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The imbalance of power in the European Union: threats, historical and current issues that may cause its failure

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) is a supranational entity that is formed by twenty-eight European states, and it is both an economic and political entity. The EU is often perceived as an immutable entity and the possibility of its collapse has not been explored in detail by political experts and scholars. However, in the EU are present several issues that might endanger its future existence. Overall, these issues create an imbalance of power that affect the stability and the aims of the EU project. To date, experts have focused on the analysis of the effects rather than the causes of EU's fragility. This thesis argues that the causes of contemporary issues are found in the past. This thesis focuses on the imbalance of power in the EU, unpacking this through both contemporary and historical analysis of the EU. Due to the broadness of the topic, the thesis focuses mainly on three key aspects: the history of European attempts of unity, the current situation of the EU, and the nationalist-populist sentiment that re-emerged in Europe in the recent years. The thesis examines these three themes from a historical and political point of view, using policy and media analysis as wells as core political theory. It examines the nationalist-populist phenomenon through a case study on the Italian Five Star Movement, arguably the first openly populist party to govern a major EU country. Overall, the thesis demonstrates that the EU is burdened by historical legacies and, if it not solved, these will lead to the failure of the EU project.

Declaration

I certify that the ideas, conclusions reported, and the work in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

16/10/2018

Endorsements

Supervisor: Dr Jess Carniel

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is the union of twenty-eight states, and it is both a political and economic entity. For several aspects of policy, the EU has a shared strategy and common aims; however, due to reasons that can all be linked to an imbalance of power within, the EU has difficulties in creating effective shared decisions and a strong unity. This has been demonstrated by recent events such as Brexit and a re-emergent sentiment of nationalism, which often results in populism, in several EU state members. The thesis identifies several symptoms and effects of this imbalance of power in the EU. Beginning with a discussion of the historical background to the project of European unification and the eventual emergence of the European Union as the contemporary manifestation of this, it illustrates possible historical and contemporary causes that have led to such an imbalance. The EU was created with the burden of pre-existing issues that continue to resonate in contemporary European politics and that present significant challenges to the contemporary project of European unity. Overall, the thesis's final aim is to identify and analyse the major issues of the EU, but also to suggest that the importance of a stronger and more democratic EU, different to the current one in which Germany has a hegemonic role. Due to the breadth of the topic, the thesis focuses mainly on three key aspects. Firstly, it provides an historical overview of the concept of Europe and the attempts to create a unified Europe, connecting this to the current situation of the EU, its disunity, and a revamping of nationalist and populist sentiments in Europe. Secondly, the thesis examines the impact of German hegemony on the power relations within the EU and its efficacy in enacting cohesive European policy, which in turn weakens its image and power on the international stage. Thirdly, it explores how populist movements have arisen in response to the perceived threat of the European Union on state sovereignty and national identity. The aim of this chapter is to propose an insight in key terms such as nationalism and populism, their ideological and historical roots as well as to explain the recent spread of populism in EU, with a focus on the Five Start Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle in Italian, referred to throughout as M5S) in Italy. In explaining nationalism, and populism it also highlights its origins and several scholarly opinions regarding its meaning and origins. This insight's objective is to better understand the actual political situation in the EU.

The EU can be defined as a project of an integrated union of states for the purpose of creating an economic and political organisation to make the European region both more stable and more competitive through the creation of a European entity. Yet this project is not without its significant challenges in its attempt to assemble a politically, culturally, and economically

heterogenous yet unified region. Although this heterogeneity can be a strength, it can also lead to lack of consensus on key issues and an imbalance of power. This, in turn, could lead to the failure of the EU project. Focusing on the EU's historical roots, the overall weakness of EU as an actor in foreign affairs and regional policy, and a revamping of nationalist and populist sentiments, this thesis argues that such issues, if left unresolved, could lead to an increased balance of power. Specifically, the thesis examines these problems and explains their impact on the European Union project. It situates these issues within the EU's political and historical background before focusing upon key examples that illustrate these problems.

The existence of the EU is under threat. Evidence of this can be readily found in the difficulty the EU has in presenting a united voice and cohesion on the global scale. Furthermore, events such as the Brexit, and the rise of populism, especially in France, Greece, Italy, Germany, Spain and Austria, indicate fragmentation from EU values and politics. Political instability within the EU can be linked to various factors, which are the product of historical developments in Europe in the last decades.

To date, I have found no work that analyses in depth the main threats in to EU and how these might lead it to its failure. Overall, the issue of a possible failure of the current EU has not been taken in to sufficient consideration, as if the EU is an unchangeable, and permanent entity and its failure is not possible (Ilonszki 2009; Bretherton & Vogler 2005). For example, according to Fischer (pp.2-3) EU, with all its contradictions and limitations, still represents the best solution for Europe since it guarantees economic and political stability. Also, Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, declared 'The European Union is here to stay, we recommitted at the 60th anniversary of our history to stay together and to grow together as a reliable, predictable, cooperative, indispensable partner for the United Nations and for the entire world' (European Commission 2017). It is acknowledged, however, that a deeper review of the literature is required before this observation can be asserted with authority. Nevertheless, in surveying the available literature, it has been found that many scholars focus on specialist issues rather than attempting to understand the bigger picture as it derives from deep-seated historical legacies. While these touch upon similar issues as identified here, such as rising populism and nationalism, scholars appear to be short-sighted, as do the policymakers, in regard to the long-term future of the EU. Several scholars associated issues in EU's migration policy to nationalism, which resulted in a rise of populism (Attinà 2016; Barnickel & Beichelt 2013; Mavroudi & Nagel 2016; Mindus 2017; Reslow 2017; Trauner & Wolff 2014; Völkel 2014; Wunderlich 2013). Others, examined

security and defence policy in the EU analysing their issues and weaknesses (Biscop 2016; Hartley 2010; Larivé & Krishna-Hensel 2014; Peters 2014; Rayroux 2013; Riddervold 2016; Rosén 2015; Ruiz, Hainaut & Schiffino 2016; Whitman 2016). These issues are usually examined in isolation and fail to paint a broader picture of the imbalance of power in the EU.

The roots of the current difficulties in creating a united Europe are to be found in its past. Europe's history is characterised by conflict, division, and shifting loyalties. This can be seen in the events of recent history, such as both the First and the Second World Wars, as well as in events of the preceding centuries, such as the battles between Italy and Austria, France and England, and the many conflicts that continuously changed the borders of European nation-states. These conflicts can explain how there remains today difficulty in accepting a united Europe as historical competitors and enemies must now instead accept each other as economic and political partners and as part of the same union of states. Yet it remains a site of ongoing economic and territorial competition.

Extant research on populism seems to focus on a mere description of the phenomenon, analyses of populism, and populist parties. The approach taken here differs significantly as I locate contemporary populism within the historical roots of European nationalism, which has been a consistent challenge to the project of a unified Europe, underpinning also the anxieties around German hegemony. I argue that populism is a destabilising force in the EU, but one that responds to the imbalance of power and the desire to maintain state sovereignty. The Italian M5S provides a case study for understanding these historical and current forces. As Italy is a founder and a key member of the EU from an economic and political point of view, M5S presents an effective case study for analysing the connections between the EU's fragility and rising populism because it is the populist party with the highest chance to govern in a EU state, as the recent elections in March 2018 demonstrated. The M5S, in a coalition with another populist party, La Lega, represent today the first populist government in a EU country, which could be the start of a gradual weakening of EU, due to the political aims of this coalition that are anti-immigration and euro-sceptics.

The imbalance of power within the EU is identified here as the central cause of these issues and others that the organisation faces. Specifically, the hegemonic role that Germany holds within the union causes a series of problems ranging from the lack of shared and effective decisions on key issues, the rise of populist and nationalist sentiment, weakness and a projected image on disunity in international affairs. All these issues, if not confronted, may cause the end

of the EU project. Failure of the EU would be a problem for individual states and their populations as well as for international affairs since the EU holds a key role in trade and politics on the global scene. However, despite its prominent role as an actor in foreign affairs, the EU appears to have weaknesses in administering its position, and this issue has been dealt by several scholars (Blakkisrud & Wilson Rowe 2018; Davison 2008; Dowling, Liesch, Gray & Hill 2013; Findley & Rothney 2011; Marshall 2017; Merriman 2010; Panara 2015; Varoufakis 2015; White, Little & Smith 2005). Overall, the imbalance of power constitutes a problem for the survival of the EU.

CHAPTER 1 – European unity and its historical roots: from the Holy Roman Empire to Post-war conception of Europe.

"Whoever speaks of Europe is wrong. Europe is a geographic expression" (Bismark, cited in Sudeshna, Cooper & Murphy 2013, p. 234).

Europe exists as an idea as much, if not more, than it is a place. Projects like the EU seek to harness this idea politically and economically. This first chapter explores the various historical attempts to reach unity and it frames the concept of a united Europe from an historical point of view. Through a brief historical analysis, it proposes that the historical conceptualisation of Europe underpins the creation of today's European Union. Beginning with an analysis of this changing concept of Europe, the chapter then examines several key historical attempts to unify Europe, specifically the Holy Roman Empire, the Napoleonic Wars, the First and the Second World War, analysing their differences and identifying similar causes for their failure. Overall, the chapter provides an historical analysis of the pathway leading to the creation of the EU and argues that such historical understanding is crucial to understanding the contemporary challenges faced by the union. Also, the analysis of Europe's historical evolution and the events that characterised and marked it, helps to identity the roots of today issues and conflicts within the EU.

Europe's history illustrates the challenges of regional unification, but it also demonstrates an ongoing desire for unification. Although the Holy Roman Empire, the Napoleonic Wars, and the Second World War were acts of domination, they nevertheless were equally focused upon the idea that Europe was an entity that could be unified under a single power or regional organisation. If we relegate the original Roman Empire to the separate historical realm of the ancient world, the Holy Roman Empire provides the first attempt at European unification in the pre-modern world. Formed in the ninth century by Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Empire unified most of Western Europe for several centuries. This unity began to crumble by the sixteenth century, when the Empire had already lost most of influence due to the fact that local nobles and kings gained independent power (Merriman 2010, pp. 145-146). As a result, the Holy Roman Empire was reduced to only a nominal control without any real power over the various states. Like the current context of the EU, the numerous differences between each of states that formed the Holy Roman Empire also played a role in its eventual

downfall (Hayes 1962, pp. 4-5). In some ways, Napoleon's conquest of Europe in the early nineteenth century can be compared to that of Charlemagne with a strong even if short-lived hegemony in most Western Europe (Broers 2001, pp. 136-137). Certainly, Napoleon considered himself Charlemagne's natural successor, especially from a geopolitical point of view. Napoleon's attempt to unite Europe with force failed since his actions led to a creation of an alliance of countries that stood against him, which had the only common trait of having in Napoleon a common enemy. What these two early attempts at European unification share, even as they differ in historical specificities, is that they intrinsically failed due to the inability to find a way to deal with the diverse national identities and cultures of Europe. Several scholars (Green 2016, pp. 290-291; Wilson 2016; Simms 2012, p. 52) draw particular parallels between the Holy Roman Empire and the EU. They suggest that even if the idea of Europe was in the former an empire and in the latter a union of states, both share the lack of a shared identity, the role of Germany as a centre of power, and a time in which strong national identities have difficulties to create a common one. The unifying thread between the Holy Roman Empire, Napoleon, and the European Union is the fact that historical rivalries and different cultures appear to be underestimated by those attempting the project of a united Europe historically. Consequently, it should be one of the key considerations addressed in the contemporary EU project in order to avoid possible failure.

Although motivated by problematic political philosophies, Germany's attempts to unite Europe forcibly with conquest in both the First and Second World Wars provides another example of an attempt to unify Europe under a singular identity. In the first half of the twentieth century, expansionist and nationalist ideas began to spread in Germany and affected its political scene. Ludendorff, a German general and influential nationalist, believed that Germany's national destiny and policy was to lead, and its army was the means to achieve this destiny (Bourne, Liddle & Whitehead 2000, p. 403). These beliefs were the basis of German expansionism that led Germany to the First World War. Hauser (cited in Stevenson 2012, pp. 855-856) also argues that the cause of the outbreak of the First World War was Germany's need of industrial and territorial expansionism. Germany lost the war and, in its aftermath, bore the consequences for instigating the conflict. At the Paris peace conference, the Allied powers, particularly France and the United Kingdom, designated Germany as responsible for the outbreak of the First World War and imposed upon it responsibility for all the reparation costs (Trachtenberg 1979). The Treaty of Versailles also resulted in a policy disarming Germany.

German national resentment about this aftermath of the First World War and the economic strain it resulted in provided the basis of the Second World War. Hitler, who rose to power in 1933, rejected the Treaty of Versailles by introducing a policy to re-arm Germany, which led to the outbreak of the Second World War (Carroll 1966). Nationalist sentiment was strong in Germany. This, coupled with a belief in national and racial superiority, characterised Hitler's years in power. These sentiments peaked during the Nazi era, culminating in the Second World War and is exemplified by the persecution of Jews and other marginalised groups. These nationalist and racist ideas led Germany to impose itself upon Europe, and led it to near destruction (Hirschman 2004, pp. 396 - 397). Hitler capitalised upon German nationalist sentiment to promote the idea that it was Germany's destiny to dominate Europe due to the superiority of the Aryan Germanic race (Hauner 1978, pp. 21-22). Nazi Germany's expansionist views were not limited to Europe. Hitler's extreme nationalism led him to plan a continuous expansionism in Europe, with a final goal of world's conquest (Weisiger 2013, pp. 120-121). Germany's expansionist views were one of the main causes of the outbreak of both the First and the Second World War. This, coupled with the idea of a Germany as a country destined to rule over Europe, represented Germany's views on Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

Nationalism was strong not only in Germany, but also in several European states, and it was one of the causes of the outbreak of the Second World War. The Second World War was the result of competing nationalisms in Europe, and unequal treaties imposed on the losing powers of the First World War (Bayly 2018, p. 50). Being aggressive and war prone is one of the trait that often characterises nationalism. According to Schrock-Jacobson (2012, p. 826), a country that embraces nationalism is more likely to start an interstate war. As we saw, German nationalism is an example of aggressive and expansionist nationalism. During the Second World War, German nationalism was an aggressive and reactionary one, contrarily to other European countries, such as the Eastern European ones which embraced a more progressive nationalism (Korovin 1946, pp. 743-744). Nationalism advances the involvement of the whole country in the war effort. Nationalism has a strong connection with war, its ideals generated an unprecedented participation of people to the war effort, and it also redesigned the concept of war extending the involvement of nations both in term of efforts and resources (Cederman, Camber Warren & Sornette 2011, pp. 626-627). There is a strong link between the Second World War and nationalism, since nationalism has often an aggressive component.

The EU is the result of a long process of political and economic modifications but should be understood also as a direct result of the events of the Second World War as various ideas for a unified Europe emerged in its aftermath. Specifically, the EU derives from the European Economic Community (EEC), which was formulated in response to the war. The EEC was established primarily for trade purposes but also with the political aim to disincentivise war, create stability, and establish a supranational institution to act as a control over European countries (Milward 2000, pp. 1-2). While the EEC was the organisation that manifested, other competing hypotheses for a united Europe were also in circulation. The "United States of Europe" was proposed, arguably for the first time, by Churchill just after the war as a means for Europe to overcome the issues of its past and create a united Europe through the formation of a Council of Europe. Churchill said, 'The structure of the United States of Europe will be such as to make the material strength of a single State less important. Small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honour by a contribution to the common cause'. He also added 'The cannons have ceased firing. The fighting has stopped. But the dangers have not stopped. If we are to form a United States of Europe, or whatever name it may take, we must begin now' (International Churchill Society 2018). This idea led to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which can be seen as the first step of the still ongoing process of a European unification (European Commission 2018). This can be seen in the article three of the treaty that affirms, 'the abolition, as between Member States, of obstacles to freedom of movement for persons, services and capital' (European Commission 2018, p. 4). As Bonciu (2012, pp. 40-41) points out, the idea of the United States of Europe (USE) could be a viable option for a future EU, but unlike to the United States of America, the EU has a considerable history of division and issues; the problem of sovereignty and different economic, as well as social standings, makes the idea of USE difficult to be achieved. The EEC was centred on trade while the idea of the USE regarded a political union of the European states that, in the light of the past and current differences among the European states, seems to be an unlikely project. Since its establishment in 1958, the EEC started a process of elimination of trade barriers between its members states, as well as an attempt of reach equality in wages and welfare (Merriman 2010, p. 1123). It represents the most recent attempt to unite Europe and create a common platform before the creation of the EU.

The process that led to the formation to the EU can be illustrated by several key dates. In 1979, the first direct elections for the European parliament were held. In 1986 the single European Act was enacted, in which it stated that open market among members would have to

be achieved by 1992. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty was signed, and it established the future renaming of EEC to EU in 1999, the creation of a EU Central Bank created to control monetary policy of member states, creation of EU citizenship, common foreign and security policy (Hargreaves & Homewood 2011). These measures represent the transition between a group of European countries that agreed on a common market and trade rules to a union of countries also on the political level. Between 1995 to 2007 EU members increased from 15 to 27, expanding the number of countries that decided to embrace the emerging EU project. In 1999, the Euro was adopted alongside other national currencies and from 2002 as sole currency for EU member states, with the exception of Britain, Denmark and Sweden.

The transformation from the ECC to the EU thus appears to be the continuation of a project to create a more united Europe. This began with trade and work conditions established by the ECC and eventually extended to an idealistic project of common policies in several areas with the creation of the EU. Some policy areas, such as a common foreign policy and security/defence issues, remained only on paper; individual states often still decide upon these for themselves, despite regional policies and recommendations. Europe has such deep historical divisions that the organisation of a system such as the EU must be considered a great achievement (Findley & Rothney 2011, pp. 436, 437), yet the concept of a united Europe in a meaningful sense beyond economics and policy appears to remain an ongoing process. Due to ongoing historical legacies, the EU struggles not only to achieve a sense of legitimacy within its member states, but also to create a European identity and vision.

This chapter illustrates the history of the evolution of the concept of Europe, and the major attempts to unify it. Moreover, it examined different approaches to unification such as the HRE and the First and Second World War, highlighting the key role of Germany, or its precursors in political and cultural terms, in all of them. Due to the forcible nature of these attempts, which especially in the case of the Second World War are still vivid in people's memory, it appears clear how it can be difficult for other European countries to accept a Germany with a pivotal role in today's EU. This analysis of Germany's role in Europe over time provides the basis for today's position of Germany in the EU to be discussed in the next chapter. Also, this chapter has shown how nationalism has been powerful and destabilising in Europe, creating the premise for further analysis of its roots and the return of this ideology in today's European political scene that it is offered the subsequent chapters. Overall, this demonstrates how historical divisions and rivalries, still influence today's Europe and ideas of a united Europe, such as the EU project.

CHAPTER 2 – European Union: the hegemony of Germany and the current challenges of an unstable union

"Here is the irony: Europe dominated the world, but it failed to dominate itself. For five hundred years Europe tore itself apart in civil wars, and as a result there was never a European empire" (Friedman 2009, p. 22).

The creation of the EU demonstrates how the idea of a united Europe remains today a strong and ongoing project. Nevertheless, there are significant challenges to the EU project that make it vulnerable to failure. This chapter identifies and explores several challenges to the EU; specifically, strong economic differences among countries, a lack of common policy and strategy, the predominance of Germany as leader of the EU, and, finally, the overall weakness of the EU as actor in politics and government, which causes in several cases a re-affirmation of the concept of nation-states. Building upon the historical events outlined in the previous chapter with consideration of their legacies and effects, this chapter argues that the current EU situation, characterised by disunity and an evident imbalance of power, could lead to the failure of the EU project.

Today's EU is a supranational entity, but it is predominantly an economic union, in which the economic factors drive political actions. It is a supranational entity that, through a transnational project, aims to unite Europe both economically and politically (Ahonen & Tienari 2009, pp. 655-656). Restrictions, such as the demand to keep the budget deficits down, not only makes it difficult for countries to join to the EU but also for EU state members to stay within the parameters. This results in a sentiment of disconnection and distance from this supranational entity, which in return fosters a renewed nationalism (Merriman 2010, pp. 1229-1230).

Economic factors are perceived by states as the most important aspect of the Union, creating a sense of a union that is based more on a common economy rather than political unity. This is evidenced by the emphasis placed upon economic performance in the European Commission's assessment of prospective members to the EU. For example, in admitting new members to the EU, the European Commission assesses whether the applicant country

addresses certain parameters. Among the key parameters used in this assessment process there is the Copenhagen Criteria, which establish indicators such as the accession to free market and the ability to deal with market forces and internal competition. These parameters, found by scholars to be broadly defined and open to interpretation, are criticised for appearing to privilege the accession to the EU of capitalist countries with a long-established tradition liberal market economy, and to disadvantage Eastern European countries (Veebel 2011; Sargentini & Dimitrovs 2016; Ademmer 2018, pp. 673-674). This system of evaluation creates an EU based on countries that share similar basic principles; this resulting homogeneity is the opposite of EU's motto "United in diversity". Lapavitsas et al (2012, pp. 11-12) argue that core EU countries, such as Germany, France, Belgium and Netherlands, have major divisions - especially economic - with peripheral countries, such as Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland; despite holding a prominent role in Europe, Italy's classification within one of these two categories is complicated by its weak economic growth and significant economic differences within the country. Moreover, the Euro is not the currency of all EU state members, creating yet again more disunity and disparity between member countries, thus emphasising the distance between states that, as explained previously, already have deep historical and economic differences. Those EU countries that did not take Euro as their currency (specifically, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Sweden, and Hungary) have refrained from doing so due mainly to the fact that their economies are too small and cannot compete on the market with a currency that does not have the flexibility of their local currency. For example, due to the fact its exchange rate is decided by the European Central Bank, Sweden's economy would not benefit from changing to a less flexible currency because it is more competitive with its actual currency; Sweden also has the fear, shared by other EU members without Euro, that the introduction of Euro would concentrate the power in Franco-German hands (Svensonn 2006, p.218).

The disproportion of political power among EU states, with large states that have more bargaining power than smaller nations, is another significant point of difference. Any member state can withdraw from the EU, and the threat of withdrawal can be used as a political tool, but this threat is more meaningful when it is made by the larger states. For example, if a decision goes against the national interest of a member country, a large state that contributes significantly to the union, particularly economically or in its political governance, could leverage its membership to gain more benefits, but this approach cannot be used by small and medium countries since leaving the EU would result in their political and economic

marginalisation (Biondi, Eeckhout & Ripley 2012, p. 154). For example, French President Macron threatened several times to leave the EU, before and after his election, if economic reforms were not enacted (Bolongaro 2017; Heffer 2018). However, Macron, a known pro-Euro politician used this threat as a way to advance French economic interests and used the idea of France leaving the EU as a political tool; he obtained to preserve French's national interests advancing ideas protectionism and barriers that are starting to be taken in consideration by EU's institutions (Nougayrède 2017; Vinocur 2017). Moreover, Macron states that if he will not change the EU, it will equal to betrayal: he said 'I don't want to do so'… 'Because the day after, we will have a Frexit or we will have [Ms Le Pen's] National Front (FN) again' (*BBC News 2017*). This illustrates the fragility of the ideal that the European Union is a political community of equals. The EU should be a bloc of nations with the aim of having common policies in several policy areas, but this ideal of unity is consistently undermined by a diversity in member states' goals and the imbalance of political and economic powers.

Europe's proportion of political entities to surface area is the highest in the world (Howorth 2014, pp.242-243). Each of these have differences rooted in the past yet still conditioning the present. The number and diversity of political units in Europe makes it difficult to develop an ambitious project such as the project of European unity signified by the EU. The EU lacks the political and constitutional unity required to make this endeavour successful. It does not have sovereignty over its state members, and moreover its internal and external aims are limited by the constant tensions between the Union and its member states. As a result, the EU's actual powers are limited, as is its influence on policy. Its greatest powers are limited to its customs union and competition rules. National governments maintain exclusive control over most of economic areas, while in other areas, such as health, environment and consumer protection, will collaborate with the EU (Hargreaves & Homewood 2011, p. 9).

Lack of unity and sovereignty diminish the EU's power and credibility as actor in international affairs. According to Smith (2016, p. 457), the EU must achieve greater unity among its states members in order to address its deficit of credibility in foreign affairs. Individual state members' interests coupled with a weak bureaucratic core still prevent or delay its ability to act unitarily, and its capability to promote its ideals of democracy, equality and economic openness both within and outside the EU. The effects of this can be observed in the example of Libya in 2011. Without any discussion with other EU institution or state members

France, United Kingdom, supported by the US, planned and carried out a plan to overthrow's Qaddafi government. Only after the decisions were made EU as an entity opted to join France and UK (Marchi Balossi-Restelli 2014, pp. 93-94). This highlights how the EU strategic decision-making is still bound to individual states' actions and input, rather than a result of concord among EU state members. In this situation of scarce political integration, stronger state members can affect and almost single-handedly determine the direction of the EU politics and policies.

Germany is identified here as an exemplar of this phenomenon. Both now and historically, Germany plays a key role in Europe. As highlighted in the previous chapter, Germany, although a different Germany from the modern one from a political view, but in continuity with the modern one in terms of culture, was the centre of the first attempt to create a European unity with the Holy Roman Empire, but also the country that during the Second World War almost destroyed Europe with extreme nationalism and a belief in their own superiority. Moreover, as a losing power, Germany was also heavily affected in the aftermath of the First World War by stringent limitations administered through the Versailles Treaty of 1919 (Marks 2013). After the Second World War, the UK, as the winning European power, created a series of structures and treaties to limit Germany as it still had great economic and military potential which represented a latent threat for Europe (Mawby 1999, p. 94). Germany in both World Wars was censured in international politics and economics of the twentieth century, only to rise up again to be Europe's most powerful country in the twenty-first.

Post-war Germany was divided into East and West by ideological difference, yet West Germany's political and economic activities underpin the power basis of contemporary unified Germany, such as membership in NATO and founding the EEC. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, West Germany incorporated East Germany and, as a unified entity started an ambitious project of a renewed centrality of Germany in Europe (Green 2016, p. 201). This process that led Germany to its reunification and its renewed image as the federator for a European unity project seems to clash with the past fears of Germany held by other European nations. These historical fears had led to the creation of severe economic limitations for Germany and a military alliance that was created essentially to block a possible German resurgence. The 1947 Dunkirk Treaty and the subsequent creation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 were aimed to contain a possible renewed threat from Germany, and the possible expansion of Soviet Union in Western Europe (Ismail 1954, p. 8). However, Germany, although only the Federal Republic of Germany, was permitted to join NATO in

1955 as it was seen as a key player in Western Europe defence during the Cold War (Frydrych 2008, p. 16). This can be partially explained by an apparent change of mentality of Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War's decisions. Germany's process of recognition of its negative past actions of genocide and war created a new nationalist approach, which led to its unification, economic recovery, and to a democratic path with the aim to reach an integration and unity in Europe culminated in the late 1960s. (Rynhold 2011, pp. 270-271).

Although it has been a driving force in projects for European unification in the second half of the twentieth century, such as the EEC and the EU, Germany's strong role in the EU contributes to the union's lack of unity and common strategy. Germany is heavily involved in the project of unifying Europe, albeit not entirely altruistically. Using its credibility as advocate for European unity and through the use of tools such as its economic influence and status of regional power, Germany acts as federator, but it has an approach that is, especially in the last decade, trying to create a EU integration using its financial and economic power mainly to pursue its own national interests (Bulmer & Paterson 2010, pp. 1057-1058). Despite its strong attachment to the EU project, the national interests of Germany often prevail over its ideas of European unity. A key example of this is found it its attitude to the EU judiciary. EU laws have an absolute and unconditional primacy over individual national laws; this is a pillar of the EU system (Claes 2015, p. 178). However, Germany complies with this only partially. EU law and German law have clashed several times and, on more than one occasion, the German judicial system ruled against or refused to rule in cases that presented a potential loss of German national interests, arguing also against the primacy of EU law on national constitutions (Davies 2015). German national interest might prevail on European laws (Federal Ministry of Justice 2009; Federal Ministry of Justice 2013). This highlights not only a weakness of EU judicial system but also an inconsistency in Germany's attitude to the idea of the EU. On one hand, Germany advocates for European political and economic integration, censuring smaller nations that pursue national interests, but on the other it does not respect the law that results from that integration. Merkel said that EU and Germany would be more mindful of smaller EU nations, but small countries like Greece and Slovakia's have tried to advance their ideas. Their interests were not taken in consideration, due to the prominence of a Franco-German alliance in the EU, and that goes against the principle of cooperation that should be the basis of EU (Barysch 2010; Lisbeth 2017). Not only does this not represent a good model for other state members, it undercuts the core principles of the project.

Germany's hegemonic approach to EU has been criticised by several scholars (Crawford 2007; Beck 2013; Lever 2017). The major criticisms derive from Germany's disregard of EU institutions, and the lack of an attempt to involve other EU state members in the decision-making process. The weakness of EU structures enables Germany to deal with many issues unilaterally, as demonstrated with the Greek Crisis in 2008 (Varoufakis 2015). Moreover, many observe that Angela Merkel, and as consequence Germany, is the de facto leader of the EU; not only does Merkel lead the most influential country in the EU, but also Germany is invested in the idea of its own leadership in that space (Erlanger 2017; *Economist 2017*; Abadi 2017; *BBC News 2018*). Merkel's leadership of the EU is not unopposed (Rachman 2016): EU state members from Eastern European hold different views on migration policy; France and Italy oppose Merkel for her views on economy; the UK's conservative parties blame her for Brexit; and the EU Commission feels ousted by her power.

Such opposition to the German hegemony also indicates the difficulties many several member countries face in adapting to the EU and the idea of a singular 'European' policy. One consequence of this and a subsequent challenge to the EU project is the emergence of powerful regional blocs that are against the concept of the EU. Rather, they believe in a supremacy of nations or more localised regional alliances, and create regional blocs or alliances based on common interests. For example, the Visegrád Group, comprising the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, jointly opposed the EU's repartition of refugees in their countries and also demanded a stronger attention to the specificity of their region (Grygiel 2016, p. 101; Podgozatiska 2017, pp. 95-96). The Visegrád Group (2018c) declared, 'EU institutions should treat all Member States equally and act strictly within the remits of their respective treaty-based competences. The right of Member States to carry out domestic reforms within their competences should be respected'. This statement highlights how the countries of the Visegrád Group believe that nation-state should keep their power, but it also shows their contrariety to the creation of a common European policy. Moreover, the Visegrád Group in several occasions declared that EU needs stronger common policies, such as a new industrial policy and the strengthening of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), but at the same time they argued for regional discussions and solutions, rather than dealing with issues on an EU level (Visegrád Group 2018a; Visegrád Group 2018b). The creation of blocs or alliances based upon common interests further illustrates the weakness of the EU as a supranational organisation.

In some cases, fear of losing sovereignty and national individuality leads to the resurfacing of nationalist sentiments. The EU fails to create a shared identity, mainly because it lacks the political means to do so; these political means are, however, available to its member nations, which continue to shape their own identity (Palmowski 2011, p. 641). Maintenance of a national identity is not inherently problematic, nor something that has necessarily to be demonised, but the combination of the lack of a common EU identity in itself and the stronger, often excessive emphasis on national identities is creating issues that in turn lead to excessive nationalism and may lead to a possible collapse of the EU. It has already been demonstrated that in the case of perceived risk individual states within the EU will return to nation-state mentality, rather than escalate the issue and ask for support or help from EU bodies to act as medium (Pelinka 2011, p. 26). This phenomenon can be explained by an underlying distrust of the EU, but also by the lack of familiarity with a concerted system due to the historical traditions of solving issues through a nation-state approach, which is strongly embedded in European countries as will be demonstrated in the last chapter. Some member states perceive the EU as a threat and an imposition of rather than an attempt at European unity, and instead seek refuge in re-vamped nationalism. The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, known as Brexit, can be considered as an example of this phenomenon. Brexit was caused by a strong popular vote which has its roots in the disagreement between a member state of the union and EU, for reasons such as the lack of trust on economic and of an idea of a common defence and foreign policy (Philippon 2016). As Nigel Farage, former leader of the UK Independence Party, said in response to criticisms of the EU raised by Hungary's Prime Minister Orban, 'Time to be a bit more logical, come and join the Brexit club'. Farage also praised Orban for standing up to "bullying" from the EU: 'thank God there is at least one European leader prepared to stand up for his principles, his nation, his country and his people in the face of such extreme bullying' (quoted in Mowat 2018). This shows how Brexit and nationalist movements in EU are spreading an anti-EU sentiment that damages the structure of the EU. Brexit was prompted by a lack of European integration, a sentiment of Euroscepticism, and distance between UK and EU (Martill & Staigerp 2018, p. 264). Similarly, as mentioned before, France shares some of the characteristics that led UK to Brexit, such as the rise of nationalism and a sentiment of Euroscepticism, which could France to leave the EU. This would cause issues in the EU and an almost certain failure of the EU project.

Analysing the current world geopolitical situation with the rise of China and Russia, and the ongoing instability of the Middle East, Stiglitz (2016, p. 318) argues that Europe must

find a unity to avoid economic weakness in order to address this new economic and political scenario in which new powers are emerging. Altogether, Germany appears as a strong advocate of the EU and of European unity as an ideal, yet its actions do not seem to be entirely altruistic not consistent with these principles. This chapter has highlighted how Germany's tradition in both recent and distant history of seeing Europe as its territory for conquest causes mistrust among other EU state members. Moreover, its approach is perceived by several other EU state members as autocratic and not prone to true concord on regional economic and political decisions. Germany's conduct and predominance cause an imbalance of power at a EU level. In approaching the current situation in EU, this chapter has explained today's problems with consideration of the historical roots of the current issues of the EU highlighted in the previous chapter. The lack of integration in the EU coupled with the difficulty of several states to adapt to the EU project causes the re-vamping of nationalism, but also the rise of anti-EU parties and movements, which will be explored in the following chapter. EU's imbalance of power has deep roots in the past that still affect today's the project of European integration. This chapter demonstrates how today's approach to a European integration appears to follow a path which leads to failure of this project.

CHAPTER 3 – The revamping of nationalism and populism in the EU, and the case study on the Italian Five Star Movement

"Patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because you were born in it" (Shaw, cited in Dukore 1996, p. 142).

Today's political era can be characterised as the end of political parties as representing cohesive political philosophies and as the rise of populist and nationalist parties that capitalise upon trends and anxieties of the citizenry. As indicated by various examples provided in the preceding chapters, nationalism has been a powerful idea in Europe historically and remains so today. Through an examination of the historical origins of nationalism in Europe, this chapter argues that there is a strong link between historical nationalism and contemporary populism. It then evaluates the origins and spread of populist ideas in the EU. A case study centred on the M5S enables an evaluation of this phenomenon in the EU, incorporating within this an analysis of Italian politics of the last five years to contextualise the success of this new political movement.

Symbology and slogans are highly effective to create a sentiment of unity, and to clearly define a more complex idea through a direct type of communication. The European Union's motto "United in diversity" constitutes an accurate representation of the union and its challenges. The differences among European countries are several ranging from economic conditions, history, language, culture and politics. A strong sense of belonging to the respective countries makes it hard to unify European countries under the same flag and idea of a union of European states. As Marshall highlights (2017, p. 8), Europe is composed by states with strong national identities, and that makes it complicated to unify people under the EU flag; this is particularly evident in the current climate of increased nationalist sentiment, and subsequent attachment to their national flag. The differences among the cultures that comprise Europe are one of the key factors that have to be taken in consideration to achieve an effective and balanced EU.

Nationalism is an ideology based on the promotion of a particular nation-state, with a strong focus on the concept of sovereignty and self-determination. In an early exploration of

the concept, Muir (1916, pp. 48-49) defined nationalism as national patriotism. He stated 'No one contributes so much to light the flames of national patriotism as the conqueror who, by trying to destroy a nation, gives to it the opportunity of showing that it is inspired by the unconquerable spirit of liberty, by whose appeal the meanest soul cannot fail to be thrilled'. By contrast, Orwell (2018, pp. 1-2) argued, 'Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism', adding,

> 'By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire of power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality'.

Nationalism derives from nation. According to Renan (1882, pp. 26-27), 'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. History is integral to his conceptualisation of nation: 'To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition for being a nation'. The key characteristics of nationalism that emerge from these early thinkers and that remain in theories of nationalism today are a sentiment of passion for one's own country, a strong belief of nation-states as the most important political units, and the rejection of a supranational political bodies.

The birth of nationalism is disputed and there a few schools of thought about its emergence. While most scholars locate its emergence in the nineteenth century, Tarnas (2010, pp. 243-244) argues that the birth of nationalism can be dated back to the period of Reformation in the early sixteenth century, and that it was caused by a strong rebellion against the Holy Roman Empire; this uprising formed the concept of nation-states against the idea of countries united under a Western Christendom, leading to their successive empowerment and the individual state as political and cultural authority. This in a way resembles closely what is happening now in EU: nation-states rejecting the EU's authority, reasserting the concept of centrality of nation-states against a supranational entity to oversee them. This view of nationalism as a concept formed in the sixteenth century is also shared by Hirschi (2011, p.2). He also challenges the mainstream view that nationalism originated in the nineteenth century, arguing that pre-modern periods should be included in the study of the origins of nationalism.

Although the roots of nations and national sentiments may be found earlier, the dominant schools of historical thought and political philosophy locate the rise of nationalism as well-defined idea, ideology, and political doctrine in the nineteenth century as it bears the marks of the modern era. Hobsbawm (1990, pp. 120-21), for example, connects it to changing class structures and political belonging. He places its origins in the European middle class, notably in Germany, France, and then Italy, but observes that since its formation nationalism changed from being linked to a leftist and liberal politics to an imperialist, racist and radical right one. According to Anderson (1991, pp. 4-5), nationalism is a cultural artefact that was created at the end of the eighteenth century, and it is not an ideology in itself, but it can be applied to various ideologies. While Anderson identifies increasing secularism and the rise of print capitalism as core to the emergence of nationalism, Vincent (2009, pp. 230-231) emphasises the role of industrialisation in the conceptualisation of the nation-state. He recognises that there were proto-nationalist entities prior to this, but that they cannot be defined as nationalist in the modern sense, the development of industries in Europe and technological advancement proper of the nineteenth century are seen by him as linked to nationalism. The origins and meaning of nationalism have been widely debated, however it can be said that nationalism changed over time and evolved into a doctrine that was embraced by the Fascist and Nazi ideologies (Portus 2018). Fascism and Nazism changed the meaning of nationalism, making it seem dangerous and unfashionable, and it is this legacy that resonates within the contemporary relations in the European Union.

In today's EU, and globally, there is a noticeable revamping of nationalist ideas through the lens of populism. Populism is a political idea characterised by claims to a closeness with common people against elites, popular instincts as drive for political action, distrust for intermediate bodies, use of fear and hopes as political tools, and an often anti-democratic approach (Heywood 2012, p. 291). Populism is a contested term; however, in today's politics in Europe, are defined as populist the political forces, of any political ideology, that claim to be closer to the people (Muller 2016, pp. 9-10). Galston (2017, p. 36) argues that 'Populism distinguishes between the "people" and the "elite". Each of these groups is understood as homogenous: the people have one set of interests and values, the elite another, and they are not only different but fundamentally opposed'. Populism revived nationalist sentiments in EU and in the world.

Both populism and nationalism are flexible ideologies that can be adapted to the circumstances. The causes of the nationalist-populist wave are to be sought in the current

political situation in the EU. Nationalist sentiments have resurged in the EU in the last few years in response to a mainstream political system that was not able to create a shared identity to mitigate nationalist ideas that in the past, with an extreme pursuit of nationalism, led to destruction in Europe with the First and Second World War (Grotenhuis 2016, p. 104). This rise is also accompanied by an anti-democratic surge. Nationalism gives the foremost importance to national culture and values and also, frequently, nationalists in Europe aligned with anti-democratic forces (Brecht 1959, p. 344). The alignment of nationalism with anti-democratic forces is a concept that it is still relevant today, as it was in the past. In this context, the key concept employed by the new nationalist-populist wave is the civilisational difference between them and the 'others'. In contrast to traditional nationalism, the idea of nation that assumes secondary importance (Brubaker 2017, pp. 1210-1211).

The underlying anti-democratic sentiment is one of the aspects that links nationalism to populism. Specifically, the re-vamping of nationalism and the rise of populism are jeopardising liberal democracy's achievements that have been gained from the end of the Second World War to today. This can be partially explained by the weakness of the current political class in EU, which is often unable to address increasing popular criticism of the governmental system (Moeller 2011). Nationalism and populism can combine to present an alternative to the political system as it has been for decades. Representative liberal democracy appears to be in deep crisis today, making it vulnerable to substitution with an often-aggressive populism (Gelber 2015, p. 19). Nationalism and populism share also the characteristic that can be associated with any political movement, regardless of their ideology, and this make them even more flexible and adaptable to a wide range of ideologies.

Populist parties are fringe political movements that need crisis to rise to power. In the past, the crisis was represented by post-war resentments, as it happened with the rise of German Nazism and Italian Fascism after the First World War. Crisis fosters the rise of populist movements that in a calm period would not have a chance of challenging the traditional political parties and system. Today the crisis is a global economic one, which causes anger and distrust towards conventional politics (Thirkell-White 2009). Populism, like nationalism, is an ideology that plays with people's feelings and perception. In the past, populism created a vision of future greatness drawing from a past one. One example of this can be found in Italian Fascism, where the ideals of *Risorgimento* were used to distort the past to suit Fascism's

populist ideas (Breschi 2012, p. 424).[1] Today, populist movements centre upon revitalising the importance of nation-states. In the case of populist movements found within EU states, these regard the regional union with scepticism and envision a future with a strong focus on security and national sovereignty. Populism and nationalism share some characteristics, such as the challenge that both present to liberal democracy, their adaptability to various political ideologies and that both consider nation-states as important political units. They differ in two main things. First, populism is a new phenomenon. Nationalism is instead a nineteenth century concept. Second, nationalism does not divide people in classes, whereas populism capitalises upon class differences and anxieties by its discursive emphasis upon the difference between the 'elite' and the 'people'. However, in today European politics they seem to have merged in a unique political ideology that challenges liberal democracy and the traditional parties and institutions, but also rejects the new politics of supranational entities like the EU.

The Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy provides a good case study for understanding populism in the EU for three key reasons. First, the M5S is the largest populist party in the EU and the one with higher chances to form a government in a key EU country. Second, the M5S present several innovations, such as the conceptualisation of a form of direct democracy that uses the internet not just as a platform for public discussion, but in its processes of member selection and decision-making. Third, M5S have had a strong presence in Italian institutions due to strong results since the 2013 elections. They have won city council elections in important cities and towns in Italy, including Rome, Turin and Livorno. M5S's crescent power in Italy started from winning local elections in various city councils and led them to win the general election 2018 and govern Italy.

To understand the success of M5S, it is necessary to contextualise this within recent Italian politics. A brief analysis of the past five years shows how populism was able to become a significant player in Italian politics and through this how it might affect the politics of other EU states. In this period, Italy went from a technocratic and pro-EU government led by Mario Monti to a populist government led by the Five Star Movement and Lega. La Lega derives from Lega Nord, which was a regionalist party that called for the independence of Northern Italy. With the appointment of Salvini as secretary of the party, it undertook a change of name and ideology, becoming a far-right populist and nationalist party (Schumacher 2018). Former EU commissioner Monti was the Italian Prime Minister from 2011 to 2013, backed by the great

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[1] Risorgimento is a nineteenth century socio-political movement which lead to the unification of Italy.

majority of the Italian parliament after the resignation of Berlusconi due to his increasing political weakness (Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte 2012, p. 261). Since Monti's government, Italy has had six different Prime Ministers. Such a turnover is, however, not uncommon for Italy; since becoming a republic in 1946, and with the most recent appointment of Conte, Italy has had sixty-six Prime Ministers (Harris 2016), which means that over seventy-two years, Italy has averaged nearly one change in prime minister each year. Monti's government meant the end of the Berlusconi's era in the Italian politics. Between 1994 and 2011, Berlusconi was Prime Minister for eight years on three different occasions: 1994-1995, 2001-2008 and 2008-2011. Berlusconi had dominated Italian politics since 1994, often resorting to populist means to strengthen his influence (Jones 2003, pp. 182-183). He has always been despised by EU leaders and political observers. The *Economist* (2001) famously defined him as 'unfit' to lead Italian government in his early rise to power. Yet in 2018 Bill Emmott, editor of the *Economist* at the time the article's publication in 2001, identified Berlusconi as the only one who can stop the populist rise, considering him the lesser evil, observing: 'It might be shocking but his victory (Berlusconi's) would be considered a stable result compared to the alternative of a minority government led by the M5S'(*Huffington Post 2018*).[2] The Italian political class was well aware of the rise of populism and tried to adapt to the new situation. For example, Renzi, Italy's prime minister 2014-2016 once delivered a speech without the usual EU flag in the background. This visual signifier has been a way to keep distance with EU policies while also leveraging the anti-EU sentiment that was spreading in Italy (Gayle 2016). Even if it was just a one-time occurrence, Renzi's behaviour represents one of the first signs of a sentiment of increasing distance between Italy and EU. The rising lack of faith of the traditional political class and a popular sentiment and desire to change created the perfect conditions for the victory of the M5S.

Populism is not a totally new phenomenon in Italy, as Berlusconi's era shows distinctively, but the M5S presents several characteristics that make it worthy to be analysed in detail. Italy seems historically prone to populist thinking, exemplified by the rise of Fascism, and this can explain the rise of M5S populist ideas. Italy experienced a wave of populism already in the 1990, with Berlusconi. Populist arguments, and a distrust of the political class have thus been a hallmark of Italian politics, also due to the legacy of twenty years of Fascist regime, which intrinsically was not populist, but adopted populist slogans and propaganda

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[2] "Per quanto sia scioccante, una sua vittoria andrebbe considerata un risultato stabile rispetto all'alternativa di un governo di minoranza guidato dal M5s".

(Tarchi 2008, p. 86; Pasquino 2008, p. 18). M5S's popularity arises out of people's unhappiness with both Italian and EU politics; people were looking for honest politicians and transparent politics. M5S went from 8.691.406 voters (25.56%) in the 2013 Chamber of Deputies general election to 10.732.066 (32.68%) in 2018, and from 7.286.550 (23.80%) to 9.733.928 (32.22%) in the Senate (Dipartimento per gli affari interni e territoriali 2018). These votes allowed the M5S to form a new government in coalition with La Lega. After the General elections in 2018, M5S formed a new coalition government with La Lega, emerging as the first populist government in the EU (*CBS News 2018*). Notably, in these elections the three main populist parties in Italy - Five Star Movement, Lega, and the Brothers of Italy - together make more than 50% of the total votes cast (Faggiano 2018). They represent the strongest populist forces in EU. This victory at the general election represents the apex for a political force that was first created only ten years ago.

The M5S was created between 2008 and 2009, emerging from *beppegrillo.it*, a blog started in 2005 by Beppe Grillo, a famous Italian comedian, to present opinions about politics and society, which acted as a shared platform for discussion. Within a few years, this platform grew into a popular political movement became popular, with a large degree of its success resting upon its key idea of the creation of an internet-based community based on direct-democracy to substitute Italy's political system (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2015, p. 456, 463). The M5S is a product of Grillo, and the transformation into a political movement of his ideas that were already widely expressed prior the creation of the M5S. Grillo's ideas were ridiculed at first, especially his V-Day (Fuck Off Day), an initiative that saw him touring 208 locations in Italy to express his loathing of Italian political class and media (*Independent* 2007; *Guardian* 2008). His ideas were not taken seriously because they were coming from a comedian. His ideas then became the basis of the M5S and, with the creation of this political movement, he acted as a catalyst for populist ideas in Italy, creating a successful party. To provoke and make fun of Grillo's ideas, Fassino, a leader of the centre-left Italian Democratic Party, said: 'If Grillo wants to be in politics, he should create a party, run for the elections and we will see how many votes does he get' (Capone 2013).[3] Grillo did so, and the results are very clear to everyone now.

Bordignon and Ceccarini (2013, p. 429) said, 'To understand the experience and political vision of the M5S, it is necessary to examine Grillo's whole career: from being a

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[3] "Se Grillo vuole fare politica, fondi un partito, si presenti alle elezioni e vediamo quanti voti prende"

comedian and a scourge, in his shows, of political and economic power, to his role as a full-fledged political entrepreneur, web guru and founder of one of the most interesting novelties on the Italian political scene.' Grillo's idea of politics is a total break with traditional Italian politics. The main themes of his movement are the struggle against politicians, corruption but also an interest toward environmental topics (Bosco & Verney 2012, p. 148).

The aim of the Five Star Movement is also to establish a new viewpoint and act as catalyst of a protest that before had no voice in terms of a political movement to represent it, a typical trait of populist parties. The political aims of M5S draw – perhaps unknowingly - upon past political theorists. Interestingly for all their radical bluster, their understanding of the role of members of parliament draws from the classical liberal political philosopher John Stuart Mill (1865, p. 91), who identifies two types of members of parliament: those who act merely as an ambassador of their political constituents, and those who, whilst representing its political constituents, instead vote according their own opinion and judge what has to be done. The former type of member of the parliament is the one envisioned by the M5S, following their motto *one equals to one* and dreams of direct-democracy, which however remains just a dream for them, since Italy is a parliamentary republic and the application of direct democracy requires a radical change in Italy's political system.[4] Their total hatred of the political class and parties in general can be linked to Weil's ideas on parties. According to Weil (2014), all parties are authoritarians and corrupted by power, thus she advocated for their total abolition.

One of the novelties of the M5S has been the wide use of internet as mean to select party representatives. In order to do so, M5S utilises a platform called *Rousseau*, which was created by one of the founders of the M5S, Gianroberto Casaleggio, who died in 2016. As Davide Casaleggio (2018), the son of Gianroberto, explains, 'The platform that enabled the success of the Five Star Movement is called Rousseau, named after the 18th century philosopher who argued politics should reflect the general will of the people'. Davide Casaleggio, like is father before him, has a key role in the M5S since he controls *Rousseau*. *The Rousseau* platform is used by M5S for primary votes, surveys on political topics, and also as tool to collect donations (Politi & Roberts 2017). Although it is one of the key features of the movement, this platform has been criticised due to its technical limits and the low level of participation in its voting tool (Iacoboni 2018b, pp. 101-102). Furthermore, the platform has been used in a way that seems to contravene the original ideas of M5S. *Rousseau* uses obscure

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[4] Uno vale uno

criteria for its membership, which in turn limits access to its voting platform. These criteria seem to be decided by the key figures of the M5S, rather than following the direct democracy ideas that have been promoted by this movement (*Repubblica* 2017).

Besides Rousseau, another key feature of the M5S is the choice of an aggressive and anti-establishment language, which it is the same since its inception. Grillo wrote a book on political ideas of the M5S which embodies populism, starting from its title *A riveder le stelle: come seppellire I partiti e tirar fuori l'Italia dal pantano* which translates to "To see the stars again: how to bury the parties and take Italy out of the swamp". The book's language, as the one of the shows that Grillo did throughout the years, can been seen as an attempt to get closer to the people. The populist roots can also be seen in the emblematic first page of the book starting from the chapter's title, 'Enough with the living dead', in reference to Italian politicians.[5] Then it continues with 'The politicians are the butlers of the parasitical economy or of the mafia, or the both combined together. The masters command and they follow their orders, the covering fire for their actions is provided by the media, which have their same masters, the citizen can only decide on the basis of the information provided, and so they are kept in an induced coma' (Grillo 2010).[6] *A riveder le stelle* is a political manifesto of the M5S, or at least it was in the movement's early stages. It offers practical solutions and a moral judgement on the Italian political class. Grillo's book has been used in some analysis of the M5S (Floridia & Vignati 2014; Briziarelli & Guillem, SM 2016). *A riveder le stelle,* is one of the key books to better understand how M5S works and its political aims (Chiusi 2013).

The language used by M5S for their public declarations is direct and often politically incorrect, representing another key dimension in the performance of politics in the movement. For example, Di Maio, the M5S political leader since 2017 and deputy Prime Minister since 2018, described NGOs that rescue migrants in the Mediterranean seas as a 'sea taxi service' for migrants (*Corriere della Sera* 2017); the description positions migrants as consumers exploiting a service rather than people in need of humanitarian aid, thus playing upon popular anxieties about the European migration crisis. Other declarations focused on a disapproval and condemnation of the Italian political class, arguing about the lack of honesty and clarity in Italian politics. Grillo argues the governments, from Monti until the election of the M5S, took

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[5] "Basta con I morti viventi" (Enough with the living dead),

[6] "I politici sono maggiordomi dell'economia parassitaria o mafiosa o della combinazione delle prima con la seconda. I padroni ordinano e loro eseguono e il fuoco di copertura delle loro azioni e' compito dei media, che rispondono comunque agli stessi padroni, il cittadino puo' decider solo in base all informazioni di cui dispone ed e' quindi tenuto in coma assistito"

the power through a series of coup d'états (Iacoboni 2018a). In an interview before the 2013 general election, Grillo declared, 'We will open the parliament like a can of tuna, it will be transparent' (*Adnkronos* 2013).[7] The M5S and its leaders harshly criticise traditional politics, even now after gaining power, as this technique has demonstrated itself to be a winning strategy. According to Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015, p. 9), once in power populist parties keep their "protest" nature and struggle to live to their elections' promises due to a lack of experience in politics. This can be seen already in M5S, which even if it has been in charge only for a few months now, appears to have problems due to the lack of political experience (Canonico 2018).

M5S not only despises the Italian political system but also that of the EU. The movement considers the EU an enemy and it has often been at the centre of M5S leader declarations. Interestingly, these can use the idea of "Europe" as a way of emphasising national concern without even mentioning the EU directly. For example, Di Maio recently stated, 'Some European institutions are playing ... at creating terrorism on the markets' (*Reuters* 2018). On another occasion he said, 'I worry about Italian people' and 'If eurocrats worry about our manifesto, it's their problem, not mine' (Scotto di Santolo 2018). The anti-EU sentiment is shared also by La Lega's leader Salvini, who also shares the role of deputy Prime Minister. Salvini declared, 'The EU has supported economic measures that have made Italy poor' and 'I don't care about the opinion that people like Juncker and Moscovici have about the government and Italy. They should say what they want, we will continue' (Mischke 2018). Euroscepticism is another trait of the M5S. It is clear in their public declarations but also in their attitude toward the EU. The anti-EU attitude characterises the M5S since its origins (Hartleb 2015; Franzosi, Marone & Salvati 2015). Also, The M5S often used the idea of a possible referendum to leave the EU as a political tool (Corbetta & Vignati 2014, p.55). The contempt for the EU is a hallmark of the current Italian populist government and this represents a threat for the EU as an institution. The importance of Italy for the EU and its actual attitude towards the EU shows once more the issue the issues that the EU is facing.

Despite this forceful discourse, the M5S became a more moderate political force over time, especially after their election in parliament in 2013. This can be explained by their passage from a movement based on the concept of direct democracy to a political party that must work within the established system of representative democracy (Tronconi 2018). This is

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[7] 'Noi il Parlamento lo apriamo come una scatola di tonno, sarà trasparente'

a transformation, or normalisation, which can be explained by Michels' *Iron Law of Oligarchy*. This law states the impossibility of direct democracy, since every organisation, political or not, ultimately requires an oligarchy that decide the direction and representatives to mediate between them and the masses; this is a process that every organisation or movement undertake as part of their evolution, regardless of the grade of democracy they when they were established (Michels 1968, p. 65-66). However, the M5S's recurring argument is that they are different from all the other political parties, that they will they will continue to act like a movement and will never adapt to traditional politics.

By analysing nationalism and populism, this chapter has shown the connection between them that has arisen in recent years. It draws from political science theorists that throughout time tried to define both ideas, highlighting the shared characteristics. As has been shown, the current political situation in the EU represents a legacy of the historical events of the past, such as the nationalist ideas that spread in Europe in the nineteenth century and the ongoing hegemonic role of Germany. This situation caused the revamping of nationalism and rise of populism, which can lead the EU to a totally new scenario in which the pillars of liberal democracy are at risk. The case study of the M5S examines the recent past but also the current situation of one of the EU's member states, Italy, in which populists have for the first time in the EU, won an election. The case study unveiled the reasons behind the rise of populism in Italy, which have to be sought in a general loss of confidence in Italian and EU politics, and a need of a radical change that has been identified and utilised by the M5S. The chapter proposed a detailed explanation from both and historical and political points of view, of the phenomena of nationalism and populism in the EU. By doing so it showed that the themes of the history of Europe and the current political situation in the EU, examined in the first and second chapter, originated the rise of populist ideas mixed with nationalist ideas. Overall, the historical legacies of past issues, unsolved rivalries, and an aggressive ideology such as nationalism has been in Europe, still haunt Europe and cause the imbalance of power in the EU.

CONCLUSION

This thesis engaged an examination of the idea of Europe and the historical attempts to unite Europe throughout history. The historical account of this struggle for a united Europe shows how past attempts as well as today EU's project do not take in account the strong nationalist sentiment that remains present in several EU nations and that have emerged every time unification has been attempted. From the analysis provided by this thesis, it emerges quite clearly that the history of Europe itself, as well as the history of nationalism as a force within this, is crucial to understanding contemporary European politics. Policymakers as well as politicians ought to take in greater consideration of this history in the process of devising and implementing policy. Populism was identified as a contemporary force derived from both nationalism and the historical rejection of a supranational European entity. It is both a symptom of and a response to the imbalance of power found within the European Union.

As demonstrated here, many members of the EU perceive the entity as a "foreign body", an external political entity that is imposed rather than something to which they experience meaningful belonging. As a result, it divides more than it unites countries. The lack of cohesion in the EU results in a return to the nation-state mentality and rejuvenated nationalism. This fragmentation also creates space within the union for individual states to seize greater power and control in the organisation, which in turn results in greater resentment and fragmentation, as has been shown through consideration of the German hegemony. Resentment directed at Germany results not just from its current power, but from historical anxieties connected to the Second World War.

The European Union places greater emphasis on economics over cultural and political unity, although it does draw upon these ideas discursively. In this system of economic primacy, member states with a stronger economic profile have greater power than countries that have weaker one. This results in countries like France and especially Germany being invested with greater political power due to their more solid economic position. The structural and political weakness of EU thus provides Germany great, if not excessive power on the basis of its economic strength, not its capacity for collaborative leadership in a project of political unity. As the thesis demonstrated, historical German powers have attempted several times and with various means and intents to unite Europe. This said, I do not wish to imply that Germany will impose its rule by force as it has in the past. Rather, I suggest that Germany's history as a hegemon complicates its capacity to act as federator because Germany is still perceived in the

EU as a country that imposes its ideas and disregards concertation. A change of approach by Germany would allow it to develop a stronger EU as a collaborative political entity, limiting also the re-emergence of nationalism as a reaction to Germany's hegemonic role.

As argued here, the lack of unity in the European Union and the hegemonic role of Germany have created the conditions for the re-emergence of nationalism and for the rise of populism. Nationalism has re-emerged in EU as an ideology responding to the EU's political weaknesses and nation-states' perception of the union as an unjust supranational entity that threatens national sovereignty and identity. Through the increasing use of people's fears and emotions as a political means, nationalism has transformed in the twenty-first century into populism. This phenomenon has been illustrated in the thesis through the use of the M5S case study. The rise of M5S demonstrates how populism endangers the already precarious balance of power in the EU by fostering ideas that will separate EU member states from each other – and the idea of political unity - even more. Italy holds an important role in the EU: it is one of the founding members of the EU and one of the largest economies. It has a key political role both in the region and it is also a member of G7 and G20. The fact that it is now governed by a populist government is a serious issue, since the Eurosceptic stance of M5S creates a fracture with EU, whose existence can be in danger due to M5S leaders' declarations and the possibility of Italy leaving the EU. The thesis shows how populism is spreading quickly and how it is challenging traditional ideology-based parties that seem unable to rebut populist ideas with meaningful concepts.

The limited scope of the thesis cannot provide an in-depth analysis of the numerous sources of imbalance of the EU, but the themes it identifies – the historical ideas of Europe, the rise of hegemonic stance, and the emergence of populist nationalism – do provide an important starting point for a more extensive analysis of EU's problems. It has revealed historical Euro-scepticism as one of the root causes of disunity in the contemporary union, which in turn creates greater space for fragmentation. While deeper historical understanding is identified here as one key step toward unravelling contemporary tensions, further research is needed to ascertain and to try to forecast what EU should do to actively pursue a cohesive project that would limit, if not eradicate, the current imbalance of power that may lead the EU project to failure.

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