POPULISM AND SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN EUROPE

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Abstract

Migration has been part of human history for a long time. People have been migrating for many different reasons, voluntarily or forced, temporarily or permanently, to have a better future or to reunite with family. Countries receiving immigrants have often been influenced by arrivals of people coming from different countries, with different culture, language, history and religion. At different times in history countries started introducing regulations on migrants that either included and integrated migrants with the society, or kept them separated from the society and sometimes out of the country.
Politicians around the world have introduced migration in their political agenda, sometimes framing migrants as a security threat. Some populist leaders have constructed migration as a threat to national identity and economy, creating a feeling of insecurity and fear among the citizens. By positioning themselves on the side of the "pure people" against the "elite", their aims have also been to protect their people from external threats, which also helped them achieve electoral victories.
The aim of this research is that of understanding how populist leaders in Italy and Hungary have securitized migration allowing them to achieve political victories and the possible threat that the securitization of migration may represent for democratic. After looking at the different schools of thought on populism, and different perspectives on securitization of migration, the research will take into account two case studies: Italy and Hungary. For both countries there will be an analysis of the history of migration and of the migration policies, with a focus on more recent developments that occurred with the advent of populist leaders.
The findings of this research have showed how the securitization of migration helped both Matteo Salvini in Italy and Viktor Orbán in Hungary to achieve political success. Even though in Hungary securitizing migration has negatively influenced the democratic institutions, worsening the quality of democracy, the same cannot be said for Italy where despite migrants not always having the same rights as citizens, there are very little signs of democratic erosion.

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List of Abbreviations

LN Lega Nord
UNDESA United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
PSI Partito Socialista Italiano

Introduction

In 2015 Europe registered a record number of 1.3 million migrants applying for asylum (Pew Research Center, 2016). Mainstream media started talking about 'migrant crisis' and 'refugee crisis' influencing the state of emergency that quickly spread among the European Union member states. Between August and September 2015 BBC news published an article titled "Migrant crisis: Hungary's closed border leaves many stranded", ABC news published the article "Europe migrant crisis: Surge through Macedonia, Serbia as Italy takes thousands aboard at sea" and "Inside the Refugee Crisis That Has Migrants Walking to Safety in Europe" the New York Times was writing about "Germany Orders-at Border in Migrant Crisis".

The approach taken by the states and their leaders within Europe was different, not only because countries were affected differently by their geographical location. The already existing domestic issues such as increase of racism and xenophobia in some countries had a strong impact on how the situation was handled. Newspapers, social media, and television programmes were inundated with images showing the bad conditions in which migrants were travelling, the boats that were used to cross the Mediterranean, women and children dying at sea and migrants forced on overcrowded trains by the police. While pictures and news on migrants, were used by some to sensitize the public to the topic, urge the EU institutions to take some measures and states to help these people that fled their home countries because of war or persecution, others used it to build a political discourse based on threats and fear. Even though immigration is not a new phenomenon, the consequences brought along by the so-called 'migration crisis' surely are something new for the European Union and its member states whose cohesion and efficiency was put to test.

The aim of this research thesis is to understand how the securitization of migration can be used for political purposes by populist leaders, and how the introduction of anti-immigration policies can damage democratic institutions. In the first section the main concepts will be discussed according to the existing literature, presenting different approaches to populism, explaining what it means to securitize migration and which democratic institutions are at risk of being eroded by immigration policies. In the second part two case studies will be taken into consideration: Italy and Hungary. For both countries the history of migration and migration policies will be analysed from the end of the 1900s to present time, taking into consideration the major changes that happened in Europe. In addition, there will be a focus on the populist parties and their leaders, namely Lega Nord with Matteo Salvini and Fidesz with Viktor Orbán as the main actors in the securitization of migration both at the national and European levels.

Considering that the two populist leaders had a strong influence on migration policies in their countries, the impact of these policies on the quality of democracy will be investigated.

1. Literature Review

Migration has been identified as a permanent process in the history of human beings, it is not a new phenomenon that developed recently although there are different causes and consequences related to it throughout history. By looking at the history of Europe from the beginning of the 20th century until today, it can be noted how the region experienced migration in different ways: people have been leaving Europe to migrate to other parts of the world, people have been migrating within Europe, and people have been migrating to Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the re-unification of Germany in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union have been the starting point for many changes that in Europe, these events were followed by major migratory flows from East to West Europe. Another significant historic moment in regards to European migration was the 1973-74 oil crisis, that changed the pattern of countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece that used to be emigration countries and became immigration countries, receiving refugees and undocumented migrants in large numbers from Africa and Asia. (Kaya, 2002)

The end of the Cold war not only represented the collapse of one of the two major powers in the international system, but also the shift from bipolarity to unipolarity and the growth of the only great power remaining in the system, the United States. The US has been the leading actor during the post-Cold war era, spreading around the world its liberal values, promoting democracy and establishing organizations to enhance cooperation among nations. The significant changes that took place after the end of the Cold war led to the NAFTA agreement, the establishment of institutions such as the European Union, and the forming of the Schengen area aimed at making cooperation among nations easier. At the same time it raised questions on assumptions like state sovereignty and identity that had been recognized since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002).

The concept of national identity does not only relate to emotional ties and sense of belonging but it can take many forms such as regional, national or supranational. Smith (1991, p. 14) as cited in Triandafyllidou (1998) defines a nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members”. Although, Triandafyllidou

(1998) underlines an important element that is not taken into consideration by Smith but it is emphasized by Connor (1978; 1993) which is the "sense of belonging" which is what constitutes the national identity. Cultural, historical and traditional values are not only useful to identify people that belong to the same nation, but they are also relevant when recognizing "the other". In this sense, the author defines national identity as a "double-edged relationship", that implies that there are commonalities among the group which also represent the differences from other groups or nations. As a matter of fact, national identity can only exist if there are other national identities that rely on different sets of values. "The other" is not only represented by an external threat to the nation, namely another nation, but it can also be an internal significant other such as ethnic minorities, immigrant communities, and other nations within the same multinational state. Both ethnic and civic nationalisms are based on the dichotomous view of the world that distinguishes "we" from "them" based on national identity (Triandafyllidou, 1998). The European Union is founded on shared values such as democracy, freedom, human dignity, rule of law and human rights nevertheless, there are many different national identities that co-exist within the EU.

Despite begin the EU a successful example of cooperation among nations and the Standard Eurobarometer 95 (European Commission 2021) indicating high levels of optimism and support for the European Institutions, there are concerns in regards to the threat it represents to nations' sovereignty and national identity. At the same time, some countries in Europe such as Italy and Spain, are experiencing the rise of separatist movements in regions where national identity is the primary concern and where "Brussels" is believed not to be fulfilling the national interest of all the member states. As cited by Tamir (2019), after the end of the Second World War, Hans Kohn distinguished between civic and ethnic nationalism defining the former as "a rational and liberal way of thinking founded on respect for human rights and personal freedoms" (Tamir, 2019: 425) and the latter as a "mystical, religious and ethnocentric mindset predicated on tribal feelings"(Tamir, 2019: 425). Whereas Kohn identified the two different types of nationalism with different stages of development, with ethnic nationalism at a primitive stage and civic nationalism at a more developed stage, Tamir (2019) argues that it is not a one way development process, as neither ethnic nor civic nationalism become permanent but they depend on social and political events.

One of the most recognized ways of defining one's identity is by knowing the nationality, which can be obtained in different ways depending on the country. For immigrants, *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* are the two possible options of obtaining the nationality of the country where they migrated to. The former allows every person born in the country's territory to have the

nationality of that country and the latter only recognizes as citizens people when at least one parent already hold that country's citizenship. The naturalization process can result in excluding migrants from rights, duties and responsibilities that nationals have, that means that there might be people living in a country which is not their home countries for a long time and despite being part of the community they cannot vote, run for elections or access public services (Kaya, 2002). In regards to the integration of migrants, naturalization is not the only obstacle that a foreign person might experience when moving to another country, as a matter of fact, racism and discrimination have been increasing in Europe and in the rest of the world. Indeed, prejudice is believed to be the major driving factor for the social construction of discriminated individuals as threats (Bello, 2020). Even though the idea of the superiority of some races to other dates back to colonialism in the 16th century, there is a new type of racism which is still part of present societies based on physical and/or cultural aspects and it is the starting point to differentiate "us" from "them", the others, the foreigners causing rejection and fear which is then used to identify them as a threat (Kaya, 2002).

The identification of "them" as a threat for "us" can be explained with the securitization theory, one of the most outstanding concepts developed by the Copenhagen school. According to Buzan (1997: p. 13-14) "issues become securitized when leaders (whether political, societal, or intellectual) begin to talk about them- and to gain the ear of the public and the state- in terms of existential threats against some valued referent objects". Any public matter can be non-politicized, politicized and securitized. If an issue is non-politicized it means it is not included in the public debate and becomes politicized once it is included in public policy requiring the government to allocate decisions and resources, it can then become securitized when it is identified an existential threat that requires emergency measures that would not be otherwise allowed (Buzan, 1997). In the case of the securitization of migration, the valued referent object is represented by state sovereignty, the identity and the national security. Politicians and media outlets have been constructing migration as a security threat in different countries for different reasons. Although one common fear related to migration that developed in the 21st century is terrorism related to a specific group of people identified as Islamic extremists. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks migration has become a major concern not only in the US, but in many Western countries where Muslim migrants have become the main focus of these fears, and where migration policies underwent significant changes (Hough et al., 2015). Huysmans and Squire (2009) underline how the current debate on migration and security does not only reflect the transformation in the nature of migration but also in the way people think about migration. The securitization of migration can be considered as a spiralling phenomenon rather than a linear

one, meaning that the prejudicial narrative of migration spread by state and non-state actors in their discourses is responsible for the construction of migration as a security threat, that can lead to the implementation of new policies and practices. These practices and narratives work as up-warding or down-warding forces in the process of the securitization of migration. Once the state introduces new policies to regulate migration it does not mean that the problem is solved and migrants are not considered as a threat anymore. Different countries react to the arrival of migrants in different ways, if the narratives are exclusive and discriminatory the society tends to be more prejudiced and demand for more regulatory policies causing migration to grow as a security threat. On the contrary, if there is a more inclusive approach, migration can be deconstructed as a security concern (Bello, 2020). During what was defined as the "migration crisis" in Europe politicians and media in each country identified the arrival of migrants in different ways, in some countries it has been constructed as an issue that needed to be securitized causing a widespread misperception among the society, especially in those countries where prejudice had a dominant presence in the narratives. It is also true that the securitization of migration is self-fulfilling in the sense that no matter if the number of migrants increases or not, if migration is considered a threat it will always represent an issue to manage, and in the European case it had been constructed as a "crisis" causing a growing concern for the security (Bello, 2020).

Depending on how migrants are identified there are important consequences on how they are integrated with the societies and what kind of immigration policies are implemented. Three main aspects are important within the integration policy process these are social, economic and political integration. The first one refers to everyday aspects of life including housing, schooling and social rights, the second one is about joining the workforce and the third one refers to the possibility of taking part in the political decision-making process. All these three aspects are taken into consideration when introducing a new integration policy, although every country uses different models of integration. In Europe three integrations models can be identified: the assimilationist, the differential and the multicultural. The assimilationist model is based on the idea of the nation as a territorial and political community. Here the naturalization is encouraged in order to become integrated in the society to which people belong as individual citizens regardless of their culture or ethnicity. In the differential model nationality is based on blood and immigrants cannot be assimilated and naturalized. In addition, the community is considered as an organic entity with a specific culture and language, different languages and cultures are accepted not based on the idea of promoting cultural diversity but rather on the idea that people will need to be reintegrated in their home countries. The main

idea of the multicultural model is respect for diversity, the aim of this model is to integrate immigrants but at the same time promote their own languages and cultures, their naturalization is encouraged although their origins is not forgotten (Kaya, 2002).

People leave their countries for economic reasons, to reunite with their family members, to flee from dangerous situations, religious or political persecution and aim to stay in the host country temporarily or permanently. In particular, the duration might depict a migrant as a greater threat the more his or her stay is prolonged. Economic migrants for example may not be considered as a threat if they stay temporarily, but they could be seen as a threat if they intend to stay permanently for taking jobs to citizens (Hough et al., 2015). By looking at migration as a national security threat Hough et al. (2015) identify two different ways in which security can be threatened: externally and internally. The core of the external security relates to border control, meaning the process used by the state to manage the flow of people entering and leaving the country. The issues related to the external security are the number of people entering the country, which sometimes is considered to be too high, but also the country of origin and how they reached the country, as this might lead to identify these people as criminals or terrorists. As an internal security issue, migrants represent a threat once they are in the country as they might be seen as criminals or terrorists, but also as a threat to jobs, and the cause of tension with the citizens of the host country (Hough et al., 2015).

There are non-traditional security approaches that look at migration from a human security point of view, that unlike traditional security is concerned about protecting people not the state. From the human beings' perspective, migration represents a threat for people both in their home country and the host countries. The human insecurities that people experience in their home countries like the lack of job opportunities, religious and political prosecution, and conflicts also coincide with the reasons for leaving their countries. Once migrants reach another country, they still face insecurities as they do not have the same access to health and education as citizens, there are cultural barriers causing economic uncertainty, either because migrants do not know the language, or people are not comfortable employing certain groups of people. If migration is constructed as a security threat it makes integration harder and it might cause social and political hostilities (Hough et al., 2015).

A different point of view on migration as a security threat is the one presented by Nazli Choucri (2002), who starts from the idea of security as a function that includes military security, regime security and structural security. The first one refers to the ability of the state to guarantee the defense of the country from external threats, if it is subject to invasions, attacks or incursion the state will use military means to secure itself. The second aspect refers to the ability of the

state to manage internal threats such as revolts or dissensions through its institutions. Lastly, structural security is the ability of the state to fulfill the demand of the population, depending on the availability of resources, the levels of technology and the environment. According to Choucri (2002) if any of the three conditions for security cannot be maintained then the national security is threatened. Migration can undermine the security function in many ways, for example in the population factor as the increase of the population might result in the state not being able to meet its demand, because of lack of resources, or technology (Choucri, 2002).

Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) identify four main axes around which the securitization of migration is built by politicians, security agencies and the media. One is the socioeconomic area in which migration is linked with unemployment and the rise of informal economy. Within the securitarian axis migration is associated with issues of sovereignty, borders, external and internal security. The identitarian axis is concerned with the national identity threatened by foreign people. Lastly, the political axis is where building discourses based on anti-immigration ideas help obtaining political benefits. (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002)

While until the 20th century borders represented the political-geographical delimitation of the territory where the state exercised its control, in the 21st century after the 9/11 attacks borders became a tool to control people's movements. Benedicto and Brunet (2018) define borders as the "geographical space where the domestic law of the State and the integrity of the nation are strengthened based on the legality of people according to their origin". Not only has the concept of border changed to the point of requiring strict controls and monitoring of people moving across countries, but it has also changed its concept of space. In some cases, in order to protect their national borders, countries externalize their border by signing bilateral agreements with third countries that avoid or limit migration from that country (Benedicto and Brunet, 2018).

When faced with the numerous migrants arriving in Italy through the Mediterranean, the Italian government struggled with managing migrants' inflow and decided to externalize its borders by signing the Memorandum of Understanding with Libya in 2017.

The aim of this agreement, that has been highly criticized for its legality, was to support Libya economically in exchange for it to stop illegal migrants leaving from Libyan shores. Borders and migration have become important security concerns for the European Union that reacted both by externalizing its borders and by working on the so-called Fortress Europe. By signing bilateral agreements with third countries and adopting development aid funds, such as Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the EU externalized its borders to the countries of origin of migrants that represent a security threat for the member states. The construction of the so-called Fortress Europe began in the 1990s, even though with the approval of the Schengen Agreement

in 1985 the idea of strengthening the external borders and allowing free movement among the signatory states was first introduced. The migratory flows that affected the EU from 2013, led to stronger measures to securitize migration. Locking down borders, monitoring the movement of people and constructing social, political and physical walls was part of the process of securitization based on the idea that the more the EU was closed among itself the less likely it was for insecurity and terror to enter. The policies that were introduced to securitize migration were legitimized by xenophobia and racism that resulted in the development of structures based on racism and inequality where the "other" represents a security threat (Benedicto and Brunet, 2018).

Cooperation and solidarity have been replaced by the urge to secure the national borders in many of the member states, where the support for populist parties portraying migrants as a national security threat has increased. The UK Independence party and its successor the Brexit party renamed Reform UK, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, Le Front National in France, Lega Nord in Italy, Fidesz in Hungary, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs in Austria, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in Poland and The Finns Party in Finland focused on the importance of defending the state sovereignty and supporting anti-migration discourses. These parties have gained large electoral support in the recent elections which also demonstrates the growth of extremism, intolerance and xenophobia among the EU (Panebianco, 2020). Politico Europe "Poll of Polls" gathers data for every European country's by aggregating data from multiple polling companies in order to give an accurate picture of the situation in each country. "If a general election was held in your country today, how would you vote?" is the question asked by polling firms in order to measure how much support each political party has and from the answers given by citizens, it is possible to estimate a national opinion. The UK Independent Party has had a growing support in the period of time preceding the Brexit referendum to the point where more than 15% of the British population affirmed to be willing to vote for this party, even though at the 2019 general election they only won 0.1 percent of votes and in August 2021 only 3% of people are showing support for this party. Another right-wing populist party was formed in the UK in 2019, the Brexit Party which was later called Reform UK led by Nigel Farage. Just a couple of months after this party was formed, more that 20% of the population was supporting it, although at the 2019 general election it only got 2% of votes. In Germany the *Alternative für Deutschland* party, founded in 2013 as an anti-European party later changing its focus on immigration and Islam, has had a growing support in the years preceding the 2017 federal election when it received 12.6% of votes making it the third biggest party in Germany. In August 2021 11% of the population affirms it would vote for the AfD,

although other parties like the *Grüne* (the Greens) are rising within the German public. Far-right nationalist party *Rassemblement National*, formerly known as Front National, has a long history in France although the support for this party has grown significantly in the last years under Marine Le Pen leadership. The 2017 presidential election represented a great change in the French political history, as there was no majority in the first round, the second round of elections was held with the two top candidates Emanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen. Even though the former won with more than 66% of votes, the fact that more than more than 33% of the population voted for the populist leader, shows how much anti-immigration and xenophobic beliefs are growing in France. In Italy the right-wing populist party Lega Nord founded in the early 1990s has had a peak of support from the Italian population since the mass migration of people arriving from the Mediterranean started in 2014. Another more recently formed populist party *Movimento 5 Stelle*, was chosen by more than 30% of the population as the preferred party in 2018 at the time of the general elections. After the institutional crisis that followed the 2018 elections, the *Lega Nord* and the *Movimento 5 Stelle* parties formed a coalition and ruled no longer than 14 months. In Hungary between 40% and 55% of the population claimed to be supporting the populist right-wing *Fidesz* party led by Orban since the party came to power in 2010. The *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* was the preferred party in Austria between 2015 and 2017. Although, in the latest 2019 general election it lost many supporters due to the "Ibiza scandal" involving the leader of the party offering control of an Austrian tabloid to the niece of a Russian oligarch in exchange of campaign support (Oltermann, 2019). In Poland the euro-sceptic party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* has been ruling the country since the 2015 elections, and still is at present time the preferred party among polish citizens. As a matter of fact, Poll of Polls identify 33% of the population supporting the party in August 2021. In Finland, the right-wing populist Finns Party founded in the late 90s, after being supported by more than 20% of the population between 2012 and 2015, it lost many supporters from 2016 to 2019. At the beginning of 2019, the year when the elections were held, only 8% of the Finnish population claimed that they would choose the Finns party as their preferred one, but at the beginning of 2020 more than 20% would have chosen the Finns party. (Politico, 2021)

The growing support that these populist parties are gaining could deteriorate the democratic values in these countries. Although before looking at how populism represents a threat to liberal democracies, the term should be explained. Populism has been defined in many ways, to mention some as "language", "political discourse", "mode of identification", "political frame", "political style" (Mudde, 2016). Despite being the term populism contested, and

interpreted from different perspectives, the relationship between "the people" and "the elite" is a common thread among all approaches (Bang and Marsh, 2018). There are different ways in which populism has been analysed and defined, the literature identifies three main approaches in identifying the term populism: the political-strategic approach, the ideational approach and the socio-cultural approach. The former defines populism as "a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, unistitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2017). The ideational approach identifies populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people"(Mudde, 2017). From a socio-cultural point of view, populism can be understood as "an antagonistic appropriation for political, mobilizational purposes of an *unpresentable Other*"(Ostiguy, 2017).

Populism as a political strategy approach relies on two main aspects: the type of political actor seeking and exercising power and the principal power capability. Individual politicians are a key component for populism as they represent an alternative to the established political parties, by presenting themselves as different actors from the existing political elite. Populist leaders reach "the people" in a quasi-direct way by identifying themselves with their followers without any political party intermediation, through TV and social media. Being in contact with citizens almost in a direct, face to face way strengthens the idea that populist leaders take their sides and aim at supporting the "will of the people". In regards to the principal power capability, populist leaders prefer numbers over special weights by mobilizing "the people", that represent the majority, to legitimize their base of rule (Weyland, 2017). Even though many ideologies are based on the opposition of the people against the elite, in populism this contraposition relies on the concept of morality. On one side the pure and authentic people and on the other side the corrupt elite, which originally comes from the same group of people who decided to put the interests and morals of the elite over those of the people. The core concepts of the ideational approach of populism are ideology, the people, the elite, and the general will. In terms of ideology, which is intended as "a body of normative and normative-related ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society"(Sainsbury, 1980), populism has been defined as a thin ideology.

Compared to thick ideologies such as socialism or liberalism, populism has been considered not to be as intellectually refined and consistent, therefore it has more limited ambition and scope. Regarding the concept of people, even though many authors believe that the people do

not exist as they are constructed by populists, the fact that they are characterized as "pure" does provide a content. Despite the concept of purity not being precise, populist leaders determine the key features of the targeted community that represent for them "the pure people". The distinction between the people and the elite is made on a moral basis however, populists identify the two groups by applying different meanings influenced by other ideologies, therefore it is not only morality that differentiate them but also class or commonness, as well as ethnicity. The general will is the driving force for populist discourse, as populist leaders believe that politics should pursue the general will of the people, which is considered as a homogenous group, where internal groups are irrelevant. The aim of populist leaders is to fulfill the interests of "the pure people" whereas the elite only focuses on the interest of specific groups (Mudde, 2017).

When comparing European and Latin American populism, Mudde and Kaltwasser identified three features that distinguish exclusionary from inclusionary populism and concluded that today populism in Europe is predominantly exclusive. The three dimensions that the authors take into consideration are material, political and symbolic. The first one refers to the monetary and non-monetary distribution of state resources to specific groups among the society, the second one is about political participation and public contestation and the third one sets the differences between the people and the elite, by symbolically excluding or including certain groups of people from either "us" or "them" (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). By analysing how these three dimensions apply to European populism, the authors find that populist parties aim at protecting the egalitarian societies which they believe to be threatened by outside forces. In addition, they demand for a democracy that protects native people and limit political rights to non-citizens, and lastly European populists claim to be the voice of the people although this assumption excludes "alien" people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). The socio-cultural approach to populism is based on a two-dimensional political space which is built on the left-right and high-low axes. The former is universally recognized and relies on two dimensions: the socio-economic and the political dimension, the latter is established on the socio-cultural and political cultural components. The socio-cultural component is about how people act, dress and speak in public whereas the political-cultural refers to political leadership and decision-making. On the high we find well-behaved, composed, formalist people open to cosmopolitanism and in favour of proceduralism, on the low we find uninhibited, direct, personalistic figures, that often use slang and popular language and identify with local, native people (Ostiguy, 2017).

It seems clear that the people represent a fundamental aspect for populism, indeed by looking at the etymology of the word, it clearly derives from Latin *populus* meaning "the people" and it does share the same word with democracy, that derives from Greek *demos* meaning "the people".

How does populism represent a threat to liberal democracy, if it is also based on the idea of the general will of the people? I shall use the definition of democracy elaborated by Dahl (1998) who identifies the political institutions of a democracy as: elected officials, free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy and inclusive citizenship. It should be noted that the idea of people is understood differently, for populism it represents a "homogeneous community with a shared collective identity" whereas for democracy it refers to "an irreducible plurality, consisting of free and equal citizens"(Rummens, 2017). There are many ways in which populism is seen as a threat to democracy, some authors believe that it is a problem that can be solved by renewing the economic growth, innovating democratic institutions and educating in liberal values. Other authors assume that it is not an issue that can be easily solved as it has created a division among the society between "nativist populism" and "global liberalism"(Bang and Marsh, 2018). According to Rummens (2017) populism is to be considered as a threat to democracy, although some authors (Arditi, 2003; Mény and Surel, 2002) believe that it can also operate as a corrective for democracy, the main difference among these two opposite perspectives relies on how liberal democracy is defined. Assuming that liberal democracy is a paradoxical regime based on the democratic and liberal pillars, when the balance between the two pillars leans on the liberal one, then populism can act as corrective. If the democratic process has been restrained by liberal elitism, populist leaders by giving voice to matters of concern of "the people" can make democracy less elitist and more inclusive. Nevertheless, Rummens (2017) strongly disagree with this idea of populism as a corrective for the malfunctions of liberal democracy, and he considers populism to be a symptom signaling that something is wrong in the democratic system. This idea develops from the understanding of liberal democracy as a deliberative model, which is based on the two dimensions of liberal and democratic that should not be considered as separate pillars as they mutually presuppose each other. Individual liberty rights are possible if there is a democratic process, that in order to function require the existence of liberal rights. Despite populism represents a threat to liberal democracy, populist actors should still need to be allowed to participate in the political discourse as political freedom is one of the core institutions of liberal democracies. If populism is to be considered as a threat, two possible strategies can be enacted in order to prevent populist ideology to undermine liberal

democracies: one aims at excluding and the other one at including populist parties from the government. Considering that populism represents a symptom of an underlying problem, Rummens (2017) proposes for it to be addressed with a concentric containment strategy. The strategy is based on the idea that undemocratic forces can freely operate at the periphery of the democratic system but they should be less tolerated if they get closer to the centers of power, and not allowed to take part in government decision-making process. Taking into consideration that in liberal democracies everyone should be free to take part in the political debate, even parties or people with undemocratic values, the "cordon sanitaire" could be a possible way to protect democracies. Although this strategy aims at excluding the populist party because their proposed solutions to address citizens' concerns are undemocratic, at the same time it takes into consideration the concerns raised by populist parties' voters, in orders to propose solutions in line with the liberal democratic values. A more inclusive strategy would allow populist parties to participate in government, based on the assumption that once these parties are participating in decision making process they would have to moderate their position in order for their proposed solutions to be approved (Rummens, 2017).

Authors such as Jordan Kyle and Yascha Mounk seek to provide empirical evidence claiming that populism represents a risk for democracies. One of the key findings of their research is that populist leaders tend to last longer in office than non-populist leaders and if they leave office, they do it in a dramatic way. In addition, they found that it is four time more likely for populists to damage democracies than non-populists as a matter of fact, they are more inclined to damage checks and balances on the executive for example by changing the constitution. Furthermore, individual rights such as freedom of the press, civil liberties and political rights are more at risk under populist governments (Kyle and Mounk, 2018). Even though democracies die "slowly, in barely visible steps"(Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018), there are many ways to measure the quality of a democracy and it is possible to see from one year to the other whether democratic values are being eroded. Hungary and Turkey are among the countries where since a populist leader has gained power, democratic institutions are at risk (Kyle and Mounk, 2018). In regards to Hungary, it has been defined as a democracy in decline by Freedom House's Freedom in the World report 2019, and it has fallen from 46th to 57th position on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. In addition, according to the World's Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicator, Hungary's performance has declined and its position on the Human Freedom Index changed from 28th to 44th from 2010 to 2015 (Rohac, 2018). For what concerns Turkey, the democratic backsliding was foreseen when the constitutional referendum was held in 2017. Winning the referendum meant going from a

parliamentary to a presidential system, in which the role of the parliament would be limited, and the president would have more influence in the legislative, judicial and executive powers. With the referendum the extraordinary measures that were taken by the government during the three months of state of emergency became ordinary measures. This was defined by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe as a "dangerous step backwards" for democracy in Turkey (Cupolo, 2017). Whereas in Turkey populist leader Erdoğan is more focused on differentiating "good" and "bad" people depending on their religion (Yabanci and Taleski, 2018), in Hungary the anti-immigrant discourse is used by Prime Minister Orbán to define who the "true Hungarians" are and to distinguish between "we" and "they". Anti-immigrant's ideas such as building a wall on the border with Serbia to stop migrants from entering the country and anti-migration discourse clearly visible on government-sponsored billboards with saying "STOP" to immigration have been justified in the name of national identity and Christianity, considering that many of the asylum seekers were Muslim (Palonen, 2018).

2. Case study: Italy

In order to answer the research question of how populist parties capitalize on the securitization of migration issues to secure electoral victories and subsequently implement policies that could erode democratic institutions, let's examine Italy. In this part I will explain the development of migration policies from the 1960s until present, and how populist parties securitized migration. Considering that migration has been identified as a security threat, I will analyse what aspects of the society are threatened by migration, in particular economy and national identity. To understand how migration affects the national citizens, not only it will be considered what ideas and assumptions have been used by politicians, but also people's points of view and the support that populist parties are getting.

In order to do this, speeches, interviews, social media content of the major populist leaders will be analysed as well as surveys and reports will be used to understand public opinion.

Lastly, the possible harm to democracy represented by populist ideas on migration once they become a policy will be analysed.

The choice of the country is based on different aspects, including the fact that Italy is a democratic country that experienced an increase of support of the populist party Lega Nord and where the topic of migration has been present and discussed since the late 1960s. As a matter of fact, Lega Nord received 17.35 percent in the 2018 elections compared to the previous 4.09 percent of votes in the 2013 election. In addition, because of its geographical location,

Italy represents for migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea one of the closest countries they are able to reach. Even though the issue of migrants in Italy has been a hot topic in the last six years, migration had already been discussed and securitized earlier. Indeed, in Italy immigration has been identified as an issue long before the recent migratory flow of people reaching Europe through the Mediterranean Sea that started in 2011 and had a peak in 2015. Populist leader Matteo Salvini is not the first politician in Italian history to address the topic of migration and frame it as a security issue.

When Umberto Bossi President of the Lega Nord used expressions such as "Bingo Bongo" (La Repubblica, 2003b: 435) or affirmed he wanted to hear "the roar of cannons" (Bossi, 2003) he was addressing the issue of migration as early as 2003. In many interviews he insisted on the idea that Italians, more specifically Padanians (from the north of Italy), worked their entire lives to earn enough money to buy a house whereas immigrants were given accommodation without even working for it. When he talks about immigrants, he uses a specific language aimed at delivering a message. One of the most famous ways he referred to migrants coming from Africa is by calling them "Bingo Bongo", which refers to the 1947 song "Bongo Bongo Bongo" by Nilla Pizzi and Luciano Benevene, the Italian version of the 1947 American song "Civilization" by Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman that talks about an explorer that went to Africa. After the Bossi-Fini law on migration was approved, the leader of Lega Nord was waiting the Minister of Interior for new implementing regulations, and what he wanted was to hear "the roar of cannons" not just words against clandestine migration. When asked by an interviewer if he would shoot against unarmed women and children on the boats, he stressed that something had to be done to defend the Italian territory by any means necessary (Bossi, 2003).

The origins of Italian's migration regulation dates back to the 1960s when Italy, governed by a Democratic Christian party, was not yet an immigration country but rather an emigration country although the presence of foreign university students, African and Asian housekeepers, and fishermen from Tunisia led to the necessity of establishing rules on non-Italian workforce. Concerned about foreign competition within the labour market, the Ministry of Labour that was in charge of managing immigration at the time, introduced the requirement for any foreign person of having a signed employment contract with an Italian employee before arriving in Italy in order to be granted a valid working visa and a residence permit. The process required by these regulations for employees to hire people they did not know living in another country was not successful, and resulted in employees bending the law. People from foreign countries would arrive in Italy with a tourist visa and once they found a job they would sign an employment contract, go back to their home countries and return to Italy simulating a first entry

with a valid working visa. Until 1986, when Italy was ruled by the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) this process had been followed when the "Foschi law" [1] was approved consolidating the already existing rules introduced in 1963 by the Ministry of Labour to regulate the entry and stay of immigrants in Italy which was still addressed as a labour force issue. It was not until the 1990 "Martelli law"[2] approval that immigration started to be discussed among people, developing a polarized public opinion on the topic.

In the 1990s for the first time in Italy, immigration started to be associated with criminality, and the topic first became politicized and later identified as a security threat. Considering that immigration became in the late 1990s a matter of public order and security from that moment it was no longer a responsibility of the Ministry of Labour but of the Ministry of Home Affairs which was authorized to intervene in the name of security. The "Martelli law" required the government to set a limitation on the number of working permits issued annually and later introduced a cap to the total number of people allowed to enter the country both for working or family reunification reasons. When the "Turco-Napolitano law"[3] was approved in 1998, it maintained the model introduced with the "Martelli law" that required having a work contract before entering the country. The reason behind this was the raising concern about the new flow of Albanian migrants that was framed by the media as being linked to criminality and public disturbances. After the draft legislation was presented, development organisations such as Caritas, ARCI, Communita' di Sant'Egidio pointed out the unrealistic idea of having a migration policy based only on remote recruitment. Therefore, the law introduced the idea of sponsorship, requiring migrants to have an Italian resident to sponsor them and take care of them economically until they find a job (Bontempelli, 2009). In 2001 unemployment, criminality, and immigration were some of the top priorities among Italian voters, during the 2001 electoral campaign the Lega Nord party developed a strategy of framing immigration as a law-and-order issue that resulted in a high rate of voters associating immigration and insecurity.

The LN party can be identified as an extreme right party (Albertazzi et al., 2018), with xenophobic and federalist values although, the expectation was that once taking part in the government the party's approach would be more pragmatic. Nevertheless, being in the Casa

[1] Legge 30 dicembre 1986, n. 943, recante *Norme in materia di collocamento e di trattamento dei lavoratori extracomunitari immigrati e contro le immigrazioni clandestine*.

[2] Legge 28 febbraio 1990, n. 39, recante *Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decretolegge 30 dicembre 1989, n. 416, recante norme urgenti in materia di asilo politico, di ingresso e soggiorno dei cittadini extracomunitari e di regolarizzazione dei cittadini extracomunitari ed apolidi già presenti nel territorio dello Stato. Disposizioni in materia di asilo*.

[3] Legge 6 marzo 1998, n. 40, recante *Disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero*.

delle Liberta' coalition with Silvio Berlusconi represented for Umberto Bossi, the leader of Lega Nord, a chance of bringing the issue of immigration to more citizens and the 9/11 attacks intensified the cultural racism against Islam. As a matter of fact, Bossi claimed that the 'invasion and erasure of our culture' had to end (cited in Bossi, 2001) , that we do 'not want them' (cited in Repubblica, 2003a) and identified immigration as a threat to national cohesion and identity (Carvalho, 2013). According to Carvalho (2013), even though since the earlier stage of the coalition, LN was able to influence the development of the Italian immigration policy and to expand its electoral support, it was not until Berlusconi's second term that Bossi's ideas on migration had an impact on immigration policy. The amendments introduced with the "Bossi-Fini" law abolished the sponsorship and made the process for remote recruitment more complex. These policy developments required the employer to enter into a 'contract of residence' that not only secured a job for the immigrant but also provided appropriate housing and took care of repatriation expenses if needed. Apparently, these new norms aimed at protecting the rights of migrants but in reality, they were restrictive and discriminatory as a migrant without an accommodation in line with the necessary standards, was not allowed to enter the national territory (Bontempelli, 2009). Whilst from the 1960s until the early 1990s migratory policies gradually became more inclusive allowing more people to arrive in the country and facilitating the arrival processes, with the "Turco-Napolitano law" and the "Bossi-Fini law"[4] it became more difficult for migrants to obtain a residence permit which resulted in most migrants living illegally in Italy (Iocco et al., 2020).

The 9/11 attacks, and the 2004-2007 enlargement of the European Union had a significant impact on Italian migration policy, and on Italian citizens' perspective on migrants, in particular with regards to Muslims and Central and Eastern Europeans. Nonetheless, two more recent events further influenced the debate on immigration in Italy, namely the 2008 economic crisis and the humanitarian crisis. According to UNDESA (2020) in Italy in 2005 the total number of international migrants at mid-year was 4 million, in 2010 and 2015 5.8 million and in 2020 6.4 million. There has been an increase in the number of migrants from the early 2000s until present times, although other factors should be taken into consideration when analysing the development of policies, the media coverage, politicians' discourses on the topic and people points of view. The economic crisis of 2008 affected many countries worldwide, including Italy where citizens facing economic difficulties experienced increasing precariousness and fear. Together with the fact that a growing number of migrants were arriving from the Middle

[4] Legge 30 luglio 2002, n. 189, recante *Modifica alla normativa in materia di immigrazione e di asilo.*

East and North Africa, the media, politicians and public started to associate their economic struggles and losses with the fear of immigrants that were perceived as competitors on the labour market (Colucci, 2019). According to Eurobarometer 469 (2017), 58 percent of the population agreed on the fact that immigrants "Take jobs away from workers in Italy" and 63 percent of Italians believed that immigrant "Are a burden on our welfare system".

The Arab Spring and the conflict outbreaks in Tunisia, Libya and Syria led to a rise of maritime migrants' arrivals in the south of Italy. Since 2011 when five thousand people arrived on the island of Lampedusa from Tunisia, the number of immigrants willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars and risk their lives by crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy has grown significantly. The peak was reached in 2016 with 181,436 arrivals. Initially the majority was arriving from Tunisia, and later expanded to Syria, Eritrea, Somali, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea. Considering the rise in number of applications that had to be processed, Italian institutions were overloaded struggling to make the decision-making process fast and efficient in order to avoid thousands of immigrants unable to move somewhere else, work or do anything because of the absence of the proper documentation (Colucci, 2019). The so-called 'Mediterranean model' of immigration policy characterized by "vagueness, inaccuracy and insufficient regulation"(La Bella, 2019: 448) also applies to the Italian case.

Before 2011 the two ways Italy handle migrants were through the *Sistema di protezione richiedenti asilo e rifugiati* (SPRAR) and *Centri di accoglienza richiedenti asilo* (CARA). The former run by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and local entities aimed at protecting refugees, foster their independence and integrate them with the local communities. The latter was created to assist and limit the freedom-of-movement of asylum seekers while their applications were being processed.

In 2011 a new centre initially named *Emergenza Nord Africa* (ENA) and later renamed Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (CAS) was established, overseen by prefectures and run by private organizations (Colucci, 2019). There are many actors involved in the implementation of migration policies including the Ministry of Interior, territorial bodies such as Prefectures, State Police Headquarters, territorial committees, and municipalities, national health services but also private-sector actors, voluntary associations, companies in the hospitality sectors and even individuals and families.

In his research, La Bella (2019) identifies six phases within the procedure of assignment of international protection from the docking of the humanitarian rescue vessels to the positive or negative outcome that results in the migrant to either stay at certain facilities for another six months or be expelled or repatriated. One of the major issues outlined in the research is the

difference between the predicted time and the actual time that every phase takes, in some cases the actual time is ten times longer that the predicted time. The factors identified as responsible for the delays depend on the local bureau, although the most common obstacles are the lack of information, complicated identification and recognition processes and the scarcity of offices and personnel appointed specifically to assist the Border Police (La Bella, 2019).

In response to the issues caused by the delays, in 2017 the "Minniti-Orlando"[5] decree was approved by the Senate introducing new measures to accelerate the procedure for international protection and to contrast illegal migration. While claiming that the purpose of the decree was to facilitate the asylum procedures, it has been criticised for not fully complying with the fundamental human rights and right to asylum that are protected by international law (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). After being appointed Ministry of Home Affairs in 2018, Matteo Salvini was able to get the so-called 'security decree'[6] approved by the Senate in regards to asylum, immigration, citizenship and security. With this decree the residency permit for humanitarian protection could no longer be granted, migrants staying in the *Centri di permanenza per il rimpatrio* (CPR) while waiting to be repatriated could be withheld for 180 days, more funds for the repatriation were allocated and international protection could be revoked if the refugee commits a crime. In addition, if an asylum seeker's country of origin was on the list of safe countries, determined with information from UNHCR, European Asylum Support Office and the Council of Europe, the migrant would have to provide severe reasons to justify the asylum request. Furthermore, in regards to the citizenships the 'security decree' did not allow asylum seekers to register their residency in Italy, and the citizenship could be revoked to people that acquired it if they commited a crime related with terrorism (Camilli, 2018). The already existing economic and structural issues allowed for the 'migrants crisis' to create a widespread panic among the Italian society. The right-wing populist party leveraged this public mood to frame immigration as a lucrative business for smugglers, NGOs, landlords and hotel managers hosting refugees (Castelli Gattinara, 2017) which allowed the 'security decree-bis'[7] regulating sea rescue to came into force in 2019. With this decree the Ministry of Home Affairs was allowed to limit or stop the entry of boats in national sea for order and security reasons, namely if believed that the boat was aiding and abetting illegal immigration (Camilli, 2019). Even though it is clear how Lega Nord anti-immigration discourse influenced the recent introduction

[5] La Legge 13 aprile 2017 n. 46 recante disposizioni urgenti per l'accelerazione dei procedimenti in materia di protezione internazionale, nonché per il contrasto dell'immigrazione illegale. Prime riflessioni interpretative
[6] Decreto Legge, 04/10/2018 n° 113, G.U. 03/12/2018
[7] Decreto Legge, 14/06/2019 n° 53, G.U. 14/06/2019

of both ‘security decrees’, it has also been known for having emphasized immigration as a priority that the Italian government’s political agenda needed to address since the early 2000s. In order to understand the policies introduced by populist leaders, it is important to acknowledge what kind of populist party Lega Nord represents, and the difference between Umberto Bossi and Matteo Salvini. The following part will discuss the development of Lega Nord’s political discourse, in particular in regards to the securitization of migration.

The Lega Nord party was founded in 1991 by Umberto Bossi by merging six autonomist movements that developed in the northern of Italy from the late 1970s. It can be considered as a new party within the political history of Italy, as it was a shock for the traditional and stable party system that had been in place since the end of the Second World War, and because it brought new issues to the political debate. The first issue was the ‘northern question’, namely the discontent that the northern and more economically developed and dynamic regions had towards Rome, the centre of politics which was more focused on the southern less developed regions. The second one was the discontent with politics, in regards to the oligarchies of parties and democratic institutions. The Lega Nord has been since its beginnings an autonomist and populist party, even though it had to give up its regionalist and secessionist claims to join the Casa delle Liberta’ centre-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi (Bulli and Tronconi, 2011). The regionalist aspect relates to the fact that Bossi claims that his regions, the northern regions, are different from the rest of the country and because of the centralization their interests and identity are being damaged. The populist characteristic is based on the contraposition between the pure hard-working northern people and the corrupt elite in Rome (Albertazzi et al., 2018). In the beginning, Lega Nord was focused on the concerns relating to the people living in the northern of Italy, who lacked confidence in government institutions, blamed the distributive crisis on corruption and the local communities’ crisis on the centralized state that redistributed the tax revenues from the north to the south of Italy. The party leveraged people’s disappointment and proposed itself as the antithesis of party politics using the *‘Roma ladrona’* (Roma big thief) slogan to represent the shared feeling among ‘Padanians’, the people living in the North of Italy (Woods, 2021). During Bossi’s leadership the party’s focus was on north vs south and on the pure people vs the elite in Rome, after Bossi was forced to resign and Matteo Salvini became the new leader of the party in 2013, there was a substantial generational and ideological change. With the new leader, Lega Nord renewed its electoral target and its communication channels. Dropping the word ‘North’ from the electoral symbol of the party, and changing it to ‘Lega Salvini Premier’ not only allowed Salvini to strengthen the personalization of the party, but it also reinforced the idea of expanding its electorate to the

Centre and South of Italy. The rebranding of the party resulted in Lega Nord achieving the best electoral performance in the 2018 election since the 1990s, receiving a strong support from the North, a growing support from the 'red' regions, and a small support from the South (Albertazzi et al., 2018). As Weyland (2017) explains, the driving force of populism is political and not ideological, as a matter of fact "populism revolves around the opportunism of personalistic plebiscitarian leaders"(Weyland, 2017: 21). Populist leaders are focused on power more than on ideology and, in order to do this they connect with the people in a quasi-direct, unmediated, unistitutionalized way often using ideas, slogans and campaigns. Weyland (2017) underlines how populism as a political strategy revolves around individual politicians, who aim to gain more power and to present themselves as opposed to the elite. As a matter of fact, since Matteo Salvini personalized the party, he was able to sustain mobilization and widen the geographical spectrum not only by sharing his ideas on social media but also by meeting people in person, from North to South of Italy (Albertazzi et al., 2018). One of the major claims during Bossi's leadership was about the north becoming independent from the rest of Italy, nevertheless with Salvini making the regionalist party go national, it allowed the party to gain a greater electoral support which sustains the idea explained by Weyland (2017) of power prevailing over ideology. Being voted and representing people from the South of Italy also meant that the political campaign on free-riders had to shift from targeting people from the South as during Bossi's leadership, to targeting immigrants and refugees (Woods, 2021). This change was further underlined by the different slogan proposed by Salvini as '*Prima gli italiani*' (Italians first) opposed to Bossi's slogan '*Prima il Nord*' (Nord first).

A few days after Salvini was elected as leader of Lega Nord, he apologized for having insulted people from the south during his political career, reinforcing the idea that he now believed that Italy could only survive as one nation, without making any difference among regions (Albertazzi et al., 2018). Another innovative aspect introduced by the 'new' Lega was about communication. Even though Berlusconi was able to innovate communicative channels between the First and Second Republic thanks to the power of television (Tarchi, 2015), Salvini introduced social media as a new way of communicating with citizens. Using social media represented for the renewed party a strategic opportunity to shape and dominate national debates, to overcome the geographical limitation of the 'old' Lega and to gain new supporters (Albertazzi et al., 2018). By looking at Lega Nord and Salvini's account on Facebook, which according to Pew Research Center (2018) is the most common social network used by Italian adults to read news, the themes of immigration, security and terrorism are the most discussed (Albertazzi et al., 2018). Besides the '*Prima gli italiani*' slogan, Salvini used other slogans to

securitize migration such as '*Orgoglio italiano*' (Italian pride), '*Stop invasione*' (Stop invasion) and 'Porti chiusi' (Ports closed). The political discourse on migrants both on social media and during interviews always includes words such as invasion, expulsion, war and when referring to migrants he uses words such as violent, criminal, aggressive, 'tourist forever', drug dealer, prostitute. To reinforce the idea that he represents every Italian in the fight against immigration and terrorism, he travelled around Italy and posted pictures on social media with local products such as Sicilian arancini, Grana Padano, focaccia with mortadella, Sicilian cannoli, Neapolitan pizza and many different varieties of local cheese, wine, oil, meat, fruit and vegetable to the point when journalist started to refer to him as the politician food-blogger(Cavallo, 2019). This helped him to get closer to people, and become someone people can trust with their concerns.

Even though the ideational approach proposed by Mudde (2017) does not take into consideration the importance of the personalistic leader, the distinction between exclusionary and inclusionary populism introduced by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) can be used to define populism in Italy. As the authors affirm European populism is exclusive (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013), in fact Italian populism excludes non-native groups from the material, political and symbolic dimensions. The material dimension includes all monetary and non-monetary resources of the state such as social services, housing, and jobs (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013), which according to Italian populists should be shared among citizens and not migrants. Some of the widespread stereotypes about migrants included the fact that illegal migrants were living in five-star hotels and receiving 35 euros per day (Francesca Romana), which according to Salvini were wasted on migrants 'bivouacking' in railway and bus stations (Salvini, 2018). In regards to the political aspect, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) explain how populist parties claim to be representing the people and they often call for referendums, or initiatives to demonstrate that their opinion matters although most of the times non-citizens are not allowed to vote for elections. In Italy only citizens have the right to vote, even though there have been proposals to extend the right to vote to migrants residing in Italy that was strongly opposed by Salvini and his supporters. As a matter of fact, in 2014 Salvini held a referendum against the anticipated right to vote for migrants (Salvini, 2014), and in 2016 he proposed the idea of giving the right to vote to 16 years old rather than migrants (Salvini, 2016). Lastly, in regards to the symbolic dimension, European populist parties exclude non-native groups based on culture, including illegal migrants, legal non-citizens such as guest workers and refugees, and ethnic minorities (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). The '*Prima gli italiani'* slogan introduced by Salvini clearly explains that he only represents Italians, and Italians should be the priority of the government. In addition, one of the issues often raised by Salvini is in regards

to citizenship. His position is against introducing *jus soli*, with which everyone born in the Italian territory would be granted the Italian citizenship, that has been proposed several times by the left parties. According to Salvini, approving the *jus soli*, would mean prioritizing migrants over Italian citizens (Salvini, 2019).

When framing migration as a threat in Italy, two main aspects are considered to be at risk: national identity and economy. Even though article 7 of the Italian constitution states that the Catholic Church and the Italian state are two separate and sovereign entities, Catholicism represents an important part of Italian history and culture. Article 8 of the Constitution states that all religions are equal, nevertheless Catholicism is the major religion in Italy and the entire society is influenced by it. Public holidays are based on religious beliefs such as Christmas, the Epiphany, Easter Monday, All Saint's Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Ferragosto (Assumption of Virgin Mary) and Catholic symbolism is present in the society; for example, in schools where crucifixes are displayed in every classroom. Since Salvini became the leader of the party in 2013, Christianity was identified as the basis of the renewed political party (Molle, 2019). To reinforce the importance of religion, Salvini often showed Catholic symbolism during his speeches, such as the Gospel Book and the rosary.

Religion played an important role for the traditional Christian-Democratic parties that were focused on Church membership and participation. Populist parties such as Lega Nord used religion as a distinguishing factor between 'us' and 'them', using religious traditions to define Italian identity as opposed to Islam. Therefore, every migrant identified with Islam, has been considered as a threat for the national identity.

Another aspect of the Italian society that has been considered to be threatened by immigration is the economy, and considering the economic difficulties experienced by many Italians after the 2008 crisis, it is an issue very close to the citizens' hearts. Taking into consideration the exclusionist concept of people based on nativism supported by Salvini, it is not surprising that he also supports the idea of welfare chauvinism. According to Salvini, only citizens should enjoy welfare state benefits and not immigrants (Woods, 2021). The leader of Lega Nord, accused the government and left parties of prioritising migrants over citizens, by giving money and accommodation to migrants that did not deserve it while Italian citizens who lost their jobs and their houses were not considered (Matteo, 2018). Salvini also managed to cut the funds that the government assigned to refugee centres, from 35 to 19 euros a day per migrant (Ziniti, 2018). The money is used by the refugee centres such as SPRAR and CAS to cover the expenses for identification, food, personal and environmental cleaning services, essential goods, linguistic and cultural assistance, phone cards and 2.50 euro of pocket money

(Francesca Romana). As Woods (2021: 14) states 'Welfare chauvinism becomes a vehicle to undermine the universal principles of liberal Democracy and to do so ironically in defence of people's democracy.'

Even though the issue of migration had already been securitized and politicized, with Salvini migration became one of the major issues discussed among citizens and an important topic within the political agenda. According to Gonzalez-Barrera and Connor (2019) in 2018 more than 54 percent of Italian population believed that immigrants are a burden, and only 12 percent of the population thought that immigrants make the country stronger with respect to 19 percent in 2014. In regard to the association of migration and security, 44 percent of Italian population are of the opinion that immigrants are to blame for crime more than other groups, and 60 percent assume that immigrants increase the risk of terrorism (Gonzalez-Barrera and Connor, 2019). Similar ideas resulted from the *More in Common* report that analysed the opinion of Italians about their country. According to the study, the major issues identified by Italians are unemployment, immigration and crime, and half of the population fears that the Italian identity is disappearing. Italian citizens have a negative attitude towards immigration due to security issues, and they believe migration is not being managed effectively by the authorities (Dixon et al., 2018). Taking into consideration how migration has been addressed and securitized in Italy, it is not surprising to see that it becomes a greater priority throughout time. In line with Eurobarometer (2014) Italian citizens identified immigration as the third topic after unemployment and the economic situation, that should be a priority of the institutions. Four years later Italian citizens recognize immigration as the second major challenge after unemployment that the country is facing, with 32 percent of the population identifying it as a priority. In addition, 60 percent of the Italian population believe that migrants do not contribute to changing the country in a positive way and 66 percent have a negative view on migrants coming from outside the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2018).

The 2008 economic crisis and the 2015 humanitarian crisis, together with the technical-organizational issues of the procedure to grant international recognition, the rising fear among the citizens, the European regulation on migration and the identification of migrants as a security threat are among the reasons for the 'paralysis of Italy's approach to its migration policy'(Colucci, 2019: 435). The vulnerable situation in which many Italian citizens found themselves due to major global crisis has been exploited by Lega Nord and its leader Matteo Salvini to show its citizens that their feelings and opinions matter. In fact, the approval of the 'Salvini Decree' in 2018 was a way for Salvini to demonstrate his supporters that he managed to bring an issue close to people's hearts to the government, followed by a strong and often

wrong communication on social media in regard to the reduction of numbers of migrants reaching Italian shores. Several times the leader of Lega Nord has been accused of sharing false information on the number of migrants, both on social media and as a guest speaker in political television programs, both to claim that the number had decreased thanks to his decree and to accuse the opposition of letting too many immigrants enter the country. Nevertheless, there has been no proof that the numbers decreased thanks to the 'Salvini decree' but it is believed that the numbers in 2018 were lower than in 2016 because that was when most migrants left their countries and not because the Italian government was too permissive in regard to who was entering the country (Gabanelli and Ravizza, 2020).

It can definitely be said that the securitization and politicization of migration sustained by Salvini among other factors helped him to gain more support from Italian citizens. Whether the implementation of the migration policies introduced by Lega Nord represents a risk for democratic backsliding cannot be proven. In fact, according to Freedom in the World 2021 by Freedom House, Italy is considered a Free country with a score of 90/100, one point higher than the previous year. Nevertheless, the erosion of democracies does not happen suddenly but rather it is a gradual process that can begin from anti-democratic discourse. By looking at the Lega Nord political discourse, it can be identified as anti-democratic under certain aspects. In regard to the topic of migration, the perspective sustained by the right-wing political party can be considered as a threat to the universalizing principle of democracy (Woods, 2021).

As stated by Dahl (1998), one of the six required political institutions for a modern representative democracy is the 'inclusive citizenship' according to which 'No adult permanently residing in the country and subject to its laws can be denied the rights that are available to others and are necessary to the five political institutions just listed'(Dahl, 1998: 86). Even though the Freedom in the World score is high, some of the issues identified by Freedom House are in regards to the limitation of the egalitarian principle. In fact, when analysing whether all 'segments of the population have full political rights and electoral opportunities' (Freedom House 2021, B4) the results showed how migrants have limited political participation rights as a result of the populist discourse. The fact that non-citizens cannot vote, and after the 2018 'security decree' the process to acquire citizenship became stricter, many people residing in Italy have been left out of the political and electoral debate. Furthermore, Italy has been considered as a country where 'individuals are free to practice and express their religious faith' (Freedom House 2021, D2) although some concerns have been raised in regards to the anti-Muslim discourse supported by the right-wing political party and to local governments trying to hinder the construction of mosques. Another matter of concern

is about the equal treatment before the law, even if the results to the question 'Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segment of the population?' (Freedom House 2021, F4) are mostly positive, the issue of migrants is considered. In fact, since the 'security decree' was approved in 2018, significant criticism have been raised both nationally and internationally. The Italian Constitutional Court declared the decree to be partially in violation of article 3 of the Constitution that establish the equality before the law and required it amendment. In addition, at the international level the provisions in the decree allowing the Ministry of Interior to decide on the sort of ONG boats saving migrants at sea, have been defined in violation of international law, in particular of the Geneva Convention. In accordance with what has been previously discussed, Matteo Salvini's political agenda is based on the idea that Italians come first, and that non-citizens should not benefit from the welfare state clearly denying foreign people the same rights as citizens and representing a threat to the egalitarian democratic institution.

3. Case Study: Hungary

If the relationship between the securitization of migration, populism and democracy in Italy was to be compared with another European country it would be interesting to look at the situation in Hungary. The choice of Hungary as a country to compare with Italy is based more on differences rather than similarities, in particular for what concern its history and political regime. The historic past of Hunagry definitely had an influence on the approach of the current Prime Minister Viktor Orbán with his openly defined 'illiberal democratic' country. The case of Hungary, with its right-wing conservative party Fidesz and populist leader Viktor Orbán has been extensively studied and analysed, also with respect to the securitization of migration. Nevertheless, considering the strong ties developed between Salvini and Orbán, and the fact that the two populist leaders share the same viewpoint on many aspects including migration, comparing the two countries could be a starting point to understand future developments in the Italian scene. During a meeting in 2018, the two leaders expressed their shared perspective on how migration should be dealt with at the European Union level. Both believe that Europe is divided into two sides, one side with countries supporting migration led by French President Emanuel Macron, and the other side supported by countries such as Italy and Hungary who want to protect their borders, countries and identities (Tondo, 2018). What the two countries have in common is in regard to the presence of a populist party with a strong focus on the securitization of migration. In the following part, the rise of the right-wing populist party in

Hungary will be discussed in relation to the development of migration policies and the decline of democratic institutions.

The history of Hungary is quite different from Italy, starting from the fact that it underwent significant changes from dealing with the country's national borders and identity when being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from the mid-19th century, to experiencing the fragmentation caused by the First World War, and then confronting many internal political changes from the Hungarian Democratic Republic, to the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Kingdom of Hungary which ultimately fell under the Soviet occupation. After being part of the Soviet bloc during the Cold War, Hungary held its first free parliamentary elections in 1990 when its democratic transition started, and allowed the country to achieve some important goals such as becoming part of NATO and the European Union. Even though Hungary met the minimum requirements to join the EU, its economic and democratic situation was not yet stable, and indeed became quite fragile as a consequence of some major events such as the war in Yugoslavia, the 2008 economic crisis and the 2015 humanitarian crisis. Even though Italy became a democratic country more than 40 years before Hungary and was one of the founding members of the European Union with strong democratic institutions, it does not have a long history as an immigration country in the same way as Hungary, which can explain why both countries struggled with migration policies, and with the integration of migrants.

In regard to inflows and outflows of migrants in Hungary, it should be noted how the Peace Treaty of Trianon signed after the First World War divided the Austro-Hungarian Empire into many countries. By creating several small states including Hungary it also divided the ethnic Hungarian population among all neighbouring countries (Bocskor, 2018) resulting in Hungarian minority groups living outside Hungary, that eventually caused major migratory movements to Hungary (Gereoffy, 2006). The Second World War also caused large-scale movements of people leaving or entering the country as a consequence of the deportation of Hungarian Jews, population exchange with Germany and Czechoslovakia, prisoners of wars being sent to the Soviet Union and still many ethnic Hungarian making their way to Hungary (Bocskor, 2018). During the Cold War period there were no migratory flows in Hungary for two main reasons, firstly under communism emigration was illegal as it was considered to be an act of disloyalty towards the state. Second, immigration was only allowed for refugees or students coming either from likeminded countries, such as Greece, Chile, Cuba, Vietnam and China (Gereoffy, 2006) or from the Soviet Union, or other neighbouring countries withing the communist bloc (Bocskor, 2018). Even though after 1989 Hungary opened its borders and became an immigration country, it should be taken into consideration that between 1988 and

1991 80 percent of immigrants entering the country, were ethnic Hungarian arriving from Romania, Ukraine and Yugoslavia (Gereoffy, 2006). In addition, considering the collapse of the Soviet Union and Hungary's geographical location it became a transit country for people travelling from the East to the West (Bocskor, 2018). Since Hungary singed the Geneva Convention in 1989, the country registered an increase in the number of asylum seekers, with a peak in 1991 after the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia, when for the first time the country had to introduce an institutional framework to process asylum applications that was not considered necessary with the previous experience of ethnic Hungarian refugees (Gereoffy, 2006). It was at this time when the regulation on migration became a relevant topic on the political agenda, which led to the first immigration regulation acts that came into force in 1993-1994. Two acts were introduced: the Act on Hungarian Citizenship and the Act on Entry, Stay, and Immigration of Foreigners in Hungary. The former introduced the eight years residency requirement for naturalization, and the latter established the definition of immigrant as a person that worked and lived in Hungary with a residence permit for three years. A few years later in 1997 the Act of Borders and Border Guards regulating illegal border crossing became effective. Almost ten years after Hungary singed the Geneva Convention, the Act on Asylum was introduced in 1998. It distinguished three types of refugees, namely convention refugee, asylum seeker and refugees given shelter/accepted refugee, for whom decision-making procedures and rights would be different (Gereoffy, 2006). With the 2001 Act on Entry and Residence of Foreigners the distinction between legal status of foreign citizen coming from the EU and third-countries was approved. In addition, the Act provided certain benefits such as educational support, a work permit, social security and health coverage for ethnic Hungarians migrating to Hungary, reinforcing the idea that the country was willing to welcome immigrants with Hungarian backgrounds and discouraging the arrival of people from Asia and Africa. Following the same segregated immigration system trend, in 2011 the citizenship law was amended further facilitating the entry and integration of ethnic Hungarians by making the naturalization automatic and a year later a new law for third-country nationals came into force offering a five-year residence permit for people disposed to buy five-year government bonds with a minimum value of 250,000 euros. In 2013 a Migration Strategy was endorsed by the Orbán government promising the regulation of migration, the integration of regular migrants with the society and the elimination of illegal immigration. These promises were never fulfilled because of changes in circumstances in 2015, when immigration became a major focus not only in the political discourse but also in the media. After the major inflow of people as a consequence to the war in Yugoslavia, Hungary did not experience a high number of asylum

seekers until the humanitarian crisis in 2015 when Viktor Orbán organized the anti-immigration campaign which made the country's hostile position at the centre of many debates in Europe (Bocskor, 2018).

Orbán's party, Fidesz, is now considered a right-wing conservative populist party. However, when it was founded in the late 1980s it was a liberal party composed of opponents of the communist regime and it was not until 1992 that the party moved towards the centre-right and started to radicalize after losing the legislative elections in 2002. As a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis the socialist-liberal government suffered a major decrease in popularity that allowed Orbán to secure his electoral victory in 2010 (Bocskor, 2018). Since winning the 2010 elections, Orbán started to centralize power and having two-thirds of seats in parliament allowed him to get new legislation easily approved, jeopardizing democracy and civil society. He was able to limit checks and balances, by reducing the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court, to nationalize certain sectors of the economy (Bocskor, 2018), to obtain control over the media through censorship, disinformation and political and financial pressure, and to limit intellectual freedom by attacking the Central European University (Shattuck, 2019). Orbán used 'the nation' based on religion, ethnicity and culture as the focus of his political discourse, and his nationalistic rhetoric as a justification for his political and legislative choices to defend Hungarians from external threats (Bocskor, 2018). In the same way as Lega Nord can be identified with the description of exclusionary European populism proposed by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013), also Fidesz is in line with this kind of populism. The anti-immigrant rhetoric sustained by Fidesz clearly excludes non-citizens from the material, political and symbolic dimensions in the name of 'Hungarians' whose economy, society and culture is threatened by immigrants.

It should be noted how even though Fidesz was in power in 2014 because of corruption scandals, slow economy and high unemployment the party lost support from its citizens and identifying migration as a security threat not only helped shift the focus from the scandals but it was also used to re-gain trust from the people. The securitization of migration in Hungary was built on feelings of danger and insecurity towards migrants, whom have been considered as an easy target and framed as an issue that could only be resolved by the government (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015). The Charlie Hebdo shooting on the 7th of January 2015 was the turning point for Orbán's securitization discourse built on the fact that migrants represented a threat, both for Europe and Hungary which was presented both at the national and European level as a country opposed to migration (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015). As a matter of fact, during a commemoration for the victims of the attack Hungary's Prime Minister stated that the

European Union should not allow migrants with 'different cultural characteristics' adding that 'While I am PM, Hungary will definitely not become an immigration destination' (Rettmann, 2015). Even though the populist leader took advantage of the situation of fear caused by the Charlie Hebdo attack to reinforce the idea that migrants are dangerous, he did not associate migration just with terrorism. He generalized and included all kinds of migrants identifying them as a threat for the economy and culture emphasizing on the idea of keeping 'them' out as 'We want to keep Hungary as Hungary'(Rettmann, 2015). Despite Hungary not having a large number of migrants when Orbán started to develop the anti-immigration rhetoric, when the number of arrivals started to grow and the media began to talk about the 'migration crisis', Orbán already had control over the issue and took advantage of it to achieve political goals (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). As explained by the Copenhagen School, securitizing an issue means dramatizing it, presenting it as a supreme priority and raising it 'above normal politics and into the realm of 'panic politics' where departures from the rules of normal politics justify secrecy, additional executive power, and activities that would be otherwise illegal' (Buzan, 1997: 14).

Whilst Italy experienced a high number of asylum seekers being one of the first entry point for people crossing the Mediterranean, in the same way Hungary had to manage a higher number of asylum seekers with respect to other European countries as a country positioned on the external border of the European Union. According to FRONTEX (2018) the Western Balkan Route was one of the major entry channels into Europe, with a record number of 764,033 illegal entries in 2015. For migrants arriving from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan through the Western Balkan route and reaching Serbia, Hungary was the first entry point to the EU (FRONTEX, 2018). Even if Hungarian anti-immigrant politicians similarly to Italian anti-immigrant politicians dramatized the situation often communicating incorrect information on the issue, it should be noted that what was often described an invasion of immigrants in both countries was far from the reality. As a matter of fact, both Hungary and Italy were seen by migrants as entry points for Europe and transit countries where migrants were not willing to stay and hoped to move to Northern European countries as soon as possible.

By demonizing migrants and describing them as a threat to national security with different means that will be discussed later, Orbán was able to introduce new measures to take care of the problem which ultimately led to the construction of a wall on the border with Serbia. In a different way from Salvini who made intensive use of social media to securitize migration and to establish a strong relationship with his supporters, Orbán used more traditional channels such as billboard campaigns, national consultations, speeches, and a physical wall to defend people from outside threats. It should be considered that the success of the government's anti-

immigration campaign was made possible also because of a fertile ground. In fact, the idea that Hungarians believe that the arrival of migrants would make their country worse did not develop in 2015, but in 2002 with the only difference that in the early 2000s Hungarian had moderate opinions on migrants, whereas by 2015 there had been a rise in rejecting any kind of immigrant (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). In addition, migrants and refugees were not the only groups considered as responsible for threatening the national security, but also societal and political actors such as NGOs and the European Union, who have been accused of helping, organising and facilitating the entry of illegal migrants (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). Many times, Orbán as well as Salvini in their speeches accused NGOs and Brussels of representing a threat for Europe, claiming that welcoming migrants allowed for a multicultural society to develop which represents a threat for the European identity (Adnkronos, 2021).

The fear of multiculturalism is nothing new, according to Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) it has been linked with migrants not being integrated with the society who create their own communities of people sharing the same culture, religion and language in a foreign country, such as 'Hispanics in the United States, North Africans in France, Turks in Germany, and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain' (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002: 29). Through all channels of communications used by Fidesz to securitize migration, the language used towards migrants has been strong, hostile and racialized (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015). The anti-immigration campaign developed by the Hungarian government in 2015 was more focused on the issue of security and identity rather than economy. In fact, terrorism was identified as a threat to the Hungarian state, influx and high birth rate of people with different cultural and religious traditions as a threat to ethnic homogeneity and religion, more specifically Islam was represented as a threat to the national tradition of a Christian state (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015). The securitizing process developed by the government was built on the association of migrants with words and adjectives such as 'uncivilized, unclean, and unorderly, they do not respect our laws and they are prone to committing crimes'(Szalai and Gőbl, 2015: 20) and 'terrorist, disrespectful, shifty, parasitic, deviant, Muslim, violent, anti-women, lying and ungrateful'(Szalai and Gőbl, 2015: 20). During a speech at the Hungarian Parliament in 2015 Orbán identified mass immigration as a three-point threat: 'Firstly, on Friday night we witnessed the fact that mass migration represents an exponentially increasing terror threat', 'Secondly, mass migration increases the risk of crime. […] There is more theft, robbery, physical assault, grievous bodily harm, rape, and murder', 'Thirdly, mass resettlement of people arriving from other continents and cultures represents a threat to our culture, way of life, customs and traditions' (Mendelski, 2019: 15). Not only the racist and Islamophobic

language used by the government influenced people's opinion, but the anti-immigration billboard campaign started in 2015 resulted in a steady increase in Fidesz's support (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015). In regards to the billboards campaign, the same rhetoric was used in the slogans that were mostly focused on 'us' the Hungarian versus 'them' the foreigners. The aim of the billboard campaign was not that of targeting migrants but rather the Hungarian population, which is why they were all written in Hungarian language and not in English (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015) with slogans like 'If you come to Hungary, don't take the jobs of Hungarians!' (Euractiv, 2015) or 'If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our laws' (Nolan, 2015).

To accompany the billboard campaign, in 2015 the government launched the National Consultation on Migration and Terrorism with the aim of linking migration to terrorism, inciting social and religious fear, and accusing the European Union of being responsible (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). National consultations had been introduced by the government in 2010 as a way to discuss issues with the citizens by sending out questionnaires in order to establish a relation between politics and people (Bocskor, 2018), which is not surprising for populist parties that claim to be representing the people and often use 'plebiscitary measures such as people's initiatives, referendums and recall' (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013: 163). The 'National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism' of 2015 included two documents: a document with foreword written in the name of the Prime Minister Orbán with his picture and signature and another document with a 12-questions survey. Two main aspects of the foreword are relevant to the securitization of migration; firstly, the identification of migrants and secondly the identification of Hungarians. The foreword mentions economic migrants, although it also make references to the Charlie Hebdo, linking terrorism with migration to which negative words are attribute including 'terror', 'brutality', 'horror', 'illegally', 'threat' and 'jeopardise the jobs and livelihoods of Hungarians' (Bocskor, 2018). Orbán also establishes a relationship with the reader by using words such as 'we Hungarians', 'our welfare system', 'our country' implying a sense of unity with citizens. Identifying with Hungarians also suggests the existence of 'them' compared to 'us', the fact that the government is on the side of the people underlined by the sentence 'I am counting on your opinion', and that there is an elite that is not on the side of the people, namely Brussels (Bocskor, 2018). The language used in the foreword and in the questionnaire is the same, to the point that the former is believed to suggest the answers to the latter, as a matter of fact some critics have raised the issue of the questionnaire being biased (Bocskor, 2018). The results of the survey, communicated through media and billboards, were used to justify new legislation and the construction of the fence on the Serbian border as Orbán

claimed ‘The people have decided: the country must be defended’ (Bocskor, 2018). Despite referendums being considered as instruments for direct democracy as they promote political participation, populist leaders can use them to ‘manipulate the political agenda and distort complex issues such as migration by reducing them to yes/no questions’ (Tok, 2018). Legitimized by the will of the people who wanted to be protected from outside threats, the government approved the construction of a 175- kilometres-long border fence that was completed in September 2015 and then declared a state of emergency allowing extraordinary measures, such as sending to jail or back to Serbia anyone trying to cross the border (Tok, 2018). The anti-immigration campaign started in 2015 culminated in the key political event of the quota referendum in 2016 (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). The referendum held on 2nd October 2016 asking: “Do you want the European Union to be entitled to prescribe the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the consent of parliament?”, was a response to the EU’s Emergency Response Mechanism. In 2015 the EU’s Council of Ministers approved the decision on refugees’ quotas requiring all member states to share 160,000 migrants in the EU based on a quota system. The Emergency Response Mechanism passed with the majority of votes and only four votes against from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary (Tok, 2018). The Hungarian Prime Minister strongly opposed the quota system, which would have required Hungary to take 1,294 refugees, as he believe that “This is why there is no need for a common European migration policy: whoever needs migrants can take them, but don’t force them on us, we don’t need them” and referring to migrants as ‘poison’ that Hungary was not willing to swallow (The Guardian, 2016). To support the idea that his country was not willing to welcome any refugee he called for a referendum in October following a four-month long campaign with billboards using ‘Did you know’ as a catch phrase associated with facts or events related to migrants such as the terrorist attack in France or the rise of harassment of women (Tok, 2018). As with the national consultation, also the question on the referendum was misleading asking Hungarian citizens: ‘Do you want the European Union to be entitled to prescribe the mandatory system, of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without consent of parliament?’ (Culik, 2016). Even though the referendum was invalidated as it did not meet the 50 percent threshold, Orbán took the 98 percent of votes against the quota system as a victory and felt the obligation to amend the constitution introducing restrictive measures against immigration in the name of ‘the will of the people’ (Tok, 2018). Closing the Serbian and Croatian border and amending the Asylum Act made it almost impossible for asylum seeker to enter Hungary and receive humanitarian protection which resulted in a decrease in the number

of asylum applications, which has been presented to Hungarian citizens as a success for the government and helped Fidesz to win the 2018 elections (Tok, 2018).

Even though the securitizing campaign started before the numerous arrivals of migrants in the summer of 2015 and the fact that it was constructed as an economic and cultural threat for Hungary even if migrants were just passing through the country, it can be said that the securitization of migration has been successful and led to a rise of xenophobia (Szalai and Gőbl, 2015). As a matter of fact, in autumn 2015 68 percent of the Hungarian population perceived immigration as an important issue compared to the previous year when only 18 percent of the population identified immigration among the two most important challenges faced by the European Union (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). The anti-immigration campaign helped the government to construct a sense of fear and the need for a government that would defend Hungarian people from the invasion of Islam, with Orbán promoting himself as a strong leader capable of protecting his people from outside threats (Tok, 2018). According to Bíró-Nagy (2021), the politicization and securitization of migration sustained by the Hungarian government was successful, and helped to maintain a sense of crisis until the 2018 elections in order to achieve a political victory. As a matter of fact, at the 2018 election Fidesz received 465,000 more votes that the 2014 elections. Together with the positive macroeconomic performance of the country, and the fragmentation of the opposition, securitizing migration became the 'political jackpot' for Fidesz electoral success in 2018 (Tok, 2018).

In regards to the impact of the anti-immigration regulations that have been introduced by Orbán's government, it can be said that they definitely influenced the quality of democracy, with authors like Tok (2018) even claiming that the 'refugee crisis' was used as a distraction for the citizens while the government was implementing a regime transformation. In line with Freedom Freedom House (2017) Freedom in the World report, in Hungary was identified as a free country with a 76/100 score, whereas is 2021 it has recorded a score of 69/100 defining it as a partly free country (Freedom House, 2021). The major issues encountered by Freedom House that represent a threat for democratic institutions in Hungary relate to the lack of political opposition, high levels of corruption, lack of transparency, limitation of civil liberties, associational and organizational rights, the judiciary and individual rights. With respect to the anti-immigration approach maintained by the Hungarian government since 2014, it also affects the quality of democracy. The Constitutional amendments introduced in 2018 and 2020 make direct references to Christianity, limiting the freedom of religion and fuelling anti-Islamic sentiment. In regards to laws, policies and practices being applied equally to various segments

of the population, Freedom in the World 2021 report raised concerns for rights of rights of refugees and asylum seekers being violated by the new legislation introduced in Hungary.

Conclusion

Even though there is a clear sign of democratic erosion in Hungary, and one of the causes is the anti-immigration political agenda supported by Orbán and his party Fidesz which has gained increasing support since he was first elected, the same cannot be said for Italy. There has been an increase in support to the populist party Lega Nord since Salvini became leader of the party, and his anti-immigrant rhetoric influenced migration policies in particular when he was Minister of Home Affairs, although Italian democracy does not show signs of erosions yet. It should be noted that Salvini, differently from Orbán who has been Hungary's Prime Minister for more than ten years, only covered the role of Minister of Home Affairs for 15 months. After looking at how the two countries securitized migration it can be said that in both cases it has successfully created a situation of emergency, and increased the support and trust to populist parties who claim to be on the side of 'Italian' and 'Hungarian' people. In regard to the democratic backsliding, considering that it is a gradual process the early signs are hard to see, and once the decline of democratic institutions can be measured it might be too late to counteract. Without sounding too alarmist and tragic I strongly believe that an eye should be kept on Salvini and his racist propaganda especially if he will return to power. Salvini has already expressed his opinion on the situation in Afghanistan, claiming that Italy, Europe and the entire international community should act and help people in Afghanistan fighting against the Taliban regime. Although he also underlines the importance of helping them in their own country and not by opening Europe's doors to 'terrorists'. In Italy and Hungary in the past two years the focus has moved from migration to health due to COVID-19, although the new situation in Afghanistan has raised once again the issue of asylum seeker as many fear that the European Union will experience another crisis if new measures are not introduced. It will be interesting to see in the next few years how the situation will be handled both in Italy and Hungary in case of a mass migration to Europe, and if migration will be used again to gain political support by the populist parties and justify the implementation of restrictive measures that erode democracy.

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