

## CULTURE, VALUES AND THE SOCIAL BASIS OF NORTHERN ITALIAN CENTRIFUGAL REGIONALISM. A CONTEXTUAL POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LEGA NORD

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, the issue of the autonomy of the northern regions has always been on the Italian political agenda, even if with ups and downs. The traditional “Southern Question” has been supplanted in the public debate by the so-called “Northern Question”. Its appearance and achievement were promoted by three processes.

The first, typically Italian, concerns the crisis of the First Republic and, above all, the dissolution of the main mass parties (DC, PCI, and PSI) which had guaranteed for many years the stability of national political representation, while keeping at the same time close relationships with the local communities. The second process, the current phase of globalization subsequent to the end of the Cold War, caused many economic and social problems in Italy, as in the other European countries, and had a very specific impact on the North of Italy, with its diffused economy and urbanization characterized by industrial districts and their systems of flexible specialization (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001; Cento Bull in this volume). The third process, strictly interlaced with the second, is the strong increase of migratory flows from countries of the ex-soviet block and from other continents: their swiftness and intensity caused disorientation, anxieties and fears among Italians, since they were historically more accustomed to emigration and little prepared to face the increasing processes of immigration.

The effects of these dynamics created some favourable *but not sufficient* conditions for the appearance of the “Northern Question”. It would have hardly emerged without the success of a political party – the Lega Nord – that built its own identity on the opposition between the northern regions and the national government. Still, the relationship between the party founded by Umberto Bossi and the so-called “Northern Question” is really complex and can be understood according to very different interpretative keys. We can read it in accordance with a *determinist* key, by considering the Lega Nord as a consequence of the Northern Question. Even if this party had not

existed, other northern movements would have been born in answer to problems, needs, and the deficit of representation which characterizes society in many areas of the North of Italy. A *nominalist* interpretation, on the opposite, reduces the Northern Question and the northern movement to a skilful propagandistic invention to manage a large variety of interests, the only ones considered important and concrete by the political actor and its electors. The idea of “Padania”, in this view, has no real foundation, and the electoral success of Lega Nord stands for something else: the complaint against parties, the middle classes’ tax rebellion, the needs of the ideal “North-eastern entrepreneur”, the inefficiency of public services, the demand for regional decentralization.

The two opposite perspectives seize some aspects of the relationship existing between the Lega Nord and the Northern Question, and can provide some significant cognitive contributions. Nevertheless, both consider the political process as irrelevant, and deem the dynamics of creation of a public problem as epiphenomenal, by-products of structural evolutions without autonomy. Besides being criticizable on a theoretical plan, because indifferent to the generative character of political action (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001), the determinist and the nominalist approaches, in the end, are unable to explain the whole of factors and actions that led to the appearance of the Northern Question.

In this chapter we therefore are proposing a different option, of the *constructive* type. The main idea is that the growing importance of the Northern Question within the political debate and the collective imagination could be explained by relating the subjective political initiative of the Lega with the conditions and replies of the political, economic and social world. In this sense, our theoretical option follows recent developments of the aptly defined “Contextual Policy Analysis” (Goodin and Tilly, 2006) that aims to explain political processes by observing how pertinent actors behave in some contexts structured by cultural and value constraints, by institutions and their respective prescriptive and operational instruments, by environments made up of opportunities and economic interests. In this sense, what we call a constructive approach is very similar to that sort of studies of the political process which we often refer to, even according to pragmatic sensitivity (Cefaï and Pasquier, 2004; Cantelli et al., 2009). This approach is based on the theoretic conviction that a certain degree of autonomy and inventiveness of political action, even if bound by the context it is placed in, would make a difference and should be taken into account to obtain reliable explanations of the configurations of power and the dynamics of public opinion (Boltanski and Claverie, 2007).

## **2. THE WEAKNESS OF ITALIAN REGIONALISM AND THE FRACTURE NORTH/SOUTH**

The issues of regional autonomy and federalism have never had great political relevance in Italy, at least until the eighties. The process of building the unitary state had taken a shape “at the same time so feeble to turn out largely inefficacious and so strong to multiply the opposing reaction of the country and to reinforce the secular particularistic feelings” (Romanelli, 1991:714). The persistency of parochialism and particularism and the differences of the local sub-cultures did not give rise to claims for regional autonomy and did not provoke conflicts capable to question national unity. Localist type trends are not usually characterized by the opposition to the state-nation dimension, but by the

extraneousness and lack of interest for politics: those who share these trends refer almost exclusively to the limited horizon of the local communities (Merton, 1949:725). Local sub-cultures very often coexist with the prevailing culture on a national scale, without developing significant oppositions. In Italy, localism had expressed itself within the different subcultures and local political traditions (Bagnasco and Oberti, 1998). From the Second World War until the end of the Cold War, the local sub-cultures have been integrated by the most important political cultures on a national scale (Biorcio, 2003). The mediation of interests on a territorial scale had been guaranteed during the first forty years of the Republic, both by single parties' inner mechanisms (with the co-optation of regional élites and the aimed redistribution of resources), and through a geographic division of tasks among the most important parties that, due to their privileged relationships with some territorial areas, were perceived as spokespersons for their interests and values. In this sense, the main mass parties had guaranteed for many years a sort of institutionalization of the management of the centre-periphery fracture in the framework of the Italian state, with an administration characterized by a longstanding tradition of absolutism and centralism.

The distribution of economic resources between the different territorial areas did not cause noteworthy protests in the regions of northern Italy until the eighties. After the creation of the nation state, the economic and social fracture between North and South was deep, but the absence of strong ethno-cultural differences allowed the political system to support an alliance between the economic interests of the two areas, making territorial mobilization difficult (Trigilia, 1984:82). During the second post-war period, even though the economic difference between the North and the South was reduced, an autonomous productive system did not develop in the southern regions (Mingione, 1991). In the speech of the main Italian parties, the Southern Question was represented as a national matter: problems of economic development and social modernization of southern regions were shown as priority commitments for the whole national community.

The institution of "Regions with ordinary statute" in 1970 did not promote regionalist trends. Only in those regions with a strong linguistic and cultural autonomy (Valle d'Aosta, South Tyrol, Sardinia, regions with an extraordinary statute) autonomist parties were able to obtain a considerable electoral following. The ethno-cultural distinctions between the northern regions and the other Italian regions were really limited and there were no linguistic gap or religious differences to support more or less spontaneous mobilizations.

During the second half of the eighties, the rising tax pressure and the high costs of financing public debt were creating increasing problems for the economy of northern Italy and the well-being of its population. In years of high inflation and of halving of the Gross Domestic Product growth rate (relative to the two previous decades), the intense and sometimes dramatic post-Fordist transition had created an economic context in which the traditional defence of southern interests lost legitimacy. In a context of strongly increasing patronage, mass parties were not able to offer a coherent reformulation of the problems of the South of Italy, and started losing their strategic and selective ability to represent organized interests. The Southern Question increasingly lost its credibility, reducing itself to a matter of simple redistribution of resources, often from a political viewpoint (Cantaro, 1990). The loss of an adequate cultural reference dragged with it a crisis of legitimacy of the political instruments to support the South of Italy and, shortly

afterwards, of the very possibility to consider the Southern Question as a matter of general interest (Huysseune, 2006: ch. 4)

Nevertheless, it was not just a loss of legitimacy of the South of Italy that created the conditions for the rising of the Northern Question. In the same period, in fact, another very significant trend was registered: the weakening of the mass parties' power of territorial interest mediation, invested by the effects of the end of the Cold War and by the crisis of the two main political sub-cultures. The relationship between Italian regions and national institutions radically changed during the nineties after the unexpected emergence of Lega Nord. Federalism and the Northern Question attained such an importance that they strongly affected Italian politics during the following stages.

### 3. REGIONALIST POPULISM AND THE INVENTION OF PADANIA

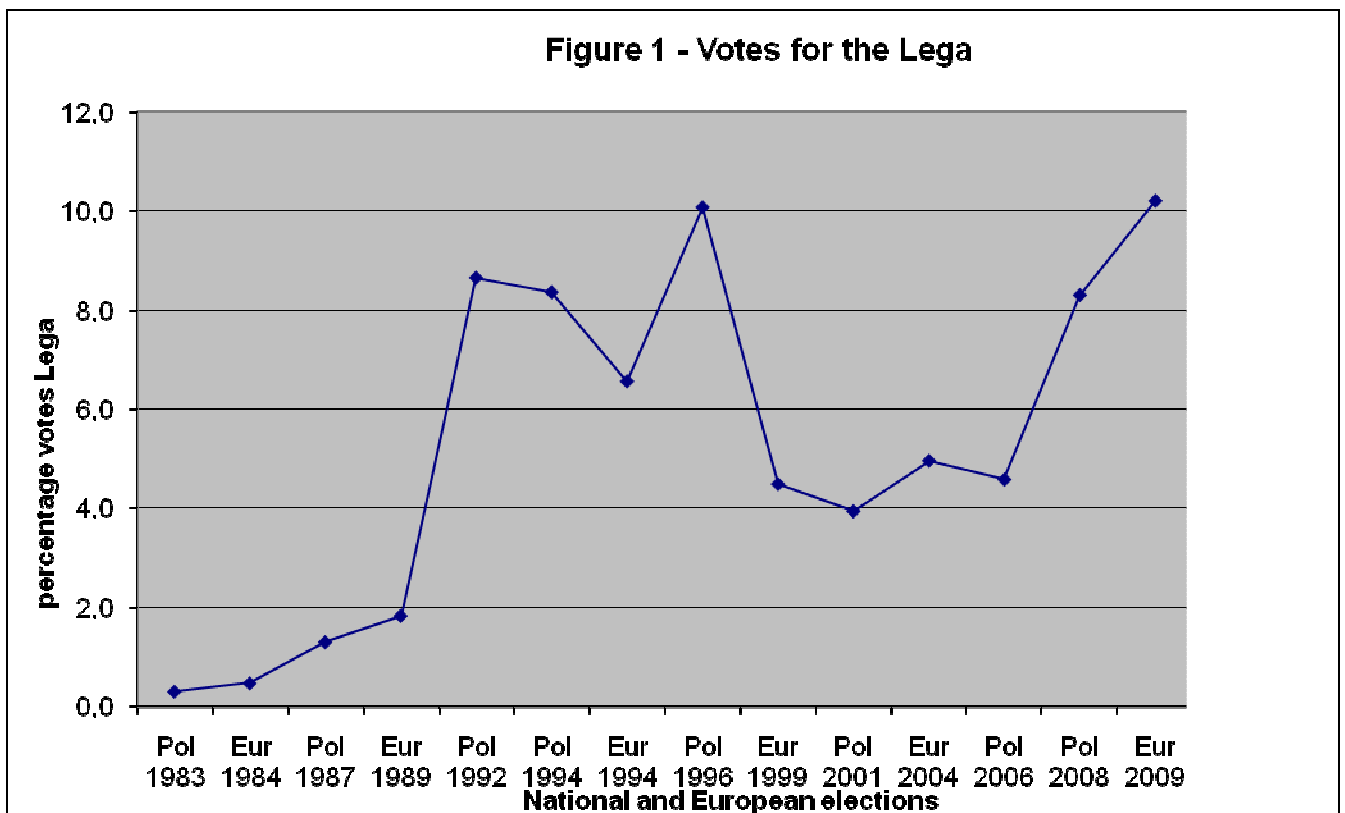
The researches on the formation and the first successes of the Lega Nord have analytically reconstructed the process of development of the new political subject, by dividing it in different stages, considering both the changes in its proposals, and the transformation in the distribution of electoral support in relation with territorial contexts and political and social positions.<sup>1</sup> In order to study in a longer period the transformations of the party led by Umberto Bossi and its interaction with the Italian political system, today a different periodization can be more suitable, by considering firstly the alternation that was registered between stages of high electoral growth and stages of decline and stagnation of support. The simple inspection of the vote percentage obtained by the Lega Nord during the European and national elections between 1983 and 2009 allows singling out three waves of electoral successes, spaced out so far by two stages of relative decline (see Figure 1). The three waves developed in a context of different social and political opportunities that the Lega Nord could efficaciously manage.

In the eighties the regional leagues created in Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto had only played a secondary role. They were small formations that re-proposed in Italy the fundamental ideas of regionalist movements: the defence of traditions and culture existing in specific territorial contexts together with a request of decentralization of political power and the promotion of local self-government. For many years, the outcomes of the autonomist leagues were disappointing (see Figure 1).

The qualitative leap happened in Lombardy in 1989 when the party founded by Umberto Bossi became the fourth party within the richest and most populated region in Italy with 470.997 votes (8,1%). The original political proposal of the autonomist leagues was deeply modified. Under the direction of Bossi, *the ethno-regionalist protest was turned into a popular battle against roman party-power*. The North was, in the speech of the Lega Nord leader, an "economic giant and a political dwarf". The autonomy of all the Italian northern regions was presented as the more radical way to get rid of the power of traditional parties and state bureaucracy. The polarization Lombardy/Rome symbolized in a very effective way the existing tensions between civil society and the party system and provided citizens with a concrete point of reference for collective identification (Diani, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> See Diamanti, 1993:16-19; Rovati and Mazzette, 1993: 25; De Luna, 1994:43-52; Biorcio, 1997:35-38; for a recent re-reading see Biorcio, 2010.



Far from just being an emerging phenomenon, the Northern Question was “invented” by the Lega and embedded in a well-defined frame: that of the dispute of the labouring North against an inefficient, inefficacious and ineffective (good-for-nothing) political centre.<sup>2</sup> The exaltation of values such as the laboriousness and efficiency of Lombard people in contrast with the shortages of the bureaucratic machinery, gave the Lega vote a general meaning of rebellion and of affirmation of the weight of a healthy civil society against the political class. This presentation of its political offer drew its strength from long period structured modalities to conceive the relationship between civil society and political representation in Lombardy: here, the tendency to perceive the productive abilities and the solidarity of civil society in contrast with an extraneous and mediocre political power has always been diffused (Biorcio, 2001). The regionalist identity became a point of reference to express a whole set of tensions experienced by some classes of the population: tensions between citizens and the political class, between natives and immigrants (southern people before, and “non-Europeans” later), between common people and the different forms of criminality and deviance (Biorcio and Mannheimer, 1995). The Lega Lombarda thus managed to establish a mass following by proposing a combination of regionalism and populist dissent (Biorcio, 1991).

Umberto Bossi’s party proposed an appeal intended both as *demos* (people as a whole and at the same time the common people, the mob, the popular masses in opposition to the *élites*), and as *ethnos* (people as ethno-national entity). The efficacious

<sup>2</sup> On the most recent developments of the frame analysis for the study of political processes, cf. Cefai & Trom, 2000; Snow, 2004; Barisione, 2009.

management of this formula was the basis of the successes of all the European populist movements and parties of the last twenty years because it connected the pole of popular protest with that of identity (Mény and Surel, 2000:187; Taguieff, 2002:57). This mixture of populism and regionalism impressed a very defined brand on the formulation of the Northern Question in Italy, since it not only implies a demand for self-government, but also as open opposition and challenge to national parties, censured as corrupted because of their centralism and consequently “Southern-ness”.

The electoral success of Lega Lombarda dragged also that of other regional leagues that converged in the Lega Nord. In 1992 the expansion in all the northern regions did not significantly change the general characteristics of the Lega electorate compared with those of the first electorate of Lega Lombarda (cf. table 1). The social profile remained interclass, with a particularly accentuated penetration within the traditional lower middle class (traders, craftsmen, independent farmers) (Mannheimer, 1993:256). As for the social composition, the Lega electorate profile was very similar to the traditional Christian Democrat one. Then again, the deepest infiltration of the new party took place, in fact, within the areas long ruled by the Catholic party, while the diffusion of votes for the Lega was much more reduced within the “red areas”.

Occupation	1991	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
Businessmen-Prof-Managers	14	15,8	12,4	12	4,4	13,5
Employee Teacher	13,3	16	18,8	10,1	8,2	10,9
Traders-Shopkeepers-Craftsmen-Farmers	24	26,5	23,9	7,6	16,8	21,7
Blue Collar Worker	16,6	21,4	31,2	10,7	9,2	19,8
Unemployed	11,2	14,2	17,3	5,9	8,1	15,5
<i>Northern Italy</i>	<i>14,1</i>	<i>16,9</i>	<i>19,8</i>	<i>8,2</i>	<i>8,5</i>	<i>17,2</i>
Sources: Eurisko, Cirm, Abacus, Doxa Pools – Northern Italian Regions						

Some characteristics of territorial contexts particularly influenced the diffusion of the vote for the Lega. In short, the percentage of votes for the Lega reached very high levels above all in three types of zones: a) areas where the catholic sub-culture was more deeply-rooted; b) small villages, in particular those far from big cities; c) areas marked out by small enterprises systems that in some cases had taken the profile of real industrial district, and that in other cases remained local production systems that were nevertheless capable of flexible specialization.

In Italy, the Lega Nord had an essential role in starting up and characterize the so-called “anti-politics cycle” (Mastropaolo, 2000; Marletti, 2002; Mete, 2010) which strongly contributed to provoke the crisis of the Italian party-system between 1992 and 1993. Berlusconi’s entering the field in 1994 stole from the Lega the representation of the middle class and of the opposition to the post-communist left, and grabbed a large part of its electoral consensus. Therefore, the Lega abandoned federalism as a political project in favour of an independence movement, with a mobilization for the construction of the “Padanian nation”. By attacking both right-wing and left-wing parties, the Lega managed to maintain a faithful electorate in many provinces and in 1996 it became the first party in the northern Italian regions (Agnew et al., 2002).

If during the first wave of its electoral successes the Lega Nord had assumed as privileged reference the crisis of the Italian party-system, afterwards the projects and initiatives of the “movement” referred primarily to the crisis of the nation-state. The Lega Nord, during this phase, invested above all in identity-making initiatives, culminating in the “march on the Po” and the election of the “parliament of Padania”. Of course, it continued its polemic against the government and party-power, as well as the management of hostility against new immigrants (no longer Southerners, but “non-Europeans”) even if the migratory phenomenon had not reached the present levels.

This second wave was characterized also by a transfer of its reference social basis. The first “anti-partyist” Lega had more success among the lower middle classes and the northern small entrepreneurs. During the second secessionist wave, workers, most of all, voted for the Lega Nord (see table 1). In 1996 the Lega collected nearly a third of the votes among workers residing in the northern regions of Italy (31%). These votes came above all from small and medium firm workers, those somehow more exposed to competition and where the identification of workers with the interests of the firms they are engaged by, is much easier. In these industries, workers attribute more importance to the dangers of international competition than to those of class relations within the firm.

Analysis shows that votes came also from a lot of trade unions members, even from the CGIL (the left-wing trade union). Dissociation occurred between the representation of economic interests strictly speaking, and the political and “identity-making” representation: workers went on relying on traditional trade-unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL) for the defence of their economic interests, in fact, Lega unions never had a great success. As for their political representation, on the contrary, the reference of Bossi’s party to the local/regional community seemed to intercept better the emerging “desire for community” within contemporary society discussed by Bauman (2001). Besides, during those years, the left-wing experienced an increasing crisis of its capacity to propose efficacious politics to local communities, and the tensions and fears present in them (Centemeri, 2011).

The disorientation of many social sectors in the context of globalization was beginning to be perceived (Beirich and Woods, 2000) and the basic idea the Lega Nord proposed was that only by closing in the local/regional community, it would be possible to secure it from the dangers of neo-liberal globalization (Huysseune, 2006:184-185). This way, it is possible to explain the insistence on separatist projects and at the same time on the policies of international institutions, and the idea of introducing protective duties against Chinese competition. After 1998, the Lega Nord’s criticisms against the construction of the European Union also increased.

The separatist turning point was a strategic choice, the outcome of a reflective elaboration in connection with the difficult fulfilment of the federalist project because of the impossibility to arouse autonomist movements in the Centre and in the South (Biorcio, 1997). The separatism of Lega Nord is distinguishable from the historical separatist and nationalist movements by two essential elements. These movements impose themselves beginning from a clear form of ethno-cultural differentiation (linguistic or religious) and involve at least part of the national élites (Cirulli, 2005). The Lega Nord could not rely upon such resources. The project of secession of the Padania did not involve the economic, financial, industrial and intellectual élites of the North. The party has on the contrary always run an explicit polemic against the élites of the North, by accentuating and displaying its own populist or “common people” character, by

simplifying its political language at the most and by introducing in politics expressions typical of the masses (Dematteo, 2007). In the second half of the nineties, then, the few intellectuals that joined the movement in the first growing phase abandoned it, while the electorate of Lega has become more and more popular.

After 1996, the radicalization of the separatist position had accentuated the isolation of the Lega, reducing its weight in Italian politics. The consensus gained could not be translated in a significant acquisition of political and institutional power. After the disappointing outcome of the European elections of 1999, Bossi stipulated a new coalition with Berlusconi. The Northern Question was tactically redefined, by linking the possibility of reinforcement of the regional autonomies to the conquest of the national government; the fight against Roman centralism, a frame on which the Lega Nord had so much invested, was articulated and partly re-represented in relation to the battle of Forza Italia against “statism”, i.e. against the intervention of the state in economics considered pervasive and paralyzing (Biorcio, 2000:261). The axis Lega Nord-Forza Italia was accredited to the militants of Lega as a sort of alliance for the productive North, strengthened by the common Lombard origin of the two political formations. In other words, the coalition was presented as a political way to solve the Northern Question.

The centre-right wing won the political elections in 2001, but the Lega Nord weakened (8,1% out of the votes in the northern regions, 3,9% on a national scale) (see Figure 1). Bossi lost support among the most radical electors, while other electoral areas that had voted for the Lega in the past, were attracted by Berlusconi and his party (Cavatorta, 2001).

### **3. THE POLITICIZATION OF SENTIMENTS OF TERRITORIAL BELONGING**

The Lega Nord has largely used sentiments of territorial belonging to give a basis to its project of autonomy of the northern regions. This policy, typical of all ethno-regionalist movements, had already been followed by the autonomist leagues of the eighties. Sentiments of territorial belonging assume deeply different meanings according to the dimensions of the territory and the reference population. The local context is specific and peculiar, characterized by the possibility for anyone to socially interact with the majority of the others. The sociological profile of other contexts such as regions and larger territorial areas is, on the contrary, much more different, as they can originate specific forms of identification or collective belonging. In this case, references are made to an area and a populace that cannot be the object of direct and personal experience. These contexts can only become the referent of specific forms of collective identification by using symbols and cultural elaborations. The problem, from this point of view, appears substantially similar to that of the creation of sentiments of national belonging which refer to an “imagined community”, the projection in a larger context of communitarian identities existing in a local context<sup>3</sup>. Even the regional communities and the North,

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<sup>3</sup> According to the famous definition of Benedict Anderson, the nation is fundamentally a mental representation, “a political imagined community – and imagined as intrinsically limited and supreme. It is imagined because the members of a nation, even the smallest, never know the majority of their fellow-citizens, nor they ever hear of them, and, nevertheless, the image of their communion lives in everyone’s mind” (Anderson, 2006).



central referents for the Lega political identity, belong to the category of imagined communities. They were built and assumed meaning and significance thanks to the action of specific political actors that understood the importance and urgency of investing on the relationship between identity and representation.

The attempts of the autonomist leagues to create a movement and to obtain consensus around sentiments of regionalist belongings were frustrated at first. In the beginning of the nineties just a sixth of the northern Italy residents indicated those sentiments of belongings as primary reference (see table 2). Sentiments of local (municipalities) and national community belonging were much more diffused. The main differences between the North and the South appear above all for the sentiments of belonging to the local context (much more diffused in the South of Italy) and for those concerning Italy (much more diffused in the North). In 1990 there were no signs of reinforcement of sentiments of regionalist belonging, nor a significant potential growth of the fracture centre/periphery. In all the Italian regions, sentiments of territorial belonging – local, regional and national – coexisted and overlapped with different intensity, without excluding each other (Segatti, 1995:109). The overwhelming majority of the Italians recognized themselves at the same time in the local or regional context as well as in the national one (ibidem:137).

The break-through of the Lega Nord was possible, as shown, thanks to the combination of the original ethno-regionalism with the populist protest against national parties. The claim for regional autonomy was changed into a popular battle against the Roman party-power. After the first electoral successes of the Lega Lombarda and the Lega Nord, the party proposals began to be known to the public and to assume meaning for the electorate. The voters of Lega presented an identity-making profile completely different from the other voters because they more frequently pointed out a greater feeling of regional belonging. The Lega Nord had progressively built up and promoted a well-defined interpretative outline for the Northern Question: the protest of an industrious North against an inefficient and parasitic political Centre that distributed resources in the southern regions to cultivate clientele and to gain electoral support.

During the following years, the difficulties of realizing the federalist project due to the impossibility to mobilize autonomist movements in the regions of the Centre and the South, promoted the Lega separatist turning point. The idea of the regions/nations was progressively replaced by that of Padania. Appealing to the grudge against the cultural and political “colonization” and the “robbery” of resources by Rome and the Southerners, the political initiative of the Lega tried to operate a fusion of sentiments of both local and regional belonging with the belonging to a new imaginary community with larger borders: Padania or more simply the “North”.

<b>TAB. 2. Sentiment of territorial belonging and electoral preference (1990, 2001 and 2006) (%)</b>										
	ALL	GEOGRAPHIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFERENCE	
		North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South	Lega-Nord
<b>Main identification</b>										
1990										
Municipality where I live	36,0	26,8	46,0	43,6	26,5	26,7	30,8	24,4	-16,8	-0,3
Region where I live	13,3	15,9	8,5	12,4	37,6	17,3	12,0	13,1	3,5	21,7
Italy	36,0	43,6	36,1	24,5	27,1	47,2	46,4	43,5	19,1	-16,5
Europe/world	13,7	12,2	8,9	19,0	8,8	7,6	10,8	16,2	-6,8	-3,4
NR	1,0	1,5	0,5	0,5	0,0	1,3	0,0	2,8	1,0	-1,5
TOTAL	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	0,0	0,0
2001										
Municipality where I live	30,3	29,2	26,9	33,7	27,3	32,5	23,8	31,1	-4,5	-1,9
Region where I live	11,0	11,5	6,4	13,2	30,7	9,8	10,7	11,8	-1,7	19,2
Italy	35,5	35,7	40,9	32,2	30,6	38,9	35,8	32,3	3,5	-5,1
Europe/world	21,7	22,2	24,7	19,3	11,4	17,7	28,9	22,4	2,9	-10,8
NR	1,4	1,4	1,2	1,6	0,0	1,2	0,8	2,5	-0,2	-1,4
TOTAL	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	0,0	0,0
2006										
Municipality where I live	27,6	27,7	21,8	30,6	29,8	32,5	24,5	26,8	-2,9	2,1
Region where I live	13,0	13,3	7,1	15,8	31,0	12,5	11,1	13,9	-2,5	17,7
Italy	35,5	35,1	42,4	32,3	26,4	38,2	34,5	34,3	2,8	-8,7
Europe/world	21,8	22,6	26,5	18,2	12,8	16,6	29,6	21,8	4,4	-9,8
NR	2,1	1,2	2,2	3,1	0,0	0,3	0,2	3,2	-1,9	-1,2
TOTAL	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	0,0	0,0

Which were the effects of the political campaigns promoted by the Lega on sentiments of territorial belonging? Two researches carried out in 2001 and 2006 demonstrate that no great changes occurred. In general, we registered a diminution of localist identification, but the differences between the North and the South did not increase. Sentiments of regionalist and localist belonging in northern Italy turned out to be relatively less diffused than in the southern regions (see table 2). Of course, the Lega voters were different because they shared to a greater extent the regional identification and acknowledged the Lega's role of expressing a particular territorial identification (Cavazza and Corbetta, 2008). On the other hand, in 1998 we could already point out how the Lega voters tended to separate local from national identification, unlike all the

other northern citizens (Biorcio, 1999:69). The researches carried out in the last ten years prove how sentiments of belonging to Europe or to the entire world are much more diffused among citizens of the North of Italy compared with the national average. Among the electors of Lega, transnational belongings dropped at a definitely lower level than that registered in the southern regions.

Even if the Lega Nord abandoned the idea of secession, and Padania stayed an administrative entity with unclear borders, the weight of the Northern Question does not seem to diminish within public opinion. In fact, we have pointed out an increasing tendency in some parts of the population to acknowledge some importance to sentiments of belonging to northern Italy (or to the North), beyond the specific localist or regionalist belongings. It deals with an attitude that refers not only to the cultural and economic differences between the North and the South, but points out also other themes and contents. In 1996 belonging to northern Italy was recognized as a priority by about 5,3% of the interviewees on a national scale, and by more than a tenth of the residents of the northern regions (11%). The diffusion of this type of belonging has increased in the following years, above all in the last years, parallel with the electoral outcomes of the Lega Nord. In 2000 belonging to the North was declared by 9,3% of the interviewees on a national scale<sup>4</sup> and this increased up to 13,9 % in 2005, 18,1 % in 2006, reaching 22,7 % in 2008.<sup>5</sup> This attitude does not only reflect a territorial belonging: belonging to the North is also acknowledged by some residents of other regions. The reference to the North includes at the same time a common belonging and a series of problems and contents that were associated to it in the campaigns promoted by the Lega Nord. This attitude is naturally largely spread within the Lega electorate, but it is also shared by some sectors of the electorate of centre-right parties resident in the North, more tuned with the proposals and the propaganda of Bossi's party.

#### **4. THE ADVANTAGES OF AUTONOMY AND DEVOLUTION**

In the last twenty years, the opinions of the northern Italian population on federalism and devolution have changed, but attitudes are often ambivalent and partially contradictory. After the first electoral successes of the Lega Nord in the beginning of the nineties, the demand for more regional autonomy progressively spread among voters of all parties. In 1991, a third of northern voters shared the claim for more regional autonomy. The adhesion to the request for tax autonomy was even higher and was supported by half of them (Biorcio, 1997:123). Above all traders, artisans and workers promoted this request that obtained less support among the upper classes. The proposal to recruit teachers regionally was backed by one out of four persons in northern Italy. This proposal was the main goal of the campaign of the Lega Nord against the "colonial school" and it obtained consensus in particular among electors of low cultural level.

During the nineties, the general claim for more autonomy for the North increased, beyond the demands for autonomy for the single regions. It was a prospect the Lega had promoted since 1990 with the proposal of the division of Italy into three large macro-regions. The claim for autonomy was not only shared by almost all the Lega voters, but it

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<sup>4</sup> The data come from a Lapolis-Limes poll of February 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Data were taken by different polls carried out by Demos, cf. Diamanti (2008).

gained plenty of support also among voters of other parties in the northern regions. The invention of Padania, that many people considered groundless, had significantly influenced public opinion (Albertazzi, 2006; Avanza, 2003). Only a small minority of voters declared themselves for the independence project, but nearly a third of the northern regions residents deemed this prospect advantageous (Diamanti, 1997).

The secessionist project had provoked, as we have seen, strong oppositions, and therefore, in the end of the nineties, it was reduced to the more manageable form of *devolution* (Loiero, 2003). The claim for regional autonomy, in any case, had acquired relevance in the political agenda and in the public debate. The centre-left wing coalition tried to recover support in the northern regions by offering a partial answer to the problem. A proposal of reform of article V of the Constitution, that increased the powers of regions was presented and voted in Parliament. The Lega Nord opposed the reform considering it completely inadequate. Afterwards, the project was approved by the constitutional referendum of 7 October 2001. The participation to the vote, nevertheless, was very limited (34%): a clear mark of the weak capacity of mobilization of the reform proposed by the centre-left, but also of the loss of relevance of the problem.

Still, the convergence of almost all parties on the prospect of federalist reforms had influenced the orientations of public opinion. The favourable opinion to a generic extension of regional autonomy had become almost unanimous mainly in northern Italy (see table 3). The request to delegate the management of taxation to the regions was more controversial: the proposal was supported by two thirds of northern regions residents, but nearly half of the residents of other regions residents opposed it (cf. also Gangemi, in this volume).

<b>TAB. 3. Importance attributed to federal reform (2001) (%)</b>										
	ALL	GEOGRAFIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFERENCE	
		North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South	Lega-Nord
<b>The Federal Reform of the State is a:</b>										
very important problem	26,2	29,4	17,5	26,8	66,0	33,4	21,0	28,5	2,6	36,6
quite important problem	33,4	36,5	31,1	30,7	23,4	41,1	36,5	32,5	5,8	-13,1
secondary problem	28,7	25,2	35,1	29,6	8,4	19,4	34,6	24,7	-4,4	-16,8
don't know	11,7	8,9	16,4	12,8	2,2	6,1	7,9	14,3	-3,9	-6,7
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	0,0	0,0
<b>The Federal Reform of the State is the:</b>										
First/second priority	0,9	1,5	0,6	0,3	10,4	1,8	0,6	0,8	1,2	8,9

However, the issue of a federal reform of the state was not considered very important, especially if compared to other problems. In 2001 the federal reform was judged a very important matter by little more than a fourth of voters, without many differences between northern and southern residents (table 3). Anyway, this reform did

not represent one of the most important priorities: in northern Italy it was pointed out among the two most important problems to be dealt with only by 1,5 % of the interviewees. Support to federalism was of course much stronger within the electorate of the Lega Nord. But, only one voter in every ten pointed out the federal reform among the priorities. Other “problems” such as criminality, unemployment, immigrants and taxes often appeared as more relevant to the electorate of the Lega Nord.

The general support of public opinion for an extension of powers and jurisdictions of the regions did not seem enough for the development of specific mobilizations. In order to put forward the proposals of a federalist reform, the Lega Nord employed above all its weight within the centre-right coalition after the elections of 2001 (Biorcio, 2003b). The realization of a constitutional federalist reform was set as an inalienable condition for the alliance with Berlusconi. Therefore, in 2005 a constitutional reform was presented in Parliament and approved by the parties of the Casa delle Libertà; it included a series of rules oriented to *devolution*, in particular the increase of powers of regions on subjects such as the school system, administrative police both regional and local, welfare and health administration. Still, in public opinion, the support to the project introducing a federalist reform was limited (see table 4). It was quite wider in the northern regions compared to the southern, especially in the small towns and among the self-employed workers. A strong support to the reform was expressed by the electorate of the Lega Nord, but it was less spread among that of the other centre-right parties and, above all, among the centre-left wing electorate (see table 4).

In the elections of 2006, the coalition led by Berlusconi obtained almost half of the votes but, a few months later, the project of a constitutional reform was rejected by referendum by a large majority. The participation of citizens to the vote was higher than the previous referendum and it exceeded half of the electorate (52,3). But the defeat was very clear: the reform proposal got little more than a third of the valid votes (38,7 %), while a large majority had mobilized to reject it (61,3 %). Even within the northern regions the reform was rejected. Only in Lombardy and Veneto the electorate approved the introduction of *devolution* supported by the whole centre-right coalition.

In order to restart the process of federal reform, the Lega Nord, back in power with Berlusconi in 2008, has tried to obtain political support even beyond the centre-right alliance. So, on 5 May 2009, a bill for the introduction of fiscal federalism was approved by the centre-right majority with the favourable vote of Italia dei Valori and the abstention of the PD. The proposal, however, did not receive a great support from public opinion. The expectation of positive effects is not much diffused (see table 4). Instead, many doubts and uncertainties remain among the great majority of citizens. They do not expect significant changes, fear negative effects or declare they do not have clear ideas on the matter. Within the southern regions the diffusion of expectations of negative effects is double compared to that of positive expectations. But, even in northern Italy, the expectations of positive effects are clearly a majority only among the Lega voters. Among those of other parties many people still do not have an opinion or do not expect any changes.

The Lega Nord received much consent among that part of the electorate more interested in devolution and, in general, in reconsidering tax transfers to the state and to other regions. But it was unable to launch a larger movement on these matters, even if in northern Italy the opinions favourable to an enlargement of regional autonomy, above all related to the expectation of economic advantages, are really widespread.

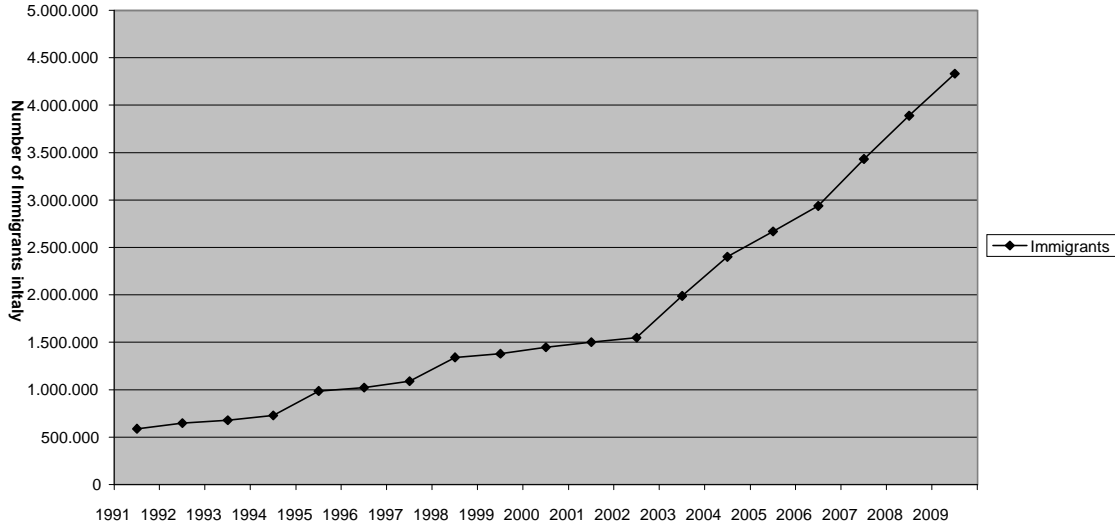
<b>TAB. 4. Assessments on Devolution and Fiscal Federalism (%)</b>										
	ALL	GEOGRAFIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFERENCE	
		North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South	LegaNord
<b>Judgement on the reform introducing devolution</b>										
Very favourable	15,6	22,4	10,5	9,7	70,5	37,7	12,0	12,7	12,7	48,1
Quite favourable	32,0	35,6	35,8	25,3	25,9	46,7	32,5	30,5	10,3	-9,7
Opposed	35,9	28,4	40,2	43,2	2,4	9,1	48,5	27,1	-14,8	-26,0
Don't know - no answer	16,5	13,7	13,6	21,8	1,3	6,5	7,0	29,8	-8,1	-12,4
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0		
<b>Consequences of the Law on Fiscal Federalism for your region:</b>										
Positive	31,8	44,5	28,4	14,5	62,4	42,1	23,7	21,2	30,0	17,9
Negative	15,9	7,3	11,2	32,2	5,9	12,9	24,5	12,3	-24,9	-1,4
Nothing will change	36,9	31,5	43,3	40,7	22,4	32,7	40,5	40,5	-9,2	-9,1
Don't know - no answer	15,5	16,7	17,0	12,7	9,3	12,3	11,3	26,0	4,0	-7,4
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0		

## 5. IMMIGRANTS AND THE SECURITY EMERGENCY

In the elections of 2008, the votes for the Lega Nord almost doubled, returning to the level of 1992, and approaching the result of 1996. Once again, support increased above all among workers, confirming a trend not limited to northern Italy, but widespread all over Europe whereby populist formations often succeed in substituting left parties as the political representation of the popular electorate, and enlarge their support especially among workers (Biorcio, 2009). The Lega Nord was also very successful at the European elections in 2009 and in 2010 obtained the governors of the Veneto and Piedmont Regions.

During the nineties, immigrants with residence permit doubled, passing from 649.000 in the end of 1991 to 1.341.000 in 2000. The increase has continued and become more intense during the following decade. Even if the restrictions provided in the Bossi-Fini law remain in force, the number of regular immigrants in the whole country tripled in a few years, passing, according to the Istat estimates, from 1.356.590 at the end of 2001 to 4.330.000 in 2008 (see Figure 2). The number of immigrants over the population reached 6,5 % in 2008 and 7,2 % in 2009, clearly exceeding the European average.

**Figure 2 - Immigrants in Italy**



The growth of immigration and its visibility were considered by many people as a menace since these phenomena were perceived as an invasion of social spaces and above all because, as a series of opinion polls revealed, public opinion since 2005 increasingly related them to concerns about the alleged increase of criminality. The mass perception of the increase of immigration is strongly marked by the way mass media treat the problem. The changes in behaviour of some actors (municipal councils, police, tribunals, security committees), the ideas diffused by mass media and the social alarm for the problems raised by the presence of non-European immigrants mutually reinforced changing perceptions on immigration. This situation created new opportunities for the initiatives of the Lega Nord, in building and managing a contentious relation between immigrants and Italians (cf. Sacchetto, in this volume). The Lega Nord succeeded in showing itself as the party most sensitive to the increasing claim for security that arises from the impact of globalization on social life. These problems were also perceived in the regions of Emilia and Liguria: territorial areas extraneous to the original areas of strength of the Lega Nord.

We can say that the Lega Nord anticipated the other parties – even the left-wing parties – on the subject of the negative consequences that globalization causes within local communities (Cousin and Vitale, 2007). For many years, Bossi’s party had expressed itself in a very strong way against international and supranational institutions, such as the European Union and the WTO. Today, “local communities” effectively suffer from on-going economic and social processes and especially from the consequences of globalization. The Lega Nord provides an answer to these problems by focalizing hostility on immigrants and gypsies (Vitale and Claps, 2010), by promoting “patrols” to defend the local population, and by proposing duties and barriers to restrain international competition.

In this way, in 2008, the Lega Nord managed to regain support and to reintroduce the battle for federalism by using changes in the social and political situation. The propaganda of the Lega Nord redefined the uneasiness and popular insecurity by establishing an explicative chain, at the same time causal, rational and metaphoric, to connect immigrants, unemployment, criminality, welfare crisis, taxes and future uncertainties. In this phase, Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale converged in a common party, accentuating their “cartelization”, with a proposal of individualized and mediatized political integration without participation and a reduction of the relations with interest groups, and hence separating and distancing themselves from the territory (Diamanti, 2009:229). The strategy of the Lega Nord consisted in particular in insisting to build up, by every possible means and through a participative rootedness within the territories, a frame connected with the presumed negative practical consequences deriving from the presence of immigrants: increase of criminality, unemployment, social degradation of the most visible areas (as gardens and some public spaces), and diffusion of new infections. The hostility against immigrants served to guarantee a popular consensus around the Lega Nord, according to logics similar to those of other populist parties in Europe.

Researches carried out between 1996 and 2008 show how the importance given to security and immigration problems in the northern regions is relatively higher than in the southern regions (see table 5). Still, the two problems remain at a lower level than employment, economic development and economic insecurity. Worries about the presence of immigrants are in most European countries more diffused among the less educated interviewees (see tables 6A and 6B). The electors of Lega Nord are distinguishable by all the others because they point out much more frequently worries about immigration and criminality.

<b>TAB. 5. Importance given to issues of immigration and criminality (1996-2008) (%)</b>										
	ALL	GEOGRAFIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFERENCE	
		North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South	Lega-Nord
<b>1996 Proposed as the first two priorities</b>										
Immigration	14,1	16,8	17,7	8,0	30,0	18,8	11,1	16,5	8,8	13,2
<b>2001 Proposed as the first two priorities</b>										
Criminality	39,6	41,2	41,1	36,8	45,8	44,9	35,5	41,8	4,4	4,6
Immigration of foreigners	11,5	16,5	10,0	5,8	26,1	18,7	15,3	13,7	10,7	9,6
<b>2006 Problems considered very important</b>										
Criminality	72,6	71,3	76,7	72,0	77,0	74,4	64,8	74,9	-0,7	5,7
Immigration	58,1	59,7	66,2	51,7	76,2	66,4	50,1	61,1	8,0	16,5
<b>2008 Problems spontaneously proposed as the most important</b>										
Security, criminality, public order	13,3	15,7	14,5	9,5	25,5	24,0	8,9	14,0	6,2	9,8
Immigration	4,9	6,9	3,3	3,3	9,2	11,1	2,0	7,8	3,6	2,3

Sources: Itanes 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008



<b>TAB. 6A. Most Prominent Perceived Social Problems in Italian Northern Regions by Educational Qualification (%)</b>						
	ALL	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION				LEGA VOTERS
		None/Primary school	Junior High School	High School	University	
1996						
<b>The First or the Second Priority:</b>						
Immigration	16,8	19,0	19,1	12,8	8,7	30,0
2001						
<b>The First or the Second Priority:</b>						
Crime	41,2	55,0	40,0	35,1	30,6	45,8
Immigration	16,5	15,2	18,5	16,2	12,7	26,1
2006						
<b>Issues Considered "Very Important":</b>						
Crime	71,3	75,6	76,7	68,7	48,8	77,0
Immigration	59,7	54,3	65,4	59,9	48,2	76,2
2008						
<b>Problems Spontaneously Proposed as the Most Important:</b>						
Security, Crime, Public Order	15,7	13,8	16,6	16,8	12,4	25,5
Immigration	6,9	7,3	8,0	6,5	2,2	9,2

<b>TAB. 6B. Most Prominent Perceived Social Problems in Italian Northern Regions by Occupation (%)</b>								
	ALL	OCCUPATION						LEGA VOTERS
		Managers	Employees	Self-employed	Workers	Others	Not Employed	
1996								
<b>The First or the Second Priority:</b>								
Immigration	16,8	14,1	11,5	12,3	16,8	25,7	15,9	30,0
2001								
<b>The First or the Second Priority:</b>								
Crime	41,2	38,4	36,4	41,5	37,1	30,3	44,8	45,8
Immigration	16,5	20,1	16,7	20,1	18,1	8,7	14,8	26,1
2006								
<b>Issues Considered "Very Important":</b>								
Crime	71,3	65,2	64,2	73,3	70,8	63,0	75,6	77,0
Immigration	59,7	54,2	57,5	62,1	63,9	53,7	60,2	76,2
2008								
<b>Problems Spontaneously Proposed as the Most Important:</b>								
Security, Crime, Public Order	15,7	10,8	14,3	22,1	14,9	20,0	16,0	25,5
Immigration	6,9	2,7	4,8	10,3	8,5	4,0	7,4	9,2

Sources 6A and 6B: Itanes 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008

<b>TAB. 7. Opinions on Immigrants and their Rights (2006 and 2008) (%)</b>										
	ALL	GEOGRAFIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFE-RENCE	
		North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South	Lega-Nord
2006										
Immigrants are dangerous for our culture and identity	52,6	51,4	49,4	55,7	79,1	67,7	34,6	51,5	-4,3	27,7
Immigrants are a threat to employment	50,1	44,2	46,8	59,7	66,1	57,9	31,4	42,8	-15,5	21,9
It ought to be forbidden to gypsies to settle down in our town	78,8	78,0	81,7	78,1	91,5	88,1	69,9	76,0	-0,1	13,5
Regular immigrants should have the right to vote in administrative elections in the town where they live	62,9	60,4	70,3	62,0	23,5	53,9	75,4	55,1	-1,6	-36,9
It is right to permit to Muslims to built some Mosques in Italian Country	34,4	31,7	45,4	32,0	18,7	24,1	44,3	26,3	-0,3	-13,0
2008										
Immigrants are dangerous for our culture	38,3	39,0	33,7	39,9	57,5	55,4	19,7	40,1	-0,9	18,5
Immigrants are a threat for employment	41,6	38,2	36,3	49,0	52,1	50,6	16,9	43,8	-10,8	13,9
It is right to permit to Muslims to built some Mosques in Italian Country	36,1	34,1	38,1	37,7	13,0	24,0	57,0	28,0	-3,6	-21,1

Sources: Itanes 2006, 2008

At the same time, it is very noteworthy to observe how hostile opinions against immigrants are relatively *less* diffused in the northern regions than in the southern (see table 7). These positions, on the other hand, are much more diffused even in the northern regions among the less educated interviewees and in general among workers, traders and self-employed persons (see table 8). The opinions of the Lega voters on these matters seem closer to the opinions present at a popular level in southern Italy.

As regards the massive increase of immigration and the perception of increasing criminality, developed also thanks to moral panic waves on mass media (Maneri, 2001; Palidda, 2009), the Lega Nord was perceived as the more coherent and combative political party, capable of criticizing even Berlusconi when he admitted the possibility to grant immigrants the right to vote for local elections (Cousin and Vitale, 2006). In the northern regions, the Lega Nord could appear as the party that – in the centre-right ambit – engaged itself more coherently and with more strength on such matters; this happened thanks to a higher attention to the territory, to relationships with people within local sections and to the role played by the network of elected mayors, in a phase in which parties became presidential in order to de-link themselves from the territory (Diamanti,

2009:11)<sup>6</sup>. The capacity of Lega Nord to obtain support is, as a matter of fact, to be understood not only considering the strategies engaged by the party leadership, but also looking at the actions engaged by the Lega political class within the territories (territorial branches, militants and administrators). One of the most noteworthy aspects of the Lega's political action concerns, in fact, the coherence between the instances promoted by the party leadership and the priorities of administrative action of the Lega's local political representatives (cf. among others Andall, 2009; Cento, Bull, 2009). The different changes of strategy of Lega Nord took place while keeping, in many localities of the North, a strong capacity to mobilize its grass roots activists, well rooted in their own territory, and able to translate instances and local problems into the language and priorities of the party (Biorcio, 2010).

<b>TAB. 8A. Opinions on Immigrants and their Rights (2006 and 2008) (%)</b>						
	ALL	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION				LEGA VOTERS
		None/ Primary school	Junior High School	High School	Univer- sity	
<b>2006</b>						
Immigrants are dangerous for our culture and identity	51,4	67,7	56,3	43,9	20,8	79,1
Immigrants are a threat to employment	44,2	55,7	49,6	38,0	17,3	66,1
It ought to be forbidden to gypsies to settle down in our town	78,0	86,3	78,2	74,0	73,6	91,5
Regular immigrants should have the right to vote in administrative elections in the town where they live	60,4	61,3	56,9	60,9	71,4	23,5
It is right to permit to Muslims to build Mosques in Italy	31,7	17,3	26,3	38,9	60,8	18,7
<b>2008</b>						
Immigrants are dangerous for our culture	39,0	55,2	41,0	32,6	17,9	57,5
Immigrants are a threat to employment	38,2	54,4	40,8	31,1	15,7	52,1
It is right to permit to Muslims to build Mosques in Italy	34,1	18,3	31,6	40,6	56,4	13,0
Sources: Itanes 2006, 2008						

<sup>6</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Bossi readily worked to obstacle the so-called mayors movement that could constitute a transversal coalition of territorial political subjects, alternative to the political project of the Lega Nord (cf. Jori, 2009)

<b>TAB. 8B. Opinions on Immigrants and their Rights (2006 and 2008) (%)</b>								
	ALL	OCCUPATION						LEGA VOTERS
		Managers	Employee	Self-employed	Workers	Others	Not Employed	
<b>2006</b>								
Immigrants are dangerous for our culture and identity	51,4	32,8	40,4	56,3	51,1	44,0	57,8	79,1
Immigrants are a threat to employment	44,2	26,3	33,2	46,0	52,2	47,8	47,8	66,1
It ought to be forbidden to gypsies to settle down in our town	78,0	80,4	78,1	71,3	76,6	84,0	79,0	91,5
Regular immigrants should have the right to vote in administrative elections in the town where they live	60,4	55,1	61,4	51,7	54,8	76,0	63,3	23,5
It is right to permit to Muslims to build Mosques in Italy	31,7	52,2	41,0	36,0	31,0	39,6	24,7	18,7
<b>2008</b>								
Immigrants are dangerous for our culture	39,0	24,7	29,8	35,3	44,9	37,0	42,2	57,5
Immigrants are a threat to employment	38,2	16,9	31,8	25,0	49,0	44,4	40,4	52,1
It is right to permit to Muslims to build Mosques in Italy	34,1	44,2	41,1	26,5	31,8	48,1	31,8	13,0
Sources: Itanes 2006, 2008								

The Lega Nord is not characterized by a precise and fresh local government style, or by distinctive modalities of regulation, in particular modalities of contrasting particularism and patronage within the governance networks (policy network, networks of political interchange, structures of influence of the élites) from one side, and in the choices of allocation and distribution in public politics from the other. Nor is the party particularly innovative, in the ability of attracting resources from Europe or from enterprises, and concerning the presently most delicate challenges in northern Italy, relative to the multilevel articulation of decisional processes (Berta, 2008) and to the coordination between different cities in large areas, in a context of interurban competition (Perulli and Pichierri, 2010).

If anything, the Lega Nord developed a political mobilization of its basis and top administrators able to select the priorities of public action by focusing on symbolic aspects that enable the party to obtain positive outcomes. These priorities, rather than matters of local development or competition between territories; concern issues of law

and order, proprieties, care of open spaces that, once being defined as priorities, allow to accumulate easy successes and to demonstrate a dynamic of incremental outcomes.

## **6. THE PARADOXES OF THE LEGA'S "NORTH-ISM"**

The Lega Nord tried to offer to the northern regions a comprehensive political representation that was not limited to the defence of economic interests. And, sometimes, Bossi's party managed to be acknowledged as an almost exclusive referent as regards the Northern Question. Can the Lega Nord be considered the radical expression of cultural trends spread in the North, different from those prevailing in the South? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to analyze value trends and political attitudes of citizens resident in the northern regions, by confronting them with those found in the southern regions. It will then be possible to display the specificities that the Lega's electorate presents compared to trends and values of the northern regions.

To deal with these problems, we used the techniques elaborated and proposed by the psychologist Shalom Schwartz who has researched peoples' values in more than sixty countries of different continents.<sup>7</sup> The analysis on the Italian value trends reveals some clearly differentiated tendencies between northern and southern regions, but also between Lega followers and those of other parties in northern Italy (see table 9). As regards some values such as security and conformism (respect for rules and respect for the conventions of "good manners") the answers of the Lega voters seem to reinforce the differences between trends prevailing in the northern regions and those which characterize the southern regions. In this case, the Lega Nord voters stress the tendencies that more strongly characterize the North compared to the other parts of Italy. Lega voters, on the contrary, definitely differentiate from the trends prevailing in the northern regions for other values such as universalism and benevolence, much more spread among northern citizens than among southerners. *Universalism* synthesizes tolerance for different ideas and people, and the will to give everybody the same opportunities in life; *benevolence* shows the availability to respond to the others' needs and to help people around us. It deals with values that, in general, are less shared by less educated people. We can further observe how among the Lega Nord electorate the value of traditionalism is very accentuated: a trend that does not present great differences between northern and southern regions, but it is much more shared by small provincial centres residents and, in general, by the less educated interviewees (see tables 10A and 10B).

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<sup>7</sup> Schwartz identified ten types of basis values that people of all cultures recognize as more or less important targets of their life (Schwartz, 1992; 1994; 2006). His research concerns values that have been defined as universal both because acknowledged by people from very different cultures and societies, and because they are based on some fundamental human needs, such as that of controlling reality around us or establishing relationships with other people.

	ALL	GEOGRAFIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFERENCE	
		All	North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South
Security	69,8	72,1	77,9	63,7	83,3	75,6	69,9	65,5	8,4	11,2
Conformism	51,9	53,3	59,3	47,1	70,0	57,5	50,8	43,9	6,2	16,7
Tradition	38,3	38,0	44,6	35,8	45,8	45,6	32,0	34,3	2,2	7,8
Self-determination	43,4	47,5	47,7	37,2	47,4	49,4	48,4	41,7	10,3	-0,1
Universalism	41,8	45,2	47,0	35,8	39,5	40,8	54,7	32,8	9,4	-5,7
Benevolence	34,6	36,4	39,5	30,5	29,8	34,1	42,5	28,8	5,9	-6,6

Source: Itanes 2006

	ALL	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION				LEGA VOTERS
		None/Primary school	Junior High School	High School	University	
Security	72,1	77,5	73,4	66,9	74,8	83,3
Conformism	53,3	58,2	57,1	45,3	57,3	70,0
Tradition	38,0	49,7	41,2	29,6	31,5	45,8
Self-determination	47,5	40,5	44,6	50,3	63,7	47,4
Universalism	45,2	32,3	42,6	50,0	64,3	39,5
Benevolence	36,4	35,0	37,3	34,3	43,8	29,8

Source: Itanes 2006

	ALL	OCCUPATION						LEGA VOTERS
		Managers	Employee	Self-Employed	Workers	Others	Not Employed	
Security	72,1	72,0	70,7	73,6	69,8	68,7	73,3	83,3
Conformism	53,3	64,3	46,8	55,7	49,3	41,4	56,3	70,0
Tradition	38,0	40,6	29,4	43,6	36,6	42,0	40,5	45,8
Self-determination	47,5	58,7	50,4	61,4	46,7	52,3	42,5	47,4
Universalism	45,2	62,9	52,6	41,3	41,2	49,8	41,2	39,5
Benevolence	36,4	53,0	38,9	29,5	30,1	43,9	35,8	29,8

Source: Itanes 2006

Confirming these trends, researches carried out in 2006 and 2008 show other interesting aspects of the profile of the Lega's electorate. We examine four areas of attitudes which are very important to orient political and social behaviours: interpersonal confidence, demand for authority, civil rights and neo-liberal economic politics.

Interpersonal confidence is considered one of the fundamental conditions for the development of the public spirit of a community (Putnam et al., 1993).<sup>8</sup> More recent researches substantiate the historical difference as regards the level of interpersonal confidence, between northern and southern regions (Inglehart, 1993:35) (see table 11). It is interesting to notice that, concerning this attitude, Lega voters appear more similar to the inhabitants of the southern regions. The level of distrust towards the others that characterize the Lega voters can be found within the northern regions only among people of a very low cultural level (see table 12).

<b>TAB. 11. Opinions and Social Attitudes (2006 and 2008) (%)</b>										
	ALL	GEOGRAFIC ZONE			VOTE IN NORTHERN REGIONS				DIFFE-RENCE	
		North	Centre	South	Lega	Centre-right	Centre-left	Other-NR	North-South	Lega-Nord
<b>Interpersonal Trust</b>										
You can trust most of the other people	17,8	20,3	19,2	13,8	13,7	18,8	30,6	15,2	6,5	-6,6
You ought to be cautious in dealing with the people	79,3	76,6	77,6	83,6	84,2	79,3	64,7	82,1	-7,0	7,6
<b>Individual Rights</b>										
Extend rights of married couples to couples who decide to have a stable relationship without marrying	66,1	70,6	70,0	58,0	65,8	56,8	88,1	66,2	12,6	-4,8
Extend rights of married couples also to homosexual couples	34,3	39,5	38,4	25,2	28,8	28,0	61,4	32,2	14,3	-10,7
Abortion has to be restricted	34,9	30,8	29,8	43,0	41,8	45,8	14,4	32,4	-12,2	11,0
<b>Demand of Authority</b>										
Today in Italy we need a strong leader	75,7	74,7	74,3	77,8	93,2	90,0	56,7	75,4	-3,1	18,5
Death penalty for worst crimes	42,2	39,1	37,0	49,0	56,1	50,8	24,2	42,9	-9,9	17,0
<b>Neo-Liberalism</b>										
Enterprises ought to have more freedom to hire and fire	41,1	42,8	40,2	39,5	62,3	59,4	27,1	40,7	3,3	19,5
Unions' power is too high	42,6	42,0	44,8	42,0	68,4	67,5	21,6	38,1	0,0	26,4
Government ought to intervene less in economy	31,9	34,1	28,0	31,1	37,0	36,2	30,6	34,9	3,0	2,9
Income divide between rich and poor has to decrease	79,0	76,8	84,6	78,7	59,7	70,1	81,0	80,9	-1,9	-17,1

Sources: Itanes 2006, 2008

<sup>8</sup> The presence of public spirit is based on a set of conditions that refer both to structural aspects (relationships networks), and to cultural aspects (rules, social values and interpersonal confidence) that characterize a community (Putnam et al., 1993:196). The different aspects are related, and it is difficult to establish which one is prior to the others in causal terms, cf. Almond and Verba (1980). The point, all the same, is really delicate, with important political repercussions, as is argued, among others, by Sabetti (2002: ch. 9) and Huysseune (2002).

<b>TAB. 12A. Opinions and Social Attitudes in Italian Northern Regions by Educational Qualification (2006) (%)</b>						
	ALL	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION				LEGA VOTERS
		None/ Primary school	Junior High School	High School	Univer- sity	
<b>Interpersonal Trust</b>						
You can trust most of the other people	20,3	14,1	17,4	24,9	32,9	13,7
You ought to be cautious in dealing with the people	76,6	83,4	79,4	72,9	61,4	84,2
<b>Individual Rights</b>						
Extend rights of married couples to couples who decide to have a stable relationship without marrying	70,6	61,8	72,0	72,3	75,7	65,8
Extend rights of married couples also to homosexual couples	39,5	14,5	43,5	42,6	57,1	28,8
Abortion has to be restricted	30,8	44,4	29,6	26,0	25,0	41,8
<b>Demand of Authority</b>						
Today in Italy we need a strong leader	74,7	78,8	77,7	72,6	59,3	93,2
Death penalty for worst crimes	39,1	51,2	41,9	34,3	17,3	56,1
<b>Neo-Liberalism</b>						
Enterprises ought to have more freedom to hire and fire	42,8	36,9	44,4	44,3	41,4	62,3
Unions' power is too high	42,0	42,4	40,0	44,2	41,8	68,4
Government ought to intervene less in economy	34,1	28,2	34,3	37,4	35,0	37,0
Income divide between rich and poor has to decrease	76,8	81,4	80,3	73,8	62,5	59,7
Sources: Itanes 2006, 2008						

A similar outline characterizes opinions on individual civil rights. In the northern regions there is a more open attitude towards these matters compared with the southern: a greater disposition in favour of laws that recognize rights to common-law and homosexual couples; a lesser availability towards more restrictive measures for abortion. On these problems, the positions of Lega voters tend to be similar to those expressed by residents of the southern regions and, above all, correspond to the opinions of older and less educated people.

We can also find similar differences in the quest for authority, which is usually related to a demand for more severity in punishment. These opinions are less diffused within the northern regions than within the southern. In the northern regions, in fact, the idea of death penalty for the most serious crimes and the claim for authority expressed with the demand for a “strong leader” are definitely less spread. On these matters, the trend of Lega voters comes closer (accentuating them) to the most widespread position of southern Italy and reflects, once more, the prevailing opinions within the less educated popular sectors.



<b>TAB. 12B. Opinions and Social Attitudes in Italian Northern Regions by Occupation (2006)</b>								
<b>(%)</b>								
	ALL	OCCUPATION						LEGA VOTERS
		Managers	Employee	Self-employed	Workers	Others	Not Employed	
<b>Interpersonal Trust</b>								
You can trust most of the other people	20,3	23,4	23,3	16,2	16,7	18,5	20,4	13,7
You ought to be cautious in dealing with the people	76,6	70,1	73,6	77,9	80,3	81,5	77,0	84,2
<b>Individual Rights</b>								
Extend rights of married couples to couples who decide to have a stable relationship without marrying	70,6	76,6	75,6	75,0	77,8	77,8	66,1	65,8
Extend rights of married couples also to homosexual couples	39,5	46,8	54,3	48,5	48,5	51,9	30,3	28,8
Abortion has to be restricted	30,8	20,8	21,7	22,1	28,3	29,6	36,2	41,8
<b>Demand of Authority</b>								
Today in Italy we need a strong leader	74,7	66,2	74,4	75,0	80,8	85,2	73,3	93,2
Death penalty for worst crimes	39,1	29,9	28,3	47,3	50,9	44,3	39,4	56,1
<b>Neo-Liberalism</b>								
Enterprises ought to have more freedom to hire and fire	42,8	59,7	35,7	61,8	39,4	59,3	41,8	62,3
Unions' power is too high	42,0	58,9	36,4	63,8	38,2	23,7	40,9	68,4
Government ought to intervene less in economy	34,1	37,7	33,7	45,6	35,4	29,6	32,2	37,0
Income divide between rich and poor has to decrease	76,8	65,4	72,4	74,3	81,0	56,1	79,7	59,7
Sources: Itanes 2006, 2008								

We can, finally, observe how the Lega Nord voters are characterized by a strong support for economic liberalism. Within the northern regions Lega voters differentiate themselves by a much stronger support to claims for reducing the power of unions and to extend the enterprises' freedom of dismissal. The support to policies directed towards the reduction of social disparities is much more limited compared to the rest of the electorate.

The Lega Nord intended to create a party which represented the whole of the northern regions, capable to defend their interests and culture. If we examine the profile

of people that voted for the Lega Nord, we find some discordant features compared to the project. A large majority of the party's electorate naturally supports federalism and devolution. However, the party's electorate paradoxically displays value trends and convictions that, for many aspects are in countertendency compared to the population of northern Italy, and much closer to those of the southern electorate.

The relationship between the Lega Nord and northern society remains ambivalent and the party is unable to represent the whole of value instances that its citizens consider most important. Bossi's party gave only partly expression to the dominant ideas and values in northern Italy. This would seem a quite strange paradox for a regionalist party born to draw attention to the Northern Question. This paradox is all interior to political dynamics, where actors interact in a complex way, considering the context in which they are included, that binds them, but does not determine them: far from being the expression of a homogeneous territory as regards culture and values, the Lega Nord is a particular political actor that builds its own identity by selecting themes and questions to represent.

On the other hand, the North presents some very noteworthy interior differences both in territorial and socio-cultural terms; even if in the last years some converging dynamics are emerging around the medium enterprise model with long networks (Bagnasco, 2009; Perulli and Pichierri, 2010). As Michel Huysseune reminds in the beginning of this volume, centrifugal regionalism reveals deep conflicts not only between territories, but also and above all, within the same regional territory, of the same "regional culture", showing this way the value heterogeneity internal to every territory. The Lega was able to intercept and mobilize a specific type of electorate – present above all in particular territorial contexts and within the popular and less educated sectors of the population – that on the point of view of values, of public spirit and of social attitudes, is distinguishable from the prevailing trends within the northern population and resembles the most diffused ones in the South. The Lega Nord was able to obtain support especially in these areas, by reinforcing fears, prejudices and some specific value trends of its inhabitants. By acting in such way, however, it progressively mobilized around a number of political matters quite distinctive from the territorial ones, engaging itself rather in the defence of identity and national frontiers.

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