

# The Blurred Borders of Racism, Neo-Fascism and National Populism

## Povzetek

### Nejasne meje rasizma, neofašizma in nacionalnega populizma

Današnji evropski prostor zaznamujejo naraščajoči nacionalizem, rasizem, ksenofobija in islamofobija. Te pojave *de facto* podpirajo osrednje politične stranke, kot je nemška CDU-CSU, britanska Konservativna stranka, francoska UMP in tudi Socialistična stranka (kar je mogoče ponazoriti z izjavo sedanjega predsednika vlade Mauela Vallisa o Romih). Toda še odkritejše jih podpirajo različne stranke in gibanja, ki jih na splošno označujemo za desno populistične. Pojem »populističen« je v resnici postopoma izpodrinil pojem »fašističen« in z njim označujemo skrajna ali radikalna desničarska gibanja in stranke, kot je npr. Nacionalna fronta v Franciji, ki zagovarja »bolj prikrite« oblike rasizma, ki jih lahko splošneje opredelimo kot »kulturni rasizem«. Fašizem, ali natančneje neofašizem, pa zato ni izginil: v zadnjih letih je ponovno prilagodil svojo ideologijo in simbole in ostaja minortaren element evropske politične arene. Članek obravnava razlike in podobnosti med neofašizmom in desničarskimi »populističnimi« gibanji. Osredinja se na italijanski primer, ki je lahko poučen zaradi tradicije fašizma in neofašizma, ki sega v 40. leta prejšnjega stoletja (čas po koncu 2. svetovne vojne), in desničarske populistične sile, Severno ligo, ki ima v jedru svojega programa protimigracijsko sporočilo (v zadnjem času ga kombinira z odločnim zavzemanjem proti evru in EU).

**Ključne besede:** rasizem, islamofobija, populistična gibanja, (neo)fašizem, skrajna desnica, Italija

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## Abstract

Today's European context is characterised by growing nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. These manifestations are *de facto* supported by mainstream parties such as the German CDU-CSU, the British Conservative Party, the French UMP and also Socialist Party (by way of example, we can quote the declarations of current Prime Minister Manuel Valls on the Roma people). However, they are more openly promoted by different parties and movements that are generally defined as right-wing populists. The term "populist" has in fact progressively replaced "fascist" to define far or radical right-wing movements and parties such as, for example, the Front National in France, expressing the "more covert" forms of racism, which can be broadly defined as "cultural racism". Fascism—or, more precisely neo-fascism—has not disappeared in the meantime: having over the years readapted its ideology and its symbols, it is still a minortarian component in the European political arena. This paper considers the differences and similarities between neo-fascism and right-wing "populist" movements, focusing on the Italian case, which can be instructive due to the old tradition of fascism and neo-fascism, dating back to the forties (the years immediately following World War II), and the presence of a right-wing populist force, the Northern League, whose anti-immigration message (more recently combined with strong anti-euro and anti-EU positions) is at the core of its programme.

**Keywords:** racism, Islamophobia, populist movements, neo-fascism, far right, Italy

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## Introduction

Reeling from the horrors of Nazism and Fascism, and pushed by the world community gathered in the United Nations,<sup>1</sup> Europe in the post-World War II era has seen the demise of overt forms of racism based on the idea of biological inferiority. Racial inequalities have nevertheless persisted, while immigration and race relations have progressively occupied a growing space in the political debates about many aspects of social and economic policy (Solomos and Back, 1996). *Cultural racism* is one of several terms that scholars have coined to describe and explain the new ideologies and practices at the interconnection of race and nationhood, patriotism and nationalism, which have emerged in practically all European countries since World War II, presenting a number of varied permutations in different historical, national, and local settings. The broad approach to these more covert forms of racism has ensured that questions about race are closely linked to issues such as ethnicity and nationalism.

In the frame of this broad approach, neo-fascism occupies a specific place. Today's European context is characterised by a growing number of manifestations of nationalism, combined or not with racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. These manifestations are *de facto* supported by mainstream parties, such as the German CDU-CSU, the British Conservative Party, the French UMP and also the Socialist Party (by way of example we can quote the declarations of current

Prime Minister Manuel Valls on the Roma people). However, they are more openly promoted by different parties and movements that are generally defined as right-wing populists. The term "populist" has in fact progressively replaced "fascist" to define far or radical right-wing movements and parties such as, for example, the Front National in France. During the 1980s, the French scholar Pierre



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André Taguieff (1984) incorporated the concept of populism from the Anglo-Saxon and Latin American literature, and applied it to the French context in order to analyse the growth of the Front National, which, until then, had been defined as a party of the extreme right or, generically, "fascist", and placed at the edge of the political Republican game.

P. A. Taguieff proposes the term "national-populist" in order to overcome the ambiguity of the definition of "fascist" and to highlight the process of adaptation that the Front National has gone through in order to attract electoral support—distancing itself from strongly ideological fascist parties such as, for example, the MSI (Italian Social Movement) in Italy, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands NPD (National Democratic Party) and Deutsche Volkunion – DVU (Union of German People) in Germany or the National Front in Britain. The refusal of the "national-populists" to associate themselves with the "neo-fascists" clearly appeared after the European elections in May 2014.

In order to understand the blurred borders between neo-fascism and national populism, and their specific relations to what we have called the "more covert" forms of racism, which can be broadly defined as "cultural racism", the study of the Italian case can be instructive, due to the tradition of neo-fascism dating back to the 1940a (the years immediately following World War II), and the presence of a right-wing populist force, the Northern League, whose anti-immigration message (more recently combined with strong anti-euro and anti-EU positions) is at the core of its programme.

<sup>1</sup> See the 1966 United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

## The Neo-Fascist Experience in Italy from World War II to the 1990s

In spite of the universal condemnation of this movement after World War II, fascism or “neo-fascism” has played an important role in the Italian political arena since the foundation of the Italian Social Movement (MSI, *Movimento Sociale Italiano*) in 1946.

With the clear aim to be the home for all those who recognised themselves in fascism, the MSI collected the “scattered souls” of Italian Fascism’s legacy. Or, right from the start, two souls coexisted in the party: the “fascism as movement” and the “fascism as regime” (Renzo De Felice, 1996; 1997; 2002): on one side, the intransigent, revolutionary, anti-capitalist, anti-American, anti-Semitic wing, which represented the initial period (1922–1928) and the end of fascism (1943–1945), the Republic of Salo, allied with the Nazis; on the other, a right-minded, anti-communist, authoritarian, traditionalist component, ready to integrate the parliamentary system in order to push the political axis of the country towards the right, and ready to become pro-Atlantic, accepting even NATO, in order to counter the main enemy, communism.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, the two wings found it difficult to compromise: in 1956, the choice of a moderate line by the majority of the MSI pushed some opponents out of the party, who gave life to a *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* (New Order), a future point of reference for neo-fascist extremism.<sup>3</sup> This was the first division of a long series that progressively transformed Italian neo-fascism in an “archipelago” of movements, groups and organisations. The autonomy of the extremist wing represented the beginning of a season of assaults and provocations to the “enemies”, justified by Mussolini’s statement about the primacy of direct action.

In 1960, a new division inside New Order led to the birth of *Avanguardia Nazionale*, National Vanguard, which chose as its symbol an Odal, a letter of the ancient Runic alphabet, positioned at the centre of a white circle surrounded by red, exactly like the flag of the Third Reich. Together with the Odal, the Celtic cross, the symbol of a division of the Waffen-SS, began to penetrate in Italy. These symbols represented a detachment from Italian fascism in favour of an interest in Nazism and Eastern European fascism, especially the Romanian Iron Guard of Codreanu, who became a point of reference for neo-fascist groups. Young neo-fascists took theoretical inspiration from the philosopher Julius Evola, whose vision of “Tradition” as a timeless entity that runs through the history of ancient times<sup>4</sup> led them to view with favour the Nordic sagas (including Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*) and mysticism. With this new ideological background, they advocated a renewal in the ranks of neo-fascism, going beyond the Italian Mussolinian tradition.

*Avanguardia Nazionale* (National Vanguard) established links with other European neo-fascist movements, such as “*Jeune Europe*” founded by the former SS Belgian Jean Thiriart. These movements were abandoning individual nationalisms to promote a “European nationalism”, able to release the old continent from the Cold War logic between the United States and the USSR in order to pursue a re-foundation of fascist Europe, according to the design of the Nazis’ New European Order.

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<sup>2</sup> It must be stressed that, beyond the fears of the intransigent wing, NATO membership remained for the MSI just a tactic to fight communism and did not represent an adherence to the values of consumerism and of the American way of life. The party remained faithful to the idea of fascism as a “third way” between communism and Anglo-Saxon capitalism (Germinario, 2002: 691).

<sup>3</sup> *Ordine Nuovo*/New Order enhanced the antiparliamentarian tone, launched a process of redefinition of the fascist doctrine under the inspiration of Julius Evola and his theory of “Tradition” and supported militant activities, which materialised in assaults and provocations against organised opponents.

<sup>4</sup> Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola (1898–1974) also known as Julius Evola, was an *Italian philosopher*: extremely critical of modernity, Evola saw in tradition the only possibility for rebirth. Evola’s works are *Revolt Against the Modern World*, *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger*. In fact, he was never a member of the Italian National Fascist Party or the Italian Social Republic. He regarded his position as that of a sympathetic right-wing intellectual.

During the 1970s, neo-fascism, divided in different groups, became part of the battle that took place in the country as part of the Cold War, in order to prevent the Communist Party from achieving political power. Violence spread, and the Left also used a heavy hand, often murderous. In this context, some neo-fascist leaders and groups attempted to take power through subversion:

The neo-fascist groups launched against the Republic the most serious offensive ever attempted, with different actors and different connections: militants of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), of the nebula of clandestine or semi-clandestine groups, and even men who were variously present inside the army, the services, the most diverse state apparatus. Next to the subversive projects, there was the daily violence in the streets, in schools, against left-oriented political and cultural centres, militants. As at the time of the first squads in the 1920s, in the 1970s violence for the neo-fascists was a political tool and weapon at the same time, violence was politics: the share of the right wing in the violence [...] was equal to 95 per cent between 1969 and 1973, to 85 per cent in 1974 and 78 per cent in 1975. (Bartolini, 2002: 4)

In the current neo-fascist imaginary, this period has replaced the older generation's memory of the civil war in 1943–1945: this is no way surprising, considering the fact that the political leaders of that season are still in place – such as Roberto Fiore, founder of the present neo-fascist party *Forza Nuova* (New Force). On the basis of the experience of these years, “the violence finds its place as a dynamic that responds to the logic of the political action that founds the neo-fascist paradigm” (Bartolini, 2002: 6).

During the 1980s, with the end of the season of terrorism, a few activists linked to the MSI such as Marco Tarchi (who later became an expert in populism) tried to revitalise neo-fascist Italian culture. This new trend was called the “*New Right*” and combined a closer attention to social issues, especially in relation to young people (denouncing drug addiction and youth marginalisation, dealing with urbanisation, hardship, etc.) and a change in cultural references and expressions, influenced by a current of thought born within French neo-fascism, the *Groupement de recherche et d'étude pour la civilisation européenne*, GRECE, which finds its point of reference in Alain de Benoist (see GRECE). In order to empower the youth of the MSI to communicate and express themselves with the same language and gestures of their peers, the instruments were the organisation of music festivals, entertainment and graphics. The symbol of the renewal were the *Hobbit Camps*, which represented a turning point for Italian neo-fascism. The name was inspired by the works of Tolkien, whose world for the young neo-fascists represented the contrast between materialism and the values of the spirit of camaraderie, a reaffirmation of a community based on ideals – as the “*Country*” of the *Hobbits*.

Throughout this period, neither racism nor immigration were issues in the neo-fascist movement or in general in Italy. Antisemitism – and an ambiguous attitude towards the Shoah, which tended to be minimised, if not denied – remained, in contrast, a characteristic of the neo-fascist groups.

The years 1993–1994 were marked by the collapse of the so-called first Italian Republic, under the weight of international changes (the fall of the Berlin Wall) and the corruption scandals involving the Christian Democrats and the Socialists. The Communist Party changed its name and modified its strategy. The MSI was also touched by the crisis of communism and split into two groups: *Alleanza Nazionale* – National Alliance, which abandoned the references to fascism, and *Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore* – Social Movement, Tricolour Flame, which wanted to keep the fascist legacy.

## Neo-Fascism or Post-Fascism of the Third Millennium. Immigration and Racism in Neo-Fascist Political Discourse

From the 1990s on, Italy became a country of immigration, as the transformation of the society towards a growing multiculturalism raised new challenges in the world context of globalisation. A new political party created from scratch, the Northern League, represented better than any other a response to these new challenges in line with the “populism” that had appeared in many European countries since the 1980s, where a range of political actors on the extreme right, united by xenophobic speech and an anti-globalisation as well as anti-European stance, were having great electoral success.

In this new context, where racism appeared as a new issue, neo-fascism went through a new division. With the emergence of Silvio Berlusconi as a political leader, the MSI finally gained the possibility to reach power through an alliance with him, but “modernisation” was necessary. Leader Gianfranco Fini was the main actor in this process: after having changed the acronym into MSI-AN (National Alliance) for the general election of 1994, he launched an internal debate over fascism and neo-fascism that culminated with the Congress of Fiuggi in 1995, where the rejection of fascism, totalitarianism and the condemnation of the racial laws of 1938 were approved.

Gianfranco Fini’s move to cut Alleanza Nazionale’s fascist roots, however, failed to appeal to all the members of the MSI. In Fiuggi, the first division took place with the foundation of MSI – Fiamma Tricolore (Tricolour Flame) by Pino Rauti and others who placed themselves on the left side of the party, insisting on social topics. In 2004, it was Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of Benito Mussolini, who left and created the new group Alternativa Sociale, Social Alternative. In 2007, it was the group of Francesco Storace that left Alleanza Nazionale to form La Destra, which became a political party and ran in the elections in 2008.

In 2012, a group of former members of Alleanza Nazionale, which had been dissolved into the Popolo della Libertà, The People of Freedom of Silvio Berlusconi in 2008, created another neo-fascist party, Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy), which is active in the political arena and follows the political positions of Marine Le Pen.<sup>5</sup>

As in the earlier history of neo-fascism, different souls continue to exist in the 21st century. La Fiamma, La Destra, Alternativa Sociale and now Fratelli d’Italia represent “parliamentary oriented” groups, but there are other groups – namely Forza Nuova and CasaPound – that focus more on anti-parliamentary activity, social action on the ground and/or clandestine activities. These two groups have profited from the advent of social media, and they are adept at using new technology to amplify their message, recruit, and organise (Fasanella and Grippo, 2009).

Forza Nuova’s roots go back to the 1970s – the years of terrorism –, their leader, Roberto Fiore, having escaped to London to avoid jail. Back in Italy in 1997, Roberto Fiore founded the movement/party Forza Nuova, whose symbolic paraphernalia are the same as of the European neo-fascist groups, from the runes to the Celtic Cross. Extremely nationalist and traditionalist, Forza Nuova, especially since the crisis broke out, has undertaken social campaigns on the right to housing (“housing right”), unemployment, and the high cost of living. While the opposition to immigration is justified in name of the rights of the people to live in their own place, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial are rooted in the cultural politics of Forza Nuova.

Roberto Fiore expanded his party base, recruiting especially among radical soccer clubs. Forza Nuova rapidly took over right-wing clubs such as Lazio F. C., but also such traditionally left-wing clubs such as Roma A. C., applying tactics learned in Britain. Today, Forza Nuova controls most of Italy’s hooligan clubs, through front organisations.

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<sup>5</sup> All these small neo-fascist parties have, at one time or another, made an alliance with Silvio Berlusconi in some local or national elections.

Forza Nuova, and even more, CasaPound emphasise modes of direct activism (for example, organising street protests, demonstrations, political campaigns, and marches) over more formal methods of political engagement in continuity with neo-fascist movements of the 1970s, covering a range of economic and social areas with its primary concern being the “housing right” for Italian citizens. CasaPound was in fact founded as occupation for residential purposes in 2003 in Rome, in the Esquilino area. After having passed within the Fiamma Tricolore, the leading group, headed by Iannone, founded the National Association of Casa Pound Italy. Engaged in social issues, CasaPound focuses on communication, producing magazines, newsletters, alternative music, the Zetazeroalfa, and also a streaming radio, Radio Black Flag, whose slogan is “free beautiful rebels”. CasaPound has numerous websites on the servers that are fashionable and frequented by young people, such as like Myspace or Facebook, but also a film club. It has launched new types of actions defined as futurist or squads media, such as the assault on the home of the popular TV show Big Brother and some motorised events on the streets of Rome.

CasaPound symbols are innovative, referred to the imagery of piracy with iconic cartoon characters familiar to young people. CasaPound clearly represents a “left-wing” neo-fascism, a sort of return to the origins of fascism, as a revolutionary movement attentive to social problems.

To conclude, we can say that neo-fascist groups found in their own traditions the political answers to the new context: rejection of globalisation destroying the identity of peoples (in some neo-fascist texts, globalisation is seen as a sort of USA-Jewish plot – to assure their domination of the world financial system); migration as another means of destroying the cultural traditions of peoples; defence of cultural traditions (including Catholicism) and of national identity: giving priority to nationals in every sector; strong rejection of the right of the soil; and the unification of the “people” by a “common blood” according to the fascist imaginary.

## Fascism, Neo-Fascism and Populism: Similarities and Differences in the Italian Socio-Political Literature

The question of the similarities and differences between fascism and populism has been of interest in international academic debate over the years. In spite of the different approaches, most Italian scholars have rejected the overlapping of fascism and populism. In most Italian works, neo-fascism is seen in its specificities, and is not labelled under the “populist” umbrella.

In books published in the late 1960s and the 1970s (*Politica y Sociedad en una epoca de transicion*, 1968 and *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*, 1978), the Italo-Argentinian sociologist Gino Germani deals with the pathways leading to the breakdown of a democratic system and a shift to authoritarianism. Germani’s main argument is that fascism proper should be seen as primarily a middle class reactionary movement while lower class authoritarianism in the Argentinian case (the Peron government) demands a separate category, which he calls *national populism* (Celarent, 2013). Analysing the specificity of the Argentinian context through empirical data (demography and institutions), Germani (1968; 1978) can better define the characteristics of populism, which was in fact a multiclass movement expressed in some sort of left/right heterogeneous ideology based on three conditions: the difference between middle class and upper class, the recent formation of the urban middle class, and the spread of egalitarian patterns in society. Given these differences, fascism ends up in totalitarianism, while populism ends up in authoritarianism. Germani is especially attentive to the attempt of fascism to indoctrinate youth, in order to build “a new man”, the final aim of totalitarianism.

According to Tarchi (2003), both the national populist parties, such as the Northern League, and the ones bound to the neo-fascist tradition, such as MSI, present themselves as offering answers to the electorate’s common concerns: fear of losing codes of recognition and membership, including national identity, because of globalisation; fear of the mingling of diffe-

rent cultures and races; the threat of a drop in the levels of consumption and wealth of the less “protected”; and risk of unemployment, exacerbated by the possible competition of immigrant labour. From this point of view, the axis joining national populist and neo-fascist parties also serves to separate them: what is missing in national populism is a nostalgic ideological background.

According to Tarchi, even if we are not in the presence of two incompatible types of political aggregation, we must at least record the existence of two distinct forms, born from the same strain. It remains to be determined whether “the latter is only the result of an adaptation of the first model to the times, or a competitor, now emancipated from the political culture of origin.” Moreover, Tarchi analyses the political and social dynamics at the moment when populism appeared in Western Europe, in front of the traditional neo-fascist parties. The latter suffered damages from the crisis of communism instead of advantages: the vanishing of the spectre of Soviet military invasion or of collectivist expropriation deprived them of the most solid argument with which they used to attract sectors of the middle classes, sensitive to the echoes of the Cold War.

National populism was, in contrast, ready to offer a new narrative, which responded to the uncertainties linked to globalisation, Europeanisation, economic transformations, loss of security, and changes in the welfare system, and was able to identify two crucial elements to persuade: revolting against taxes and, at the same time, taking immigration as a scapegoat. Tarchi makes interesting observations about “*scapegoatism*”; right-wing radicalism, even before the appearance of neo-fascist movements, always targeted different scapegoats: the “caste” of professional politicians, high finance, the Freemasons, the central international subversive, the Jews (e.g. the Dreyfus affair). After vanishing in the years after World War II and the tragedy of Nazism, the figure of the scapegoat once again reached the level of effectiveness in the early decades of the 21st century, through a new incarnation: the immigrant from the Third World, a stranger to the indigenous peoples and instantly recognisable by their characteristic facial features. The concentration and the discharge of the social and cultural tensions provoked by globalisation and Europeanisation on a single alleged perpetrator (the immigrant) created a new political rift, with respect to cleavages expressed in previous political conflicts. The rising populism was supported by strong xenophobia, while the issue of national identity was declined primarily as a reason for the exclusion of the “foreigner” and not, as was the case in the neo-fascist version, as a factor of aggregation of a community torn apart by class conflicts. This shift explains, among other things, why the votes received by the populist movements often come from lower classes rather than from those that have traditionally provided consent to the neo-fascist parties. Pushed by the populists, neo-fascist groups have also made immigrants the main target of their propaganda, but immigration is rarely the core of their ideology – as it is, in contrast, for some populist movements.

Piero Ignazi (1994) defines the extreme right as a political entity that adopts the ideology of fascism – as a “palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism”, according to the interpretation proposed by the British historian Roger Griffin – occupying “the space where political-ideological fascism is the basic reference”, located to the right of the range of the conservative parties, and which takes the attitudes of opposition to the democratic system, expressed in the form of anti-parliamentarism, antipluralism and antiparties.

Ignazi divides the extreme right in two variants: the traditional extreme right, which in his time has found its most typical incarnation in the MSI, and the post-industrial one, whose more relevant representative is the French Front National. This second variant, today more and more clearly predominant, is not a masked neo-fascism, but rather the result of new conflicts, no longer centred only around material interests as at the time when the political competition had at its centre the clash of class, but extended to the whole spectrum of values “post-materialist” that had crept into European societies after 1968, namely cultural matters and identity issues.

It must also be stressed that both national populists and neo-fascists are nationalist. What

characterises both national populists and neo-fascists is a vision of the nation linked to ethnicity. This is the aspect that brings them to cultural racism.

## Neo-Fascism and Nationalism: The Present Issue of Sovereignty in Post-Democratic Europe

It should, however, be noted that nationalism is still one of the most powerful forces in the modern world and it does not concern only neo-fascists or national populists. In the present euro-crisis, scholars analyse the role of Germany and its “economic nationalism”. Hans Kundnani (2012) speaks of export nationalism as a sort of economic nationalism:

As everyone knows, Germany is proud of being an *Exportweltmeister*. But in the last couple of years I've been struck by how much Germans seem to talk about their country as an Exportnation. The term suggests that exports are not just increasingly central to the German economy but also to German national identity itself. What might be called export nationalism is part of why Germany finds it so difficult to solve the euro crisis: in order to correct the economic imbalances within Europe, it must become less competitive in relation to the rest of the eurozone; but its export-dependent economic model success depends on maintaining competitiveness as German manufacturers face increasing competition from emerging economies outside Europe.

Moreover, nationalism is also difficult to be grasped in its political content: “... like a chameleon it changes its complexion to blend with very different political environments” (Anderson, 1986: 115). Often used by autocrats, Napoleon, the Russian Tsars, and by fascist regimes (Mussolini, Franco), nationalism's development has been closely bound up with the democratisation of the political sovereignty, most notably in France and in the Italian Risorgimento. The idea of a democratic popular sovereignty is today playing an important role in the opposition to the EU austerity policies in the progressive forces' programmes, such as Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain.

These forces mobilise people not only around the “social question”, important as it is, but also around the issue of national sovereignty. The refusal to submit to the injunctions of the European Commission, whose President Juncker had tried to influence the Greek electorate during the electoral campaign, of the BCE, which is trying to pressure the new Greek government, and of Germany as the most powerful country in the EU is a very important dimension of the victory of Syriza. As in Syriza, the sovereign component is not negligible in Podemos, or in the Irish party that will run for victory at the beginning of 2016, the Sinn Féin, and even in the Italian Five Stars Movement, which is in favour of the abandonment of the euro and the return to the lira.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> From Beppe Grillo's blog (2015): “... the latest Greek elections revealed a clear popular will. We could summarise the 36.34 per cent obtained by Tsipras as a scream: The Troika must go ... The peoples of Europe want her sovereignty, for us Italians we have to get out of the euro as soon as possible! Our collection of signatures for popular law index the referendum to leave the euro and that it will be brought to Parliament continues throughout Italy.”

## CONCLUSIONS

As Gino Germani (1968; 1978) points out in his study of fascism and populism, the factors that lead to one model or another are multiple: the conjunctural dimension is extremely important. The present development of national populism is a result of a specific conjuncture in Europe, while neo-fascism, with its continuity with the past, remains a minority force. Neo-fascism and national populisms have closely similar discourses on migration (threat to cultural identity, priority for the nationals) and they produce the same cultural racism in strong defence of national identity, but they are quite different with respect to ideological references to various forms of fascism (from Mussolini to Codreanu) and the use of its symbols.

The components of neo-fascism that have gone through a process of change have progressively abandoned these ideological positions, and are trying to enter mainstream politics as national populists do. In contrast, openly neo-fascist groups in Italy have little capacity of creating a narrative that can sway a large number of voters, and remain a minority force with a strong extremist component (that does not reject violence).

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