoy life more and it is probably true to say that those people are right and that we are wrong. However, why should the North of Italy subsidise and pay for the people of the South who don't have to work while we do not have a good level of public services[19]?

According to the LN, the Italian state has undergone a process of 'Southernisation' since its creation, which means that Italian identity is actually a 'Southern Italian' identity. Consequently, the anti-South rhetoric of the LN is also based upon a rejection of this 'Italian identity', which allows the party to justify the idea of a different and separate 'Northern Italian' identity. This is in fact a vague concept that is defined more by 'what it is not' rather than any specific geo-cultural features. Primarily, it is constructed out of the contrast with, and rejection of, an 'Italian' identity that the LN sees as artificial and based upon 'Southern' values and attitudes. Secondly, history and heritage are used to express the difference between the North and South of Italy. The LN claims that the North and its people have different origins, traditions, and culture that are distinct to those of the South and the LN tries to (re)construct an awareness of these issues, which it sees as having been lost with the creation of the Italian national-state. As three LN supporters discussed when asked about their reasons for supporting the party:

[Matteo replied] Another reason for the differences between the North and South of Italy, apart from the socio-economic argument, which is very important, is the cultural argument. There is a cultural difference between the people of the North and the South of Italy. For example, in the South a lot of people still speak their own dialects instead of Italian whereas in the North dialects are less widely used. However, this is a pity because it is important that we maintain our language and culture. The problem is that Italy is a relatively young nation-state and it still has a strong regional diversity. Fascism tried to create 'Italians', for example, by enacting legislation that ensured the widespread use of the Italian language in schools and public places. The introduction of television and radio has ensured that the Italian language has become more and more widely used. It was during fascism that the Southernisation of the Italian state began and it has continued up to the present day.

[Fabio added] This does not mean that we, the people of the North, are racist or that Southern people are less intelligent or less hard working than people in the North. It is because the state system is so inefficient that Northern people associate the contemporary problems in Italy, to the South

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[19] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Roberto Biza, the LN Federal Organisation Secretary, 6/5/96.

and its people. This is logical even though it is the system that is the problem and not the people.

[Laura interrupted] Italy does not only have marked economical differences but strong cultural differences as well and it is quite similar to the former Yugoslavia because it has having different ethnic minorities, languages and cultures. Also, it is the people of the North, that form the ethnic minority and it is the Southerners that constitute the majority. At school we are not taught our own language, culture and history, we only study the history of Rome, the Middle Ages, Fascism and then the Italian Republic. We cannot study and learn about our own history and culture, which is wrong. Thus, as the minority in the unitary state we constantly lose out not only socio-economically but also culturally. It is only because of the LN that people are realising these injustices and want to learn more about their own culture and roots, which they have been denied for years, and not to be constrained by the centralism of the government in Rome[20].

Cento Bull (1996:177) argues the LN has managed to articulate *ex novo* a sense of identity for the North of Italy and especially Lombardy, which was built around a core set of cultural characteristics such as a strong work ethic, entrepreneurship, a spirit of sacrifice, a high propensity to saving, trust and solidarity and law abidance. This was referred to by the LN as "the Lombard neo-Calvinism". However, this identity only became significant when it was contrasted to the alleged cultural traits of the South of Italy, which Bossi claimed were in direct contrast to those of the North. As the LN Federal Organisation Secretary explained:

> Bossi has taken the commonly articulated sentiments and feelings of the people of Northern Italy and has given them a voice and a means of representation. Bossi has not created this feeling but merely reacted and done something about it but he has not created the separate peoples within 'Padania' because they have existed for centuries with their own cultures and histories. However, what Bossi has done has made the people of the North of Italy proud to identify with their territory and this is why the LN has been so successful[21].

The protection of the North of Italy, its economy as well as its socio-cultural identity from what it is portrayed as the Southern Italian 'other' is a fundamental discourse of the party. However, the party also stresses the importance of maintaining the social and cultural integrity of the North of Italy in the face of increasing immigration of

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[20] Author's fieldnotes extract from group interview with Fabio (aged 24), Matteo (aged 24), Laura (aged 26), they are members of the *Gruppo Giovani* of the LN Varese, all of them are university students, 1/4/96.

[21] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Roberto Biza, the LN Federal Organisation Secretary, 6/5/96.

people from outside the EU. According to the LN, the local culture and well-being of certain areas of the North of Italy is under threat not only from Southern immigration but also more recently from the influx of *extracomunitari*. The LN argues that because of this foreign in-migration the stable cultural communities of the North are being threatened. This is especially the case for those migrants from Africa and the Magreb, whom are deemed less likely, by the LN, to be able to integrate into the culture and society of Northern Italy. For example, Bossi wrote:

> "I am convinced that the *extracomunitari* who originate from certain parts of the world, particularly Arabs from the Middle East and Magrebians, do not have the least intention of integrating and accepting our customs" (Bossi and Vimercati 1992:149).

Bossi is also quoted as stating that:

> "the cultural differences are too much [between Italians and Third World immigrants]. The difference in skin colour is detrimental to social peace. Imagine if your street, your public square, was inhabited by people different from you, you would not feel part of your own world" (Epoca, 20 May 1990).

Diamanti (1995) argues that the growth in success of the LN was due to the fact that the people in certain areas of the North of Italy were concerned about the rise in social tensions related to foreign immigration, and the LN presented itself as the party to protect and defend the people and culture of the North of Italy. Biorcio (1991:65) describes this as a "circle of hostility" in which the supporters of the LN feel as though they are surrounded by the elements of society which they fear, such as foreign and Southern immigrants, the traditional political parties and institutions and other groups which they consider to live outside of their socially defined norms, such as gypsies. According to the LN, foreign immigration has created a whole set of new problems for such areas, which further threaten their cultural homogeneity and social cohesion. As a LN local councillor explained:

> The problem is that the *extracomunitari* often enter Italy illegally and cannot gain legal employment so the only way they can live is by doing illegal work and so often they get involved in crime, drugs and prostitution. The worst group of immigrants are the Moroccans who most days can be seen outside the railway station; most people think that they are involved in drug dealing. The Africans do not cause that much trouble as they generally only sell illegal

merchandise and are not involved in crime or drugs. The eastern Europeans, usually from Hungary, Albania and the former Yugoslavia, are unfortunately often involved in prostitution. Also, there are the people from the Philippines who generally worked as cleaners and home-helps in families. Consequently, they tend to fit in quite well because they can find work and contribute legally. Finally, there are the *zingari* [gypsies] and whenever they come to town, crime levels increase notably, especially during the Summer months.

. The people are not racist but the problem is that the immigrants are coming at a time when the Italian economy is in trouble and so there are not enough jobs for all the Italians, let alone the foreigners. Furthermore, it is difficult for them to mix with Italians when they don't have proper jobs and so they cannot integrate fully[22].

The anti-Southern discourse of the LN has allowed the party to develop a hard-line and controversial image and enabled it to use the 'South' as the metaphor for all the socio-economic problems of Italy. In using the 'South' as the 'other' the LN has managed to articulate a socio-cultural identity for the North itself. As Cento Bull (1996:174) argues the LN utilises a racist ideology which is based on cultural rather than biological differentialism. This process of racialisation is accompanied by a racist subtext, in which negatively evaluated characteristics are attributed to the 'other'. For LN, the 'other' is portrayed as Southern Italians, whom are attributed with a negatively evaluated culture, which can be summed up using the term '*mafiosità*'. In addition, according to the LN, *extracomunitari* form a second and potentially threatening cultural 'other' (Cento Bull 1996:175).

The articulation of the South as an 'other' by the LN puts it at the centre of the political debate within Italy. However, as Davis (1996) argues the 'South' cannot be easily defined and it is increasingly difficult to refer to it as either an undifferentiated or a coherent economic or cultural region. The LN clearly ignores this as it consistently treats the South as a coherent unit, which of course is erroneous but one that suits the rhetoric of the party. Davis (1996) poses the question whether it perhaps make more sense to view the Italian South or *Mezzogiorno* not as something that really existed, but as a 'construct' or 'artefact', as a series of images and perceptions, which were prejudiced by Northern perceptions. Undoubtedly, the LN utilises existing stereotypes of the Italian South in its discourses and rhetoric when in fact it is

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[22] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN councillor in the commune of Varese, 27/3/96.

clear that many of these are anachronistic, inaccurate and misleading. It is such rhetoric which has fuelled the growth of the party and gained so much interest amongst diverse social groups across the North of Italy. Furthermore, the LN has been able to present the South and especially Rome as the cause of the recent political and institutional upheavals in Italy.

### 3.2.2 Anti-state discourses

Another important factor in the growth of the LN, as Diamanti (1995:67) argues, was the feeling of mistrust and intolerance towards the traditional Italian parties and state institutions. It is the alleged inefficiency of State institutions and the burden which the central state places upon the Northern economy, which the LN has utilised as an important political discourse. In particular, the LN is critical of the Italian central state and its fiscal system, which it alleges is iniquitous and harmful to the 'productive North'. Senator Speroni, leader of the LN's parliamentary group, argues that:

> "The people want to be alright and don't want to pay taxes for those who are incapable of looking after themselves. We want autonomy so that we can look after ourselves with our own resources and without having to forgo them in favour of the South" (Il Gazzettino 14 April 1992).

The LN argues that it is the high levels of bureaucracy and taxation and the problems of the burgeoning public sector deficit, which are compromising the economic health of the North of Italy. This means that there is widespread hostility towards the central Italian State amongst the supporters and activists of the LN:

> The main problem is that State bureaucracy is too slow and inefficient, which means that public services are generally poor; the massive tax burden imposed upon Northern business reduces economic dynamism and the massive public sector deficit places a massive strain on the North of Italy as the driving force behind the Italian economy. Therefore, in the North of Italy there is a massive feeling of discontent towards these economic problems, not only from LN supporters but every citizen of the North and there is the general belief that Italian politicians cannot manage the economy. The LN was born out of this feeling of discontent and mistrust of Rome and the traditional politicians[23].

The LN is very critical of the traditional Italian political parties, which it argues is the cause of the political and institutional problems in Italy. According to the LN, it is the traditional political parties, which are responsible for the general degeneration of the

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[23] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Giuseppe Bonomi, ex-LN Deputy between 1994 and 1995 when the LN was part of Silvio Berlusconi's government, 3/4/96.

political situation in Italy and the malfunctioning of the Italian state institutions. As Bossi proclaimed:

> "We are the poison in the parties' veins. The people are now convinced, and I feel it in the street even in Rome, that they have destroyed democracy; that there isn't just an economic-financial crisis, but also a very serious political and social crisis which is caused by the parties" (La Repubblica, 5 October 1992).

For the LN the problem of the Italian state and the traditional political parties is that they are Southern biased and are controlled and run by people from the South. Consequently, the LN claims that the North of Italy is denied an adequate number of Northern civil servants and politicians. The party is especially critical of the state bureaucracy which it argues is too large and inefficient and employs a disproportionately high number of Southern Italians. The result, according to the LN, is the undermining of the economic dynamism of the North of Italy. As a LN councillor in the commune of Varese explained:

> The problems that the North of Italy are undergoing are basically due to a form of colonialism, whereby the South exploits the North in various ways. The first and most important is of course, the level of money and transfers that go from the North to the South and secondly, it is the massive bureaucracy system that has been created to provide jobs for Southerners in exchange for their political support that penalises the North of Italy[24].

In addition, the LN Federal Organisation Secretary explained that,

> In Italy, the level of inefficiency in the state bureaucracy is very high. There are about 5 million public employees which is an enormous number when one thinks that in the USA there are only 250 000 federal public employees. Thus, in Italy the number of public employees represents approximately ten per cent of the whole population, which is an enormous amount and goes some way to explaining why the Italian public sector deficit is so high. There are obviously too many public sector employees, but the problem is that there are teachers and other public employees in the North who are unemployed because there is a bias to people from the South within the public sector. Therefore, state employment in the North of Italy has been colonised by people from the South, while our own people remain unemployed. Obviously there is massive resentment at this and it is fundamentally unjust that teachers in the North are unemployed when jobs are filled by people from the South. Another example of the problems of the bureaucratic central Italian state are the four million people who receive invalidity pensions when really there are only 300 000

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[24] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN councillor in the commune of Varese, 27/3/96.

'real' deserving cases[25]. The reason for this corruption is because people in the South of Italy receive jobs and favours in return for their political votes and support. This system cannot go on and this is why the LN is so important, not only in the North but for the whole of Italy[26].

The alleged socio-economic and political problems and tensions of the Italian state cause the LN to challenge the legitimacy of existing institutional, political and economic structures within Italy. Furthermore, the LN rejects the concept of the Italian national-state on the grounds that it:

> "constitutes an arrangement that always belongs more to the past. It is, broadly speaking, too small to respond to issues in the sphere of economy and the environment; on the other hand, it is too big to respond to the demands of politics at the local level and especially in recognising proper identity" (Lega Nord 1996b:40).

According to the LN, the need for Italy to remain a single nation-state is becoming less and less. This is mainly because Italy is unable to meet the demands of a global economy and the cultural, regional, and socio-economic divisions within the country have become too great. As one LN party activist explained:

> After the Second World War there was only one direction towards which the whole of Italy was aiming and that was towards the reconstruction of Italian economy and society. During this period the whole of Italy was together because there was a common goal to aim for and the solidarity between the North and South was clearly evident; the North paid its taxes to fund the development of the South in the name of Italian unity. However, nowadays the situation is very different and no longer are people hungry in the South since they have everything thanks to funding from the North. The legitimacy of the North funding the South has now gone because the state has continued to give to the South but this has constrained economic dynamism in the North and the people of the South have become reliant on state transfers and so a welfare culture has developed[27].

This leads to a scepticism, on the part of the LN, towards the historical process of Unification within Italy as well as the future role of the Italian state. Clearly, the anti-state discourses of the LN form an important part of the political project of the LN.

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[25] Statistics taken from LN publication.

[26] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Roberto Biza, the LN Federal Organisation Secretary, 6/5/96.

The party not only challenges the institutional structures and system of governance within Italy but also the very existence of the Italian State itself. The next section discusses the different solutions and discourses, which the LN proposes to restructure (or indeed replace) the Italian State.

### 3.2.3 Federalism or secession?

The LN claims that the only way to solve the problems of the Italian State is to fundamentally change its socio-economic, institutional and political structures. However, the LN has changed and modified its proposals for the precise ways in which the Italian State should be restructured. In its earliest phases of growth the party ideology, as Farrell and Levy (1996:139) outline, contained a mixture of regionalism, neo-liberalism and varying degrees of racism. Yet by the early 1990s the LN's proposals for regionalism and federalism began to take shape. By far the most important of the LN's discourse is that of federalism. According to the LN, the creation of an Italian federal state would not only mean greater economic autonomy from the central government but would also mean changing the institutional framework of the Italian State, which would facilitate social and cultural autonomy. It is hard to define accurately the specificities of the LN's federal discourse as it has been modified over time as the party has changed its political rhetoric. The importance of the LN's discourse of federalism is significant because ten or fifteen years ago the suggestion of creating a federal state in Italy was relatively unheard of. The LN has changed this and has successfully put the discourse of federalism onto the mainstream political agenda. Furthermore, in the North of Italy the LN's federalist discourse is one of the main issues for which the LN has successfully mobilised political support from across the socio-political spectrum. As a LN party representative explained:

> The LN proposes the creation of a federal Italian state in which taxes are paid at the local and regional level so that public services are commensurate to the levels of taxation. The LN challenges the concept of the Italian nation-state; it does not challenge the concept of 'nation' but of 'state'. The concept of the nation-state is old-fashioned and an obsolete system of representation. In the opinion of the LN the new way forward is a federal Italian state that is similar to Switzerland or the USA. We are not against the idea of 'nation', in fact the whole point of the federal structure is that it would respect all the different

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[27] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Caprice, LN party activist and member of the LN *Gruppo Giovani*, Varese, 1/4/96.

'Italian nationalities' and give them a voice. Within this structure each region would have control over its own affairs and would be able to keep, for example, 70 per cent of taxation with the other 30 per cent going to the central state which would be in charge of foreign policy and defence matters. This would mean that the North of Italy could keep its own wealth and be able to reinvest it into its own economy and be able to stay competitive in the European and global economy. This does not mean threatening the national unity of Italy with threats of secession and war as has happened in the former Yugoslavia, but it does mean radically changing the structure of the Italian State. The LN is the only party in the whole of Italy that is committed to making this change. The other parties talk about federalism but never really want to change the status quo. There is a real possibility that the North will split from the South if these changes do not happen quickly because the divisions between the two regions have been increasing over the past 15 years and are getting significantly wider all the time. Unless something is done these divisions will continue to get wider[28].

The development of the LN's federalist discourse was bolstered by developments within the EU and the continuing drive towards greater European political and economic integration. This was especially the case after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty as well as the growing recognition of the competitive pressures facing Italy from the EU and from the workings of the global economy. In its most sophisticated form the LN's proposes a 'two speed' Italian economy based upon a federal structure, which the party argues would allow the economy of the North of Italy to be unshackled from the state dependent, welfare-oriented economy of the South of the country. The LN argues that this would allow the two economies to be able to move at the pace appropriate to their means (Farrell and Levy 1996). Even commentators outside the LN acknowledged the difficulties facing the North of Italy if it was to continue to support the South of Italy. For example, as the ex-New Leftist Giulio Savelli wrote:

"It is clear that the North cannot accept the burden of permanently subsidising the South and must - especially at the moment when European integration is coming closer - remove from its shoe a stone which reduces its competitiveness with its tenacious adversaries" (Savelli 1992:123).

During the 1990s, the LN's discourse of federalism became more and more mainstream within the party's political project. Furthermore, federalism became

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[28] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Giuseppe Bonomi, ex-LN Deputy between 1994 and 1995 when the LN was part of Silvio Berlusconi's government, 3/4/96.

widely accepted as a necessary political reform within Italy, especially amongst the main political parties. This was partly in recognition of the need for fiscal reform within Italy but also in order to take away some of the popularity which the LN had gained because of its federalist discourse. Indeed, by the 1996 election, it was apparent that the LN was not alone in endorsing federal reforms for Italy; in fact each of the largest political parties acknowledged the benefits of federalism. The problem for the LN is that it has, to a large extent, lost its main element of difference from the other political parties. Subsequently, to maintain a distinct political identity the LN has been forced to shift its political discourse and rhetoric. This party has more or less rejected its federalist discourse in favour of a more hard-line and aggressive discourse, which is based upon secession and the creation of a separate state called 'Padania'. Federalism has been rejected on the grounds that, as one senior LN party representative described:

> Federalism would be very difficult to achieve for several reasons; firstly, there are too many interests that would have to be broken in order to achieve federalism and it would be like smashing an egg because one would have to destroy the whole system. However, the interested parties in Rome would have to vote to smash themselves, which of course they would never do. The only way forward is for the EU and Brussels to change the structure of Europe in a federal way so that Italy would have to follow. It is clear that federalism would never be achieved in Italy because there are too many obstacles to overcome. The EU is the only way forward [29].

Closely linked to the LN's emerging discourse of secession are the issues of European integration and globalisation. The LN argues that the Italian economy, with its massive public sector deficit, high unemployment and high taxation burden, will not be able to meet the criteria of the Maastricht Treaty for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The LN argues that this would be a disastrous situation for the economic competitiveness of the North of Italy. As an ex-LN Deputy argued:

> Lombardy has to maintain its position as one of the 'four motors' of the EU otherwise it will not be able to enter into the Maastricht Treaty and then it will not be able to gain the benefits of membership. If it does not enter it will become simply a market for the Germans or the French. The Maastricht Treaty should be amended so that instead of taking into account the 15 nation-

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[29] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Roberto Maroni, co-founder and deputy leader of the LN and ex-Minister of the Interior during Berlusconi's government, 7/5/96.

states of the EU it should take into account the regions and territories within countries that could already meet the criteria for Maastricht. The North of Italy could already be in Europe as it is one of the richest regions in the EU and alone it could pay off the Italian public debt in a short time. Italy is a long way from meeting the criteria of Maastricht and so why not let the North be part of the EU locomotive and wait for the South to catch up? This would take into account the diverse speeds of the economy of Italy instead of penalising the North of the country[30].

The LN argues that the traditional Italian political parties have not really considered the challenges which European integration and globalisation pose. The LN argues that the processes of globalisation render the old equilibrium between the North and South of Italy obsolete. The centralistic state system, which links the North and the South of Italy together can no longer be maintained, the LN argues. For the LN, the contemporary situation is unlike that of twenty years ago when the resources which the North gave to the South returned back to the North because the people of the South bought products that were 'Made in Padania'. Instead, today, the LN claims that the resources which are transferred from the North to the South of Italy no longer return back. Within a global market-place the Southern consumers buy the cheapest products so the whole North-South equilibrium is breaking down (Lega Nord 1997).

For the LN, the crucial event will be the creation of a single European currency, which it defines as a "trigger of inevitable change" (Lega Nord 1997). The reason for this is that if the Italian economy is not able to meet the criteria which will enable it to join the single currency, it will be disastrous for Italy, the LN argues. However, according to the LN, the only way in which 'Padania' can meet the criteria for the single currency is by the division of Italy into two. This would mean the creation of two different currencies for the two different economies and productive systems; the 'Euro' would be introduced in 'Padania' while the Italian Lire would remain in the South of Italy. This would benefit 'Padania' because it could enter into the single currency but also it would be beneficial for the South of Italy, the LN states, because it would receive inward investment as a low cost location (Lega Nord 1997).

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[30] Author's *fieldnotes extract from interview with Giuseppe Bonomi, ex-LN Deputy between 1994 and 1995 when the LN was part of Silvio Berlusconi's government, 3/4/96.*

Apart from the alleged socio-economic importance, another aspect of the European discourse of the LN is that of the prospect of greater integration. The LN argues that closer EU integration is beneficial for the North of Italy for several reasons. Primarily, for the LN, a federal Europe is the only way forward for Europe because it would decrease the power of the central Italian State and facilitate greater regional autonomy. Within this European federal structure, the LN is in favour of the creation of a 'Europe of Regions', which would not only transfer greater power to the regions but also allow the self-determination of the people of the North of Italy. A senior LN party official explained the LN's vision of Europe:

> The main project of the LN is to be in a united and federal Europe. We do not contest the concept of 'nation' but rather the concept of 'state', which is an inefficient and obsolete construct. 'Nations' exist within 'states' but the LN wants to allow 'nations' to have self-governance. Instead of using the term a 'Europe of the Regions' I prefer to use the term a 'Europe of peoples', where each 'nation' would have its own government. Thus, the Maastricht Treaty does not go far enough to allow the self-determination of the peoples of Europe. Instead, the LN's vision of Europe is one in which every 'nation' is represented so that there would be Padania, *Meridione* [referring to the South of Italy], Scotland, Wales, England, Ireland, Catalonia, the Basque country, Corsica and so on. All these 'nations' would be represented and linked by a federal structure; for example, 'Padania' would have closer links to Brussels and London rather than Rome. Today's 'nation-states' will cease to exist because 'self-determination' is the way forward[31].

The LN is clearly pro-European and uses the ideal of an integrated Europe and a 'Europe of the regions' as a way of legitimising its political project. The LN's discourse of federalism was influenced by the developments surrounding the Maastricht Treaty and more recently the drive towards EMU. In addition, the LN has vested globalisation with a political role and value, using it to justify itself and its own political project of secession. In so doing the LN claims that it is the only force in Italian politics, which is able to understand contemporary economic and political changes. Furthermore, it uses globalisation and its impacts as a way to continue to stress the differences and continuing divergence between the North and South of Italy.

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[31] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Roberto Maroni, co-founder and deputy leader of the LN and ex-Minister of the Interior during Berlusconi's government, 7/5/96.

As federalism has become recognised as a necessary political reform within Italy then the LN needed to find an alternative discourse to justify its reason to be. Thus it has used 'globalisation' and framed it, in simple terms, as a threat to the continued success of the Northern Italian economy at a time when the majority of Northern Italian citizens are concerned about the future of their country and in particular whether Italy will be able to meet the criteria for EMU. There are obvious criticisms with the rhetoric of the LN in relation to globalisation, not least because the LN does not mention how it proposes for Italy's public sector deficit to be divided with the creation of Padania. Indeed, the party fails to recognise that there is still a large amount of interlinkage between the economies of the North and South of Italy and that big business has as much interest in the South as its does in the North of Italy. However, yet again the discourse of the LN is presented in a direct and provocative manner and once more has aroused a considerable amount of controversy and publicity.

The complex political discourses of the LN have contributed to the party's success, in a number of ways. Firstly, the distinctive communication style of the party has ensured that the party has created a distinctive political identity. The mix of cultural and historical symbolism combined with original political slogans has been a relatively successful source of success for the party. In addition, the way the party has been able to modify its political rhetoric to take advantage of the political situation, whilst maintaining a relatively stable base of support has been another factor in the party's political rise. However, this has also caused problems for the party because it has been accused of not having a consistent and coherent set of policies.

## 4. Conclusion

The rise to political prominence of the LN has taken place in a relatively short period of time. The party has gone from a small locally and regionally based informal organisation to a nationally based formal political party. Along the way it has developed a specific set of internal institutional structures as well as a number of related organisations aimed at integrating the party into the various spheres of civil society. Moreover, the LN has utilised a specific set of strategies in order to expand its levels of electoral support. Undoubtedly, the key factor in the development of the party has been Bossi; he has guided the party through its various phases which have

involved both highs and lows and has managed to generate a 'cult' status within Italian politics and society. One reason for this has been the folkloristic rhetoric and cultural symbolism used by Bossi and the LN. This has given the party a very strong socio-political identity, as the party has aimed to become more than just a political party but a 'political movement'.

Although the discourses of the LN have been modified during its political history it is clear that the party's political project has remained based upon certain fundamental themes. The same can be said for the reasons why the people of the North of Italy affiliate with the party. As Diamanti (1995) argues, there have been variations in the reasons why people have supported the LN during its different phases of growth. However, the underlying attitudes have remained quite constant; the overwhelming factor being distrust and intolerance towards the people of the South of Italy as well as towards the central Italian state. The anti-Southern stance of the LN is a recurrent element in the political discourses of the party and in spite of its controversial nature has attracted widespread support across the North of Italy. It is the LN's ability to politically represent as well as reproduce such anti-Southern sentiment in the North of Italy, which has been the main reason for the growth of the party. On the other hand, this has also caused problems for the LN because it is often viewed as being racist and against Italian national unity. Therefore, the party's rhetoric has been more successful in certain areas than it has in others. The reasons for the geographical variations and impacts of the LN's political discourses are considered in the following three chapters.

## 5. Case-study areas

The next three chapters analyse the LN in specific geographical contexts in order to examine the different challenges and problems which the party faces in different localities. The first case-study area is the province of Varese (Chapter Five), which is symbolically and politically very important for the LN. Varese has a high level of electoral support for the party, not least because it is from where Bossi comes and also where the LL was founded. The party in the province is very well-organised with a considerable number of party offices as well as party activists and supporters. Consequently, the province of Varese represents an important example of an area

where the LN is very strong with significantly deep political and social roots. Varese is the LN in its 'purest' form.

The second case-study area examines the autonomous province of Trentino (Chapter Six) where the LN gains some electoral support and is relatively well-developed. In this province the party faces the added challenge of competing with the existing provincial political parties which strive to protect the autonomy of the province. Moreover, the party has to adapt its political discourses to take into account the different set of institutional and political structures related to Trentino's autonomy. Therefore, in Trentino the LN is confronted with a number of challenges which it does not have to face in the majority of other areas across Northern Italy. Despite these challenges the party has managed to develop electorally as well as organisationally in a relatively short space of time.

Finally, the third case-study area is the province of Macerata (Chapter Seven). In this province the LN is faced with the most serious and difficult challenge to its political project. This is due to the geographical location of the province in Central Italy, which means that it is situated outside of the party's heartlands. Consequently, the LN's level of electoral support is considerably reduced and also the party has had to modify its political discourses, especially its anti-Southern sentiment. However, the Marche region forms one of the LN's 14 'nations' of Padania and so is an important part of the party's political project. The question is whether the LN is able to expand its level of support in the province.

# Chapter Five : Varese - *La terra di Bossi* - A heartland of support for the Lega Nord

## 1. Introduction

The province of Varese is very important for the LN in both political and symbolic terms. First of all, it was the birthplace of the *Lega Lombarda* as well as Umberto Bossi, the leader of the party. The commune of Varese was the first in Northern Italy to elect a LN *sindaco* (mayor); the province of Varese was also the first to elect a LN *presidente* (president). In addition, at the national level, Varese was the first province in Italy to elect a LN Senator, which was Bossi and a LN Deputy (Giuseppe Leoni) to the Italian Parliament. The LN is well organised in the province having 62 *sezione* (party offices) and 29 mayors (as of May 1996) comprising the four main cities within the province (Varese, Gallarate, Busto Arsizio and Tradate) (Giordano 1996). Undoubtedly, Varese has been and continues to be one of the heartlands of support for the LN, and so it constitutes an important reality in which to understand the reasons for the growth of the party. Analysing the reasons which have influenced the growth of the LN in Varese is fundamental in understanding why the party has gained support across the North of Italy. This is because the province of Varese has one of the purest and strongest forms of *leghismo*.

The first section of the Chapter provides a geographical outline of the province of Varese including the nature of its socio-economic development. The second section examines the LN in Varese; it focuses on the party's origins, its electoral and organisational growth and the key themes and reasons why support for the party is so strong in the province. The third section focuses upon the LN in local government in Varese and analyses some of the impacts which the party has had upon the political-economic geography of the province. The fourth section discusses some of the reasons why the geographical, socio-economic and cultural specificities of the province of Varese have provided such a fertile political ground for the LN.

## 2. The province of Varese - a geographical outline

Varese is situated in the far north of Italy in the region of Lombardy; it borders Canton Ticino of Switzerland to the north and the region of Piemonte to the west. Varese occupies a unique position within the region of Lombardy because it is the smallest province in terms of territory yet one of the most well-developed industrially, and after Milan it is the most densely populated. The total population of the province is approximately 800 000 and the average density is 670 people per Km². In terms of area, the province covers approximately 1 198 Km², which is only 0.4 per cent of the whole area of Italy and 5.04 per cent of the region of Lombardy. Administratively, the province is divided into 141 communes, with the largest being the commune of Varese, which has a population of almost 90 000 people (Camera di Commercio, Varese 1988).

The province of Varese has undergone a remarkable population expansion since the end of the Second World War. In 1951, the population was 477 000 but by 1971 the population was approximately 725 823, which was an increase of over 50 per cent in 20 years. However, in the last 25 years the rate of population expansion has slowed mainly because of the slowing down of internal migration fluxes within Italy and a general decrease in birth rates. Overall, the population of the province has more than tripled (an increase of 239.7 per cent) in about 120 years (since the Unification of Italy), whilst in Lombardy itself the population increased by 181.6 per cent during the same period. At the national level over the same period the increase was somewhat lower at 158.3 per cent (Camera di Commercio, Varese 1988). One of the main reasons for the significant growth of Varese's population during the post-war period is its considerable socio-economic and industrial expansion. This ensured a significant increase in the number of job opportunities in the province and stimulated a wave of population in-migration, mainly from people from the South of Italy.

In the last 50 years the province of Varese, as with the other areas that make up the so-called 'industrial triangle' of Milan-Turin-Genoa, has undergone a significant economic expansion, especially in the manufacturing sector. This development has ensured that Varese is one of the most economically developed areas of the whole of

Italy, with one of the highest incomes per capita, a high level of exports and a positive balance of trade (Vullermin 1991-1992). The economic growth of Varese has been due to a number of factors; firstly, a general increase of consumer and industrial demand within Italy provided an expanding market; secondly, an efficient transport system provided links to the major markets in Italy and abroad; thirdly, the existence of a relatively dense network of economically dynamic small and medium sized industrial and craft industries formed the cornerstone of the province's economy. Varese is one of the most industrialised provinces in Italy; in 1992, the industrial sector contributed 47 per cent of the whole income generated in the province.

The industrial and craft sectors are the most important ones in the provincial economy of Varese. For example, in 1991, 50.3 per cent of the workforce were employed in the secondary sector, compared to 48.2 per cent in the tertiary sector and only 1.5 per cent in the primary sector. In addition, there is a significant density of firms in the province, which number over 23 000 and employ a total of 175 900 people. The vast majority of these are small and medium sized firms even though there are also major Italian and foreign companies in the province. The average number of employees per firm is 7.6 and 84 per cent of firms employ less than ten people. The firms which employ less than 10 people constitute 31.2 per cent of the total workforce of the province. There are 70 companies which employ more than 200 people (of which only 14 employ more than 500) and these make up 17.9 per cent of the workforce employing over 31 000 people in total (Camera di Commercio, Varese 1994). Thus, although the larger firms are important, the strength of the economy of Varese is mainly due to the rich mix of small and medium sized firms.

The geography of industry within the province shows that the main concentrations are to be found in the four largest towns, Varese, Busto Arsizio, Gallarate and Saronno. However, the smaller towns also have industrial activities. The main zones for industry are to be found in the central and southern regions of the province because of the flatter land and the closer proximity and better transport links to the metropolitan area of Milan. In the north of the province the area is too mountainous and relatively inaccessible and subsequently it has a greater concentration of tourism and tourism

related activities. The fact that economic activity in the province is not concentrated in one particular location is another important feature of the economy.

In recent years, the economy of Varese has undergone a period of restructuring, which meant that unemployment in the province increased to around six per cent (this is relatively high for the province). In particular, the textiles sector, which was a very important employer in the province, especially in the cities of Busto Arsizio and Gallarate, has decreased in size over the last few years[1]. The other main sector to be hard hit has been Varese's aeronautics industry, which was another large employer in the province. Varese had one of the biggest and most important concentrations of aeronautics expertise in the whole of Europe, concentrated within two or three big firms; the biggest of which was the Aermacchi company[2].

The density of small firms in Varese has been crucial to the development of the province's economy, however, this sector has also faced significant challenges in recent years. The challenges facing the small firm sector are intensifying in Varese, as elsewhere in Northern Italy, for two main reasons. Firstly, the small firms are facing higher fiscal costs because of the level of taxation forced upon them from the central Italian government. Secondly, another problem is that with increased competition from the European Union and South East Asia it has become more difficult for Italian small firms to find new markets. This situation is made worse because although Italian exports are relatively cheap abroad, raw materials are more expensive. This hinders competitiveness, especially for those small firms which are not export oriented[3].

The socio-economic challenges with which the province of Varese has been confronted have had a variety of impacts upon the society and politics of the province. Significantly, the slowing down of the province's economic growth has created a widespread concern amongst the business community as well as the majority of

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[1] Information taken from author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Signor Zaccherelli, Secretary General of the CGIL Trade Union, province of Varese, 4/4/96.

[2] Information taken from author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Marco Molteni, General Secretary of the UIL Trade Union, province of Varese, 3/4/96.

citizens that the years of economic prosperity are coming to end. This is particularly strongly felt amongst the small business community, which is a fundamental sector of Varese's economy but one which has been hard hit in recent years. Moreover, this has raised a whole series of questions and issues about the ways to maintain and protect the economic well-being of the province of Varese. Undoubtedly, the rise of the LN has to be understood in this context. One reason why the party has grown in popularity in Varese is that it has presented itself as the only political force, which is interested in representing the interests of the business community as well as the citizens of the province. The next section examines in more detail the reasons for the growth of the LN in the province.

## 3. Varese and the LN

> "Varese is the source as well as the witness of the 'Spring' of the autonomist movement. In the province of Varese, the LN has been able to weave together a dense network of social links, which have already been transformed into a political subculture. The territory of Varese represents a precious stronghold for the party. The strong, deep-seated territorial roots, the high level of socio-cultural and socio-economic development and the geographical position on the Swiss frontier favour more than anywhere else the 'syndrome of Giussano'" (Lega Nord 1993:14).

This quote reflects the importance of the province of Varese for the LN and also how relationships between the province and the LN extend back some considerable time. Bossi himself was born in the province of Varese in the town of Cassano Magnago on the 19th of September 1941. Bossi had had a long interest in issues of autonomy, federalism and self-determination within the North of Italy because of his relationship with, and affinity for the leader of the *Union Valdotaine* party, Bruno Salvadori, who convinced him of the need for a political movement specifically aimed to protect and defend the culture, society and economy of Lombardy (Bossi and Vimercati 1992).

The *Lega Autonomista Lombarda*, as it was called then, was created in Varese on the 12th April 1984. According to one of the founder members of the LN, the early years were very difficult for the party:

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[3] Information taken from author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Alberto Volonte, Vice Secretary General, of the Artisans Association of the Province of Varese, 5/4/96.

It was very hard in the beginning because everything had to be done by a few people, such as the preparation of posters and the *Lombard Autonomista* magazine of the party. From home I typed letters, folded envelopes, and even distributed party magazines. It was not just a sacrifice for us but also for all of our families because they had to give up a lot for the cause. The movement started to grow slowly; eventually we moved to a bigger meeting place because the existing flat was not big enough. We rented a Church hall which was bigger, however, we had to be careful what we talked about because the Priests were rather wary of us. Also, the Police were very watchful of us and we often received threats down the phone and in the street from anti-LN activists. On several occasions, Bossi was almost driven off the road and other times the brakes of his car were tampered with. Even today Bossi and others still receive threats and are spat at and abused in the street. However, we are all quite strong and well motivated which keeps the movement going! Without Bossi there would be no LN and there is nobody to replace him. He has so much presence and personality. The experience with the party, in spite of all the problems and sacrifices, has been a really important and rewarding one[4].

The LN has had to overcome a significant number of hurdles in the province of Varese, however, this has been achieved partly through the perseverance of Bossi and a small number of loyal party members. The result has been a remarkable growth both institutionally and of course electorally, with the party becoming one of the largest and most important political parties in the whole of the province. From Varese the party has expanded throughout the whole of the North of Italy and developed into a mass political party. The next section charts the electoral growth of the party in Varese.

## 3.1 Electoral Geography of the LN

The first electoral success of the *Lega Lombarda* (LL) (as it was) came in May 1985 when it gained 1831 votes (3.02 per cent of the vote) in the elections of the commune of Varese. Its first elected representative was Giuseppe Leoni (one of the founders of the movement) who gained a seat on the Varese commune council. In his first speech as councillor, Leoni spoke in the local Varese dialect, which caused a considerable amount of controversy as well as publicity for the party. The main platform of the party at that time was to extol and protect local values, dialect and culture, which it saw as separate, superior and different from the rest of Italy. In the same year there were two other elections; in the regional elections the party gained 2 265 votes (3.70

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[4] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Silvia Bazzan, one of the founder members of the LN in Varese, 22/2/96.

per cent) and in the provincial elections it gained 381 votes (3.25 per cent) (Comune di Varese 1985).

Just five years later, in May 1990, again in the commune elections of Varese, the LL gained 20.77 per cent of the vote (12 704 votes). This meant that the party was the second largest, with nine elected councillors out of a total of 40. The largest party was the DC, which gained only 13 councillors and 29.87 per cent of the vote. Similar gains were made by the LN in the regional and provincial elections during the same year. In the regional elections the LL got 21.67 per cent of the vote (13 197 votes) and in the provincial elections, the LN gained 22.38 per cent (2 433 votes), which was only 400 less than the largest party, the DC (Comune di Varese, 1990).

In only five years the LL had risen to prominence at both the local and provincial levels in Varese, however, this trend was to continue because by 1992 the party had made even greater electoral gains. In the Varese commune elections of December 1992, the Lega Nord (LN) (as it had become known) gained 37.33 per cent of the vote (22 654 votes), which meant that the LN had 17 elected councillors on the Commune Council. This was a landmark election not only in the history of the LN but also for Varese itself because for the first time ever the DC became the second largest party. The DC only gained 17.64 per cent of the vote and only eight elected councillors. None of the other political parties in the election gained ten per cent of the vote or more than three councillors (Comune di Varese 1992).

In only seven years from 1985, the vote for the LN had risen from three per cent to over 37 per cent. The outcome was that the LN candidate, Raimondo Fassa, was elected as *sindaco* (mayor) of Varese. This was the first time ever that the LN had gained political control of a commune in the North of Italy. During the Varese provincial elections of 21st November 1993, the electoral growth of the party continued; the LN candidate, Massimo Ferrario, gained 68.21 per cent of the vote[5] (Comune di Varese 1993). Therefore, again the LN recorded a very important

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[5] Italian provincial elections are carried out using the French style 'Double-turn' voting system. Therefore, this result was gained in the second ballot of the election, the other candidate in the second vote was Livio Ghiringhelli of the *Partito Popolare*, who gained 31.79 per cent of the vote.

symbolic first because this was the first time that the LN had gained control of a Northern Italian province.

The electoral support of the party has continued to increase throughout the 1990s. Figure 13 shows the electoral results for the LN in the 1994 and 1996 national Italian elections. Overall, the results for the party illustrate the relatively high levels of support which it gains in the province. The variation in its percentage is really quite small with the lowest results, of just below 30 per cent, being recorded in the electoral constituencies of Luino and Saronno. It is apparent that the actual geography of electoral support for the LN in Varese is relatively uniform as the party has relatively high levels of support across the whole of the province.

Figure 13 : Percentage vote for the LN, in the national Italian elections of 1994 and 1996, in the seven electoral constituencies of the province of Varese.

(Source : Comune di Varese 1996).

| | National Election 1994 | National Election 1996 |
|---|---|---|
| **Varese** | 31.8 | 29.8 |
| **Luino** | 28.4 | 29.6 |
| **Tradate** | 31.7 | 34.2 |
| **Gavirate** | 32.6 | 35.3 |
| **Gallarate** | 31.3 | 31.7 |
| **Busto Arsizio** | 31.3 | 31.0 |
| **Saronno** | 27.9 | 29.9 |
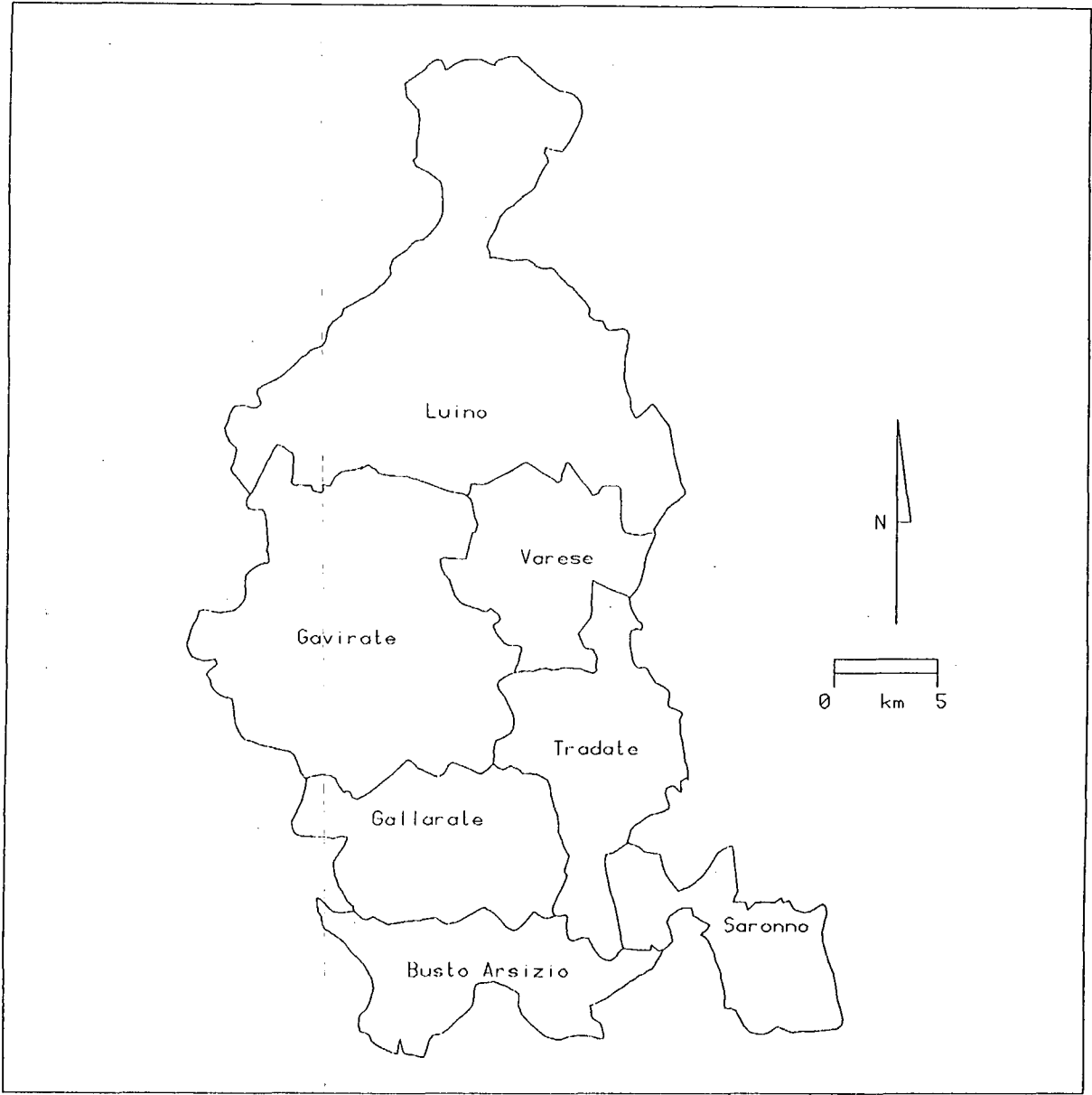
There are certain areas which have witnessed higher levels of electoral support for the party and others which have lower levels. As a LN councillor in the commune of Varese explained:

> The constituency of Luino, in the north of the province, generally has the lowest level of support for the LN, for several reasons. Firstly, this area is mountainous and the most remote area of the whole province, hence the communes are the least densely populated (less than 1 500 people on average). In the majority of these communes the party does not present candidates for local elections because they are too small. Moreover, in such small communes, which often have a population of less than 100, it is often the most popular local figures who win local elections and often they are not linked to any of the mainstream political parties. Secondly, the larger towns such as Lavena Ponte Tresa and Luino, which are near the Swiss border, have a high proportion of Southern Italian immigrants who travel daily across the border to work in Switzerland. Consequently, in these towns the LN does not have a strong base of support.
> The central area of the province around the main city of Varese is the biggest and most important centre of support for the LN. The commune of Varese was the first in the whole of Italy to elect a LN mayor and so is symbolically very important for the party. Furthermore, the communes surrounding Varese have become controlled by the LN because the popularity of the party has spread to the communes close by. This is because of the 'good government' and positive effect which the LN has had in Varese. Indeed, support is now stronger in the smaller towns surrounding Varese where local identity and feeling is much stronger than in the main urban centre of Varese.
> The south of the province is another main zone of support for the LN. The main cities of Gallarate, Busto Arsizio and Tradate all have LN mayors, which is important because it means that the LN controls the largest and most economically active zones in the province. These cities were 'conquered' by the LN in 1993 at a time when the party was doing very well[6].

The considerable electoral growth which the LN has undergone in Varese has been accompanied by significant developments in the organisational structure of the party within the province. There is a close relationship between the electoral expansion of the party and its organisational development because the spread of the LN party offices across the province has been one important contributory factor to the party's increase in electoral support. This is because it allows the citizens of a particular area to affiliate with the party and become involved both socially and politically with it. Indeed, this has been a strategy of the party in Varese as well as across the whole of

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[6] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 3/4/96.

Northern Italy in order to become embedded within local communities and create links with local territory. As the LN Provincial Secretary of Varese explained:

> There have been several main phases of growth for the LN in Varese. The first and most important was between 1985 and 1990 when the party underwent a period of significant expansion. The first party office was opened in 1986 in the centre of Varese, in Piazza Podestà which was in fact the first in the whole of the North of Italy. Another two offices were set up in 1989 in the towns of Gallarate and Busto Arsizio, making a total of three. By 1992, there were 62 party offices throughout the whole of the province which was an increase of over 60 in just six years. In comparison to the other political parties in the province the LN has the greatest number of party offices; for example *Forza Italia* has 13 and the PDS only 15. In fact, the aim of Bossi is to have a LN office under every 'bell tower' in Lombardy in order to spread the influence of the party. This territorial presence is important for the LN for several reasons; firstly, because the party does not have much access to television and media sources like the other political parties and thus the LN relies on the 'personal filter' through which the views and policies of the party are transmitted from person to person and face-to-face and so at the local level the territorial spread of the party offices is vital. Secondly, the offices are very important because they are a point of contact for the supporters, a forum for social interaction and an important way in which people can identify with the party. Thirdly, territory, local identity and culture are important to the LN and its supporters and so the networks of party offices represent an important means of organising and maintaining local political, economic and social affiliations[7].

The LN has a strong electoral as well as territorial presence in the province of Varese. In just over the decade the party has been transformed from a marginal political party into the largest political force in the province. There are several reasons for this considerable expansion, and the next section examines some of the main reasons why the LN has gained so much support within Varese.

## 3.2 Support for the LN in Varese : Key themes

The fundamental question is why has the LN in Varese achieved such a prominent political position? In what ways have the strategies, rhetoric and discourses of the party enhanced its support at the local level? Why do the people of Varese affiliate with the LN? This section examines some of the main themes and reasons why a considerable number of the citizens of the province affiliate with, and support the LN.

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[7] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Marco Reguzzoni, LN Provincial Secretary for Varese, 30/4/96.

### 3.2.1 Anti-state themes

As elsewhere, the LN in Varese has gained a considerable amount of support for its stance against the Italian central State. The LN's discourse and rhetoric claims that it is the Italian state and government that is biased towards the South of Italy, which is to blame for the North of Italy's social, economic and political problems. The antipathy towards the Italian State is relatively strong in Varese mainly because the province, up until a few years ago, was one of the richest in Italy. During the past few years its economic situation has deteriorated slightly and this has contributed to the growth in support for the LN. In particular, it is the alleged inequality of the Italian fiscal system, which supporters of the LN claim is burdening the economic dynamism of the province of Varese. As the LN Provincial Secretary of Varese claimed:

> The south of the province of Varese was one of the richest and most industrialised areas in Italy. This was especially the case around the cities of Busto Arsizio, Gallarate and Saronno. Over the last few years its economic position has decreased considerably, which in turn has fuelled the support for the LN. In the 1960s and 1970s, the triangle between Milan, Busto, and Gallarate was the richest region in Italy, however, this area was recently given Objective 2 status by the EU for 'declining industrial areas' as it has undergone significant economic restructuring. The reasons for this decline are complicated but mainly it is because of the high tax burden, inefficient state bureaucracy, as well as competition on the international front. This is especially the case in the textiles sector. This has fuelled the resentment towards the central government which is particularly felt amongst the small and medium sized firms in the area which were hit badly by the economic downturn at the beginning of the 1990s[8].

This resentment towards the Italian central State is not only felt within the business community, but seems more widespread in Varese. In particular, the LN has been able to capture the votes of people who feel disgruntled at what is claimed to be a poor level of public services in the province. As an ex-LN Deputy claims:

> Varese is one of the richest provinces in Italy and so the people of the province demand a high level of public service. Yet, local services are very poor and cannot meet the requirements of the people who are frustrated because they have to pay high taxes but get very little in return. A good example of this is the motorway journey between Varese and Milan; in normal traffic it takes 45 minutes to get to Milan, however, at certain times of the day it could take

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[8] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Marco Reguzzoni, LN Provincial Secretary for Varese, 30/4/96.

anywhere between two to four hours. This is because the motorway is not capable of meeting the traffic demands placed upon it[9].

The issue of taxation is one which has generated a significant amount of consternation amongst a number of supporters of the LN in Varese. The basic issue for the LN and its supporters is that taxation is too high and that the province gains less back from the central State than it gives. This is a key issue, as a LN councillor in the commune of Varese stated:

> The problem for Varese is that it pays more money in taxes to the State than it receives back, whereas provinces in the South pay less tax but receive more money back from the State. For example, the statistics show that the commune of Varese, with a population of over 80 000, pays more taxes than the commune of Salerno, which has a population of over 150 000, however, Varese receives much less from the state in return than Salerno does. At the local level the situation is much worse for Varese as the State has cut funding to the communes so local taxes have had to be raised to meet this short fall. This is of course very unpopular since public services are still relatively poor. It is for this reason that the LN has gained support in Varese as the people are fed up with this situation. A common saying in the North of Italy is that the citizens work six months of year for the State because of the high tax burden they face. This is badly affecting the local economy and has forced business closures and the high costs are restricting the creation of small firms and the dynamism of the economy[10].

The LN in Varese has certainly benefited from the opposition towards the Italian central State, which is relatively widely felt amongst the people of the province. It is a difficult task to ascertain why this resentment is felt; certainly, the socio-economic problems which Varese has faced recently contributed to the opposition against the polices of the central Italian government. However, it is the rhetoric of the LN which has translated this feeling of resentment into political support. Moreover, the party has managed to intensify and exaggerate the alleged problems with the Italian central government and the traditional political parties by using its derogatory political rhetoric. An important part of this is the LN's anti-Southern discourse, which has been a key theme that has gained considerable support within Varese, as the next section discusses.

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[9] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Giuseppe Bonomi, ex-LN Deputy, 3/4/96.

[10] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese 5/3/96.

## 3.2.2 Anti-South themes

The LN's anti-Southern discourse is a recurrent theme in the party's political project and it is apparent that in Varese this aspect of the party's rhetoric has really been a key factor in the growth of support for the party. The reasons for this are partly to do with the location of the province in the far North of Italy, which means that the 'South' has always been seen as distant geographically as well as culturally. The LN's exaggerated and quasi-racist stance and rhetoric towards the 'South' and 'Southerners' has appealed to certain sectors of the population of Varese, especially the large numbers of young people.

According to the LN and its supporters, a key problem facing the citizens of Varese is the rising cost of living in relation to decreasing wage levels. However, the real issue is that wage levels in the public sector, between the North and South of Italy, are more or less equal, which according to the LN and its supporters is iniquitous because it does not take into account the higher standard of living in the North of Italy. This is an important issue in Varese, where the cost of living is relatively high, as a LN party activist in Varese explained:

> Wage levels in the state sector penalise workers in the North because for the same job a person in Varese gets the same wages as a person in Palermo. Obviously geography plays a big part in this because the cost of living varies enormously between the different parts of the country. Thus, for wages to be standardised is an injustice to the people of the North[11].

For the LN and its supporters in Varese the problems of the central State are intertwined with anti-Southern sentiments. The central State is portrayed by the LN as being biased towards the South, which has fuelled resentment amongst the citizens of Varese and has helped the party to expand its support in the province. As a LN party activist in Varese claimed:

> In the South, there have been many examples of people claiming false pensions. For example, I heard of a bus driver in the South who was claiming a blind person's pension. Other examples are of postal workers claiming invalidity benefit for people who cannot work. The irony is that to work in the public sector a person must pass a medical! The Italian system of bureaucracy

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[11] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Simone Isella, LN party activist in Varese, 19/2/96.

is grossly inefficient, which means that the needy people in the North cannot live adequately on their pensions. This is a disastrous situation for Italy and reflects a society with 'wild west' values where people do as they please for their own benefit instead of a modern developed society structured on civic values and responsibilities[12].

It is the alleged positive discrimination towards people from the South within the public sector that has further fuelled controversy within Varese for the followers of the LN. There is particular hostility towards teachers and civil servants who are from the South of the country but work in the province. As a LN councillor in the commune of Varese explained:

> At school, the children are required to study a passage about a Southerner who moves from the South to the North of Italy and about his experiences on the journey and of his life as an immigrant in the North. On one particular occasion the teacher made the class answer some questions about the passage and the final task given for homework was for the students to ask their parents about their experiences of immigration in the North of Italy. One pupil wrote in response "my parents are not immigrants to Lombardy, they are Lombards and are proud to be Lombards". However, of course the pupil got into trouble for this because the teacher was from the South of Italy[13].

Immigration to the province of Varese is also another key theme for the followers of the LN. This is in part linked to what the LN defines as the Southernisation of the public sector. The party is against what it argues are public sector jobs being taken by people from the South of Italy whilst civil servants from Varese remain unemployed. Furthermore, the LN argues that immigration is in fact a danger to the local traditions, values and customs of the province of Varese. As the LN Provincial Secretary of Varese stated:

> Primarily, because of the immigration of 'terrone'[14] and more recently extracomunitari the social structure of Varese and other areas of the North of Italy are changing. For example, the population of Busto Arsizio is about 80 000 people and about 30 000 of these come from the South of Italy. Moreover, these people live in certain zones of the city and have formed their own communities; they continue to speak their own dialects and do not try to

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[12] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Simone Isella, LN party activist in Varese, 19/2/96.

[13] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 20/3/96.

[14] 'Terrone' is a derogatory term used by people of the North for people of the South of Italy, literally translated it means 'dirt-scratchers'.

integrate with the ways of the people of Busto. Often they come to work in the city for only a short period, such as three to four years and so are generally not interested in learning a new way of life or culture. This immigration has caused problems for the social cohesion of the city in various ways, for example, crime has increased and the social structure has changed. More recently, with the influx of *extracomunitari* more problems have been created, such as theft, the use and sale of drugs and general petty crime. However, the economy of Busto cannot provide employment for all of the local people and so it certainly cannot cope with the influx of foreigners. The 'black economy' gets bigger every day and the social cohesion of Busto and other towns in the province is disintegrating. The LN wants to protect and maintain the traditional values, dialects and culture of these areas[15].

The anti-Southern sentiment is not a new creation instigated by the LN because such feelings have been apparent for decades not only in Varese, but across the whole of the North of Italy, for a number of reasons. The LN has, however, given such anti-Southern sentiments a new impetus and legitimacy because of its political discourse and rhetoric, which is explicitly anti-Southern. Consequently, the party has given greater political and formal legitimacy to issues which before were relatively widely felt throughout the population but not really a clear political issue. In a way the LN's political discourse builds upon the feelings and anxieties of the people within Varese and is really an articulation of such anti-Southern sentiments. The LN is saying what the people want to hear and what they have been saying for a considerable amount of time. In this respect, the discourse of the party is closely intertwined with the views of a significant number of people within the province, which is further strengthened by the myths, misconceptions and prejudices which are commonly held. The most common myth is that it is somehow the South of Italy and the Southerners, whom are to blame in a variety of ways for the problems of Varese. This is a massive generalisation and one that is wrong, however, the LN has given this misconception political legitimacy by basing its political project upon it. In addition, the alleged differences between the culture and traditions of Varese are stressed by the supporters of the LN as another way of differentiating themselves from what is perceived as the Southern 'other'. This issue is discussed in the next section.

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[15] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Marco Reguzzoni, LN Provincial Secretary for Varese, 30/4/96.

### 3.2.3 The culture and identity of Varese

The cultural traits of the people of the province of Varese are expressed both by the LN and its supporters as the basis of a distinct identity. It is this identity and culture which the LN claims is under threat. In particular, immigration into the province, especially from people of the South of Italy but also more recently from people from outside the EU, is viewed as a threat to the culture, traditions and social cohesion of the province. The political discourse of the LN in the province is about protecting and preserving such alleged traditions and distinct cultures and this is another factor which has gained considerable support in the province. As the LN Provincial Secretary explained:

> The social cohesion of Busto and other towns in the province is disintegrating and the LN wants to protect and maintain the traditional values, dialects and culture of these areas. There is still a very strong affiliation with local areas and traditions, for example in the province of Varese there are 14 different dialects and in the town of Busto there are at least two or three different dialects in different areas of the town. An old person from Busto might not be able to understand an old person from Varese, and so for a person from Palermo it is almost impossible! Unfortunately, the young people of Varese and Lombardy are losing these dialects because they only speak Italian; we learn from our grandparents but this is not enough because we don't practice and thus the languages are dying out. However, in the South dialect is spoken everywhere, and so their dialects are not dying out. This is a real problem and it is for this reason that the LN has gained so much support because it wants to protect, preserve and promote the culture, heritage and identity of the province of Varese for future generations[16].

The contrast between the culture of Varese and that of the South of Italy is another important theme. Within Varese it is apparent that there is certainly a strong affiliation with local territory and sense of *campanilismo*. The history of municipal autonomy in the province strengthens this feeling as well as its geographical location in the 'far North' of Italy. The LN has certainly not created this sense of identity and cultural distinctiveness, but yet again because of its political discourse, which stresses the protection of the culture and traditions of Varese, the party has been able to translate this feeling into political support. In particular, Bossi in his political speeches often makes reference to the 'Celtic cultural heritage' of Varese and uses

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[16] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Marco Reguzzoni, LN Provincial Secretary for Varese, 30/4/96.

Celtic folklore and symbolism in his rhetoric. This serves to strengthen the feeling of cultural distinctiveness within the province and further demarcates the differences between the culture of Varese and the South of Italy. This appeals to the youth groups of the LN in the province. As a LN party activist in Varese explained:

> The people in Varese are generally very cold and in fact they call us 'the Swiss of Italy'. This is because we generally don't socialise outside of our own social groups and it is difficult for outsiders to gain acceptance into these social groups or clubs. The LN is one example of such a group because we are quite hostile to outsiders at first. Furthermore, the people of Varese liked the idea of separation because it reflects our social and geographical situation and our distinct culture. Varese has a Celtic culture which is more similar to that of Northern Europe than the South of Italy. The people are descendants of the 'Longobard' tribes who lived in the North of Italy during the Middle Ages and we are proud of our Celtic origins in Varese. Indeed, there are several Celtic cultural associations in the province which perform pagan festivals and dances. Furthermore, Bossi is an expert in Celtic history and folklore and he often uses stories in his political speeches. He compares one particular Celtic folk story to the task of the LN. In this story the young people of Varese had to go in the mountains leaving their families and villages in order to survive the hardship of living into the mountains. The villagers at the bottom of the mountains lit fires which the young people could see from the mountains, which kept their spirits up during their stay and reminded them of their homes and of the importance of their stay. Bossi likens this hardship to that which the LN must face in its struggle to change the system of State and government in Italy. This story is told by Bossi to remind LN supporters and activists of the difficult battle that lies ahead[17].

For the LN, the culture and identity of Varese is much closer to that of Northern Europe, which is a key element in its discourse as it tries to differentiate Varese from the South of Italy. By doing this the LN aims to reduce the legitimacy and importance of Rome and the central Italian State, as well as justifying the LN's federal reforms and also promote a feeling of closer links to Europe. This is an important issue that followers of the LN endorse as extracts from a group discussion with several LN supporters highlight:

> [Matteo added] a federal Europe is the only way forward because the nation-state is now obsolete; it is too big for the little things and too small for the large things so federalism is the only way to bring democracy and control closer to the citizens of Europe. The regions of Europe would be linked within

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[17] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Simone Isella, LN party activist in Varese, 21/2/96.

a federal structure and they would make decisions at the local and regional level whereas the EU would control the big things such as defence and foreign affairs. Basically, the unitary state is ineffective against the forces of global trade and too bureaucratic for accurate decision-making. For example, in Italy it is wrong that the same decisions are taken by Rome for both Milan and Basilicata because Lombardy has more in common with parts of Germany and Switzerland than the South of Italy!

[Marco interrupted] In Varese, there is a very strong 'central European' feeling; if you stopped anybody in the street and asked them whether they would prefer to join with Ticino or stay with Palermo, every time the reply would be to join with Ticino. The people of Varese see that in Switzerland the federal structure works because the Swiss people are relatively more wealthy than the people in Italy. The people feel more European here in Varese because they have more in common with the countries of Northern Europe in terms of way of life, economy, history and culture than the people in the South of Italy.

[Matteo said] I feel strongly about Europe and want to see a united Europe because I feel more 'European' than 'Italian' but of course, for football I support the Italian national team. First and foremost I am 'Lombard' but because Switzerland is so close to Varese I feel closer to the rest of Europe than Palermo, which is very far away so it is difficult to identify with the people there. Also, Italy has very different regional and local histories, which are still important today. Thus, Italy is too big and too diverse to feel 'Italian'; Lombardy is smaller and so the culture is felt stronger. For example, abroad, the common image of Italy is of 'pizza', 'spaghetti' and 'Mafia'.

[Laura interrupted] This is not the reality in the North of Italy and it only signifies the fact that 'Italian' culture is really seen as the culture of the South of Italy and that Northern Italian culture has been 'Southernised' and eroded.

[Marco continued] The people in Varese are closer to Swiss or Germans than Southern Italians, not only in terms of history but in terms of family structure, culture, mentality and work ethic. In the South of Italy the people have Latin origins whereas in the North the people have Celtic and 'central European' origins and so we are different. However, the problem is that in the North we are ready to enter Europe but in the South they are not, but why should we wait? This is a very important issue and one that could cause Italy to break apart; if the North cannot enter and gain all the benefits of the EU then the LN will continue towards secession and splitting the country apart[18].

The political project of the LN in Varese, as well as nationally, is made up of a mix of interrelated discourses. There are, however, certain key themes which are prevalent and have been more important than others in the development of party's support in the province. In particular, the resentment towards the central Italian State is very marked

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[18] Author's fieldnotes extract from group interview with three members of the *Gruppo Giovani* of the LN in Varese, 1/4/96.

in Varese, partly because of the relatively poor public services in the province. In addition, anti-Southern sentiments are widely felt in Varese, partly as a backlash to the high levels of Southern immigration to the province. It is these issues, which are relatively important in Varese, which became the basis for the political project of the party. The strength of such sentiments in Varese has heavily influenced the growth of the party not only in the province, but also in other areas of Northern Italy. The result of the LN's widespread electoral support has meant that it has gained local political power in Varese, which is a considerable achievement for the party but it has also created a number of challenges and problems, as the next section discusses.

## 4. The institutional impacts of the LN in Varese

This section aims to explore the impacts that the politics of the LN have had upon the economy and socio-political institutions of the province of Varese. The LN has been in power at the commune and provincial levels in Varese for less than five years, however, it has been able to make some changes to the political-economic geography of the province. On the other hand, it has been a difficult transition for the party and its political representatives whom have had little or no previous experience of government at the local level.

## 4.1 The LN and the commune of Varese

The LN *sindaco* (major) came to power in the commune of Varese in 1992, which was a landmark victory for the LN as it was the first time that the party had won control of a commune. The key question was how the party would translate its anti-system rhetoric, which had won the election into a coherent set of policies. The 1992 election was also significant because at the time the LN was doing well in the opinion polls thanks to the corruption scandals which had rocked the traditional Italian political parties and the whole system of government in Italy. Before this Varese was a stronghold of support for the DC party but, as at the national level, the DC in Varese more or less disintegrated. The chief beneficiary was the LN which gained over 37 per cent of the vote and 17 councillors. Significantly, this was the first time that the DC did not have political control of the commune. Secondly, this election was also significant because it was the last time that the Commune council of Varese was elected under the old Proportional Representation system. In 1993, due to the

corruption scandals and the crisis of Italian politics, this system was changed to a Double-turn voting system. The aim of the reforms was to allow the citizens of a commune to be able to vote directly for the mayor of their choice, which it was hoped would improve local democracy and the political accountability of the mayor.

Under the old electoral system the citizens of a commune voted, every five years, under a Proportional system, to elect the Commune Council. In Varese this meant voting for 40 members, which were elected from the various political parties. The Commune Council then elected the *Giunta Comunale* (Board of the Commune Council) which was responsible for applying the proposals made by the Council into policy. In Varese, the *Giunta* is made up of eight *assessori* (Councillors responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of policy). It was the Commune Council which also elected the most suitable person for mayor from the candidates standing in the election. On the other hand, under the new electoral system this has changed and it is the mayor who has the majority of decision-making powers. The citizens elect the mayor of their choice and then it is the mayor which then selects the *Giunta* of his/her own choice. The Commune Council is made up from 60 per cent of the elected members from the mayor's own party and the rest of the seats are proportionally divided according to the votes which the candidates from the other political parties gain. This is quite a radical change because it gives the mayor much more power but also direct accountability to the citizens of the commune.

In Varese, it would seem that the new system has been positive for the LN because the party was in power when the changes were made, and so it has been able to take advantage of some aspects of the new electoral system without actually having had to be elected under it. For example, the mayor has been able to choose his own *Giunta* and so implement more legislation, which has made it harder for the opposition parties to influence decisions. However, in spite of the fact that the LN mayor of Varese has benefited from greater powers, it is evident that the party has not been able to make many wide ranging changes within the commune. According to a LN councillor, there are several reasons for this:

It is very difficult indeed to change anything at the commune level for two or three reasons. The first is that basically because of the structure of central government laws there is little local autonomy. The *Prefetura* [Prefect], which is the central government representative in the commune ensures that all central government legislation is adhered to at the local level. The problem is that this is another layer of bureaucracy which slows down the decision-making process and thus the speed of change. For example, any decision taken by the *Consiglio Comunale* [Commune Council] has to be approved by, and given the consent of the *Segretario Comunale*, [Commune Secretary] who is the representative of the central government on the Commune Council. Any legislation can be blocked by the Commune Secretary.

Another problem is the fact that it is very hard to enforce public sector redundancies, which creates several problems. Firstly, it makes it very difficult to cut costs by reducing the levels of public sector workers; this is especially important because central government has progressively cut funding levels to communes to try to stem the growing public deficit. Therefore, in order to raise funds the communes must raise the taxes for its citizens at the local level; raising taxes is bad for the local community, which in turn reflects badly on the LN, which as the ruling party is seen to be a party of tax increases. We have found it difficult to raise enough revenue to maintain certain public services and to reduce costs we have cut back on the purchase of new materials, such as the number of new school books but this does not make a great difference when inflation is taken into account.

A further problem for the LN is that it only has 17 out of the 40 seats on the Commune Council, which means that it does not have a large enough majority to allow legislation to be passed without support from other parties. Although we are the largest party, we are quite restricted because we still need to gain the support of other parties[19].

The LN mayor of Varese expressed similar sentiments about the problems which the party faces:

At the local level in Italy, it is very difficult to make any real changes because of the centralised nature of the Italian State. There are too many laws that make it very difficult to make real changes and so autonomy is heavily restricted. However, the LN takes these laws to their maximum flexibility so as to maximise the possibility for change at the local level[20].

The LN has made certain changes within the commune of Varese since it gained power in 1992. The LN has controversially sold off the commune's research institute, in an attempt to reduce costs and public spending. In addition, the party is

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[19] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 20/3/96.
[20] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Raimondo Fassa, LN mayor of the commune of Varese and LN Member of the European Parliament (MEP), 8/3/96.

undertaking a project of privatisation of public services, such as refuse collection, gas, and water. There are several main reasons for this as a LN councillor explained:

> The main reason for the privatisation is to introduce greater 'economic democracy' for the citizens of Varese, so that they can have a greater interest in how local services are provided. Secondly, by selling shares it is hoped that the companies can be transformed into profit making concerns and so reduce costs. However, we have encountered some problems with the privatisation plans. The main problem is that Italy has very large state ownership and in fact the private and public spheres are virtually interchangeable. For example, the Italian state sold Alfa Romeo, which was publicly owned, directly to FIAT for a nominal figure so it became part of a massive private company that has very close links to the Italian state. Moreover, private firms rely heavily on the state for support. Secondly, privatisation in Italy is a new concept and it is difficult to change the opinions of citizens who are accustomed to the corruption of the old system. Furthermore, it will take some time to transform loss-making concerns into attractive opportunities for potential buyers. Thirdly, it would mean making job losses which are unpopular and difficult to make because of Italian employment law and the power of the trade unions[21].

Another important area of policy change which the LN has instigated has been an attempt to reduce public sector corruption amongst local politicians and business people. This was deemed necessary because Varese was one of the cities which was heavily involved in the *tangentopoli* scandals of recent years. The main change implemented by the LN has been the abolishing of the powers of the mayor to select the heads of the commune's public service companies. According to the LN, the opportunity for corruption was rife because the mayor could choose people who could potentially benefit from the position which in turn could benefit the mayor. The LN's aim is to create a new visible layer of public servants who are efficient and responsible to the needs of the citizens.

In the area of town planning, the LN has attempted to make some changes and again the main impetus behind this is to reduce corruption, which was previously rife in this area, especially in large commune construction projects. As a LN commune councillor explained:

> The laws on where to build things in the city were very flexible and easy to avoid. Basically, permission had to be obtained from the commune for a

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[21] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 20/3/96.

building project but this was open to corruption and bribery. In order to try and stop this the LN has created certain regulations to ensure that town planning laws are followed. This has cut corruption but over time it is also hoped that environmental degradation will be reduced. By ensuring that development is planned in the city, problems such as traffic congestion should be reduced. Over the last thirty years, poor planning has effectively spoiled the city of Varese because there was a lack of order and organisation and it was aesthetically displeasing[22].

The third main policy of the LN is to implement improvements to the transport system in the commune of Varese. This policy involves an increase in the amount of public transport provision in the city with the aim of reducing the number of motor vehicles and also to reduce the level of pollution and congestion in the city. As a LN commune councillor pointed out:

> One of our proposals is to reintroduce a system of trams into the city because Varese had trams in the first half of this century. This will be funded with a grant from the Lombardy regional government. Another plan is to reopen the cable car up to 'Sacro Monte' [a local beauty spot] and so reduce access to motor vehicles and to improve access for tourism development. Indeed, tourism is another of our policy areas; we want to attract increased numbers of visitors to the city with the main focus being to develop business and conference tourism. Malpensa airport, which is Milan's second airport is in the province of Varese but it has poor access to the city. The province of Varese is developing the airport and by the year 2000 it will be the biggest airport in the North of Italy. Our aim is to promote Varese as a prime location for conference and business trade by stressing its closeness to Malpensa. Furthermore, the LN is concerned with improving the environment of the commune of Varese in order to attract more tourists to its natural sites of beauty. It is investing in the clean up of the Lake of Varese and the River Olona, which is the most polluted in Italy[23].

The LN has certainly been involved in a number of projects, which have brought about changes in the commune of Varese, however, as the LN major pointed out the party has also encountered several problems:

> I am very proud of the progress that the LN has made in Varese and it gives me great pleasure to walk around the town and see the positive impacts that the LN has had. Varese is one of the best examples of a LN commune which is run efficiently, however, in other LN controlled communes the situation has

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[22] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 20/3/96.

[23] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 20/3/96.

been somewhat different and the results less impressive. In particular, we have implemented new and better town planning legislation; a new commercial plan has been approved for the town; the urban transport network has been privatised and improved and lastly Varese will have the biggest pedestrianised area in the whole of Italy at the tourist attraction of 'Sacro Monte'. These changes have taken place in only three years, which shows just how much the LN has done in Varese. There are problems for the party mainly because the LN *consigliere* [councillors] do not always support the mayor in all actions. This is also a problem in other areas of Lombardy. In general, the problem for the LN is that it is easy for the LN to win elections but not to continue to support the mayor and so provide 'good government' for local citizens. Often LN politicians lack experience and don't know how to act in local government and sometimes they are short sighted and only support LN policies that only effect their own locality and are very parochial which can hinder 'good government'. For example, in Varese the *Giunta* is made up of specialists in particular areas and they are not all supporters of the LN; the LN councillors do not always like this and so are sometimes against the *Giunta's* proposals. However, it is more important to be a representative of the citizens and not just the LN because that is the best solution for the whole town and not just the party itself [24].

The LN has clearly had an impact upon the political-economic geography of Varese with its attempts to reduce the level of corruption; to introduce various privatisation schemes aimed at reducing costs and wastage; to improve the urban transport network and to clean-up the environment of Varese in order to benefit tourism and to generally improve the quality of life within the city. Bearing in mind the success of some of these policies it is also important to understand the constraints and problems that the LN has within local government. A key issue is the apparent lack of experience that the majority of LN politicians have within local government; the relatively young age of the party means that some of its representatives have had little or no previous political experience at the local level. The general opinion within Varese is that the LN and Fassa, the mayor of Varese, have done a good job but that the lack of experience of its councillors has limited the success of the party. As a journalist in the province of Varese argued:

> The growth of the LN in Varese has been extremely fast and in some ways it
> has been too fast because the party has little experience in government. At the
> local level, in general one can say that the LN has done the small things well,
> such as street lighting and other smaller aspects. However, often the expertise

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[24] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Raimondo Fassa, LN mayor of the commune of Varese and LN Member of the European Parliament (MEP), 10/5/96.

and experience of the LN officials in running local government is limited. In the case of Fassa, he has done a very good job, the main reason being that he does not have a very big majority, only 17 out of the 40 Council members are from the LN. Thus, he has to work under pressure and against the other parties, which ironically has ensured that he has done a good job. The same cannot be said for most of the other communes controlled by the LN across the North of Italy mainly because of the lack of expertise of the LN politicians[25].

The LN's control of the commune of Varese has received criticism for various reasons, from different groups. In particular, the other political parties have been critical of its policies as a councillor of the *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) party for Varese argues:

> The LN has done little to change the local socio-economic situation for the better and it has not implemented any changes one could call federalist. It may have been the case that the old class of politicians in Varese were thieves and corrupt but at least they got things done; the new class of LN politicians do not steal, at least for the moment, but they certainly don't know how to govern! This is because they have no real experience of political office and how local government works. This can only be acquired over a long period of time[26].

This highlights some of the problems with which the LN as a relatively new party in local government has to contend. Internal problems would seem to be the most significant mainly because of the lack of experience of the LN Councillors and their short-sightedness in only considering the gains for the party rather than the commune as a whole. The key problem for the LN is that it seems easier for the party to be an opposition party, by strongly criticising existing powers and policies, rather than being in power itself. Moreover, the political discourses of the LN do not lend themselves easily to 'good government' at the local level. Thus, in local elections the LN seems to do worse perhaps because the people are more reluctant to vote for a party, which has few constructive local policies. Yet, in national elections the LN tends to do better because the opposite tends to be true; more people vote for the LN because they have the opinion that it will less directly affect their lives. Therefore, in relation to the LN, it seems that in local elections people vote *for* something, which often is not the

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[25] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Gianfranco Giuliani, political correspondent on the *PreAlpina* - the main local newspaper in the province of Varese, 26/4/96.

[26] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Luigi Frediconi, member of the Commune Council for Varese representing the *Alleanza Nazionale* political party, 3/5/96.

LN because of its perceived lack of local policies and government experience. Whereas in national elections the people tend to vote *against* something and so the LN benefits because of its anti-system stance. In Varese, the party has managed to carry out certain positive things but this is the exception rather than the rule.

## 4.2 The LN and the province of Varese

At the provincial level in Varese the LN has been in power since the end of 1993 when the LN candidate, Massimo Ferrario was elected. Again this was a significant result for the LN not only because of the margin of victory but also because Varese became the first province in Italy to be controlled by the LN. The provincial government has a greater number of powers and responsibilities and obviously covers a greater population, however, it has no tax levying powers whereas certain taxes are levied at the commune level. Therefore, in some ways the province has less autonomy from the central government than the commune does. In spite of this the LN has instigated two main changes and policies that are of crucial importance, not only for the LN, but to the whole of the province.

Firstly, the LN has passed a motion for a referendum on whether Varese should become an autonomous province, similar to the other Italian 'Special Status' regions. The obvious aim of the LN is to gain greater autonomy for the province from the central Italian government. According to the Italian Constitution, the only provinces that can have 'Special Status' are those that are geographically situated in Italy's border regions (as well as the islands of Sicily and Sardinia). Clearly, this is a very ambitious proposal because even though Varese does border Switzerland and in theory might have the right to a referendum on the issue, it is difficult to see the central government granting it 'Special Status'. If Varese were to gain 'Special Status' then other provinces in Lombardy, such as Como, Sondrio and Bergamo, which have similar geographical locations, would probably want to do the same. This would be a very problematic scenario for the Italian State, as a LN commune councillor for Varese explained:

> The Province Council of Varese has voted overwhelmingly to have a referendum on whether the province is to become an autonomous province like Trentino or Valle d'Aosta. This is a very clever political move on the part of the LN President, Massimo Ferrario who is a very astute man. The problem has arisen because the province of Varese does not have enough money to spend to match all of its outgoings and therefore provide adequate public services. Moreover, at the provincial level there is no way to raise taxes in order to raise funds unlike the commune level. Central government has continued to cut its funding to the provinces and so the President has said that the only way to raise enough funding is to have greater autonomy from Rome. This is a very clever strategy for two reasons; firstly, if Rome was to allow the referendum to take place then the people would of course vote overwhelmingly for greater autonomy and less taxes. However, this would be significant because eventually the whole of Lombardy would want to have autonomy and eventually the whole of the Italian State would disintegrate. Secondly, it is highly unlikely that the Italian government would ever let a referendum to take place and would do anything to obstruct it. In this case the LN would gain because the people of Varese would resent the central government even more. Ultimately, it is only the LN which can really gain from this move[27].

The political strategy of the LN is a complex one, however, it is apparent that its main aim is to further undermine the legitimacy of the central Italian State. The attempt to make Varese an autonomous province is very bold and is an example of how the LN is trying to formalise its demands for greater autonomy within an institutional framework. Rather than being realistically achievable it is a provocative attempt and strategic move from which the LN hopes to gain at least greater public support, and at best some concessions from central government. The extent to which either of these will be realised remains to be seen, however, the LN has cleverly used its political position to further influence its own political demands at both a provincial and national level. As the LN President of the Province proclaimed:

> Of course the citizens of Varese would vote for the autonomy of the province because it would mean paying less taxes to Rome, which is of course attractive. However, it would be very difficult to achieve such autonomy because Rome would never allow it; yet nobody up until now has ever tried it and geographically Varese is similar to the other autonomous provinces because it is a border province[28].

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[27] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Fabio Binelli, LN local councillor in the commune of Varese, 27/3/96.

[28] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Massimo Ferrario, LN President of the Province of Varese, 13/5/96.

The second major policy with which the LN has been involved, at the provincial level, is the *Regio Insubrica*[29] (RI) project. The RI was created on the 19th January 1995 and its aim is to promote greater trans-frontier co-operation in the spheres of economy, transport, communications, environment and culture between Canton Ticino (Switzerland), the provinces of Varese and Como (in Lombardy), and Verbania (in Piemonte) (see Figure 14).

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[29] The name *Regio Insubrica* has a historical and cultural significance; *Insubria* was the name given to the pre-alpine region between what now is Switzerland and Italy, by the Celtic peoples that occupied the territory between the fourth and fifth centuries. The main settlement and capital of the region was called *Mediolanum*, which later became known as *Milano* (Milan).

Figure 14 : Map to show the area of the Regio Insubrica project

(Source : Giordano 1996, Comunità di lavoro Regio Insubrica 1996)
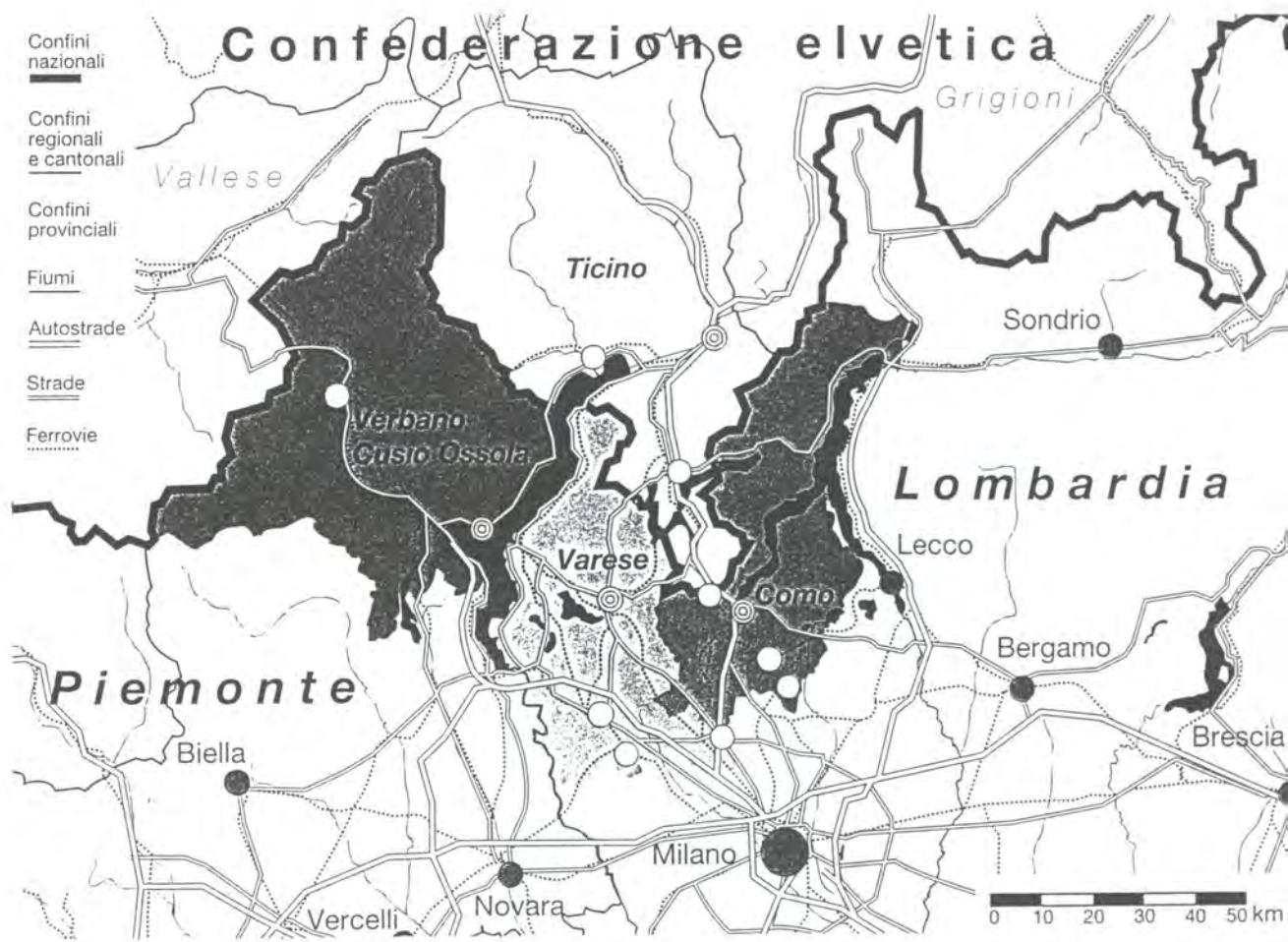
The main impetus for the RI was the EU's Treaty of Madrid in 1980, which paved the way for formalising trans-frontier co-operation throughout Europe. The RI is one such example of co-operation within Europe, however, it is quite unique because it involves a country (Switzerland) which is not a member of the EU. The LN has played a key role in creating the RI and its President is Massimo Ferrario, the LN President of the Province of Varese. Although still in its infancy the RI is a very interesting project that is worthy of further research. As the LN President of the Province of Varese explained:

> The RI is the most important project which has been created in the province for decades. It is a real example of a 'Europe of the Regions' style initiative with the main focus being on subsidiarity and creating closer co-operation between the separate areas. One main area of concern of the RI is the control of pollution in lakes Maggiore, Como, Lugano and Ceresio, which all form part of the Insubrica region. More generally the aim is to protect and the improve the environment of the area. This is important because the costs of sharing the maintenance of the lakes are great and so it is better that we have a system of co-operation which shares costs and so increases efficiency.
> Secondly, alongside this there are initiatives which aim to promote and co-ordinate tourism in the region. Previously each area had its own plans for tourism and did not know about the other events going on in the other parts of the region. Thanks to the RI tourism has become much more integrated, which has meant that the whole region will benefit. Thirdly, another aspect of the RI involves the recognition of qualifications and social rights between the Italian provinces and Ticino. This is to facilitate a greater trans-frontier exchange of labour, especially allowing young people to gain work in other parts of the region. The aim is to link this to the promotion of trade between the regions[30].

The RI has had to overcome a variety of problems, which to an extent has constrained its continued development. As the LN president of the province pointed out:

> It has been very difficult to promote and develop the RI mainly because the central Italian government is very wary of the project and is anxious of the fact that the RI has gained importance in such a short time. Central government representatives have been invited to attend the meetings of the RI but they have constantly declined the offers. Rome does not like the project and really wants to abolish it or do what it can to undermine it. However, with little resources and no backing the project has gained some success. The problem is that the members of the RI cannot, as yet, go far enough to create even closer links. This is mainly because of the lack of support from Rome and because the provinces have very little power, autonomy or funds of their own to forge

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[30] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Massimo Ferrario, LN President of the Province of Varese, 13/5/96.

ever closer links. I would like very much to see the project developing even further with a much wider scope in which to operate[31].

The LN has been heavily involved in the development of the RI project and it forms an important part of the political strategy of the party. It is in the interests of the LN to expand the importance and powers of the RI because it is a way in which the province may gain greater autonomy from Rome. Therefore, for the LN, the RI is more than just about creating greater links between Varese and the Insubria region; it is about superimposing a new, modern structure of government and representation for the citizens of Varese. Furthermore, the RI is a good way for the LN to stress the importance of closer regional links and co-operation and also further undermine the legitimacy of the central Italian state. In addition, the RI receives funding from the EU via the INTERREG initiative, which was set up in 1990 to support projects between cross-border regions within the EU in areas such as infrastructure, environmental protection and co-operation between firms and public utilities (Weyand 1997). The strategy of the LN is to exploit this as an example of how good its links are with Brussels in order to promote its own political ambitions at the provincial and national levels.

At the provincial level, the LN has been relatively successfully, especially with its work with the RI project. The party's proposals for a referendum on Varese's autonomy will obviously be a difficult thing to achieve, however, it is more of a deliberate political move on the part of the LN to raise the issue with the central Italian government. The LN's electoral and institutional development within the province of Varese has been relatively rapid and also significant because it has gained political control not only of the province but also of a number of communes within Varese. Therefore, the party's impacts on politics as well as the economy and society of the province have been wide-ranging. However, the key question is why has this expansion occurred within Varese when in other provinces of the North of Italy the party's growth has been less marked. This is linked to the socio-economic, political and cultural specificities of the province, which have provided a very fertile political ground for the LN, for a number of different reasons, which are dealt with in the following section.

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[31] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Massimo Ferrario, LN President of the Province of Varese, 13/5/96.

## 5.  The changing political-economy of Varese

The post-war development of Varese's economy was accompanied by the rise in political importance of the DC political party, which was the main party in the province up until 1992.  The DC became deeply embedded into the socio-economic and cultural spheres of the province, promoting the importance of family values and the Church as well as the virtues of the culture of enterprise and work ethic in Varese. Therefore, the province had a strong, 'white' political sub-culture, and the DC was the most important force not only politically but also economically as well as socially. This was because of the party's vast networks of linked organisations, such as Church groups and socio-economic institutions, and its extensive patronage and clientelistic links.  The decline of the DC party has therefore had a significant impact upon the province of Varese.  The whole political, economic and social infrastructure, which the DC had created and maintained largely for its own political gains but also to maintain the socio-economic success of the province has been affected.  At the same time, Varese's economy has been undergoing significant socio-economic problems, which meant that its previously high growth rates were being reduced considerably (see Section Two).  The political implications of the combination of these problems were quite significant.

> Traditionally, Varese was a strong Christian Democrat area but after the scandals of 'tangentopoli' this has changed; before the people were not really interested in politics as long they were left to get on with their work, the economy was doing well and they were making money.  However, the LN has captured the feeling of discontent against the political situation and the corruption, bureaucracy and high tax burden that the citizens face.  This resentment is especially strong within the business community, which was previously relatively uninterested in politics[32].

The decline of the DC in Varese created a political hiatus and meant that former DC supporters had to find an alternative political party for which to vote.  The other main parties were also involved in the corruption scandals and so this meant that the LN, as a relatively new political force in Varese, was able to capture a large proportion of the protest vote in the province.  Also, the LN positioned itself as the only political party which aimed to protect the interests and the dynamism of the economy of the province

of Varese. The rhetoric of the LN particularly appealed to the small firm sector of Varese, which was facing considerable problems and resented the high levels of taxation imposed upon it by the central Italian government. The LN's promises of increased regional autonomy, less state bureaucracy and reduced taxes were very attractive, as a representative of the Association of Small firms of the province of Varese explained:

> It is from the small firm sector that the LN has gained most support mainly because it has gained the protest vote from the entrepreneurs who do not like the fact that they are constantly faced with high taxes, poor services and State bureaucracy together with the burden of a massive public sector deficit. Furthermore, the LN appeals to the small firm sector because the party claims that it is the only political party which wants to protect its interests, while the other parties only want to protect the interests of big business. Thus, a number of owners of small firms support the LN for this reason and because they feel that the LN is the only party which offers them a way to preserve the wealth and economic dynamism of Varese[33].

The structure of the economy of Varese, with its relatively high concentration of dynamic small and medium sized firms is associated with, and reflects a dominant set of cultural values in the province. In particular, one of the reasons for the successes of the small firm sector in Varese is that the entrepreneurs have a strong work ethic[34]. The desire for greater autonomy from the central Italian State as well as for less bureaucracy is a common feeling amongst the business community in Varese, as a journalist within the province argued:

> Firstly, the structure of the economy in Varese is an important factor for the LN because of the relatively high number of small firms. This means that there are a lot of entrepreneurs who want efficiency from central government, less taxes and better services. Furthermore, amongst these entrepreneurs there is a strong culture of individualism and egotism; these people are generally relatively wealthy and demand the same level of independence and autonomy in their civil lives as they have in their working lives. The rhetoric of the LN appeals to these people because allegedly it offers them what they are looking for. Thus, the specific local cultural and economic context of Varese is an important factor to bear in mind in understanding the LN[35].

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[32] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Alberto Bramanti, researcher at the Bocconi University of Milan and resident of Varese, 10/5/96.

[33] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Lelio DeMicelis, Vice President of the Association of Small firms (API), Varese, 17/4/96.

[34] Information taken from author's fieldnotes extract with Dr Ronchi, small firm owner in Varese, 24/4/96.

[35] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Gianfranco Giuliani, political correspondent on the *PreAlpina* - the newspaper of the province of Varese, 26/4/96.

The animosity towards the central Italian State is particularly strong in Varese. This is partly because there is a general perception that the level of public services in the province is not commensurate with the high levels of taxation. Therefore, the LN proposals for federalism and greater autonomy from Rome are widely welcomed in the province of Varese, as a small firm owner explained:

> The Italian State has a lot of problems and these have caused a massive obstruction and burden to the dynamism of the Italian economy. The North of Italy is particularly hardest hit and especially its small firm sector, which is penalised by the burden of high taxation and inefficiency of the Italian State bureaucracy. This is especially the case for the small firms in Varese and this is why federalism is a necessary reform for Italy and especially the North. It is also why the LN has gained so much support in Varese because its political rhetoric appeals to the businesses which are the hardest hit by the problems of the Italian state and economy. There is a need for better public services in Varese because the local infrastructure is very poor, for example, the road links to Milan are very poor. The citizens and businesses of Varese pay high taxes but we have no control over how our money is spent in the province. We want more control over our money and the ability to decide how this money can best be spent[36].

In Varese, federalism is widely recognised as a necessary political reform for the Italian state. This is because most people in Varese feel that the province is economically central to the Italian State but politically peripheral and so it has little control over the way state resources are distributed. The LN has gained so much support in the province because of the formulation of its federalist discourse, which it claims would solve the problems of the economy of Varese by giving it greater autonomy and responsibility for its own resources. However, since the LN has gone even further and embraced outright secession, this has received criticism from a variety of different groups within the province. For example, the Vice President of the Association of Artisans (CNA) of the province of Varese argues:

> Federalism is the way forward for Italy because it would allow greater autonomy at the regional and local level. The small firms in Varese agree with this because it would mean taxes being used to improve local services and would reduce the level of State bureaucracy. Federalism is also the way forward for the South of Italy because it will give more responsibility to local government there also. This is very important because in the South the people expect something from the State, which has created a welfare culture and subdued the entrepreneurial spirit that exists in the North. However, the LN is

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[36] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Ronchi, small firm owner in Varese, 24/4/96.

wrong to endorse the secession of Padania from Italy because what would Italy be if it was without Florence, Rome or Naples? It is crazy to talk of dividing Italy, especially when one considers what is happening in the former Yugoslavia[37].

Varese's geographical location and specific cultural identity is also bound up with the desire for greater autonomy in the province. Varese's close links to Canton Ticino, where there is a significant degree of autonomy and a system of federalism, has favoured the growth of the LN in the province. In part, this is because the citizens of Varese are able to witness the benefits which autonomy and federalism have produced for Ticino, such as excellent public services and a high standard of living, which is somewhat greater than that enjoyed by the citizens of Varese. This contrives to fuel the resentment towards the central Italian State because Varese has much less autonomy than Ticino, but it is culturally very similar. As an academic in the province of Varese explained:

> Varese's proximity to Switzerland is an important factor in its demand for greater autonomy from Rome. This is because the citizens of Varese see how wealthy the Swiss are and how efficient their society seems to be. The people of Varese demand similar levels of public services and wages to Ticino and if there was a referendum tomorrow then the people of Varese would vote to join Ticino rather to stay with the rest of Italy. Also, in the North of Italy there is a strong history of local municipalities and independent communes. Both of these factors have influenced the growth of the LN in Varese because the party aims to reintroduce this level of independence and reduce the inefficiency and bureaucracy that Rome and the central state has created[38].

The socio-economic, geographical and cultural specificities of the province of Varese have all provided fertile ground for the growth of the LN. However, another fundamental reason why Varese has witnessed a considerable growth in support for the LN is the symbolical link between the party and the province. The fact that Varese is the *terra di Bossi* (territory of Bossi) as well as other key party figures such as Maroni, and it is also the birth-place of the party, has fuelled the growth of the LN. As a councillor of the AN party for Varese argues:

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[37] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with the Vice President of the Association of Artisans (CNA) of the province of Varese, 19/4/96.

[38] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Alberto Bramanti, researcher at the Bocconi University of Milan and resident of Varese, 10/5/96.

> The LN has grown significantly in Varese because the main figures of the party are from the province, such as Bossi, Leoni, Maroni and Speroni. Therefore, the people in Varese can identify and relate to them better. The political issues which the LN raises are listened to by the people of Varese because it is Bossi who comes up with them[39].

The socio-economic strength of the province of Varese and the relatively high standard of living enjoyed by the majority of citizens has provided an opportunity for the LN to expand in the province. This is because the party has been able to capture the protest vote and resentment of the people of Varese, who in recent years have become increasingly concerned at the slowing of socio-economic growth in the province. This, combined with the decline of the DC party and the political problems of the Italian state, has meant that the LN has become the main political alternative for a significant number of the citizens of Varese. One of the main reasons for this was the LN's discourse of federalism, which was widely seen as a viable solution because it aimed to increase the autonomy of the province and reduce the level of state bureaucracy. It remains to be seen whether the LN's discourse of secession will be able to gain as much support, especially amongst the business community and socio-economic institutions of Varese. These groups are critical of the LN's rhetoric of secession because the South of Italy provides an important market for many of the firms of Varese and so dividing the country would be far from beneficial. It seems that the LN in Varese may distance itself from the mainstream institutions of economy and civil society in the province because of its secession discourse.

## 6. Conclusion

Varese is one of the strongest areas of support for the LN and there are a variety of reasons for this, including the changing nature of the economy of the province; the decline of existing political and social subcultures built around DC hegemony; and the protest against the Italian central State and the traditional Italian political parties as well as the Italian South. The symbolic and political origins of the LN in Varese are important for the party and there is still a close link between the province and the party because of Bossi. Also, the growth of the LN in Varese has had a significant influence on the party across the North of Italy. This is because in Varese the LN

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[39] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Luigi Frediconi, member of the Commune Council for Varese representing the *Alleanza Nazionale* political party, 3/5/96.

gained its first political success by representing some of the resentments of the citizens of the province. The success of the party in Varese ensured that people elsewhere in the North of Italy became interested in the party and its politics. In a relatively short space of time, the issues which had contributed to the growth of the LN in Varese, were incorporated into the political discourses of the LN and became wider political issues in other Northern Italian provinces.

The specific geographical context of the province of Varese has provided a very fertile socio-political context for the LN. The party has benefited from a certain 'mix' of factors, issues and problems, which produced a set of social and political responses, which the LN has been able to build upon but also reproduce for its own political aims. However, in other areas of Northern Italy this 'mix' of factors has not produced the same responses, for a number of reasons. The importance of geography is paramount in order to understand the success of the LN. This is especially true with the LN in the province of Trentino where the party has not been able to gain the levels of support as it has in Varese. The next chapter discusses the reasons for this in more detail.

# Chapter Six : Trentino - the Lega Nord in an autonomous province

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the case study area of the province of Trentino in the northeast of Italy. Trentino, along with the province of Bolzano, forms the 'Special Status' region of Trentino Alto-Adige (Trentino AA). The region is distinct from the majority of other Italian regions for a number of reasons; firstly, it is one of only five regions in Italy to have this 'Special Status', which gives it a significant degree of autonomy from the central Italian government as well as a different set of institutional, political and socio-economic structures. Secondly, the region has a complex mix of different ethnic and linguistic groups, of which the three main ones are Italian, German and Ladin[1] speakers. In 1991, the population of the region was 890 568, with the province of Trentino having a population of 460 000 and Bolzano 430 568 (Provincia Autonoma di Trento 1996a, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano 1995). Trentino's population is mostly Italian, although 8 000 people are of Ladin origin and 2 000 speak an ancient German language. On the other hand, in the province of Bolzano, 68 per cent of the population are German speakers, 28 per cent are Italian speakers and 4 per cent are Ladin speakers. These ethnic compositions are of fundamental importance to the cultural, socio-economic, institutional and political structures within the region. Thirdly, the region itself is one of the most wealthy in the whole of Italy. It has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Italy, just over four per cent (the national average being over 12 per cent). Furthermore, the annual income per person in Trentino is approximately 30 Million Lire, which compares favourably to the national average of 24 Million Lire and that for the North of Italy which is 29 Million Lire (Associazione degli Industriali della Provincia di Trento 1995).

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[1] The Ladins are the oldest and the smallest linguistic group in Trentino AA. They were resident in Italy at the time of the Roman conquest of Raetia, but were then increasingly pushed back by the invading German tribes, and germanised. Today Ladin language and culture is maintained in the Dolomite valleys of Grodntal (Val Gardena), Gadertal (Val Badia), Val di Fassa and Ampezzo. As the smallest language group, the Ladins are the most endangered linguistic minority (Autonome Provinz Bozen 1989).

In relation to the Lega Nord (LN), Trentino is geographically situated between the two main heartlands of support for the party (Lombardy and Veneto), although the situation for the party within the province is markedly different. This is due to a number of complex reasons, not least because the party is confronted with a contrasting set of institutional, political, socio-economic and cultural structures within Trentino. These pose certain problems and constraints but also opportunities for the party, in different ways, and this chapter discusses these in relation to the development and importance of the LN in Trentino. The first section of the Chapter provides a geographical outline of the province of Trentino, including the historical development of autonomy in the Trentino AA region, its contemporary structure as well as the socio-economic contours of the province's economy. The second section focuses on the LN in Trentino, examining the party's electoral and organisational geography, the political discourses of the party and the problems which the party faces in the province. The third section discusses the distinct nature of the political-economy of Trentino and how this has provided opportunities as well as constraints for the growth of the LN in the province.

## 2. Trentino - a geographical outline

Trentino is situated in the Tyrol region of the Alps. From the fourteenth century, the Tyrol region was part of the Habsburg empire and it remained part of Austria until this century. The crucial period in the history of the Tyrol came after the end of the First World War when the region was effectively divided into two parts; the north and east Tyrol (to the north of the Brenner pass) became part of Austria and the southern part, South Tyrol and Trentino became part of Italy. This division meant that the German speakers of the South Tyrol and the Italian speakers of Trentino became part of Italy.

In 1919, King Victor Emmanuel III promised to guarantee autonomy for the German speakers of South Tyrol, who effectively became Italian citizens. Shortly afterwards in the 1920s, during the fascist period in Italy, Mussolini started a period of 'Italianisation' of the region. The South Tyrol was given the Italian name of Alto-Adige, which persists today. The Italian authorities largely ignored the fact that the region contained German speakers and the Italian language was made obligatory, whilst use of the German language became prohibited. Public positions previously

occupied by German speakers were given to Italians and people were encouraged to relocate to the region from other parts of Italy. In 1939, Hitler and Mussolini concluded the 'Options Agreement', under which the German speakers of the Alto Adige either had to opt for Italy or for the German Reich. About 80 per cent opted to go to Germany, which meant that approximately 79 000 people left the region, of whom only a smaller number returned after the end of the Second World War (Gruber 1975).

After the end of the Second World War, the South Tyrol issue resurfaced because of the attempts by the Austrian government to regain the region. The Allies rejected this proposal and instead favoured negotiation between Austria and Italy for the creation of some form of self- government for the region. On September 5th 1946, the 'Paris Agreement' was signed by the Foreign Ministers of Italy and Austria, DeGasperi and Gruber. This effectively gave the people of South Tyrol rights and protection within international law. The Agreement assured complete equality of rights for German speakers with the Italian speakers. In particular, it laid the foundation for certain legislation in favour of the German speaking population, for example, it ensured the legal teaching of German in schools; the right to German family names; equality of rights for Germans within the public sector; and the use of both German and Italian language in all public information, documents and topographic naming (Peterlini 1994).

In 1948, the Italian government gave the province of Alto-Adige autonomous legislative and executive powers and these were also extended to the province of Trentino, which meant the creation of the region of Trentino AA. This newly created region had a population with an overwhelming Italian majority and the administrative centre of the region was located in the city of Trento. The main aim of the regional government was to implement legislation, which would recognise the autonomy of the German speakers of Bolzano in accordance with the international agreements. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, the people of Bolzano became increasingly angry at the apparent denial of their rights to autonomy by the Italian authorities. The result was that a campaign of terrorism and aggression ensued, instigated by members of the German speaking community in the South Tyrol; the aim was to gain recognition by

Rome of the continuing ethnic problems in the province. In 1957, the first terrorist bombings occurred and in 1959 the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (South Tyrolese Peoples Party or SVP) left the Regional government in a protest move against the Italian government. In September 1959 the South Tyrol question was raised for the first time at the United Nations by the Austrian Foreign Minister. The debates about the problems in the South Tyrol continued at the United Nations and in 1960 and 1961 two new resolutions were passed which urged Austria and Italy to find a solution to their differences over the implementation of the Paris Agreement (Autonome Provinz Bozen 1989).

By 1969 a new set of measures for the province were created, however, it was not until 1972 that the major breakthrough was made. A new autonomy statute was adopted and made Constitutional Law and came into effect on the 20th January 1972. The most significant aspect of this legislation was the establishment of the Region of Trentino AA and the two provinces of Trentino and Bolzano as separate entities. This meant a redefinition of the powers between the Region and the two Provinces, with the powers of the Provinces being increased. This means that Trentino and Bolzano are the only two autonomous provinces in the whole of Italy. The provisions for autonomy apply generally to both provinces but Bolzano has special provisions, which take into account the ethnic composition of its population. These provisions include legislation regarding schools, culture, ethnic proportions in employment and bilingualism. The implementation of the 1972 legislation has had far reaching impacts upon the institutional, political and socio-economic structures of the region and of the two autonomous provinces, as the next section examines.

## 2.1 The structure of autonomy in Trentino AA

The main difference between the region's autonomy and that of the other four 'Special Status' regions is the division into the two autonomous provinces of Trentino and Bolzano, which each have their own respective powers. The Region itself also has certain powers but it is the provinces which have the majority of power. The structure of governance in the region is particularly important; firstly, there is the Regional Council of Trentino AA, which consists of 70 elected deputies, 35 of which are elected in the province of Bolzano and the other 35 in Trento. The legislative period

of the Regional Council is five years and sittings of it take place in Trento in the first half of the term and in Bolzano during the second half. The President of the Regional Council must be a deputy of the Italian-speaking group in the first half, and of the German-speaking group in the second. The opposite applies for the Vice President of the Regional Council. The Regional government consists of the President of the Council and the Regional Assessors, which are chosen every five years by the Council from amongst its ranks. According to the Autonomy Statute of the Region, the Italian and German language groups must be represented in the Regional government. The duties of the Regional government are to implement regional laws, to administer those subject matters falling within regional competence, and to give directions to the subordinate regional bodies (Provincia Autonoma di Trento 1996b).

The Provincial Councils are the most important legislative bodies within the two respective provinces. Within the framework of the powers granted to them by the state, the Councils have the tasks of electing and supervising the Provincial government (the President and the Assessors), as well as discussing problems of public concern. Each Provincial Council consists of 35 elected deputies (which are the same as those representing the Regional Council), which are elected under a Proportional Representation system in the two respective provinces. In the case of the Bolzano Provincial Council, as with the Regional Council, there is an ethnic rotation of the President and the Vice President during the five year legislative period of the Council but this does not apply in Trentino. The Provincial government implements the laws passed by the Provincial Council and administers the Province. The Bolzano Provincial government consists of the President and Vice-presidents from the two respective language groups.

The legislative competencies of the Region and of the autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano are stipulated in Articles 4 to 19 of the Autonomy Statute; any competencies which are not listed fall automatically within the competency of the central government. Even where there is legislative competency, for either the Region or the Provincial Councils, the central government has ultimate power and can veto any legislation which it deems to be against the 'national interest'. The most important competencies of the Region are in the field of the organisation of various

bodies, including health bodies, Chambers of Commerce, fire services, the development and control of co-operatives and the organisation of public welfare bodies. There are various other roles of the Region including participating in the Italian Parliament in the election of the Italian President, however, by far the most important and wide-ranging competencies fall to the respective Provinces, which have responsibilities in three main areas. The first area is in education and culture; the Province is responsible for the protection and care of historical, artistic and ethnic artefacts as well as cultural institutions and events. In addition, it is responsible for the construction of schools and nurseries, as well as technical colleges involved in professional and vocational training. The second main area is in economy and administration, which is a very important sector in which the Province has quite wide ranging powers. The Province is responsible for, amongst others, the craft, mining, agriculture, transport, and tourism sectors; as well as various other areas such as the protection of the environment and the local police service. The third main area of competency is in the social field where the Province has power in social welfare issues, the provision of subsidised housing and control over employment agencies.

The Province has three different levels of power in terms of the nature of legislation it can pass, within each of its different areas of competency. These are primary, where the Province can create its own laws irrespective of whether the Italian State has similar laws or not; secondary, where the Province can modify existing state legislation; and complementary powers where the Province can implement unmodified state legislation. Furthermore, besides a legislative autonomy, there is also an administrative autonomy, for both the Region and the Province, which means that both bodies are responsible for the administration and implementation of the laws which they create. The other aspect of autonomy relates to taxation and finance. Both the Region and the Provinces have - apart from small amounts - practically no power or sovereignty to determine levels of taxation. The State is responsible for the setting, raising and collection of taxes in the region as it is for the whole of the country. However, the important difference between Trentino AA and the other regions of the country is that of the tax yields collected, the Italian State returns 90 per cent of them back to the region. In addition, the Provinces receive up to 80 per cent and the Region five per cent of the Value Added Tax on imports. The Regional and/or Provincial

Councils have complete power over how the funds returning from central government can be spent in the region. This system ensures that most of the funds generated through taxation in Trentino AA, actually remain in the region and can be used in the provision of public services. Moreover, the Italian central government also sends other funds to the region as well as the tax returns, which means the budgets of the respective Provinces are relatively large when compared to the majority of other Italian provinces. This has had a significant impact, in a variety of ways, upon the socio-economic situation in the region, as the next section discusses.

## 2.2 The Trentino economy

The economy of the province of Trentino has not always been as relatively prosperous as it is today. In fact, during the last century the province was marked by considerable poverty; at that time the economy was dominated by agriculture and the industrial sectors of iron and textiles. The agricultural sector was not very productive mainly because of the harsh mountainous conditions and relative inaccessibility of the province. Moreover, the situation for Trentino's industry was made difficult when the regions of Lombardy and Veneto became part of the Kingdom of Italy in the 1860s. This meant that Trentino became a border territory of the Austrian empire whereas previously it was a crucial part of the south-western zone of the empire. This situation deteriorated when Trentino became part of the newly unified Italian State, which meant the loss of markets within the Austrian empire. This was a most difficult period for the province and was accompanied by harsh economic and social conditions for the majority of its population. The only answer for a significant proportion of the population was emigration and between 1850 and 1900 approximately 185 000 emigrants left Trentino. The major destinations for the emigrants were North and South America, Africa and other countries in Europe (Camera di Commercio, Trento 1996).

In the years following the Second World War, the economy of the province began to improve more rapidly. This was mainly because Trentino AA gained its autonomy from the central government in Rome. The main stimulus for economic development was the financial resources which were made available to the region. In this post-war period the economy of the province of Trentino has undergone significant structural

change. Most notably, the size and importance of the agricultural sector has decreased significantly; in 1961, agriculture employed 32.1 per cent of the total workforce of the province, however, by 1995 this figure had dropped to four per cent (with just 9 000 people employed). On the other hand, the agricultural sector has undergone a significant process of specialisation during the last few decades, which has meant that it has maintained its relative economic importance in the province. The two main areas of production specialisation are fruit, especially in the growing of apples, and in wine production. The production of apples has increased by 27 per cent between 1969 and 1994 and Trentino is the second major apple producer in Italy. In addition, in 1993, seven million bottles of *spumante* were produced and the province is one of the leading wine producers in Italy (Camera di Commercio, Trento 1996).

The secondary sector of the economy underwent a period of growth between 1951 and 1971 and the number employed increased from 52 000 to 64 000. Between 1971 and 1995, however, the sector reduced in size to 53 000 people employed, which represented 32 per cent of the total workforce. The largest and most important secondary sector is that of manufacturing, which includes several different activities, such as mechanical engineering; foodstuffs production; paper, cardboard and plastic manufacture; textile and clothes manufacture; timber and furniture; and chemical and rubber industries. Moreover, the mining and extraction sector is a traditional Trentino industry which has been operating for over 100 years and is associated with the extraction of porphyry, as well as other minerals such as dolomite, fluorite and cement marl. The craft or *artigianato* sector is another important sector of the economy of Trentino and is especially important in the rural areas of the province. Between 1984 and 1995 the number of craft firms decreased from 12 561 to 11 491, but the number employed in the sector increased by nine per cent to 32 466 (Associazione degli Industriali della Provincia di Trento 1995).

Within the industrial sector of Trentino, one of the most significant characteristics is the prevalence of small firms. As many as three quarters of firms have between 11 and 50 employees, providing 37 per cent of the total employment within the sector. Firms with between 51 and 200 employees make up 21 per cent of the total number of firms and 41 per cent of total employment, whilst firms with over 200 employees are

by far the smallest sector with only 3 per cent of the number of firms and an overall employment of 22 per cent of the total. In addition, almost three quarters of firms are locally owned and over half of these have between 11 and 50 employees, whilst only 6 per cent of firms are under foreign or multinational control, amongst the most well known firms are Sony and Whirlpool, and these tend to be the largest firms. The turnover of the industrial firms in Trentino amounts to an estimated value of 8 000 billion Lire per year, of which 2 000 billion is in exports; the main export market is Germany which constitutes over a third of all exports and in total the countries of the EU make up 70 per cent of the export market (Associazione degli Industriali della Provincia di Trento 1995).

By far the most significant structural change in Trentino's economy has been the progressive growth of the tertiary sector, which grew from 27 per cent to 68 per cent of the economy between 1961 and 1995. This meant that of the 187 000 people employed in the province of Trentino in 1995, 125 000 were employed in the tertiary sector; 42 000 or 33 per cent were employed in public administration. Moreover, the growth of tourism has further expanded the tertiary sector of Trentino's economy. There are 21 000 people employed in tourism and tourism-related occupations in the province, which is 11 per cent of the total workforce (Provincia Autonoma di Trento 1996a). In the last 50 years the economy of Trentino has been profoundly transformed from a largely agrarian and manufacturing based economy to an economy based largely on the tertiary sector.

The main contributory factor to the post-war economic growth trajectory of Trentino has been its autonomy from the central Italian State. A key factor has been the relatively high levels of public funding which are available to the Provincial government. The budget for the province of Trentino in 1996 was 4 600 billion Lire for a population of 460 000 people and the budget for Bolzano's population of just over 430 000 is over 5 000 billion Lire (Provincia Autonoma di Trento 1996c). These are clearly considerable budgets especially when one considers that the region of Lombardy, with a population of over nine million, has a budget of just over three billion Lire. Trentino has a budget which is over 1 500 times larger than that of Lombardy's for a population which is only one twentieth the size. This large amount

of public funding combined with the autonomous institutional structures, which enable the public funds to be spent and allocated according to the decisions of the Provincial government, have undoubtedly benefited the economy of the respective provinces of Trentino and Bolzano, in a number of ways.

It was at the end of the 1950s that the role of the Provincial government in Trentino began to make an impact upon the province's economy, at a time when it was regarded as relatively backward in comparison to the majority of the rest of Northern Italy. Industry was still in an embryonic stage, agriculture was unprofitable and emigration levels were still high. During the 1960s and 1970s, the first initiatives and legislation were implemented with the aim of stimulating economic growth by investing public funds into industrial activity. At the beginning of the 1980s, the industrial sector, which had undergone significant development, underwent a period of recession, which caused factory closures and an increase in industrial unemployment. In 1987, the province commenced its 're-industrialisation' phase which was specifically aimed at promoting the growth of new initiatives in order to replace the firms which had closed. The existing laws were modified and more public funds were extended to include provisions for research and the transfer of technology. During the subsequent industrial expansion, which was largely created by the public investment, direct capital incentives were eliminated in the 1990s. The province now provides strategic assistance for firms to identify and develop future strategies, instead of providing direct financial incentives.

The Province has also had a significant impact upon the development of tourism in Trentino; this was a sector that was virtually non-existent fifty years ago. Public funding has been made available for the development of the tourism infrastructure, in terms of hotels and other facilities, as well as a whole range of other developments. The spin-offs which this public funding has provided have benefited other areas of the economy. Public investment has taken place in other areas of the economy, such as agriculture, and the craft sector. Moreover, a network of research institutions has been created, which support economic development and ensure that the firms in the province have access to up-to-date technologies, and can develop innovative solutions to market demands. The results of this public funding have been wide-ranging and

nowadays the citizens of Trentino enjoy a relatively high standard of living, even when compared to the rest of Northern Italy.

Trentino's autonomy has had obvious benefits for the socio-economic development of the province's economy, however, it does have certain problems. In particular, because the Provincial government receives so much public funding it has absorbed a significant number of employees and is allegedly rather bureaucratic and inefficient. It is such criticisms which the LN in Trentino has focused upon, arguing that the Provincial government is as bureaucratic as the central government in Rome and that it has no strategic plans with which to spend the public funds at its disposal. Also, the LN questions whether Trentino's autonomy will be able continue to function as it has done in the past or whether wider economic and political changes in Italy will dictate that it will have to be modified. The LN in Trentino has gained some support in the province by concentrating upon the alleged problems of its autonomy, however, the party is still confronted by the fact that autonomy has ensured a relatively high level of prosperity. Therefore, as the next section examines, the LN faces a considerable number of challenges if it is to expand its level of electoral support in Trentino.

## 3. The Lega Nord in Trentino

The LN in Trentino is a relatively new political phenomenon, created in 1990 when a small group of sympathisers decided to set up a branch of the party in the province, since when its relative political prominence has increased significantly. In the 1996 national elections, the LN was the largest party in the province, gaining 21 per cent of the vote (Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma di Trento 1996). In some ways, there are similarities with the expansion of the party in Trentino and the rest of Northern Italy, but there are also clear differences. Moreover, the political discourses and strategies of the party in Trentino differ, in certain ways, from those successfully utilised elsewhere in Northern Italy. The reasons for this relate to the different set of institutional, socio-economic and cultural structures, with which the LN is confronted in Trentino. Although the LN in Trentino is not as electorally strong as it is in its heartlands of support, it is evident that the party is relatively well developed institutionally. The signs are that the party has already, in a relatively short space of time, embedded itself within civil society in the province.

Trentino's autonomy meant that some of the factors that had contributed to the growth of the LN across Northern Italy, such as discontentment against the bureaucracy and inefficiency of the central Italian State, were not as widely felt in the province. In particular, the issue of the mismatch between high levels of taxation and alleged poor public services, which is one of the key discourses of the LN elsewhere in Northern Italy, was not as important in Trentino. This was because of the fact that the province receives 90 per cent of its tax revenues back from the central government and public services are relatively good. However, in recent years, such issues of national importance have become increasingly intertwined and interlinked with issues which are of more direct relevance to the citizens of the province of Trentino, such as the functioning of the Provincial government. Consequently, the challenge for the LN has been to adapt the political discourses, which it employs across the majority of Northern Italy, in order to make them more applicable within Trentino because of the differing socio-economic, political and institutional geographies there. The real issue for the LN is whether it can develop a politics which places Trentino into the national context while maintaining its separateness and difference.

## 3.1 The development of the LN in Trentino

The early development of the LN in Trentino was slowed down because there was a reluctance on the part of the party elite to develop it there. The reason was that there are other autonomist political parties, the main one being the *Partito Autonomista Trentino Tirolese* (PATT), which has a long history in the province. The politics of the PATT are based solely upon defending Trentino's autonomy. The Vice President of the LN Trentino explained:

> The LN began in 1990 with about nine or ten activists who started to develop the party in the province. In those days it was very difficult for us to get the party going; the most significant problem was to convince the LN and in particular Bossi, that it was worth developing the party in Trentino. At that time the leaders of the LN were worried about developing the LN in the province because there was already a strong autonomist party, the PATT, which had a long tradition of support. Thus, Bossi thought that there was no real space for the LN because of the PATT and the other autonomist parties. However, Sergio Divina [a co-founder and Regional Councillor for the LN Trentino], myself and others continued to lobby Bossi and the other senior party officials by attending functions and gaining more and more support in

the province. Eventually, after a difficult year of campaigning the LN in Trentino was born in 1991, and the first electoral success came shortly afterwards in 1992[2].

After a difficult beginning, the development and growth of the LN accelerated relatively rapidly. In the 1992 general election, the LN in Trentino gained 13.9 per cent of the vote, which meant that the LN was the second largest party in the province. The largest party was the DC, which gained 35.19 per cent of the vote; in the previous election in the province, which was the regional election of 1988, the DC had gained 45.30 per cent of the vote (Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1995).

The electoral support for the LN continued to rise in the Regional Elections of 1993 when the LN gained 16.24 per cent of the vote. This meant that the LN was the third largest party after the DC which gained 24.09 per cent of the vote; the second largest party was the PATT, which gained 20.15 per cent of the vote. The vote for the DC had dropped from the 1988 Regional election, by just over 25 per cent, while the vote for the LN had increased by just under three per cent. In terms of the number of Regional Councillors elected, the LN gained six, the DC nine and the PATT seven, out of a total of 35. This result was significant because it was the first time in the history of Trentino that the DC had not gained over 40 per cent of the vote and 15 or over of the number of Councillors. The demise of the DC, (as well as the PCI) in Trentino is bound up with the political changes in Italy as a whole, which in part came as a result of the *tangentopoli* scandals. Within the province, the DC and PCI had been the only two political parties which had been present in every Regional Council since 1948. The impacts of their respective political demises upon the political scene in Trentino were far reaching. Indeed, the growth of the LN in Trentino, in large part, can be attributed to the demise of the DC, as in other areas of the North of Italy.

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[2] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Tomasi, co-founder and Vice President of the LN Trentino, 4/6/97.

Table Seven : The decline of the percentage vote for the DC party in the province of Trentino

(Source : Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1994)

| Year of Regional election | Percentage vote for DC | No. of Regional Councillors |
|---|---|---|
| 1948 | 57.64 | 15 |
| 1952 | 63.30 | 17 |
| 1956 | 67.69 | 18 |
| 1960 | 64.24 | 17 |
| 1964 | 57.77 | 16 |
| 1968 | 58.05 | 16 |
| 1973 | 55.27 | 21 |
| 1978 | 49.04 | 18 |
| 1983 | 44.20 | 16 |
| 1988 | 45.30 | 17 |
| 1993 | 24.09 | 9 |

By the general election of 1994, the political geography of Trentino had been transformed dramatically. The LN gained 12.49 per cent of the vote, which meant that it was the third largest party after *Forza Italia* (FI) with 22.34 per cent, and the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI), which largely consisted of politicians from the ex-DC. Although the vote for the LN had declined by just over one per cent from its 1992 level, the result was still significant because the LN became part of the Berlusconi government. However, the LN's success was not to continue because in the European elections of June 1994, the LN only gained 7.9 per cent of the vote, which meant its vote had decreased by just under five per cent in less than four months. In the same election the vote for the FI increased by over five per cent to 28.78 per cent, which made it the largest party (Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1995). The decline in support for the LN was part of a similar trend, which was evident throughout the whole of the North of the Italy in the 1994 European elections (see Chapter Three). The internal problems which hit the party because of the making and then breaking of the alliance with Berlusconi were particularly marked, and exposed internal divisions in the relatively young party within Trentino. The outcome was that the LN lost three of its Regional Councillors; two left to set up their own political party and third joined the FI. This was a considerable blow for the LN, which had done very well to gain six Councillors in 1993.

In the April 1996 election, the LN gained its best ever result in the North of Italy and also in Trentino (see Chapter Three). This was a relatively surprising result for the LN nationally, and even more surprising in Trentino because of the problems which the party had undergone in the year previously. The LN gained 21 per cent of the vote and was the largest party in the province but it only gained one Deputy in the Italian Parliament because of the workings of the 'First-past-the-post' electoral system. Although the LN only gained one Deputy, the 1996 result was heralded as a success for the party in Trentino, as the Vice President of the party explained:

> In Trentino, the LN has undergone a dramatic rise in popularity between 1991 and 1996. In 1992, the LN sent two representatives to Rome - Bertotti as a Deputy and Boso as a Senator. In the 1993 Regional elections the growth of the LN continued when it gained six Councillors, which was a good result considering the short life span of the party and that we had had to start from nothing. But in 1994 the crisis period began when the LN left the government of Berlusconi and in Trentino the problems this caused were quite severe. The number of LN's Councillors went down to three because of internal disagreements over Bossi's decision and this caused considerable tension and division within the party, as well as reducing its power at the Provincial and Regional level. However, the decision by Bossi to leave the government has been proved right, especially with the result of the last election because the party achieved its best result ever in the 1996 elections and its support has never been stronger, and the same can be said for the party in Trentino[3].

The next section examines in more detail the electoral geography of the LN in the province of Trentino in order to illustrate how its electoral support varies and to identify some of the main reasons for this variation.

### 3.1.1 Electoral geography of the LN in Trentino

The geography of electoral support for the LN within Trentino reveals some interesting patterns. Actual levels of support for the LN in Trentino are relatively lower than those for the party in the province of Varese and there is also more geographical variation in the levels of electoral support for the party across the province.

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[3] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Tomasi, co-founder and Vice President of the LN Trentino, 4/6/97.

Figures 15, 16, and 17 show the percentage vote for the LN in the *Comprensori*[4] of the province of Trentino in the 1992 national, 1993 regional and 1994 national elections. The four *Comprensori* with the highest population densities (Valle dell'Adige, della Vallagrina, dell'Alto Garda e Ledro, dell'Alta Valsuganna) consistently have the highest electoral results for the LN, in each of the three elections. In particular, Valle dell'Adige, which has the highest population density has the highest electoral results for the LN (in 1992 the LN gained 30.83 per cent, in 1993 31.61 per cent and in 1994 it gained 28.77 per cent). Conversely, the *Comprensori* with the lowest population densities have the lowest electoral results, for example, in di Primerio, which has the lowest population density, the LN has a vote which is below three per cent in each of the three elections. Although important, population density is not the only factor in the vote for the LN in the province. The *Comprensori* with the highest percentage votes for the LN relative to their population densities are della Bassa Valsuganna e del Tesino and della Valli Giudicarie. These have relatively low population densities but relatively high levels of electoral support for the LN (above five per cent in each of the respective elections). This points to an important trend in the electoral geography of the party, which is that the areas bordering the region of Lombardy, to the west, and Veneto, to the east of Trentino, have the higher levels of electoral support for the LN.

Figure 18 shows the electoral results for the LN in the 1996 election, within each of the four electoral constituencies of Trentino. The highest result for the party was 21.4 per cent in Pergine Valsuganna, followed by 18.4 per cent in Cles - Mezzolombardo,

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[4] The province of Trentino is divided into 11 *Comprensori*, which are the administrative districts of the province. Each separate *Comprensorio* varies in area and population size and contains a certain number of communes, as the table below shows. This table should be used in connection with Figures 15, 16 and 17 (Source : Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1995).

| Comprensorio | Area (Km²) | Resident Population | Population Density | Number of communes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Della Valle di Fiemme | 415.02 | 17 485 | 42.13 | 11 |
| di Primerio | 417.34 | 9 479 | 22.71 | 8 |
| della Bassa Valsuganna e del Tesino | 578.88 | 24 024 | 41.50 | 21 |
| dell'Alta Valsugana | 394.45 | 41 015 | 103.98 | 20 |
| della Valle dell'Adige | 656.7 | 150 628 | 229.37 | 34 |
| della Valle di Non | 596.74 | 35 204 | 58.99 | 38 |
| della Valle di Sole | 611.38 | 14 443 | 23.62 | 14 |
| della Valli Giudicarie | 1176.51 | 33 719 | 28.66 | 40 |
| dell'Alto Garda e Ledro | 353.33 | 38 384 | 108.63 | 12 |
| della Vallagarina | 694.25 | 76 850 | 110.69 | 18 |
| Ladino di Fassa | 318.06 | 8 621 | 27.10 | 7 |

then Rovereto with 16.3 per cent and finally the constituency of Trento with 13 per cent. Although not directly comparable with the previous maps, the 1996 result does reveal similar trends to the others. In particular, the strength of the LN in the areas bordering the regions of Lombardy and Veneto and also a lower level of support in the constituency of Trento, in which the province's capital city and main conurbation (the city of Trento) is located.

Figure 15 :   Percentage vote for the LN in the *Comprensori* of the province of
Trentino in the 1992 national election

(Source : Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1995)

Figure 16 : Percentage vote for the LN in the *Comprensori* of the province of
Trentino in the 1993 regional election

(Source: Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1995)

Figure 17 :   Percentage vote for the LN in the *Comprensori* of the province of
Trentino in the 1994 national election
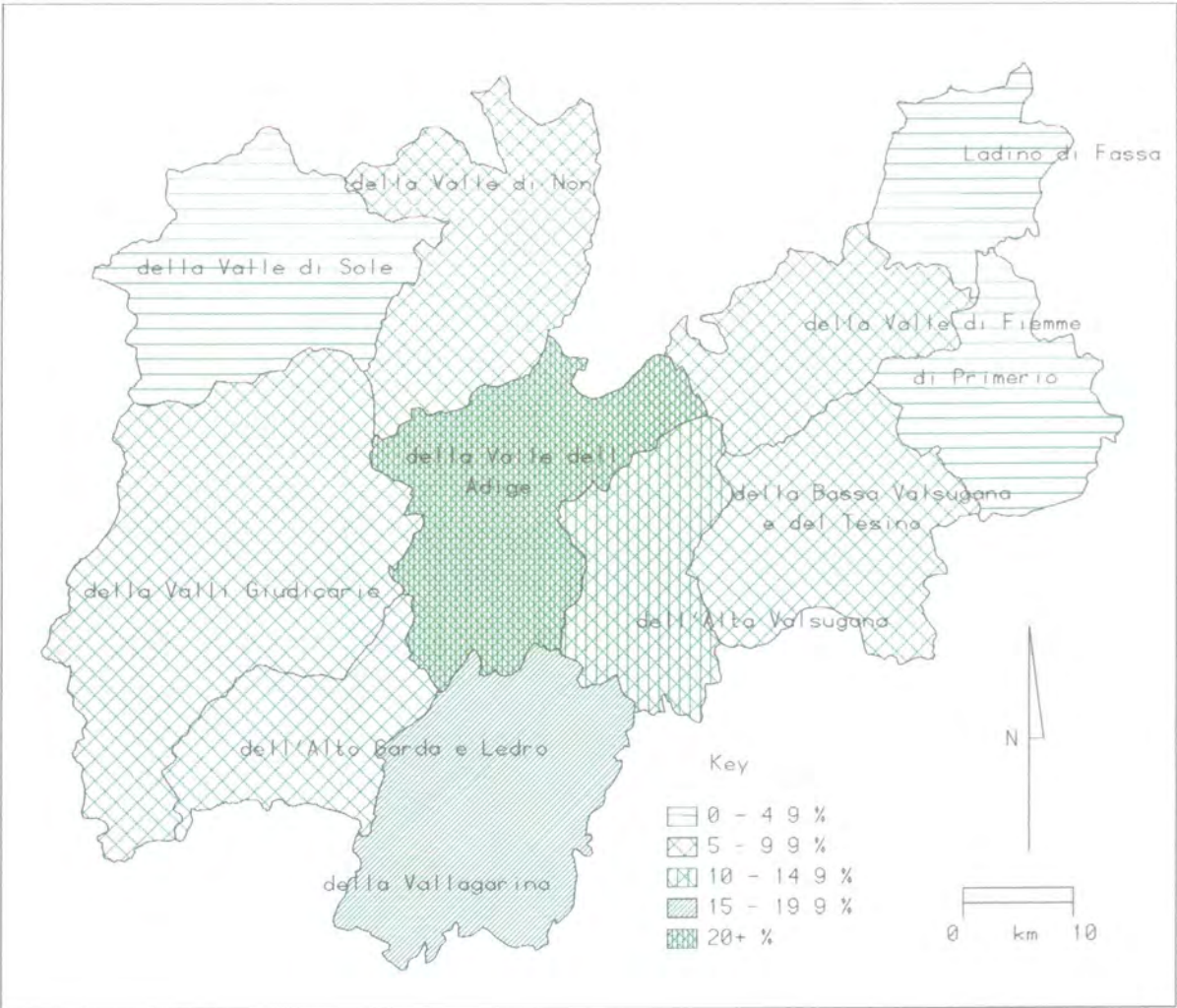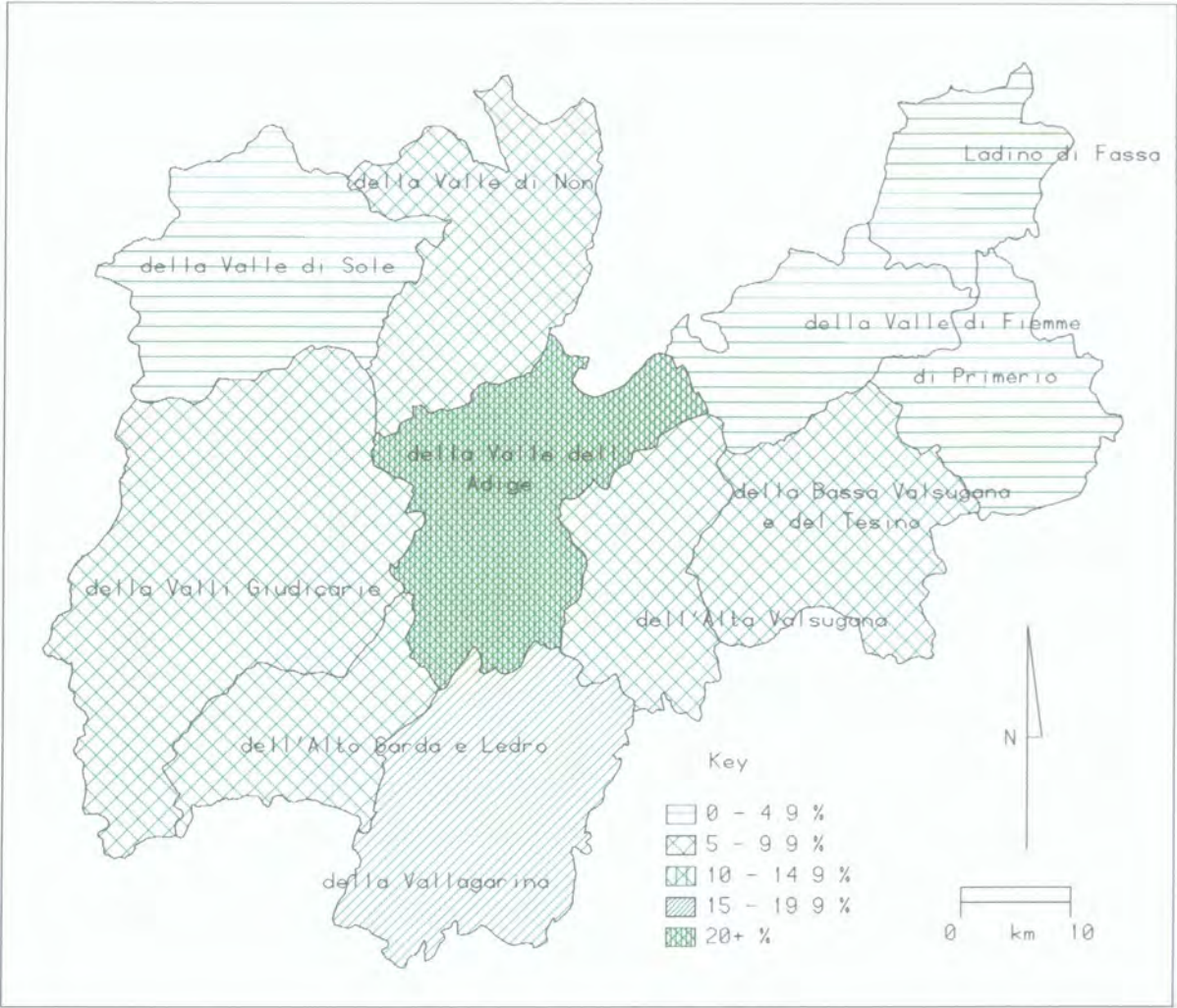
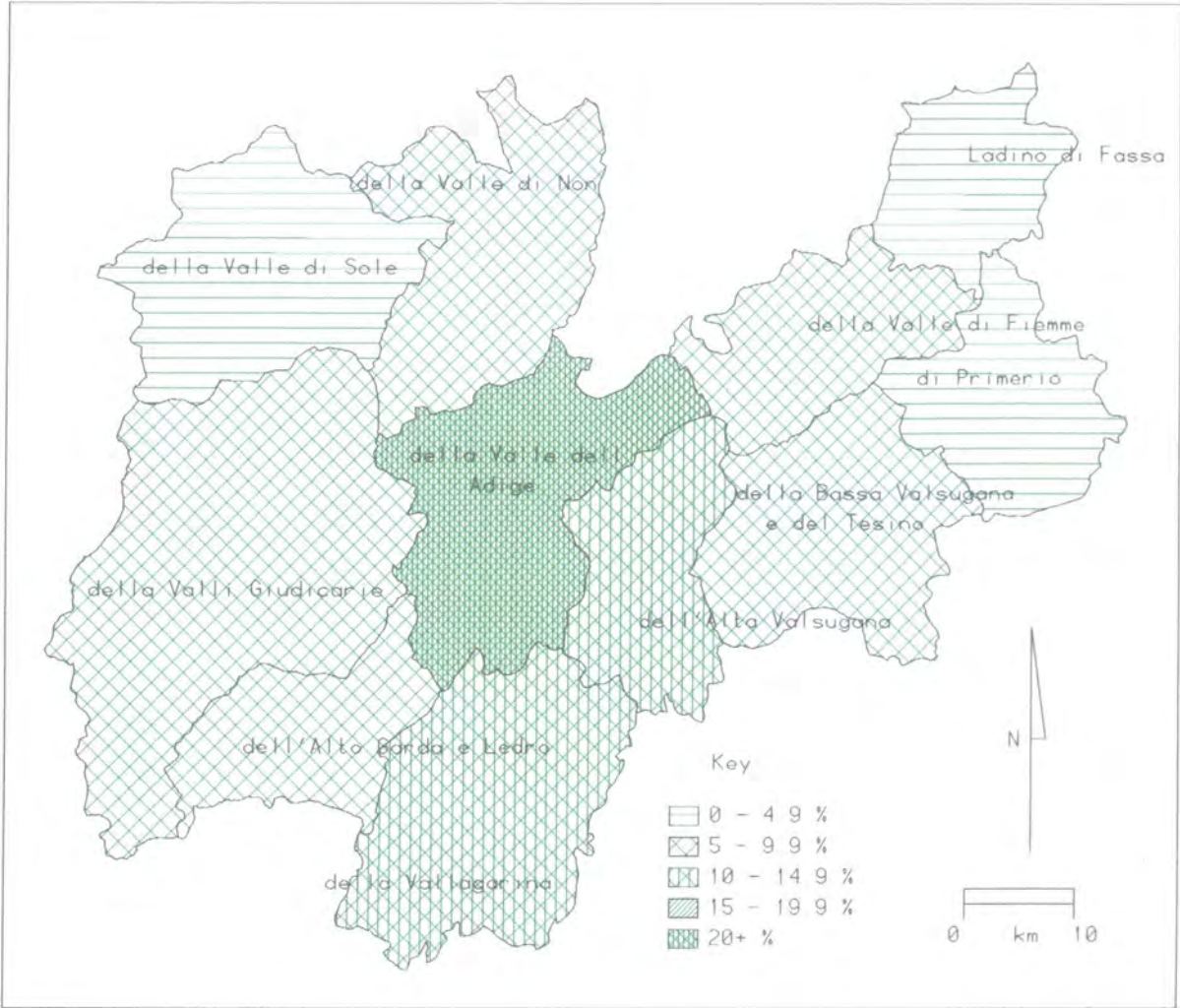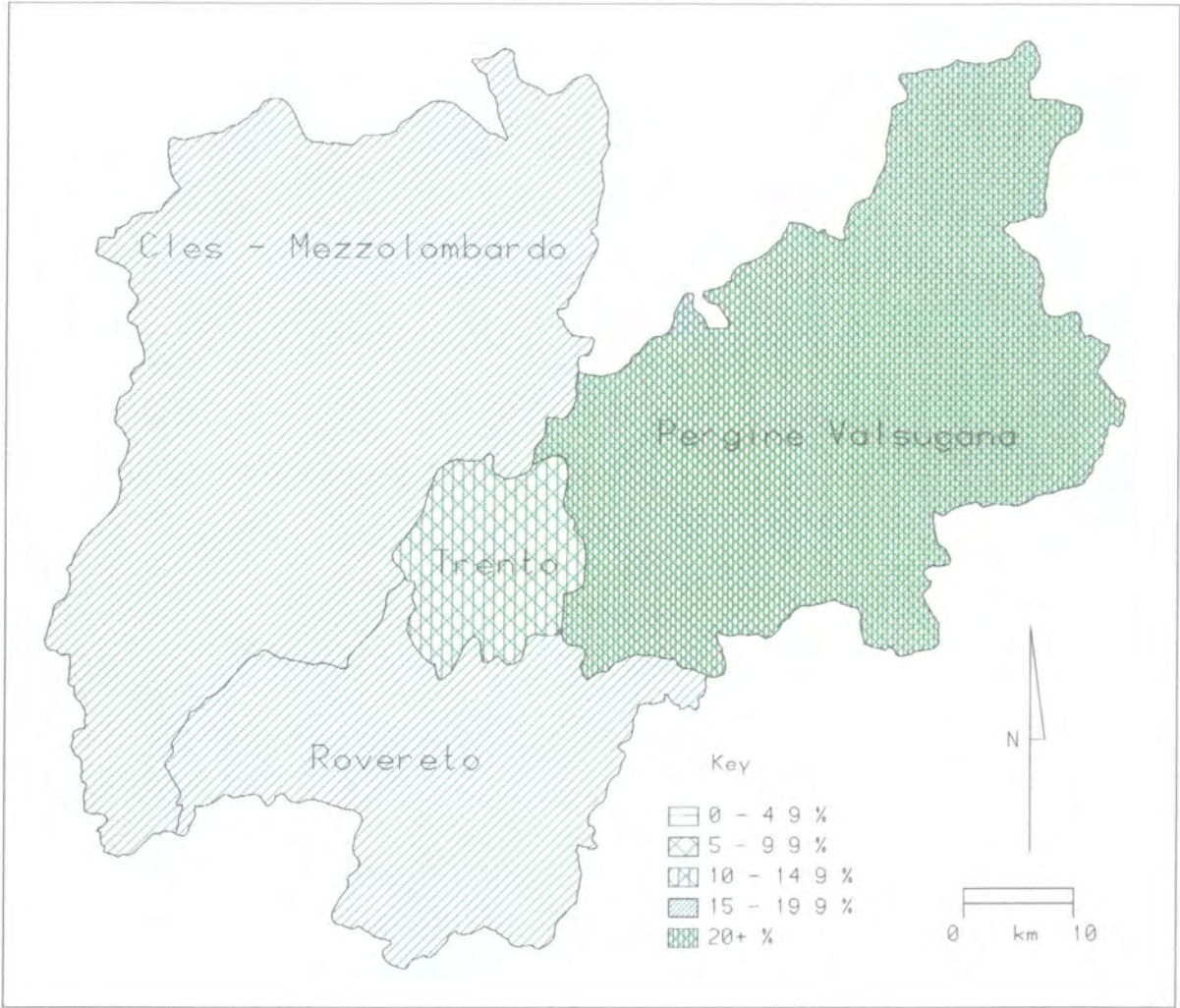(Source: Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige 1995)

Figure 18 :  Percentage vote for the LN in the four electoral constituencies of Trentino
in the 1996 national election

(Source : Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma di Trento 1996)

The reasons for such patterns in the electoral geography of the LN are related to a number of factors, as a LN party activist in Trentino argued:

> Support is stronger for the LN in the valleys of the province of Trentino and away from the main towns such as Trento and Rovereto. This was because in the valleys the people have a different mentality and attitude compared to those in the towns; the rhetoric of the LN appeals to the people in the valleys because the LN wants to protect the values, traditions and culture of the people of the North of Italy. On the other hand, in the towns the people are more cosmopolitan and it is generally the intellectuals who live in the towns and they have a tradition of being linked to the Left in Italian politics. Furthermore, in the main towns there are more Southern people and so the rhetoric of the LN is less popular. Another important factor is that in the valleys there are more small craft and agro-industrial firms and these tend to vote for the LN for similar reasons as they do in Varese. The main reason is to reduce the level of bureaucracy and high tax burden for small firms and self-employed people. The people in the valleys are also against the bureaucracy of the provincial government which they see as being as bad as Rome and in some ways more centralistic[5].

The Vice President of the LN in Trentino explained why the party is relatively stronger in the areas of the province which are closest to the regions of Lombardy and Veneto:

> This is because the LN is very strong in those regions and so there is the 'LN effect' whereby the support for, and influence of the LN seems to spread into neighbouring areas[6].

The electoral geography of support for the LN in Trentino reveals some interesting patterns. Primarily, the areas with higher levels of support for the party are those which are closest to the neighbouring heartlands of support in Lombardy and Veneto. Moreover, these areas tend to be the rural, valley areas of the province, where there is a stronger identity and culture. Conversely, the area of relatively weaker support for the LN is the city of Trento, which is the capital of the province and its largest conurbation. Although the LN has not been able to gain as higher levels of electoral support as it has done in either Lombardy or Veneto, the party has been able gain a

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[5] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pietro Avancini, party activist of the LN Trentino, 6/6/96.

[6] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Tomasi, co-founder and Vice President of the LN Trentino, 4/6/96.

significant level of support, which is certainly higher than a number of other provinces in the rest of Northern Italy. Alongside the LN's electoral geography, another important aspect of the party's development is its organisational structure, which is in fact related to how the party has expanded electorally within the province. This aspect of the LN's development in Trentino is detailed in the next section.

### 3.1.2 Organisational structure of the LN in Trentino

The organisational development of the LN in Trentino has been equally as rapid as its electoral growth but it has been rather sporadic. As the party is still relatively young in the province, its organisational structure is still developing and the party is still trying to develop consistent bases of electoral support. In the recent past, support for the LN in the province has been quite volatile as it has tried to establish itself within certain geographic areas and amongst certain social groups. The main way the LN has tried to embed itself territorially within the province is through the development of its party offices. Consequently, the party has rapidly increased its number of party offices in the province and in only five years, the LN has developed 34 party offices which cover the majority of the territory of the province. As in Varese, the LN party offices have several functions; they are important points of reference for local people with the party, administrative centres, and important places for social interaction amongst party members and for the attraction of new members and supporters. In Varese (see Chapter Five), there was a close link between the organisational structure of the LN and its electoral geography, however, in Trentino this relationship is not, as yet, as well established, as the Secretary to the LN Regional Councillors of Trentino explained:

> The geography of the party offices of the LN does not really influence the support for the party in the province. The reason is that the support for the LN is very fluid because the party is still a young party and its level of support is not completely cemented as yet. In fact, it is quite difficult to even know who votes for the LN because often people who vote for the party have never been to the party offices or had any involvement with the party. The factor which most influences support for the party in Trentino is its success at the national level. The people of Trentino are influenced by the television and media images of Bossi and the strong political messages which the party uses. So far in Trentino support for the LN has fluctuated depending on the standing of the LN at the national level, however, there is a time lag before the images and discourses which Bossi and the LN use, filter down to the level of the people.

For example, after 1994 when Bossi left Berlusconi's government, support for the party in Trentino dropped significantly because the people were not quite sure of Bossi's motives. It seems that in Trentino public opinion of the LN seems to follow after a time lag when Bossi has instigated a change of direction; it takes some time for the electorate to affiliate with the new changes. By the latest election the public opinion of Bossi had increased gradually since the end of 1994 after which more and more people had realised that Bossi was right to leave the government. The same is the case more recently with the introduction of the hard-line discourse of secession for 'Padania' because it will take some time, especially in Trentino, for the people to understand Bossi's motives and to follow him[7].

In Trentino it is apparent that support for the LN fluctuates depending on various factors but mainly upon the standing of the party nationally. In spite of the party's relatively rapid development, it has not yet managed to attract a solid and consistent base of support amongst particular social groups. Consequently, the party gains support from various social groups within the province but as yet its *zoccolo duro* (hard core) of supporters is still to be cemented, as one of the LN Regional Councillors explained:

> The support for the LN in Trentino comes from a wide variety of social groups. For example, when canvassing people in the province for support, elderly people seem one of the groups most receptive to the politics of the LN because they see the party as the only one which wants to protect pensions and the livelihoods of the people of Trentino. The elderly are most concerned that their security is being compromised by the government in Rome and by the inefficiencies of the Italian central state and they are also worried that the pensions for which they have worked are in danger. However, when speaking to people a clear issue which emerges is that most, whether young or old, are fed up of paying their taxes to Rome and receiving very little in return. This is in Trentino where the central government returns 90 per cent of the taxes paid by the province. Also in Trentino, similar to other areas of Northern Italy, the entrepreneurs and small business owners are a key group of supporters of the LN, for similar reasons as in the rest of the North. On the other hand, unlike an area of strong support for the LN, such as Varese, there are no established LN youth group networks in Trentino; this is mainly because the party is still quite young and so it will take some time to develop these. Hopefully, in the near future these will develop because young people are another important group of voters as well as party activists for the LN in Trentino. Yet I would say that the strength of the LN in Trentino is that it has been able to attract support from people of every walk of life[8].

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[7] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Aldo Maurina, Secretary to the LN Regional Councillors of Trentino, 24/6/96.

[8] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Sergio Divina, co-founder and Regional Councillor of the LN Trentino, 17/7/96.

The reasons for the growth of the LN in Trentino are related to its discourses as well as the party's standing nationally. Trentino's constitutional uniqueness means that its citizens have different concerns, in some ways, to the majority of the citizens of Northern Italy. Consequently, the political discourses of the LN in Trentino must be slightly different than those in the rest of Northern Italy, in order to take into account this difference. The nature and content of the discourses of the LN in Trentino are outlined in the following section.

## 3.2 Discourses of the LN in Trentino

This section focuses on the discourses of the LN in Trentino. The party utilises similar political strategies and methods to convey its political discourse as it does elsewhere in the North of Italy. The key difference is that the political messages take into account the differences between Trentino and the other provinces of Northern Italy, and particularly the issue of autonomy.

According to the LN, the autonomy of Trentino is not 'real' because it is basically Rome which has the majority of control. For the LN the only way in which 'real' autonomy can be realised in the province is if real power is given to it to make its own decisions. As an ex-Senator of the LN in Trentino explained:

> The problem for Trentino is that its autonomy is not a 'true' or 'real' autonomy because it is Rome which has all the power, in spite of the fact that Trentino has certain rights and powers. The bottom line is that if Rome went bankrupt tomorrow then Trentino would also go bankrupt and its autonomy would cease to exist. All the important decisions are taken by Rome, for example in terms of finance, and socio-economic policies. Ultimately, Trentino always has to get permission and funding from Rome to carry out projects which are beyond the scope of the autonomy. The LN has made the citizens of the province realise the fact that their autonomy is actually a false one and that it is Rome which still makes all the decisions and rules. Furthermore, the LN has made people realise that federalism would give greater autonomy to Trentino and the whole of the North of Italy because each region would have the ability to decide their own level of taxes, public services and social policies. Currently, Trentino certainly has more powers than other provinces but in reality it is Rome which decides and has the final say. Within a federal state, Trentino and the rest of the North of Italy would have the power to decide their own futures[9].

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[9] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Erminio Boso, co-founder of the LN Trentino and ex-LN Senator in the Italian Parliament, 17/7/96.

In criticising Trentino's autonomy the LN attempts to include the province in the arguments surrounding the problems of the centralised Italian state. The party goes even further by claiming that the Province of Trentino is too bureaucratic and wasteful and makes a direct comparison between it and the central government in Rome. As an ex-Regional Councillor for the LN summarised:

> The LN has grown in Trentino because the people of the province are basically fed up with the bureaucracy of the state both at the provincial and national level; they feel that the State and the politicians are not interested in their views and have generally failed to listen to their demands. Furthermore, at the local level in Trentino there have been a lot of problems of bureaucracy; the province gets massive amounts of money from central government but the citizens have no real accountability. In spite of all the public money, there has been no real development of wealth creating industries, and instead a kind of 'assisted economy' has been created, which simply consumes massive amounts of state money to sustain public sector jobs and services.
>
> Moreover, the LN has grown in Trentino because there is a general lack of governability in the province because there are so many different political parties. The decline of the DC caused the fragmentation of the political party system in the province and no one political party has been able to fill the gap left by the DC. Consequently, the new provincial government, led by the PATT has little experience and has shown no real leadership and direction to guide the province. The LN has gained because it has cultivated and captured the protest vote against these problems[10].

Another aspect of the party's discourse in Trentino is hostility towards the traditional political parties of the province. This is especially the case against the other main autonomist party, the PATT, which has gained control of the Provincial government and is the LN's main political adversary in Trentino. The PATT was created just after the Second World War and has been a part of previous Provincial governments but has never had an outright majority. According to the LN, ironically, the PATT has come to power precisely at a time when Trentino's autonomy is under increased scrutiny and its future is in the balance because of the problems facing the Italian state. The LN argues that the PATT lacks a coherent strategy and direction for the future of Trentino and has actually increased bureaucracy at the provincial level. The Vice President of the LN Trentino emphasised this point:

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[10] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Sergio Muraro, co-founder and ex-Regional Councillor of the LN in Trentino, 5/7/96.

The problem is that the PATT does not know how to govern and are not capable of managing the large amounts of public funds that are given to the province. The PATT has no real policies and initiatives with which to use this money and the result is that the people do not see any real benefits of the massive amounts of public funding. This is the real problem. The citizens have become angry at the waste of all this money because they see that very little has been done with the money to improve public services and reduce bureaucracy. The LN has gained the protest vote of the citizens who resent this waste and the lack of direction on the part of the Provincial government.

The fact is that Trentino has become ungovernable because after the demise of the DC, which was the main party for a long time, no other party has been able to fill the vacuum it left. Consequently, PATT gained power but has little experience of power and it is becoming harder and harder to justify the autonomy of the province at the central government level[11].

The LN argues that the bureaucracy combined with the instability of the PATT Provincial government jeopardises the future of Trentino. The massive amounts of public funding have created a kind of 'assisted economy' in which dynamism is constrained because of the over-reliance on public money. Moreover, the LN argues that because the PATT is a provincial party, it has no influence outside of Trentino, especially at the national level. This was in stark contrast to the DC in Trentino which was quite important nationally and could defend the province's autonomy in Rome. The LN argues that the only real way to protect the province's autonomy is with the creation of a federal Italian State in which Trentino would not have to be as accountable to Rome and could maintain its privileges and autonomy. However, the main difference for the LN is that the rest of Northern Italy would gain similar benefits to Trentino within the federal structure, as the LN National Secretary for Trentino pointed out:

The main aim of the LN is to create real autonomy for the province of Trentino by creating a federal structure for Italy so that the rest of the regions can enjoy the same benefits and autonomy as Trentino. The key point is to emphasise and convince the citizens of Trentino that the LN does not want to take autonomy away from Trentino but to improve it and give the other regions greater autonomy. The LN's aim is to extend the autonomy of Trentino whilst bringing about greater autonomy for the other regions so that they could decide and set their own levels of taxation, finance and public service. The citizens of Trentino are fed up with bureaucracy at the local level and basic lack of planning and leadership that the PATT has given to the province. The citizens

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[11] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Tomasi, co-founder and Vice President of the LN Trentino, 4/6/96.

demand results, which means they want their money spent in productive ways and do not want it to be wasted on corruption. The only solution for Trentino is that which the LN proposes, which is a form of federalism that would allow there to be greater regional power and responsibility instead of all the decisions being made in Rome[12].

The LN in Trentino has had to modify the kind of political discourses used by the LN at the national level. However, the importance of the rhetoric of Bossi in relation to the whole of the North of Italy is still an important factor in the party's political project in Trentino. Therefore, the LN in Trentino relates its discourse to the wider rhetoric and arguments of the party, at the national level. The LN aims to present itself as the 'protector' of Trentino's autonomy in the face of the challenges related to the problems facing the central Italian State. However, it is apparent that the appeal of the discourses of the LN in Trentino has been rather limited, especially when compared to other areas of Northern Italy. This is because of a number of different factors which constrain and limit the party's appeal in the province. These factors are outlined in the next section.

## 3.3 Constraints upon the LN in Trentino

The LN in Trentino, in spite of its relatively rapid electoral and institutional growth, faces certain constraints, which contrive to limit the appeal of the party in the province. The most significant constraint upon the LN's development in Trentino, is the province's autonomy. However, as Trentino's autonomy has created many benefits for the people and the economy of the province, there is a general reluctance on the part of the majority of its citizens to give up what is viewed as an important privilege. The result is that the LN has to convince the citizens of Trentino that its politics would not mean that the province would lose this privilege. Furthermore, the problems which are felt in Trentino are not as severe as those in the rest of Northern Italy mainly because of the relatively high level of public funding, which ensures that public services are generally quite good. The main factors which have influenced the growth of the LN in other parts of the North of Italy do not have as much importance in Trentino. As one party activist explained:

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[12] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Alessandro Savoi, National Secretary of the LN Trentino, 4/7/96.

The problem for the LN is that the people of Trentino think that its federalism, based upon three 'macro-regions' would ensure the loss of the autonomy and Special Status of the province. This is in part an image which has been created by the media and other political parties who are against the LN. Moreover, the problems for the LN are made more difficult precisely because of the autonomy, which ensures that, in comparison to most other provinces in Italy, the public services are relatively good and there is a high standard of living in the province. Thus, unlike the other provinces where the public services are under funded, the feeling of discontentment against the central State is much less significant in Trentino and the demand for change and the introduction of federalism is less strong[13].

The discourse of federalism in Trentino has proved to be quite problematic for the LN, not least because the party is rather vague about the type of federalism it would introduce and more importantly how it would be possible, within a federal structure, for Rome to maintain its funding of Trentino's massive budget. This is because, in theory, within a federal structure the central government would receive less from the regions and so would have less resources to redistribute. This has caused a number of problems for the LN in the province, as a LN party activist explained:

The LN needs to convince the people of Trentino that the party would not make the province lose its autonomy. The people already have a very good standard of living because of autonomy and so it is logical that the LN would not want to change this situation. Yet, the people always seem worried that a vote for the LN would mean a loss of this privilege. Therefore, the party needs to make the people of the province realise that if federalism is not introduced, the whole economy and state system within Italy will break down. Then it would be impossible for Trentino to maintain its autonomy. Moreover, if Lombardy and Veneto suffer economically then it is inevitable that Trentino will suffer because it is the economic dynamism of the whole of the North of Italy, which funds the autonomy of the province. Thus, it is important that the people of Trentino look much wider than just their own province, but of course this is very difficult because they have a good standard of living and are worried that this might have to be compromised if the whole of Italy was to become federal[14].

More recently, the LN has moved away from its discourse of federalism to the much more radical one of secession and the creation of the state of 'Padania'. According to Bossi, it is now too late to introduce federalism because the schism between the

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[13] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pietro Avancini, party activist of the LN Trentino, 6/6/96.

economies of the North and South of the Italy has grown too wide. The implications of this discourse upon the LN in Trentino are quite far-reaching. Above all, in referring to 'Padania' the LN creates problems for the LN in Trentino because the name refers to the plain of the River Po basin. Trentino is geographically and culturally very different to 'Padania' because of its mountainous location on the edge of the Alps. Thus, it is not clear whether the people of Trentino will continue to support the LN because of the emphasis on 'Padania' and the specific set of cultural values and traditions related to it. This is an example of how the rhetoric of the LN, at the national level, has a negative impact upon the image of the party at the provincial level. The LN in Trentino has to endorse the new hard-line direction of the party but yet also suffer the consequences of any problems which this may create. As the National Secretary of the LN in Trentino explained:

> The people of Trentino do not really identify with the concept of 'Padania'. Trentino has its own long history of autonomy and it is with this that they most strongly identify. Indeed, the people are very proud of their tradition of separateness and autonomy. Also, Trentino is very different geographically to 'Padania' because it has mountains and valleys whereas 'Padania' refers to the plains of the River Po. Thus, the culture, identity and traditions of the two areas are totally different. That is not to say that 'Padania' is not important because it is a metaphor for the common culture and identity for the North of Italy. This is the main reason for the use of the term. In addition, Bossi uses the term because using the 'North' is difficult as it is seen to be 'anti-South'; 'Padania' does not have this connotation but evokes folkloristic and historical links that actually link the North of Italy. Anyway the geographical boundaries of 'Padania' are not really fixed in the conventional sense; the main links between the territory of 'Padania' are basically its rivers which connect and flow into the Po. According to Bossi it is these, which are the lifeblood of 'Padania'. From Trentino, the River Adige flows right into the heart of 'Padania' and almost links with the River Po. Thus, for the people of Trentino, 'Padania' symbolises a set of values rather than a specific geographical region in the conventional sense[15].

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[14] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pietro Avancini, party activist of the LN Trentino, 6/6/96.

[15] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Alessandro Savoi, National Secretary of the LN Trentino, 4/7/96.

Another constraint to the growth of the LN in Trentino is the fact that there are other autonomist parties, which are in direct competition with the LN in the province. This is unlike the majority of other areas in the North of Italy where the LN is really only in competition with the mainstream national Italian political parties. The PATT has a long tradition in the province and a relatively strong base of support. Moreover, the PATT has a relatively similar set of policies and ideals to the LN. As the LN is much younger than the PATT, it is hard for the party to be distinctive from the other autonomist parties. The outcome is that the 'autonomist' vote in the province is split between the LN and the other autonomist parties. For example, in the 1996 election, whilst the LN gained over 20 per cent of the vote, the combined vote for the autonomist parties was over 50 per cent. This represents a clear victory for the autonomist parties in the province but it also means that if the LN was the only autonomist party in Trentino it would be able to expand its electoral support. As a LN party activist explained:

> The other fundamental problem for the LN in Trentino is that it has to compete with the local autonomy parties in the province. The problem is that these parties, especially the PATT are very similar to the LN, in terms of their views on autonomy and federalism. They are also much older than the LN and so they have an established structure and party political machine. Indeed, the PATT is basically the 'brother' of the SVP in Bolzano. Therefore, the autonomist vote in Trentino is split, which is unlike the rest of Northern Italy. Moreover, the PATT has a relatively strong following because it explicitly campaigns on protecting the autonomy of Trentino whereas the rhetoric of the LN is about creating autonomy for all of Northern Italy. This means the people are afraid that by voting for the LN they are jeopardising the privileges of Trentino[16].

Another feature of the LN in Trentino is that the party has generally gained greater success in national and regional elections in the province, whilst in local elections the party has generally done badly. The reason for this is in part due to the anti-system image of the party, which at the local level generates less electoral support, as the National Secretary of the LN Trentino pointed out:

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[16] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pietro Avancini, party activist of the LN Trentino, 6/6/96.

The problem for the LN in Trentino is that it is hard to recruit people with political experience and/or intellectuals who could handle the difficulties of political life. The other big problem is that the LN is viewed as a radical party and one that wants to instigate change, at the local level this is not necessarily a good thing because local people in local elections are only really interested in local issues, for example, making sure the rubbish is collected, the street lights work and the buses run on time. The image of the LN is such that the people think the party will bring in big changes at the local level, which is the level which most directly affects peoples lives and so they are more reluctant to vote for the LN. At the national scale it seems that the people are more prepared to vote for the LN because the changes it wants to create are more radical but at the same time quite distant[17].

The problems for the LN in Trentino are not only related to the image of the party nationally but also because of the fact that the party is still a relatively new phenomenon in the province. This has a number of implications; firstly, it means that the party representatives in the province have little experience in local or provincial politics, especially when compared to the traditional political parties. At the local level, this is a constraining factor for the growth of the party, however, there are other problems as a LN Regional Councillor in Trentino explained:

The main problem is that the LN in Trentino is a relatively young party and so it is still establishing itself in the province. As a new party, the LN has the problem of gaining support and new members all of the time in order to build up the party. This is essential for the party to grow because it constantly needs party workers, activists and potential political candidates, however, there are also dangers to this. In the past, people have joined the LN from other political parties not because they believe in the party but because they see the opportunity to gain political power and responsibility within the LN. The danger is that the LN attracts such people who are not real supporters of the LN but simply want to forward their own political careers.

Another constraining factor for the LN is the media in the Trentino. At first, the local media did not give any coverage at all to the LN when it was first born in the early 1990s. This was a serious problem for the party because it had, and still has, very little funds with which to advertise and so it was hard to get any public coverage. After a couple of years, the media began to cover the party but they began to distort the images of the party, or it got only one column in the papers for an important issue whereas the other parties got much wider coverage for something of very little importance. This bias against the LN is still a problem today for the party even though at the national scale the LN is well developed. The only way around this for the party is to use the 'personal filter' through which it reaches the people, which means going

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[17] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Alessandro Savoi, National Secretary of the LN Trentino, 4/7/96.

around the 'piazza's' to rally support by speaking to people and passing on the messages of the LN 'face-to-face'[18].

There are several constraints and problems, which the LN in Trentino faces; some of these are related to the discourses and images of the party at the national level and how these are viewed within Trentino. Other constraints are related to the internal problems of the party because it is still trying to consolidate itself both electorally and organisationally within the province. Combined with these constraints are the problems which are more common to the party across the North of Italy. Moreover, the LN is confronted with a whole set of issues and differences, which are related to the socio-economic, institutional, political and socio-cultural specificities of the province. It is Trentino's relative distinctiveness, which offers both opportunities as well as challenges to the LN in the province, as the next section discusses.

## 4. The distinct political-economy of the province of Trentino

Trentino's economy, society and culture is distinct to that of the rest of Italy in a number of ways. The province has a specific culture and identity partly because of its geographical location, its long history of autonomy and the ethnic and linguistic mix of its population. Moreover, the province has a strong religious history and identity stemming back from when it was part of the Diocese of Trento, which was governed by the Prince Bishops of Trentino during the Middle Ages. It is the specific socio-political and socio-economic characteristics of Trentino which provide a distinct environment for the LN. Consequently, the LN's political discourses do not have the same impacts as they do in the heartlands of support for the party, which means that in order to gain electoral support the party has had to modify its political rhetoric to take into account Trentino's distinctiveness. This has enabled the LN to gain some electoral success, but this is partly due to the LN's success across the North of Italy, rather than the party being able to develop consistent bases of electoral support within Trentino. In large part, it would seem that the geographical specificities and differences between Trentino and the rest of Northern Italy contrive to make infertile political ground for the LN in the province.

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[18] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Sergio Divina, co-founder and Regional Councillor of the LN Trentino, 17/7/96.

For centuries the province was a relatively impoverished agricultural area, which was beset with problems of emigration. However, in the nineteenth century, the province's economic hardships were overcome, to an extent, by the development of a system of agricultural and industrial co-operatives. The main instigators were priests who promoted the values of solidarity and fraternity amongst the people who were living in harsh socio-economic conditions. The co-operatives developed as a way of allowing the people to share their resources for the benefit of the local area in times of hardship. This ensured the gradual redevelopment of agriculture and local economic development within the province. Indeed, the co-operative sector is still very much an integral part of the structure of the contemporary economy of Trentino even though the economic hardship has largely disappeared.

During the last 25 years or so, Trentino has undergone a massive socio-economic, institutional and social transformation, mainly due to the province's autonomy, which has had a number of significant impacts. Primarily, it has guaranteed the province large amounts of public funding, which has undoubtedly influenced the socio-economic development of the province. Furthermore, a whole different set of institutional and governance structures have been set up in Trentino because of the province's autonomy, which are distinct to majority of other Italian provinces. In particular, the most important institution in Trentino is the Provincial government, which has quite specific powers and structures enabling it to enact important legislation that only applies to Trentino. Overall, the province has a different territorial political-administrative organisational structure and this means that public administration is the biggest employment sector in the whole province (Coppola 1994). On the other hand, Trentino's autonomy has ensured a high standard of living and quality of life for the majority of the citizens of the province. Moreover, it ensures that the province has a greater degree of power at the local level than the majority of other Italian provinces, however, there are a number of different problems with Trentino's autonomous political and institutional structures. As a political journalist from a Trentino provincial newspaper argues:

Autonomy has certainly helped the economy of Trentino simply because of the high levels of public spending which have been invested in the province. However, autonomy has created certain problems for the province; firstly, the autonomy has created a lot of bureaucracy, often the term used to describe this is 'the sovietisation of the province of Trentino', which signifies how inefficient and slow the public administration is in the province. Alternatively, people describe the province as a 'little Rome' because they feel that the provincial government is similar to the central state because there is so much bureaucracy. Indeed, there is more bureaucracy in Trentino because there are double the number of laws[19].

Another criticism of the autonomy is that because the province receives so much public funding there has been a lack of strategic planning in the use of financial resources. The alleged result has been that projects have been funded by the province, which if less funds had been available would not have been funded. As an academic of the University of Trento explained:

The economy of Trentino is based largely on public funds and consequently has a large public sector, which constitutes about 40 per cent of the workforce. In other words it is an 'assisted economy', which in some ways is similar to the economy of the South of Italy because of its reliance on State transfers. However, autonomy for Trentino is a real privilege because it was really gained as a result of Bolzano gaining its autonomy. The enormous budget has been very important for the economy and standard of living of the people of Trentino. The consequence is that the Province is the most important institution, which is very bureaucratic and employs a lot of people. The problems of the central Italian State are in some ways mirrored at the provincial level. The Province has had so much money and relatively little accountability that it has tended to be wasteful and also in the past it has been an arena for corruption. For example, a number of projects have been funded in areas which perhaps were not needed. This is especially the case with schools being built in small villages in the valleys of the province, which have relatively little use because of the fewer numbers of people living in the villages[20].

The relatively large numbers of people employed in public administration in the province has impacts upon the labour market in Trentino. In particular, private sector employment is affected because public sector positions are relatively well paid and are accompanied with other benefits, which make them quite attractive. This often

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[19] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Gezzi, political journalist on the Alto Adige newspaper of the province of Trentino, 21/6/96.

[20] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Professor Carlo Borzaga, Professor of Economics, University of Trento, 1/6/96.

creates problems, especially for small firms in the province, which cannot offer the same kinds of pay and conditions as the public sector jobs. As a representative from the Industrial Association of Trentino pointed out:

> The large provincial budget has absorbed a large number of jobs which means that public administration is the dominant employment sector in Trentino. This has had several implications upon the private sector; firstly it has meant that the majority of people prefer to do jobs in the public sector because of the better pay and conditions. Often it is more difficult for smaller private sector firms, who cannot provide similar wages and benefits, to fill their vacancies. This is particularly the case for manual jobs in the private sector where pay and conditions tend to be lower[21].

The structure of Trentino's labour market also impacts on the competitiveness of the economy. Essentially, it is argued that economic dynamism has been constrained and undermined mainly as a result of the large amount of public funding injected into the province's economy, as the Director of the Union of Tourism and Services within Trentino pointed out:

> Veneto is the locomotive of the Northeast of Italy and Trentino is the last carriage of this locomotive. That is to say that the province is economically the least well developed region in the wealthy, Northeast of Italy. In the Veneto there is a considerable industrial spirit and dynamism which has been the basis for the success of the diffuse industrialisation in the region. However, in Trentino for various reasons, such as its geographical position, lack of an industrial heritage and of course mainly because of its autonomy, there is less economic dynamism. Autonomy has significantly reduced the need for economic innovation and enterprise because of the large amounts of public funding[22].

Such problems with Trentino's autonomy are relatively widely felt amongst the citizens of the province. Moreover, it is this resentment towards the alleged bureaucracy and inefficiency of Trentino's Provincial government which has provided the LN with opportunities to expand its electoral base of support there, as an academic of the University of Trento explained:

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[21] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Fonteneri of the Industrial Association of the Province of Trento, 1/7/96.

[22] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Rossi, Director of the Union of Tourism and Services within Trentino, 1/7/96.

In Trentino the LN has gained support because it is against bureaucracy at the local level and argues that the Provincial government is similar to the central government in Rome because it is inefficient and bureaucratic. The LN has managed to take advantage of this and gain the protest vote of the people who are against this inefficiency. Moreover, there is also the problem of 'core' and 'periphery' in the province itself. The centre receives the best services and the most money from the Province whereas the valleys, which are peripheral, feel that they do not receive good services and financial support from the centre. Again this causes problems and so support for the LN has grown in such peripheral areas. Therefore, the LN in Trentino is not only against Rome but also against the inefficiency of the Provincial government, which according to the LN are very similar[23].

The disintegration of the main political parties in the province, especially the DC, which was particularly strong and well embedded within the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres of civil society has created a degree of political instability in the province. The LN has been able to capitalise upon this, as it has done elsewhere in the North of Italy, as a journalist in Trentino explained:

> The crisis of the DC in Trentino is an important aspect in relation to the growth of the LN. The province of Trentino was traditionally a 'white' area and the DC was the main political force of the post war period. Therefore, its political decline has had major implications upon the political situation in the province. This crisis has meant the fragmentation of the vote for the DC into smaller parties and the vote has gone in different ways, however, the LN has gained a significant proportion of this vote[24].

The PATT (which replaced the DC as the governing party of the Province) has also been criticised from different groups and the LN has explicitly targeted the PATT in its political discourse in Trentino. As the General Secretary of the PDS in the province argued:

> The people in Trentino are disgruntled at the fact that the Provincial government is bureaucratic and inefficient. This is to do with the legacy of the DC and their networks of patronage and corruption which still beset the massive bureaucracy in the province. Moreover, the new Provincial government led by the PATT has done little to improve this situation and in fact it has made it worse, mainly because of the lack of stability. Also, the PATT does not have sufficient experience in government because it has

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[23] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Professor Carlo Borzaga, Professor of Economics, University of Trento, 1/6/96.

[24] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Tonini, political journalist of the Province of Trentino, 26/6/96.

always been in opposition to the DC. The LN has gained political support because it has voiced a strong opposition to the PATT and the way it has governed in the province[25].

The alleged bureaucracy and political instability associated with Trentino's Provincial government emerge as a key issue in Trentino, which in part has helped the growth of the LN in the province. On the other hand, it is clear that Trentino's autonomy creates a difficult socio-political context for the LN. The problems facing the majority of the citizens of Northern Italy are not as widely felt amongst the citizens of Trentino, as a representative of the Federation of Trentino Co-operatives explained:

> In Trentino, there already exists a type of federalism, which functions quite well. In fact, the province has similar public services to those in Switzerland, which is combined with a very high standard of living. Moreover, unemployment is very low and the citizens of Trentino are relatively content with the socio-economic situation. In general, they are not really very keen on the prospect of losing this autonomy and the privileges associated with it. This is why the LN is not as strong in Trentino as it is in Lombardy or Veneto. However, the LN is right to point out that the Province is too bureaucratic and that there are too many laws which hinder the business community. The only consolation is that there is a lot of public money for a small number of people and as such the system sustains a high standard of living for its citizens. But, if a true form of federalism was introduced in Italy then the province of Trentino could easily lose out because Rome would not have enough money to fund the expense of the province's autonomy. Maybe then the Province would become more efficient in order to maintain a decent standard of public service?[26]

Trentino's autonomy has ensured a high standard of living for the majority of the province's citizens. This means that the privilege of autonomy is a very important issue for the people of the province and they are very much aware that if it was taken away, the socio-economic situation in the province would deteriorate. Therefore, federalism is not as important a political issue as it is in other areas of Northern Italy, such as Lombardy and Veneto where the desire to have greater regional autonomy is relatively widely felt. This is one reason why, in such areas, the LN's discourse of federalism has received considerable political support. On the other hand, Trentino

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[25] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Albergoni, General Secretary of the PDS political party, Trentino, 24/6/96.
[26] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Maurizio Bassetti, representative of the Federation of Trentino Co-operatives, Trento 20/6/96.

already has a significant degree of autonomy from the Italian central government which that has brought many benefits and so the citizens of Trentino are fearful of any changes, which may mean them losing the privilege of autonomy. As a Councillor in the commune of Trento argued:

> Federalism would mean greater regional devolution but obviously Rome could not send as much money to the regions with 'Special Status', such as Trentino, because each region would have to create its own wealth and rely less on the central state. Thus, it is very likely that the high standard of living in Trentino would have to be compromised and of course this is a big problem. At least Bolzano's autonomy is protected in international law because of its ethnic mix, however, for Trentino the situation could be worse because it was really only add on to Bolzano to make sure that there wasn't a German speaking majority. As Trentino is a largely Italian speaking area then it is difficult to predict what will happen and whether the province will be able to maintain its autonomy. Other regions, such as the Veneto, are very jealous of the situation in Trentino. Therefore, this is the problem with the LN's concept of federalism because it doesn't say whether Trentino would lose its autonomy and become part of the old 'TriVeneto' region. The LN is very vague about all this but it is clearly an issue for the people of Trentino[27].

Trentino's autonomy presents a real challenge for the LN because it protects the province from the key problems which face the majority of Northern Italy. It is from the protest vote against such problems that the LN has benefited electorally. However, in Trentino, the LN has been constrained because such problems are largely absent and therefore the support for the LN has generally been lower. On the other hand, Trentino's geographical location, in the 'far North' of Italy, sandwiched between Lombardy and Veneto, means that its citizens very much feel a part of the North of Italy. Moreover, in spite of Trentino's autonomy, its citizens are affected by some of the same problems, which are evident across the North of Italy. In particular, there are similar concerns that the years of economic growth and success are coming to an end in Trentino. Therefore, to a certain extent the rhetoric and claims of the LN are as influential in Trentino, as they are across the North of Italy, as the General Secretary of the PDS in Trentino explained:

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[27] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with a Councillor of the commune of Trento, from the Refounded Communist party, 2/7/96.

> It is not easy to explain the growth of the LN in Trentino because there are a variety of factors. Firstly, the impact of the national growth of the party has had an impact in the province, as it has in other regions across the North of Italy. The rise of Bossi as a national politician has caught the imagination of the voters within Trentino; many people see the television and read the newspapers and they see Bossi and the LN. As Bossi is outspoken and controversial he receives support in Trentino as he does across the North mainly from people who are aroused by the language and images that he uses[28].

Trentino is very much a part of the North of Italy, in geographic, socio-economic and societal terms, however, it also maintains its own distinct culture and identity. To some extent, the growth of the LN elsewhere in the North has influenced the growth of the party in Trentino. However, the key question is whether the LN's recent hard-line endorsement of the discourse of secession of Padania will cause a reduction of support for the party in Trentino. This is mainly because of the province's distinct cultural identity and history of autonomy, which means that the people of the province do not really feel a part of 'Padania'. This could easily alienate a number of the LN's supporters and also hinder the further integration of the party into the province, as a political journalist on a Trentino newspaper argues:

> The LN is playing a political game and it hopes that by raising the stakes by calling for secession it will gain federalist concessions from the Italian state. However, for the people of Trentino secession is not really a serious issue, for several reasons. Firstly, the people of Trentino already feel different because of their autonomy and the separate history of the province makes them distinct from the rest of Italy. Secondly, 'Padania' does not include Trentino because it is 'Prealpine' and not situated in the plains of Northern Italy, so the people have different mentalities to those in Lombardy and Veneto, where secession is rather more strongly felt. The crucial issue is how the people of Trentino will react to this hard-line discourse[29].

The LN's discourse of federalism was significantly undermined because of the influence and importance of the province's autonomy. However, the party managed to gain some electoral support because of its attacks on the Province's alleged high levels of bureaucracy, inefficiency and general political instability. It remains to be

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[28] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Albergoni, General Secretary of the PDS political party, Trentino, 24/6/96.

[29] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Gezzi, political journalist on the Alto Adige newspaper of the province of Trentino, 21/6/96.

seen what the implications of the LN's discourse of secession will have on the LN's level of support in Trentino. However, because of the distinctiveness of Trentino's socio-economy, culture and institutional structures, it remains doubtful whether the LN will ever be able to develop consistent bases of electoral support in the province. It is more likely that the party will continue to be significant in the political landscape of the province, even though it will not be the main political party.

## 5. Conclusion

The province of Trentino presents a distinct set of geographical, institutional, socio-economic, and cultural realities for the LN. The province's autonomy means that some of the issues which have influenced the growth of the party elsewhere in the North of Italy are not as strong in Trentino. This has been a constraining factor upon the growth of the LN in the province. On the other hand, Trentino is very much a part of Northern Italy and so the issues and concerns of its citizens are not so different from those in the rest of the North of Italy. Furthermore, because of the province's autonomy there is a whole set of other issues and problems, of which the LN has been able to take advantage mainly because of the way it has tailored its political discourse. The party has targeted what it sees as the key issues in the province, which are the relatively high levels of bureaucracy, political instability, and the lack of strategic policy-making, and incorporated these into its political discourse. In so doing, the party has merged its national discourses with those more specific to the provincial level in Trentino. This has proved to be relatively successful and meant that the party has managed to gain increased electoral support in recent elections. The party's support has, however, fluctuated depending on the success of the party at the national level.

Trentino's geographical location means that, in spite of its institutional and socio-economic distinctiveness, its citizens still relate to the problems and issues which the LN identifies in its political discourse. Moreover, Trentino forms a part of Northern Italy and so is very much a part of the LN's political project. On the other hand, the province of Macerata, which is the focus of the next chapter, is outside of the North of Italy but still a part of the LN's creation of 'Padania'. This creates a different set of issues and problems for the party's discourse, not least because the party has had to

tone down its anti-Southern rhetoric. In addition, the party is faced with a diverse set of socio-economic, political as well as cultural structures, which differ in a variety of ways from those of the North of Italy.

# Chapter Seven : At the centre of 'Italy' or the border of 'Padania' ? : The Lega Nord and Macerata, an area of weaker support

## 1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the province of Macerata within the Marche region of central Italy. The rationale for using it as the third case-study area in which to study the Lega Nord (LN) is mainly because the region constitutes an area of weaker electoral support for the party. The socio-economic, political, geo-historical and cultural realities of the province contrast in a variety of ways to those of the other two case-study areas, Varese and Trentino. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the factors which account for the lower levels of electoral support for the party in the province. This will allow a greater understanding as to why the rhetoric of the LN does not appeal here to the kinds of groups which support the party in the heartlands of support elsewhere in the North of Italy. Clearly, one of the key factors for the lower level of electoral support is the geographical position of the province. This is a significant issue for the LN because the Marche region is situated outside the 'North' of Italy and so as such outside the boundaries of the party's zone of support, as defined by the party's name. However, the discourse of 'Padania', which the LN now endorses, refers to a geographical area which is much more broadly (and vaguely) defined and includes the whole of Central Italy, comprising the three regions of Tuscana, Umbria and Marche. In not referring to the 'North', the LN is attempting to expand its potential 'imagined community' and zone of support out of the North and into Central Italy, however, as this chapter discusses, this is a problematic process.

## 2. A geographical outline of the province of Macerata

This section provides a geographical outline of the province of Macerata, which is one of four provinces within the Marche region. The province is situated at the heart of the Marche, stretching over an area of 2 774 Km², between the Adriatic Sea to the east and the region of Umbria to the west; to the north is the province of Ancona and to the

south is the province of Ascoli Piceno. From the middle of the fifteenth Century until the creation of the Italian state in 1860s, the whole region fell under the protection and authority of the Papal State and consequently became dependent on Rome for all its decision making, whether civil, social or economic (Ammistrazione Provinciale di Macerata 1996). Therefore, the Catholic Church has had a major impact, in different ways, upon the society and culture of the whole of the region, and indeed still has an important role to play in the contemporary civil society of the region.

The resident population of the Marche region in 1991 was 1 429 205 and the population of the province of Macerata was 295 481. This was relatively evenly distributed between the 57 communes of the province with only two having a population greater than 20 000; these were the communes of Macerata and Civitanova respectively, which constituted 27 per cent of the total provincial population. In terms of the populations of the other communes, seven had a population of between 10 000 and 20 000, a further seven between 3 000 and 5 000 and the remaining 34 had totals of less than 3 000 people. It is apparent that the province of Macerata is made up of a relatively large number of communes, which have relatively small populations. In fact, there are no large metropolitan areas in the whole of the Marche region, for example, the main city of the region is Ancona, which has a population of just over 100 000 people (Unioncamere delle marche 1994).

Another important feature in the development of Macerata's population has been the relatively high levels of emigration. In every decade from 1861 up until 1971, there was a negative migration flow; between 1876 and 1925, 135 815 people left the province and between 1881 and 1911, of the total number of emigrants from the Marche, over half of these were from the province of Macerata. This identifies just how significant the process of emigration was in the province from the end of the nineteenth up until the first half of the twentieth century. The principal destinations for the emigrants, during this period, were Brazil, Argentina and the United States of America followed by other countries within Europe.

After 1945 the levels of emigration increased. Between 1951 and 1961 the population of the province declined by 28 355 and in the following decade up to 1971, the decrease was 19 608. In this phase migration was mainly internal, to other regions within Italy, the main destination being the region of Lazio, and Italy's Capital city, Rome. Therefore, the two main phases of population loss in Macerata were between 1881 and 1921, when 71 000 people left, and between 1951 and 1971 when 48 000 people left the province. By 1981, the population of the province was 292 932 but the province would notionally have had a population of 460 000 if it were not for the high levels of emigration (Bussini 1990).

The phenomenon of population emigration from Macerata has had a significant number of impacts upon the province and accounting for it clearly involves a number of factors. Primarily, it was the problems of the province's economy which forced large numbers of people to leave in search of work. In particular, it was mainly due to the crisis of the province's system of agriculture, the so-called *Mezzadria*, as well as the lack of an adequately developed industrial or service sector. The result was that the economy of the province was unable to provide jobs and a sufficient standard of living for the majority of the population. However, during the last couple of decades the socio-economic situation of the province has improved drastically, which has largely put a stop to the emigration from the province. In fact, between 1971 and 1991 the population of Macerata actually increased by 9 326 (3.25 per cent), (while during the same period the population of the region increased by 69 218 (5.08 per cent)). This represented the first positive population growth in Macerata since 1861 (Bussini 1990).

It is really only since the 1960s and 1970s that the flows of emigration have declined and it is no coincidence that this is the period in which the economy of the province underwent a significant number of socio-economic transformations. These have had a number of important impacts not only upon the economy but also upon the culture and society of the province. These transformations are discussed in the following section.

## 2.1 Socio-economic transformations

During the first hundred years after the Unification of Italy, the regional economy of the Marche still remained relatively underdeveloped, mainly because of a continued reliance upon a relatively unproductive agricultural sector and also because of the lack of manufacturing and commercial activities (Severini 1990). Between 1861 and 1951, while the active population in sectors other than agriculture increased by 165 per cent nationally, in the Marche the increase was only 64 per cent (Amaduzzi et al 1961). The main problem with the agricultural sector was that it offered little employment opportunities in spite of the subdivision of farms and the intensification of production of certain crops (Ciaffi 1962). This situation did not improve in the first half of the twentieth century. Immediately after 1945 the economic situation in the Marche was, in several ways, similar to that of a 'Developing' country; over 60 per cent of the population were involved in agriculture and the GDP of the region was between 15 and 20 per cent lower than the Italian national average at that time (Ammistrazione Provinciale di Macerata 1996). In the 1950s the economy of the Marche had more or less the same number of people employed in agriculture as it had in 1861 when it became part of the newly formed Italian state. The economic differences between the Marche and the North of Italy were particularly marked because the North was undergoing the early years of the so-called 'economic miracle' (Marconi 1995).

In the last 40 years the socio-economic transformations of the economy of the region, and especially of the province of Macerata, have been remarkable. The most notable and important transformation has been its relatively rapid industrialisation. In the thirty years after 1945, the percentage employed in agriculture in the Marche dropped from 60.3 per cent to 11.5 per cent and the percentage employed in industry rose from 21.9 per cent to 44.7 per cent (Severini 1990). It was not just the Marche which underwent such growth but also the regions of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, and Veneto and it is this north-east and central Adriatic zone of Italy which has become commonly known as the 'Third Italy'.

The 'Third Italy' model of industrialisation involves a close link between agricultural production and artisanship, which leads to the growth of densely linked networks of flexible, small and medium sized industrial and craft firms. In the province of

Macerata there are numerous examples of towns with dense networks of small industrial firms, for example, the towns of Tolentino and Recanati are centres with a myriad of small shoe manufacturing firms (Sensini 1993). One of the key factors which has contributed to the economic growth of the Marche and the 'Third Italy' more generally, has been the *Mezzadria* system of agriculture. In the 1950s, the economy of the Marche, and in particular the province of Macerata, was still mainly agricultural and agreements between the landowners and the tenant farmers for the cultivation of the land and the division of the profits were the most common form of contract. Within these agreements the tenant farmer was not merely someone who grew produce but was also a small-scale entrepreneur, who dealt with all aspects of running a farming enterprise, especially the balancing of profits and losses. This system was the main impetus from which the surge towards industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s originated. Although today's company owners did not necessarily have parents or grandparents involved in *Mezzadria* it was, as Moz (1993) calls it, the 'endemic management ethos' that was passed on to the modern entrepreneurs, which has facilitated the industrial growth of the region.

The results of this socio-economic growth in the Marche have been very significant. By 1981, 14.5 per cent of the workforce of the province of Macerata were employed in agriculture (which was still three percentage points higher than the national average) but 48 per cent of the Macerata workforce was employed in the industrial sector. This figure is greater than the highest ever Italian national average for the percentage of workforce employed in the industrial sector (Marconi and Canullo 1994). In 1991, the number of firms in the industrial sector was 8 626 and the number employed was 47 348, which placed the Marche region fourth nationally, in terms of the numbers employed in the industrial sector. The only regions to have greater numbers employed in the industrial sector were Veneto, Lombardy and Piemonte (Ammistrazione Provinciale di Macerata 1991).

The success of the Marche economy, and in particular that of Macerata, has been due to the development of a series of integrated networks of small and medium sized companies, which have a high degree of specialisation in particular market and product segments, in certain geographical areas. Moreover, it is the flexibility of these small firms to react to crises, for example, by creating new opportunities by shifting to

new products in order to maintain market share, which has maintained the industrial dynamism of the region. In addition, certain firms in the region have emerged as 'region leaders', which have a national and international focus, such as Nazareno Gabrielli Spa and Poltrona Frau Srl. In the last ten or 15 years, as many as 49 'strategic poles of specialisation' have developed in the Marche, most of them being in traditional economic activities, such as furniture, footwear and clothing production. Furthermore, from the main traditional sectors other linked 'poles' have developed, for example, linked to the furniture sector there has been a specialisation in the working of glass; from the crisis of the larger companies which were producing musical instruments, a new class of entrepreneurs has developed. Others have become leaders in the fields of plastics and in printed circuits for electronics (Lombardi 1996).

In the province of Macerata there are 13 'poles'; six of which are shared with the neighbouring provinces of Ancona and Ascoli. The main sectors of activity within these 'poles' are shoe and furniture production; the pole of shoe production has the largest concentration of employees, 23 552, of any of the 49 in the whole of the Marche (Lombardi 1996). There is also a relatively high number of number of firms in Macerata, for example, in 1994, there were 23 596 firms in the whole of the province and of these 1 570 were joint stock companies, 5 534 were partnerships and 16 071 were individual concerns, the majority of these being handicraft-based companies (Lombardi 1995). The average number of employees per firm in the Macerata is relatively small, 5.3 and in 1991. This is smaller than the Italian national average of 7.7 employees per firm and the regional average for the Marche, which is 5.6 (Marconi 1995). Marconi (1995) argues that the smaller dimensions of the firms within Macerata is the main reason why economic growth in the province continued in the 1990s, in spite of recession in Italian and international markets.

The results of the socio-economic transformation of the Marche region, and in particular the province of Macerata, have been profound. From the beginning of the 1970s, Macerata has been transformed from an agricultural to an industrial economy. This transformation has increased the prosperity of the citizens of the province. By 1993, the province was ranked 14th in the national table of prosperity and living standards. This meant that the province was the highest ranked of the four provinces

of the Marche region and that it had undergone a rise of twelve positions since the classification of the previous year. In the same year, Macerata was ranked 30th out of the provinces with the lowest rate of unemployment, with a figure of six per cent; the province with the lowest unemployment rate was Como with 2.5 per cent (Lombardi 1995).

The fact which emerges from all of these indicators is that the province of Macerata is now on a par with the most developed and advanced areas of the North of Italy in terms of economic growth rates, industrial output and standard of living. However, there are a number of problems which must be confronted if the socio-economic growth of Macerata is to continue in the future. For example, the province has a poor infrastructure which needs to be developed, and there are other external problems which the province has to face. As Clementoni (1996), the President of the Industrial Association of Macerata argues, these problems are related to the wider socio-economic and political situation within Italy, such as the inefficient State bureaucracy system; the immense fiscal burden placed upon the economy; the spiralling public sector deficit; as well as the general feeling of a lack of trust, on the part of entrepreneurs and citizens alike, in the Italian State and government.

In other areas of the North of Italy, it is such problems and issues which has fuelled electoral support for the LN. Macerata's economy is as dynamic as those areas of Lombardy and Veneto, where the LN has gained its highest levels of support and its citizens are confronted with many of the same problems which face the majority of people across Northern Italy. However, it is apparent that in Macerata, the LN has received a negligible amount of electoral support and so the key question, therefore, is why have the discourses and rhetoric of the LN not been as popular in Macerata, as they have been in other areas of the North of Italy. This issue is dealt with in more detail in the following section.

## 3. The LN and the province of Macerata

For the LN, the province of Macerata constitutes a contrasting reality to the LN's heartlands of support, in Lombardy and Veneto. In theory, the province of Macerata could be seen as a potential zone of support for the LN, given the nature of its socio-economic structure and the problems which confront its economy and small firm

sector. On the other hand, it is clear that the political rhetoric of the LN certainly does not have the same impact in the province as it does in Lombardy, Veneto, or indeed across most of the North of Italy. Support for the party in the Marche region is small, which begs the question as to why this is the case. The geographical position of Macerata is one factor because it is situated on the border of 'Padania' and so is the southernmost region in which the LN is present, which creates a whole set of different issues and problems for the party.

## 3.1 The development of the LN in Marche

In the Marche region, the LN has a much lower level of electoral support and its institutional structure is very weak, especially in comparison to Varese or Trentino. 'Lega Nord Marche' was set up in 1993 with the creation of three party offices in the region. The main party office for the 'Marche nation'[1] was set up in the city of Ancona and the other two offices in the provinces of Macerata and Pesaro. The LN had previously only entered local administrative elections in the Marche region but it stood for the first time in the national election of April 1996 throughout the whole of the region. The LN obtained 15 489 valid votes, which was 1.6 per cent of the vote in the Marche region, for the elections to the Italian Parliament; this meant that the party was the fifth largest out of seven which stood. The largest party was the *Ulivo* (Olive Tree coalition) with 41.7 per cent of the vote, followed by the *Polo per la Libertà* (Freedom Pole) (Ministero dell'Interno 1996). In comparison to the other regions, the LN's result in the Marche region ranked 11th, out of the 12 regions in which the party stood. The region with the lowest electoral result for the LN was Umbria, which gained only one per cent.

Within the Marche, in the 1996 election, the LN presented candidates in seven out of the 12 political constituencies. Within the province of Macerata, the highest result was 2.3 per cent, which was recorded in the constituencies of Civitanova Marche and Osimo; the highest number of votes, 1 879, was gained in Osimo (see Figure 19).

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[1] According to the LN, the administrative region of the Marche is one of the 14 'nations' of 'Padania'.

Figure 19 : Percentage vote for the LN in the three electoral constituencies of the province of Macerata, in the 1996 national election

(Source : Comune di Macerata 1996)

**National Election 1996**

| | |
|---|---|
| Osimo | 2.3 |
| Civitanova | 2.3 |
| Macerata | 1.9 |
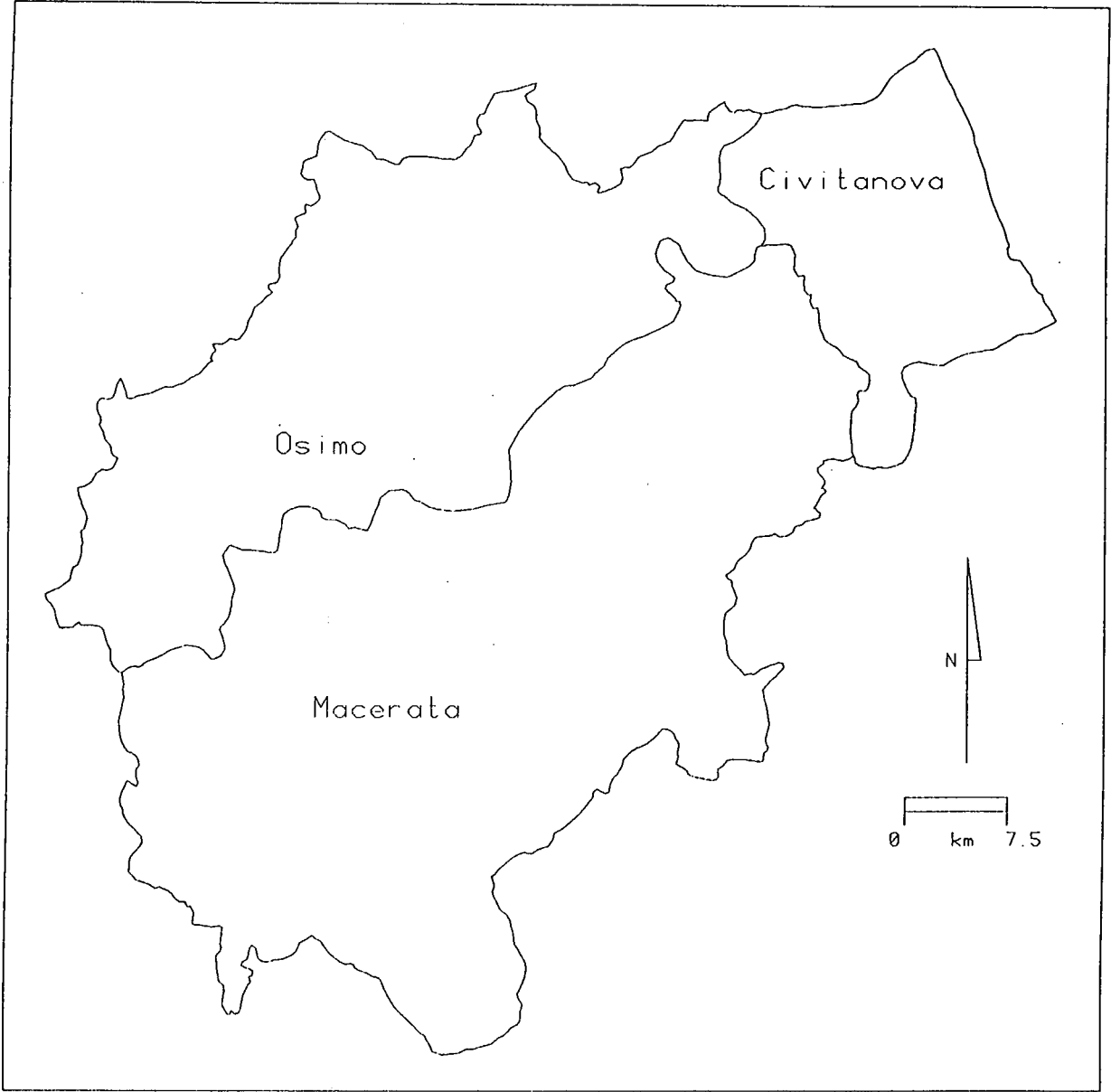
Within the constituency of Macerata, the LN candidate gained 1.9 per cent of the vote and in 14 out of the 34 communes the LN gained between two and three per cent of the vote. However, the party gained over 100 votes in only three of the communes; the highest number of votes, 563, was gained in the commune of Macerata, the *capoluogo* (head town) of the province. The second highest was 246 votes in the commune of Tolentino and the third highest was 197, which was recorded in the commune of Corridonia. The largest party in the Macerata constituency was the *Ulivo* (Olive Tree coalition) with 41 893 votes, which gained 49.89 per cent of the vote (Comune di Macerata 1996).

In the elections to the Italian Senate for the Macerata constituency, the LN gained 2.8 per cent of the vote, and in 25 of the 52 communes between two and three per cent of the vote. The LN gained over 100 votes in 12 of the communes; the highest number of votes, 602, was again recorded in the commune of Macerata; the second highest result was 540 votes in the commune of Osimo, and the third highest was 323, recorded in the commune of Castelfidardo. Again the largest party in the Macerata constituency was the *Ulivo* with 73 477 votes, 50.31 per cent of the vote (Comune di Macerata 1996).

The electoral results for the LN are very low, especially in comparison to the results which the party gained in the respective provinces of Varese and Trentino. The victory for the *Ulivo* (centre-left coalition party) was a convincing one in the Macerata constituency, as it was in the whole of the region, which reflects the persistence of a 'white' political sub-culture. In the fifty years since the creation of the Italian Republic within the Marche region, the Christian Democrat (DC) party, up until 1992 was by far the most dominant party. However, with the demise of the DC as a political force within the region voting patterns have become more fragmented. In many areas of the North of Italy, the LN has been one of the most successful political parties in capturing the votes of former supporters of the DC, however in Macerata this has not been the case, which has been one of the party's weaknesses. Instead, the *Ulivo*, with its various political components, was the most successful political party in capturing support from the former DC supporters. Within the coalition, the largest single party within the region was in fact the PDS, which gained 22.91 per cent of the

regional vote. The second largest party was the *Forza Italia* (FI), which gained 18.26 per cent (Comune di Macerata 1996).

The relatively low result for the LN in the region is obviously not comparable to the success which the party achieved in the regions of Lombardy, Veneto and elsewhere in the North of Italy. However, it is interesting to note that the provincial result for the province of Macerata, 1.54 per cent, was actually higher than the result of 1.4 per cent for the province of Ancona. As the LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata explained, this was the first time that a result for the LN has been higher in a province further south than others within the same region. The LN Provincial Secretary stressed that this was an important result for the party even though the percentage difference was very small and that it signifies that in the future the LN will play an important political role in the province. Moreover, the LN Provincial Secretary argued that the result is significant because if a more southerly province can achieve a higher result in the region, it shows that support is not necessarily linked to geography, but that it is more linked to where the most active political campaigning takes place. Undoubtedly, for him this was a very positive sign for the LN in Macerata arguing that it is a further indication that the party will gain greater support in the Marche[2].

With the discourse of 'Padania' which the LN now endorses, the Marche, along with Tuscana and Umbria, forms the southern boundary of 'Padania' and is very much included within the LN's political project. It remains to be seen whether the attempt by the LN to include Central Italy within its political rhetoric will be successful. The LN would have to overcome several different problems and issues, which so far have restricted its electoral success, as the next section examines.

## 3.2 Institutional realities of the LN in Macerata

Macerata constitutes a completely different geographical, socio-economic and political reality for the LN than most of the other areas of Northern Italy in which the party presents itself. The province of Macerata is one of the weakest areas of support

for the LN and it is situated to the extreme south of 'Padania'. There are, however, certain similarities between the party in the Macerata and elsewhere, for example, the level of commitment shown by the party activists, and the style of political campaigning.

The LN in the province of Macerata consists of only of eight to ten party activists, who between them carry out all the political work. Beyond that there are up to another 20 people who are members of the party but who only occasionally attend party functions. The majority of the party activists are owners of small firms but there are also professional people such as doctors and teachers. The average age of the activists is over 35, and most of them are married with families. There are no activists under the age of 30, which is very much in contrast to the party activists in both Varese and Trentino. In terms of support for the party there is a similar lack of young people, as the LN Provincial Secretary outlined:

> There is no single social group which supports the LN in Macerata but a variety of different groups. For example, there are the small firm and traditional handicraft firm owners, who vote for the LN because they are angry at the high taxes which they are forced to pay and the inefficiency of the public institutions; there are also some pensioners who support the LN, mainly because they are worried about their pensions, which they fear are in danger from the wasteful Italian state. However, unlike Varese, where there are many young people and students actively supporting the LN, this is not the case in Macerata. This is a great shame because students generally have more time and they would be able to put more effort into the functioning of the party. Also, more importantly they should by rights have a greater interest in politics because it directly influences their future..
>
> It has been very difficult for us to develop the LN in Macerata because of our lack of money, support and time but it was the same in the early years for Bossi when he was starting the party in Varese. This is a lesson to us in the Marche because it was very difficult for Bossi and Maroni and the others in the beginning, just as it is for us at the moment. We take heart from that and continue to work hard to build up the base of the party. Of course it would be ideal for us to get more young people supporting and working for the party but this is a problem area for us. It is not that easy to attract young people in the province because most of them are either not interested in politics or involved in the one of the main parties[3].

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[2] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and the LN candidate for the Macerata constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 20/5/96.

[3] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and the LN candidate for the Macerata constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 20/5/96.

Institutionally the LN is very weak in Macerata. The party has a single office in the province, which is self financed by the party activists who pay all the expenses in order to run it. The office is a small ground floor room with a fax machine, computer and storage space for the party's political propaganda and it is not open to the public on a daily basis because the party can not afford to pay a secretary to work daily office hours. However, the activists meet once a week there to discuss party issues, plans and projects and it is the focus of the party in the province but maintaining the party office is a major financial sacrifice for the activists.

The development of the LN in Macerata has not been easy, however it is clear that the party is mostly made up of dedicated as well as convinced followers who firmly believe in the party and for what it stands. As a parliamentary candidate for the LN in Macerata in the 1996 election explained:

> The LN has been present in the Marche region for several years, although its path has been far from easy. The region is a 'border' region, not only geographically but also in cultural and political terms, between the North and South of Italy and also between, on the one hand, conservative, traditional and centralist views and on the other hand more modern viewpoints. This has made the LN's path to the creation of its first party office in the region very hard and painful. Since then many battles have been fought, not least in trying to gain the sufficient number of signatures needed to allow the party to enter into the elections. This still remains a problem for the party but we are a group of *leghiste*, who are profoundly convinced and above all have the hope that the LN will succeed, for the good of Italy and for democracy. In addition, we hope that the support for the LN will spread, especially in the weaker, 'border' regions of Northern Italy, such as the Marche[4].

The level of commitment shown by LN party activists in Macerata is considerable and they have to face much hardship and difficulty to maintain the party's presence in the province. The reasons for this relate partly to the loyalty, which the activists have for the party and its political project but also because of the social and friendship ties which have developed between party activists in the province. The LN has developed in the province in spite of all the problems and constraints which confront and restrict its growth. There are numerous problems which the party faces, which stem from the province's geographic position and its socio-economic situation as well as internal issues within the party itself.

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[4] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Luigi Giagante, Macerata LN party activist and the LN candidate for the Civitanova constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 22/5/96.

## 3.3 Problems and constraints for the LN in Macerata

There has been a combination of problems and issues which have restricted the growth of the LN in the province of Macerata. There are the 'internal' problems that the party faces, which stem from its early stage of development. Such problems are, for example, gaining enough people to help with party activities and also generating enough money to fund the growth and development of the party. In addition, there is a whole set of problems and issues which the party faces in relation to the geographical situation of Macerata as well as the socio-economic, political, cultural and historical specificities of the province.

The institutional infrastructure of the LN within the Marche is very weak, which clearly is a major factor in its low level of electoral support. The electoral results for the party elsewhere in the North of Italy show a fairly strong link with the depth and width of the LN's institutional structures. The networks of party offices provide a territorial link between the party and the electorate and provide a means by which the LN can reach and communicate with the people. Furthermore, these networks represent a 'forum' through which the processes of political socialisation and affiliation can take place between existing party members and new members. These processes have been hindered by the lack of an adequate party structure within the province, as the LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata explains:

> In Macerata, it is relatively difficult to develop support for the LN because we have a lack of local party networks through which we can gain new supporters. In Macerata itself, there are basically only ten *militante* [LN party activists], which makes it logistically and practically very difficult to attract more support. In the province of Ascoli Piceno, there were only two *militante* campaigning in the last election in April 1996, but about 200 votes were gained in that area. It is somewhat of a vicious circle because we need people campaigning to gain support, yet until we have enough supporters willing to campaign actively, it is very hard to convert people to the politics of the LN. We need more party offices, which form 'points of reference' for the electorate with the LN, and also they allow a more efficient means of organising and co-ordinating party activities. In comparison to the LN elsewhere in the North of Italy, we are approximately ten years behind in terms of institutional development and then there is also the problem of cost in developing the party's structure, which is another serious issue[5].

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[5] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and the LN candidate for the Macerata constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 20/5/96.

The issue of cost consistently creates problems within the party because not all the activists are convinced that they should pay for the running of the party office when they receive little in return. As one LN party activist in Macerata argued:

> When a person goes to the tennis club, for example, that person pays a membership fee and then is allowed to play tennis. However, when I pay my 50 000 Lire to the LN, in return I get nothing at all and I think that this is wrong and unfair. The only way to continue, if we cannot afford to run the party office, is to close it down and then we would all save some money[6].

In response to this, the Provincial Secretary argued:

> It is out of the question to close down the party office because it is vitally important to the LN in the province. It is the only way for the party to gain new members because the office is a way in which the people can come along and join the party or to see what we are really about. The office is a 'forum', it is a place for us to meet and to talk about the party but it is also a way of gaining new support. I think that if the cost was not really felt then there would be no real problem, no real need for change and thus there would be no need for the LN. The burden of the costs which we face, as all Italian citizens do, is precisely because of the problems which the country faces. This is the main reason for the LN - to change the socio-economic and political situation within Italy[7].

The importance of the party office was echoed by other LN party activists:

> Regarding the payments which we make to the LN, I don't think that we should expect anything in return. The contributions are voluntary, in the same way as our help and assistance is - and both go towards helping the LN and its cause for the creation of a federal Italian state. Thus, our efforts and payments are very much part of this cause. It is not really as simple to ask what we should get in return for our efforts; if Bossi had asked those sorts of questions then there would not be any LN and indeed for that matter any hope for the future. It is about making sacrifices for a cause in which we believe[8].

Conflict within the party mainly stems from the issue of finance and funding but is evident in other aspects of the party's activities. As a relatively new socio-political group, the LN in Macerata has no established formal internal structures and it would

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[6] Author's fieldnotes extract from group discussion with the Macerata LN party activists, extract from Signor DeAngelis, 29/5/96.

[7] Author's fieldnotes extract from group discussion with the Macerata LN party activists, extract from Pierino Rossetti, the LN Provincial Secretary, 29/5/96.

[8] Author's fieldnotes extract from group discussion with the Macerata LN party activists, extract from Signor Passerini, 29/5/96.

seem that sometimes this causes problems because people are not sure who is responsible for what. Also, it would seem that there are conflicts between different personalities within the small group of activists because various people have contrasting motives for supporting the LN. As the LN Provincial Secretary explained:

> Another problem for the LN stems from the fact that the party is a relatively new and small political formation in the province. Consequently, we do not always know the reasons and motivations of any new members who join the party. In the past we have had people who have joined the party who were basically intent on destroying it, by creating internal conflicts and undermining the work of the party. This was mainly because they saw it as a dangerous political force, which for several reasons they did not want to see grow. Alternatively, other people, often 'refugees' from other political parties, want to join the LN because they know they will get the chance to gain a senior political position relatively quickly. This has always been a problem for the LN in Macerata, but we need the money and the support of new members and so we cannot turn people away. The problem is how to understand who these negative people are and what their aims for joining the LN are . At the finish, the main aim for the LN is to continue to grow, which so far has been hindered by such problems[9].

A further problem for the LN in Macerata has been overcoming the apparent stigma which goes along with being a member of the party in the province. As the LN Provincial Secretary argued:

> In the Marche there is a great stigma attached to openly being a supporter or member of the LN. Many people are especially worried about joining the party because they think they will lose face and favour within the town and this would have a detrimental effect on their lives. The main worry is that they would lose status and would not be able to gain favours and recommendations within the clientelistic networks which exist within the province. This may well limit their access to certain jobs and opportunities. Thus, LN supporters tend to be marginalised within the Marche for this reason. For example, we often receive hostility in the workplace from people who don't agree with the politics of the party. Alternatively, sometimes employers might look unfavourably upon employing LN supporters, which is a problem in an environment where recommendations are important in gaining openings[10].

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[9] Author's fieldnotes extract from group discussion with the Macerata LN party activists, extract from Pierino Rossetti, 29/5/96.

[10] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and the LN candidate for the Macerata constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 20/5/96.

In some ways this echoes similar sentiments expressed by the people involved in the *Lega Lombarda*, in its early stages in the early 1980s in Varese (see Chapter Five). They also talked about the hostility they faced from other people who did not agree with the politics and ideas of the party. Of course, it is difficult to judge the extent to which the supporters of the LN have allegedly suffered or been victimised, however, the alleged stigma which has been attached to the LN would seem to be a real problem and one which would seem to be difficult to eradicate. This problem is compounded by the fact that the general perception of the LN in the province is rather a negative one, which the LN Provincial Secretary argues is mainly due to the media portrayal of the party:

> The people of Macerata don't really fully understand the politics of the LN partly because it is a relatively new political force in the region but also because they tend to take the media's view of the LN. The media tends to portray the party as 'extremist' or as 'racist' against the people of the South of Italy. Unfortunately, as a party we cannot afford to get any media coverage, even in the local papers and so it is very difficult for us to gain any positive publicity. In addition, another problem is that in Macerata there is not really so much of a culture of 'reading to be informed', so that people instead tend to rely more on gossip and the television to be informed. For the LN this means that people view the party in a negative and hostile way[11].

The image of the LN is not really conducive to it gaining a greater degree of popularity within the province. It would also seem very difficult for the party to express any positive and clear messages about its politics because of its lack of local media exposure. The party in Macerata is judged not on its ideas and policies for the province but on the media images of the party at a national level. This distorts the true nature of the party in the province, which is much more moderate and in the 1996 election used the discourse of 'federalism' as its main campaign message. The *leghiste* of Macerata would be classed as convinced 'federalists' rather than being part of the '*puri e duri*' ('pure and hard') faction of the LN, which endorses the hard line discourses of secession and the independence of 'Padania'. As a LN parliamentary candidate in the 1996 election explained in an interview given during the 1996 election campaign:

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[11] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and the LN candidate for the Macerata constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 20/5/96.

There is no future for Italy without federalism and the true adversary of the LN is the difficulty in making the Italian citizens aware of the dramatic social and economic situation in the country. The problem is no longer between Left and Right within Italian politics but between centralism and federalism[12].

For the *leghiste* of Macerata the LN's discourse of federalism is not against the South of Italy but beneficial for the whole of Italy; this differs from the view of LN party activists in the 'far North' of Italy, as the LN Provincial Secretary explained:

For most *Maceratese* (people of Macerata), 'Rome' is very far away, not only geographically but also as a priority in their minds. Most people think that they have very little political power or responsibility to influence local politics mainly because of the heavily centralised and bureaucratic nature of the Italian state. Consequently, most have the opinion that there is very little possibility of change and so they simply accept things as they are. The Italian state is a very distant and artificial concept in the minds of most ordinary Italians and so the only way forward is the federalism of the LN, which would respect this diversity while promoting a unity in the difference. The federalism of the LN is not anti-Southern or racist because a 'unified Italy' does not exist in the minds of most Southerners anyway[13].

It is apparent that the views of the *leghiste* of Macerata are less strong and direct than the political views of party supporters elsewhere in the North of Italy. This is partly because of the geographical location of the province, which is obviously nearer to the South of Italy and consequently it is very difficult for party members to express any 'anti-Southern' sentiments. Moreover, it would seem that the supporters of the LN do not really endorse the hard-line discourses of the party and are convinced that federalism is the way forward for the party. This is in stark contrast to, for example, the views of the *leghiste* in the provinces of Varese or Trentino. In fact, the LN's hard-line discourse of secession has created several problems for the LN in the Marche. The LN's federalist discourse did not really include the Marche in its geographical scope yet the whole of central Italy is now included in the discourse of 'Padania'. Ironically, with the rejection of federalism the LN stands to lose more support than it will gain through the inclusion of the Marche in its 'Padania' discourse. It would seem that the supporters of the LN in Macerata are not totally

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[12] Extract from interview with Luigi Giagante published in the 'Resto del Carlino' newspaper in the province of Macerata, 14 April 1996.
[13] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and the LN candidate for the Macerata constituency in the 1996 election for the Italian Parliament, 20/5/96.

convinced of the stronger line taken by the party. As one LN Macerata supporter explained:

> It is important that we, as the LN Marche, make our presence felt at Pontida because not all the LN supporters in the North of Italy are clear about where the border of 'Padania' actually is. Most of them think that the Marche is part of the South of Italy and that the LN does not exist further south than Emilia-Romagna. Therefore, we need to show the rest of the North that there is fervent support in the Marche. Also, it is true that many people in the Marche do not feel part of 'Padania', or indeed know what it is supposed to signify. In fact, if you look at the map of 'Padania' on one of the LN's political posters then the Marche is not even drawn on it even though it is labelled as one of the regions within 'Padania'![14]

The LN's discourse of secession is viewed with a considerable amount of scepticism by the LN party activists in Macerata. In addition, the citizens of the province are even more critical of the party's discourse and they certainly do not feel a part of 'Padania', as a LN party activist explained:

> It is very important that we organise as many local party meetings as possible because it is important to inform people about the policies of the LN in Macerata. The problem is that the people only really hear about the LN from the television, and therefore in relation to the creation of 'Padania' and the division of Italy. Of course the people in the Marche do not feel a part of this project and so now it is even more important for us to campaign at the local level to make them realise that the LN is about local issues and wants to protect the local economy and local jobs. We must make people realise that 'Padania' is only one aspect of the politics of the LN because it is clear that it does not mean anything here[15].

According to the LN, the Marche region constitutes one of the 14 'nations' of 'Padania' and so it forms an important part of the political project of the party. The party strategy is quite clear because including Central Italy in 'Padania' ensures that the LN is classed as a 'national' political party because it presents itself in over half of the regions of Italy. The Marche is strategically important for the LN, as the LN Provincial Secretary argued:

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[14] Author's fieldnotes extract from group discussion with the Macerata LN party activists, extract from Antonella Ricotta, 21/5/96.

[15] Author's fieldnotes extract from group discussion with the Macerata LN party activists, extract from Eraldo Isidori, 29/5/96.

The Marche region is not all that important to the LN in terms of its size, because its total population is less than 1 500 000 people, which is relatively small when compared to the size of population of some Northern Italian provinces. However, symbolically it is important because it is the region which divides Italy, economically, culturally and socially. If one goes to the next region south, Abruzzo, one encounters a proper 'Southern' mentality and culture in terms of attitude to work and society. Also the economy is relatively weak compared to the Centre and North of Italy. The people have the characteristics of 'Southern' people; linguistically, the dialects are different and the ethnic origins of the people are different to those in the Marche. For example, the Longobards, which were Celtic people, got as far south as Ancona and Macerata. Moreover, the economy in the Marche is very different than those regions in the South of Italy, it is more similar to that of the Veneto with its structure of dynamic small and medium sized firms. Thus, the Marche is on the border of 'Greater Padania' and for this reason it is important to the LN[16].

By calling for secession, the LN hopes that the people of the Marche will want to remain a part of 'Padania', or at least the North of Italy, mainly because of its relative wealth and economic strength. However, it remains very doubtful whether the party will be able to increase its level of support in the province by endorsing the discourse of secession.

The task of the LN in Macerata is a very difficult one and there are many problems and constraints with which the party is confronted. At least the federalist rhetoric of the party was not really viewed with hostility by the citizens of the province, however, the discourse of secession is a different issue altogether. Undoubtedly, the geographical location of the province is the major constraint for the LN, which ensures that the rhetoric of the party, and especially its anti-Southern messages, are not as popular as they are further North. Moreover, the image of the party nationally, means that the LN in Macerata is viewed rather negatively precisely because of its hard-line rhetoric. This has been a recurrent problem for the party in Macerata and it seems likely that this image will get even worse with the LN endorsing secession and the division of Italy. On the other hand, the socio-economy of the province is similar to that of the North of Italy and so the important question remains why the rhetoric of the LN has not been as popular in the province. Even though the province is

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[16] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Pierino Rossetti, LN Provincial Secretary for Macerata and LN candidate for the Macerata constituency, 1996 election for the Italian Parliament,

confronted by similar socio-economic problems to areas in the North, the political response to these problems is different. This is because of the specific interactions of the different cultural, geographical, political and socio-economic issues within Macerata, which have contrived to hinder the growth of the LN. This issue is addressed more fully in the next section.

## 4. The Economy, Institutions and Civil Society of the province of Macerata

In the last three decades, the socio-economic development of the province of Macerata has taken place relatively rapidly. This has ensured a vast number of economic, institutional as well as social transformations, however, it is apparent that certain aspects of the province's socio-economic and civil structures have remained relatively unaffected. The reasons for Macerata's development are similar to those which have influenced the growth of the so-called 'Third Italy', which encompasses the Central and North-eastern areas of Italy. However, it is apparent that, in some ways, Macerata's socio-economic development has been different, and understanding the geographical, socio-economic and societal specificities of the province of Macerata is fundamental in order to understand the reasons why the LN has not been able to attract any significant levels of electoral support in the province.

The economy of Macerata has been largely influenced by the dominant structure of agriculture in the province - the *Mezzadria* structure. In Macerata, as with elsewhere in the 'Third Italy', this system has been very important and has ensured a specific type of diffuse industrialisation that is based largely upon dense networks of small and medium sized firms (often family owned), which have a close link to agriculture. It is quite common in Macerata for small firms to be located close to, or indeed on the family farm and it is rare for people in Macerata to travel over five kilometres to work so there is a close link between 'work' and 'home'. The majority of small firms are family owned, often with several generations of the family working either in the firm, on the farm or piece of land, or in a related activity. This has several effects; firstly, it ensures that the small firms have a source of labour at much lower costs; secondly, most of the families of the province are relatively self-sufficient and are closely

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integrated; thirdly, it means that flexible working patterns are common, such as 'part-time' and 'home working'. Moreover, it ensures that there is a significant 'black' or 'informal' economy in the province because of the close links between 'work' and 'home' and also between employment and family activities.

The economic take-off of the province in the 1960s brought with it a rapid increase in the standard of living for most of the citizens of Macerata. One of the preconditions of this take-off was the overlapping of modern industrial activities with the traditional social structure, with both co-existing in relative harmony. The socio-economic development of Macerata has ensured a massive social and economic 'uplift' for the majority of its citizens but in spite of this the social structure of the province has not changed significantly. It is still very strong and based on traditional family values and the teachings of the Church and there has been no real change in the urban structure of the province of Macerata, or indeed the Marche region. The processes of urbanisation have been relatively limited and the urban structure of the province has remained based upon a number of small and medium sized towns. This has meant that the province has avoided the problems commonly associated with urbanisation such as increased crime and urban degradation[17].

The socio-economic differences between Macerata and the rest of the North of Italy are key in understanding why the discourses of the LN have not gained as much support in the province. The economy of Macerata has not undergone the same kinds of restructuring processes as have taken place in the North of Italy. This is partly because the economy of the province is more linked to domestic rather than European markets. Therefore, the growth of the LN has been limited in Macerata because of the fact that the economic issues and problems affecting the region are not on the same scale as those which effect the economies of the North of Italy, as a representative of the Industrial Association of Macerata stressed:

> The LN is very weak in the Marche and indeed, it is not a political force at all at the local level; the LN's proposals for federalism were not even an issue at the local level amongst the small firms. The small number of people who

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[17] Information taken from Author's fieldnotes interview with Franco Partigiani, General Secretary of the CISL Trade Union, Macerata, 30/5/96,

voted for the LN in the last election were those making a 'protest vote' against the traditional parties in the region, but the size of the vote was negligible when compared with the vote for the party across the North of Italy. The main reason for this is that the economy of the Marche has not encountered the problems on the same scale that the regions of Lombardy, Veneto and the rest of Northern Italy have. This is partly because the Marche economy is not as large as those of Lombardy and Veneto and the problems of restructuring and unemployment have been much smaller scale. In the strongest regions of support for the LN, the vote for the LN is linked to problems of restructuring and is basically a protest at what the small firm sector sees as the excessive fiscal burden that the Italian state has placed on the Northern Italian economy. The problems were worse for the North of Italy because its economy was much more integrated into the wider European and international economy. The economy of the Marche is less linked to these external markets, although it does export abroad, but its main market is a much more domestic one[18].

The LN has gained considerable support in the North of Italy from people angry at the alleged poor quality of the state bureaucracy and public services. It is apparent that in Macerata such sentiments are not as widely felt, partly because the quality of public services is relatively good.

The main reason why a significant number of people in the North of Italy support the LN is that they are angry at what they see as the relatively poor public services which they receive, in relation to the relatively high taxes they pay. For example, in Milan there is one State university which has to serve the whole city and is massively over-subscribed and underfunded. In the Marche region there are four universities Urbino, Ancona, Macerata, and Camerino, (two of which Macerata and Camerino), are in the province of Macerata. Therefore, the people of the Marche get much better services in relation to the taxes which they pay and, to an extent, one could argue that the people of the North are paying their taxes to provide services for people elsewhere in the country. It is really a question of services in relation to taxation and in the Marche the people are happy with the functioning of the local state and public services, not least because there are only about 1.5 million people[19].

This is partly because the Marche region has in the past received considerable levels of public funding from the central government in Rome. Indeed, the southernmost province of the Marche, Ascoli Piceno, was the northernmost province in Italy to receive aid from the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* ('The Fund for the Italian South'),

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[18] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with a representative of the Industrial Association of the Province of Macerata, 30/5/96.

[19] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Carlo Pongetti of the University of Macerata, 27/5/96.

which only stopped a few years ago[20]. Moreover, politically the Marche had very close links to Rome and the central government because it was a very strong base of support for the DC political party, as the General Secretary of the CISL trade union for the province of Macerata explained:

> Federalism is not really an issue in the Marche, for a number of reasons; this is mainly because there is still a strong link to Rome and the central Italian government, which has always been very strong. In the past, the region has always really received more money from Rome than it pays back by way of taxes. This partly explains why the region was a main stronghold for the DC party under Forlani during the 'CAF'[21] era. The region benefited from its links to the DC through the patronage and clientelism which existed; the result was that the standard of living increased relatively quickly. The people are reluctant to change a system which has brought a relatively good standard of living and has brought about the socio-economic development of the region when previously there had been poverty and social hardship[22].

Federalism, or at least greater regional devolution, is becoming recognised as an increasingly important issue within Macerata, however, the federalist discourse of the LN in Macerata is commonly rejected mainly because of its anti-Southern stance and apparent lack of concern for issues such as solidarity and national unity. As the Provincial Secretary of the CIGL trade union for the province of Macerata explained:

> Greater fiscal autonomy is needed so that, especially in the Marche, local government can decide what to do with its own money. In the Marche this is a problem because there is a need to build up the region's infrastructure, especially to outlying villages. But at the moment Rome is not spending money on such projects because they are not a priority compared to other larger projects. The citizens want to have greater control at the local level and to know where the money from their taxes goes. It is generally accepted that federalism is the way forward for Italy, however, a federalism which maintains the unity of Italy and not one, such as the LN's, which is racist and ignores the South of Italy[23].

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[20] Information taken from Author's fieldnotes interview with Signor Filliponi, Provincial Secretary of the CGIL trade union in Macerata, 24/5/96.

[21] 'CAF' refers to 'Craxi, Andreotti and Forlani' ; three very important Italian political leaders during the past 50 years; Forlani was a head of the DC party who was also born in the Marche region.

[22] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Francesco Partigiani, General Secretary of the CISL trade union, Macerata, 30/5/96.

[23] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Signor Filliponi, Provincial Secretary of the CGIL trade union in Macerata, 24/5/96.

A key issue used to criticise the federalist rhetoric of the LN is the importance of 'solidarity' between Italian regions as well as national unity, as the President of the Province of Macerata argues:

> Federalism is the way forward for Italy but we must ensure that the unity of Italy remains and that the solidarity between the North and South of Italy is maintained. The LN proposals are wrong because the party wants to divide Italy. For the LN, federalism is only aimed to protect the interests of the citizens of the North and nobody else. It is no coincidence that on the 50th anniversary of the Italian Republic, the LN will be celebrating at Pontida the inauguration of its so-called 'Governo del Sole' ('Sun Government'), which is the government of 'Padania'. This just shows that the LN is intent on undermining the legitimacy of the Italian state[24].

In Macerata there is greater concern for the issues of solidarity between the North and South of Italy as well as that of national unity, which serves to undermine the appeal of the LN in the province. The reason for this is related to the province's geographical location. It is also related to the different cultural specificities in Macerata, as a representative from the Macerata Association for Commerce and Tourism explained:

> The structure of society in the Marche, with its predominantly traditional cultural norms and values is about 20 years behind that of the North of Italy. A good example of this is the use of technology in Macerata, which was about 20 years behind the level of use in the North of Italy, in our office we still use an electric typewriter and an old PC that probably could not run "Windows". This is generally the case in the majority of the offices in the region. Secondly, the structure of society is still very traditional in the Marche; the people are still very much influenced by the Church and a majority still attend Mass on a regular basis, which is a legacy of the days when the Marche was a part of the Papal State. Society is still based on traditional value systems and customs, for example there are no 'hyper-markets' and shopping centres in the region because people's shopping habits are still based upon going to the local shops every day to buy their bread. In the North of Italy this happens rarely these days and in the South the people are even more traditional. The consequence of this is that the people do not really follow Bossi because he is concerned with the people of the North, which does not include them. The people of the Marche certainly do not feel part of 'Padania'[25].

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[24] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Pigliapoco, President of the Province of Macerata, 1/6/96.

[25] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with a representative of the Association of Commerce and Tourism of the Province of Macerata, 31/5/96.

Such differences in the nature of civil society in the province present a number of challenges to the LN. The Catholic Church in the province is a very important social institution, and its influence stems from the fact that up until 100 years ago the region was part of the Papal state. This has a number of implications for the LN in Macerata, not least because the Church is very much for Italian unity and solidarity between rich and poor Italian regions, against the discourses of the party. The Mayor of Macerata explained the significance of the Church in the province:

> Another reason for the lack of support for the LN is the fact that the *Marchigiani* are very individualistic people. The dominant culture is one in which the people put their family's welfare first, which is the most important thing so that as long as they have work and food and a relatively good standard of living they are contented. They are not really people who follow the 'big' ideas or movements; generally they are simple people who go about their daily business and do not like to make the headlines. This is very much in contrast to the Lombards or the people of the Veneto who have a different mentality and a certain arrogance. One reason for this difference between the Marche and the regions of the North of Italy is the fact that the Marche was part of the Papal State up until the unification of Italy; the people are still influenced a great deal by the Church and its doctrines. For example, family values are still very strong and the concept of 'community' is still very important within the small communes of the Marche. A famous quote to describe the people of the Marche is 'better a dead man inside than a *Marchigiani* at the door'; this refers to the fact that the people of the Marche were the tax collectors for the Pope during his rule of the region[26].

In the majority of the North of Italy, it is apparent that the processes of secularisation are more advanced than they are in the province of Macerata. The LN has been one of the primary beneficiaries of the decline in importance of religion within Italian politics, however, in Macerata, the Church and its networks of related institutions are very important to the citizens of the province. In addition, another institutional constraint with which the party is confronted is the fact that the province is divided into many different separate communes. This serves to undermine a feeling of provincial or regional identity, which makes the LN's discourse about the Marche being one of the 14 'nations' of 'Padania' rather inappropriate, as the President of the Province of Macerata points out:

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[26] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Maulo, the Mayor of the commune of Macerata, 30/5/96.

> Within the province of Macerata there are 57 separate communes and each has its own mayor and town council. Thus, the citizens of the province have a strong sense of *campanilismo*, which means they affiliate more with the local level than the provincial or regional scales. This is reflected in the different dialects, attitudes, mentality and culture of the people within and between the different communes. Basically, the administrative divisions were superimposed upon the cultural divisions of the people; the result is that there is no real overall feeling or identity with the Marche 'region'. This is also because there is no real urban metropolis with which people identify, unlike Lombardy with Milan and the Veneto with Venice. However, at the other extreme, the people strongly identify with being 'Italian', this is in part due to historical reasons because Central Italy was basically the birth place of the *Risorgimento* movement. Also, it is because of the geographical position of the Marche, which is at the centre of the country. It is for these reasons that the people of the Marche feel at the 'centre' of Italy and 'Padania' does not exist in the minds of the people[27].

It is clear that the LN in Macerata has not been able to develop any significant bases of electoral support. In part this is due to the problems of the party itself and the nature of its political discourse and rhetoric, which is less popular outside of the North of Italy. However, it is clear that the specific socio-economic, historical, political, social and cultural contexts of the province of Macerata have hindered and limited the growth of the LN in the province. Although the socio-economy of Macerata is relatively similar to that of Lombardy and Veneto, where the LN is particularly strong, the party is not able to gain the same levels of support.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the province of Macerata, as an area in which the LN has gained a low level of electoral support. The case-study is important because it shows that, despite the successes of the party elsewhere in Northern Italy, the political rhetoric of the LN would seem to have only limited geographical scope. Undoubtedly, Macerata's geographical position in central Italy, as well as its historical connections to Rome and to the Pope are the key reasons why the LN has failed to gained support in the province. Moreover, the continued importance of the dominant 'white' political sub-culture in shaping political allegiances in the province is another constraining factor for the LN.

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[27] Author's fieldnotes extract from interview with Dr Pigliapoco, President of the Province of Macerata, 1/6/96.

Once before, the LN attempted to break out of its Northern Italian electoral base when it became known as the '*Lega Nord-Centro-Sud*' (see Chapter Three). The LN's aim was to gain greater electoral support in Central and Southern Italy, however, the party's experiment failed. It remains doubtful whether the LN's rhetoric of 'Padania', and the inclusion of the Marche (and Central Italy) as a part of it, will have any greater positive effects in terms of increasing the party's electoral support. Indeed, it is quite possible that the LN will lose support in such 'border' regions as the Marche because its hard-line stance has already alienated public opinion. This raises serious doubts about the appropriateness of the LN's political project of 'Padania' and its inclusion of the Marche. It remains to be seen whether the citizens of Macerata will recognise the existence of 'Padania' in the future. However, for the time being, in the opinions of the majority of its citizens, Macerata remains quite clearly at the 'centre' of Italy rather than the 'border' of 'Padania'.

# Chapter Eight : Conclusion - *L'Italia é una e indivisible?*

## 1. Introduction

The relatively rapid rise and enduring success of the LN in Italian politics has surprised many people in Italy as well as outside. As Allum and Diamanti (1996:151) argue:

> "before the 1992 [national] elections most Italian politicians were convinced that the leagues were an ephemeral phenomenon and of little national consequence."

This has clearly not been the case because the LN has managed significantly to expand its electoral support and it was the largest party in the regions of Lombardy and Veneto in the 1996 national Italian elections. Undoubtedly, the rise of the LN has given new impetus to the debates surrounding national unity in Italy. The party's rhetoric claims that the central Italian State is inefficient, Southern biased and incapable of rising to the challenges of the modern global economy. In so doing, the LN tries to delegitimise the Italian nation-state, which has always remained an abstract reality both in the North and the South of Italy. The challenge of regionalism in Italy is significant and one which will not easily go away in the near future.

The LN and its political regionalist project is an important example of the resurgence of regionalism within Europe. In some ways, the LN is similar to other regionalist parties in Europe, which are striving for greater regional autonomy. On the other hand, it is clear that the party is different in a number of ways; this is partly because of the specificities of the Italian State and its politics and economy. However, understanding the rise of the LN in Italy is helpful in analysing some of the key factors that have led to the resurgence of regionalism elsewhere in Europe. In addition, assessing some of the strategies of the LN, as well as the impacts and nature of its political discourses, allows wider conclusions to be made about the importance of regionalism in Europe. For example, whether new regionalist forms of political structures and representation are better suited to the changing nature of contemporary economy and society within Europe.

The first section of this chapter discusses the key conclusions from the case-study chapters on the LN in the provinces of Varese, Trentino and Macerata. This allows an understanding of the factors that have both helped and hindered the growth of the party across the North of Italy. The second section focuses on the importance of the LN in the Italian context and how the party has influenced the nature of politics in the country. The third section of the chapter examines the importance of the LN in the context of the resurgence of regionalism in Europe and asks whether the socio-political impacts of the LN in Northern Italy provide any wider indications as to the future challenges of regionalism within Europe.

## 2. The LN in Varese, Trentino and Macerata

Varese is one of the provinces of Northern Italy where the growth of the LN has been most marked. The political and symbolic links between the LN and Varese are significant, mainly because the *Lega Lombarda* was founded in Varese and Bossi, the party leader, was born in the province. These factors have undoubtedly influenced the growth of the LN in the province but they are not the only ones. The LN has also benefited from the changing socio-economic and political situation in Varese; the decline of DC hegemony combined with economic restructuring has provided a favourable political-economic environment for the growth of the party. Therefore, the LN has been able to take advantage of the widespread resentment and anger felt by the citizens of Varese, towards the alleged problems of the Italian central State. However, the real success of the LN has been its ability to interpret and reflect such problems and issues in its political discourse for its own political advantage.

The LN has undergone considerable electoral growth in Varese both in national and local elections. In the early 1990s, the party gained political control of the Provincial government as well as in several communes in the province. The most important of these was the Commune of Varese, of which the LN gained control in 1992. Therefore, the party has gone from an oppositional party to a party of government in a short space of time. This has created a number of problems and challenges for the LN. The main problem has been the lack of experience of LN representatives in local government. On the other hand, the party has been relatively successful in power at the Provincial level and also at the Commune level in Varese, implementing a number of new policies.

The LN gained political control in Varese at a time of real political crisis in Italy, as well as in the province itself, and the party was the chief beneficiary of the decline of the DC. The key test for the LN will be whether it can gain re-election in the Provincial and Commune elections in Varese, which are to take place at the end of 1997 and early in 1998. In particular, the election for the Commune of Varese will be carried out under a new electoral system, whereby the citizens directly elect the mayor. This offers both advantages and disadvantages for the LN. As the party has a strong and rather radical image, this may create problems at the local level because people are more reluctant to vote for the LN when it will directly impact on their everyday lives. Another problem for the LN is that prospective candidates must have a good reputation within the local area to get elected under the new electoral system. As a significant number of LN politicians are younger and more inexperienced than the politicians of the other political parties this may pose problems for the LN.

The differences between the LN in the province of Varese and the party in Trentino are quite marked. The different mix of geographical, institutional, political and socio-economic structures in Trentino contribute to its distinctiveness from the majority of other Italian provinces. Unlike in Varese, the LN has faced a number of issues and problems in Trentino, which have constrained its level of support and growth. The main factor that has constrained the growth of the LN in Trentino is the province's constitutional autonomy. Therefore, some of the issues that have contributed to the growth of the LN in Varese are not felt as strongly in Trentino. In particular, the desire to gain greater autonomy from the central Italian State, which is relatively strong in Varese, is not really an issue in Trentino because the province already has a significant degree of autonomy. The citizens of Trentino are intent on maintaining this autonomy, which has ensured a relatively high standard of living as well as other benefits. This means that issues such as federalism and any possible changes to the structure of the Italian State are particularly contentious in Trentino.

The LN in Trentino is also in competition with other autonomist parties, which are strictly provincially based and intent on protecting the province's autonomy at all costs. This means that the autonomist vote is split and also that the LN has the problem of differentiating itself and its political discourse from the other, traditional

and well-established autonomist parties. Therefore, the LN is confronted with challenges which the party in Varese, as well as in other areas of the North of Italy, does not have to face. On the other hand, the LN has been able to overcome these and other problems by modifying its political discourse and relying upon the mass media to raise the public's awareness of the LN. This has also been assisted because Trentino is situated in the 'far North' of Italy and so its citizens still associate with the problems and issues that the LN has identified.

The issue of geographical location is of paramount importance in understanding why the LN has only been able to gain a very low level of electoral support in the province of Macerata. The contrasts between the LN in the province of Macerata and the LN in Varese are stark. They are at two extremes; geographically speaking, they are at opposite ends of the LN's political map, and in electoral terms Macerata is one of the weakest areas of support for the LN while Varese is one of the strongest areas. The main reason for this is that Macerata is outside the North of Italy and so as such is outside the party's 'imagined community'. The LN gains less support because the citizens of Macerata feel that the party does not represent them as they are part of Central Italy. Also, the issues that have helped the growth of the LN, both in Varese and to a lesser extent in Trentino, are not as strongly felt in Macerata. In particular, the socio-economic issues and resentments, which have been so crucial in contributing to the growth of the LN in Varese, are not as strong in Macerata. This is partly because the province's economy has undergone different restructuring processes and also because there is less resentment towards Rome and the central State. Macerata, however, does form a part of the 14 'nations' of 'Padania' and so is very much a part of the LN's political project to expand its potential geographical sphere of political influence, out of the North and into Central Italy. However, it remains to be seen whether the LN's articulation of the discourse of secession will increase the party's level of support in Macerata and across Central Italy.

All three of the case-study provinces were traditionally areas with a dominant 'white' political sub-culture, based upon the hegemony of the DC political party. The decline of the DC (along with the other traditional Italian political parties) has had a significant impact upon political sub-cultures in the three areas. In light of the decline

in importance of the DC, the important question is how the dominant social, economic, institutional and cultural values in the three areas are politically represented (and hence reproduced) in the post-DC era. In Varese, the LN has benefited from the decline of the DC because it has managed to gain a significant amount of support from ex-DC supporters. In Trentino, however, the LN has not managed to gain as much support and of course in Macerata the decline of the DC has not resulted in a growth of the LN.

This raises a number of other issues in relation to the nature of support for the LN. Primarily, the key issue is whether the LN, in heartlands of support such as Varese, has been able to embed itself into civil society by developing links with existing civil and socio-economic institutions, in the way that the DC (and also the PCI) constructed dominant political sub-cultures. It is certainly too early to ascertain whether the LN has been able to develop a new political sub-culture; however, it is true that the LN has attempted to embed itself within the civil society of the North of Italy. The party has attempted to do this in various ways; firstly, by developing a network of party offices, which enable the party to have closer links with local people in particular areas. Moreover, the party has developed a network of related organisations that are aimed at developing closer links with different spheres of civil society, such as young people, the business community and Church groups. The success of these organisations has been most marked in areas such as Varese, where the party has a high level of electoral support. However, in areas of weaker support, where the party is also much weaker organisationally, such as Macerata, they have limited impacts. Therefore, the question remains whether the LN is ever likely to increase its electoral support in such areas out of the heartlands of support.

In Varese, where the LN is electorally and organisationally strong, the LN has not been able to develop many direct links with existing socio-economic and civil institutions in the province. It is apparent that the LN has been unable to superimpose a new political sub-culture in Varese. In fact, the LN has developed in Varese because it has gained widespread support amongst the citizens of the province and not from the dominant socio-institutions in the province, some of which do not readily agree with the LN and are actually against the party in Varese. This is in contrast to the DC

party, which was able to mediate its political interests and gain support because of its links to a number of socio-institutions, such as Church groups and Trade Unions. The question remains whether over time the LN will be able to develop closer links with the institutions of civil society in its heartlands of support such as Varese and so develop its own political sub-culture. Alternatively, the question is whether the LN has developed a new form of sub-culture, in its heartlands of support, which is different to the old or existing ones, which is based upon an ethnic identity, cultural symbolism and the importance of a charismatic leader. This is a political sub-culture which aims to represent and the discontentments felt amongst the majority of citizens of Varese.

The endorsement by the LN of its discourse of 'Padania' and its secession from the rest of Italy is clearly an attempt to forge a new political as well as ethnic or cultural identity for the supporters of the LN, as well as the people of the North and Centre of Italy. The fact that the LN has recently changed its name to 'Lega Nord per l'indipendenza della Padania' (Northern League for the Independence of 'Padania'), reflects the hard line shift in the party's rhetoric as well as the party's attempt to emphasise its political focus on 'Padania' rather than just the North of Italy. Moreover, the LN has also modified its structure with the creation of the institutions of 'Padania'. These include the 'Parliament of Padania', (which was previously called the Parliament of the North), which is situated in the city of Mantua, as well as the so-called 'Sun Government' of 'Padania', situated in Venice. Indeed, the government has its own President (Giancarlo Pagliarini) as well as ten separate Ministries, including one called 'Identità popolare della Padania' ('Popular identity of 'Padania'') which aims to spread the values and ideas of a 'Padanian' identity.

The LN has also set up the *Comitato Liberazione Nazionale Padano* (the Committee for the Liberation of 'Padania' or CLP), which is headed by Roberto Maroni and its main aim is to promote 'peaceful resistance' between the people of 'Padania' and (what the LN defines as) the outdated Italian institutions and laws. Maroni argues that the CLP is not only a LN structure but is open to anybody who wants to join the organisation (Lega Nord 1996a). The LN has gone even further and created its own type of army, which is called the *Guardia Nazionale Padana* ('Padanian' National

Guard). The LN and its supporters more commonly refer to this as the *Camicie verde* ('Green shirts') or the '*esercito di sorriso*' ('smiling army'). According to the LN, the 'Green shirts' are basically responsible for ensuring the 'defence' of 'Padania'. The LN has also developed a separate Constitution for 'Padania', which theoretically came into being when 'Padania' was declared sovereign and independent on September 15th 1996. This was carried out with a well-publicised LN demonstration, which took place along the River Po, in Northern Italy, which for the LN represents the 'lifeblood' of 'Padania'.

The recent shift in rhetoric of the LN and its endorsement of the secession of 'Padania' raise serious issues about its future political intentions. The LN has now rejected its federalist discourse in favour of what it calls a 'peaceful secession', which would be achieved in a fashion similar to the division of the former Czechoslovakia. With the creation of 'Padania' the LN aims to construct a kind of 'neo-ethnicity' for a 'nation' which is made up of citizens who do not necessarily have a common history, culture or language but an identity derived from similar socio-economic values and attitudes. This is combined with a common insufferance against Rome and the central Italian government, and the constraints that it has placed upon the economy and society of the North of Italy. In so doing, the LN is attempting to become a kind of '*volkspartei*' or 'peoples party' and is trying to normalise the discourse of secession as the only solution for the North and Centre of Italy.

The LN was one of the first to endorse the discourse of federalism as the solution for the problems of the Italian State and economy. It was federalism that gave the LN its political distinctiveness in relation to the traditional political parties and this was also one of the reasons why the party gained so much electoral support in the early 1990s. Federalism is now widely acclaimed by the other political parties as well as other institutions such as Trade Unions and the Church, as a necessary political reform for Italy. Ironically, this has meant that the LN has lost its distinctiveness from the other political parties and so is confronted with a challenge to its identity and political reason-to-be. One of the reasons why the LN has introduced its rhetoric of secession is in response to this challenge; the aim being to restore the LN's political identity. The question is whether secession will become a normalised political discourse over

time as the LN's federalism did, which was also criticised when it was first introduced. In addition, a further question is whether secession is a regressive and backward step on the part of the LN, which can only lead to violence and division in Italy.

The LN occupies an important position in contemporary Italian politics and already it has made a significant impact upon the political scene in Italy. With the party gaining its highest level of electoral support in the most recent national election, it is in both a favourable but also precarious political position. Therefore, the future direction for both the LN as well as Italy in relation to regionalism is unclear, as the next section discusses.

## 3. The challenge of regionalism in Italy

The resurgence of regionalism in Italy has taken a relatively unusual but powerful form, which is associated with the rise of the LN. Indeed, the LN is perhaps the best example of a regionalist political party, which has risen to political prominence in recent decades that is unlike the conventional regionalist parties. The majority of other regionalist parties are based in areas which have a national identity based upon historical claims to a nation, such as in Scotland, Wales and the Basque country. However, regionalism in Northern Italy is different to this for a number of reasons; firstly, it is much younger than the majority of regionalist claims across Europe; and secondly, it is the LN that has given the impetus towards the drive towards regionalism in Northern Italy. This in itself is worthy of note because it shows how, from the political sphere, regionalism can be drawn into mainstream civil society and the domain of everyday life. Before the LN, the idea of a separate Northern Italian nation called 'Padania' was unheard of, however, in recent years the LN has managed to put the issue onto the political agenda and also into the minds of a considerably large number of people in the North of Italy.

This is even more significant because of the fact that the Italian nation-state was created out of political compromises between different groups; to a large extent nationalism in Italy was created from above, out of the efforts of key political actors. The feeling of national identity in Italy was never really that strong or widespread and it still remains very weak to this day. This is one reason why the LN has been able to

appeal to a latent sense of Northern Italian identity or at least unite separate Northern identities. The LN has achieved this in a similar top-down way, with the use of its political discourse and rhetoric and the development of its related organisations. In less than ten years the LN has created a sense of Northern Italian identity and in less than a year, the LN's idea of 'Padania' has gained widespread publicity. Attempts to create a sense of national Italian identity have taken 130 years and are still very much ongoing. The question, however, is whether the LN, with the use of modern technology and mass media as well as its mix of cultural symbolism, graphic political propaganda and invented history, will be able to create a 'Padanian' sense of identity, which may well undermine Italian national identity?

The institutional and political debates about the future forms of governance for the next century in Italy are already underway. This is in part due to the influence of the LN and its questioning of the legitimacy of the Italian nation-state, as well as its demands for greater autonomy for the North of Italy. The Italian government is aware that the LN has significant electoral support in the North of Italy and especially in Italy's two wealthiest regions, Lombardy, and Veneto. The key point is that the Italian Constitution refers to local and regional autonomy but this has never really been fully implemented. Therefore, it is likely that changes will be made to the structure of the Italian state but the question is what will be the nature of such changes and also how long they will take. Ironically, the LN's rejection of federalism and endorsement of secession may well stimulate the Italian government into introducing a form of federalism, or at least some form of greater regional powers. Furthermore, the granting of greater autonomy to the Northern regions of Italy could have potentially negative effects on the LN, even though this is one of the main demands of the party and its supporters. This is because the party would become increasingly marginalised politically, as it would theoretically lose its political reason-to-be. In order to maintain its political distinctiveness, the LN would have to continue with its hard-line secessionist rhetoric. Therefore, the politics of the LN has had relatively positive effects on the debates surrounding State restructuring in Italy, however, paradoxically the implications of these upon the party itself and its political future are less clear.

The schism between the North and South has been an enduring feature of the Italian nation-state from its creation up to the present day. Undoubtedly, this dualism between North and South is bound up with the drive for contemporary regionalism and the growth of the LN. The politics of the LN is about maintaining the economic as well as cultural interests of the citizens of the North of Italy and it is no coincidence that during the years of the 'economic boom' in Italy in the 1960s, there were no such political demands from the citizens of the North of Italy. This is because during the 130 years or so of the Italian State, it has been rare for there to be a consensus that the real beneficiary of Italian unity has been the South and not the North of Italy. Indeed, it was the South of Italy which served the dual purpose of providing an extensive market for products produced in the North as well as a source of relatively cheap and skilled labour. Therefore, the economic development of the North of Italy was facilitated by its links to the South, however, this is something to which the LN does not make any reference in its political rhetoric.

It is only in recent years with the slowing of the economic growth rates of the North of Italy that the resentments towards the South of Italy and the central Italian state have been translated into real political protest. The changing nature of the global economy and increased European integration ensures that the Italian economy cannot be protected as much as it once was. The implications of this upon the economy and businesses of the North of Italy have been far-reaching. Therefore, the legitimacy of the North subsidising the South of Italy and any development or infrastructural projects has largely disappeared. Instead, the citizens of the North are more concerned about maintaining their level of relative wealth and this is why the LN has gained so much electoral support in certain areas of Northern Italy. Thus, the LN has given a new political significance to the dualism between the North and South of Italy and for the LN the only way to answer Italy's 'Southern question' is with the secession of 'Padania'. Although secession seems a distant and unlikely response to this question, it is more likely that the 'Northern question', which is a much more recent issue, will have to be answered rather quicker than the 'Southern question' ever has been in Italy. For the moment it seems that Italy remains as 'one and indivisible' but perhaps the key question is for how long can it stay in its existing form?

The next section considers the importance of regionalism in Europe, in light of some of the changes and impacts that the LN has had in Italy. Also, the significance of regionalism is considered as a possible way forward for European democracy and politics in the next century.

## 4. Regionalism - future challenges

It is important not to over-dramatise the importance and strength of regionalist movements in contemporary Europe, however, there has been an upsurge of regional political parties and movements in recent decades. The question is whether this resurgence provides new perspectives for a more positive way for the future? Or should regionalism be seen as a negative force, to be dismissed as archaic, narrow-minded and 'ethnic'. As Keating (1996:xii) argues, regionalism may be a mechanism for reconciling economic competitiveness and social solidarity in the face of the process of economic globalisation and also a way of promoting democratisation and political representation and accountability in government. On the other hand, not all contemporary examples of regionalism have such positive characteristics; some preach racism, xenophobia and intolerance and so can be seen as regressive rather than progressive forces. The danger is that they define identity in a dangerously narrow way, which can often eclipse existing forms of citizenship and democracy (Morley and Robins 1995:186).

The resurgence of regionalism in contemporary Europe, therefore, must not be dismissed as a regressive step but rather should be seen in the broadest possible sense as perhaps providing a way forward for the future. This also means that there is a necessity for more empirical work on the realities and resurgence of regionalism in contemporary Europe in order to understand better the phenomenon. This is because the regional resurgence of the late twentieth century is less a recurrence of ethno-nationalism in the traditional manner, as the example of the LN shows, and more an aspect of a more general problem affecting most European states. Understanding the nature of this problem is a more difficult question to answer but it is one which needs to be addressed in order to effectively legislate for regionalism (Urwin 1982:435).

There are a number of reasons that have contributed to the resurgence of regionalism in Europe. Undoubtedly, the processes of globalisation present challenges to the nature and contours of contemporary economy and society, which means that the role and legitimacy of the nation-state in Europe is being transformed and undermined to an extent, by these processes. Moreover, within Europe there are contradictory strategies at work, which are also related to the resurgence of regionalism. On the one hand, there is the project to create the supra-national entity of the European Union and on the other, there is the reassertion of the regionalist territorial communities of various European nations and regions. However, as yet neither of these processes seems to represent an acceptable or a meaningful choice for the future (Morley and Robins 1995:186). Consequently, regionalism offers a potential way forward for many states within Europe, which are facing threats to their legitimacy and rather than trying to dilute or obstruct regionalist parties, recent experiences in Europe show that regional devolution has proved popular without leading to secession. Moreover, recognising and legislating for contemporary regionalism is a way in which states can remain united rather than disintegrate (Economist, September 20th 1997).

The challenge for all European governments as well as the EU is to find ways of incorporating regionalist demands and claims within the mainstream political arena. The trend towards regionalism and greater devolution is spreading across the whole of Europe and so this should be recognised and included in the construction of a Europe, which is capable of meeting the challenges of the next century. Therefore, the EU is vitally important because it can provide the framework in which regionalism can be constructed in a positive way. This is why a 'Europe of the regions' is being recognised as potentially important in terms of representing a 'political fix', for the drive towards Economic and Monetary Union and the changing role of the State within the EU. The resurgence of regionalism is not only a challenge to individual countries within Europe and so it must be addressed at the EU level if it is to be properly resolved.

The power and importance of regionalism in Italy, as well as across Europe, cannot and must not be underestimated. The example of the LN provides a good indication of the speed and intensity with which regionalist tensions have grown in recent years

in Europe. Moreover, the example of the LN indicates that regionalism is a much more complex contemporary phenomenon and is not just about the historic nations of Europe making claims for greater autonomy from central States. This may mean that in the future other regions may demand greater regional autonomy, but it is likely that such regions will not be the traditional ones that have made claims for greater regional autonomy in the past. The changes going on in Europe, with the moves towards greater political integration may well avert such regionalist tensions, especially because there is likely to be greater recognition of the regional tier of governance. However, a re-drawing of the political map of Europe is already underway and it remains to be seen whether the institutional frameworks of the EU will be in place to ensure that regionalism is a constructive rather destructive phenomenon for the beginning of the next millennium.

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