

**Leadership in Times of Populism: Selected
Examples of Italian Political Leaders**

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Abstract:

The issue of leadership is becoming increasingly a phenomenon studied by specialists in political sciences. However, the emerging theoretical concepts call for constant changes and updates due to the political practice. This is supported by the changes in the political scene observed in many countries, generally referred to as the “populist revolution”. This phenomenon, with varying intensity, has been present on the Italian political scene for almost a quarter of a century.

The specificity of Italian populism should be expressed concerning three political leaders: Silvio Berlusconi, Beppe Grillo and Matteo Renzi. Although, there are many differences between them – the time of appearance, the scope of power and political culture, there are also common formal references regarding personal image and applied rhetoric. The distinct approach of leadership to populism has been further strengthened by the increasing use of new means of social communication. As a result, the intersection of technology and social change has had and will have a significant impact on the perception of politics in the future.

Key words:

Italy, populism, leadership, Berlusconi, Grillo, Renzi

The notion of leadership has become a problem analyzed more and more frequently by political science specialists in a broad sense. Thanks to the results of the recent studies, different dimensions of political leadership have been recognized, such as the definition of leader’s category, the description of both endogenous and exogenous conditioning of leadership or indication of evolution and directions of changes of political leadership (Kasińska-Metryka 2012: 17-81). The multitude of present conceptions of leadership is a proof that it is a complex phenomenon. The conceptions mentioned above include symbolic, conciliation, mobilization,

spiritual, ideological, pragmatic, disorganizing, heroic, charismatic or recessionary ones¹. Moreover, the offered exploration is of an interdisciplinary nature, which gives a universal dimension to the formulated assertions. However, in spite of a broad scope of the undergone research, the comment of James McGregor Burnes, saying that a more comprehensive knowledge about leaders is connected with the lesser understanding of the phenomenon that is developed along with constant changes of the previous conceptions, is still prevailing.

The difficulties connected with the problem of the notion of leadership are not exhausted only at the level of theoretical reflection. Contrarily, political practice does not only seem to falsify the existing theses, but also aspires more and undoubtedly to contribute to the ongoing discourse. The changes in the political scene are observed in many countries such as the USA, the UK, Turkey, Greece, France, Hungary or Poland (Rakusa-Suszczewski 2017: 33). The observed increase of populism is, in a large part, a reaction to the failure of traditional parties to respond adequately in the eyes of the electorate to the series of phenomena such as economic and cultural globalization, the direction of European integration, immigration, the decline of ideologies and class politics, exposure of elite corruption, etc. It is also a product of ‘political malaise’, manifested gradually in falling voter turnout, declining party memberships, and ever-greater numbers of citizens quoting polls for lack of interest in politics and distrust in politicians (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2000; Mastropaolo 2005). Joseph Nye (2016) calls this phenomenon “populistic revolution”. The same term was used in the comments regarding the results of the 2018 parliamentary election in Italy (Liddle 2018). Hence, the term ‘leadership’ is accompanied by, equally indistinct to define the term ‘populism’. Frequently, leadership is affected by the new kinds of populism, losing its former character and, as a result, demanding new definitions.

Term ‘populism’ that is used in so many contexts, often having assigned different contents, has a vastly polysomic character. An important exemplification of indistinctness of the term is the paper in which Cas Mudde (2007: 385) distinguishes as many as twenty-six different kinds of populism. On the other hand, Paul Taggart (2007: 111-117) describes the ideal type of populism as the one consisting of six components: 1) hostile attitude towards representational politics; 2) identifying with heartland; 3) a lack of indigenous values; 4) reaction towards a sense of strong crisis; 5) self-limiting; 6) variable character.

¹ More about the examples of leadership conceptions can be found here: Szklarski (2008); Sielski (2008); Rubisz (2004); Burns (1978); Wiatr (2008); Bailey (1988); Edinger (1967); Biernat (2000); Hartliński (2012).

Therefore, populism can be identified as an ideology whose features do not allow to describe it the same status as conservatism, liberalism or socialism. However, being a thin-centred ideology, it shows the society in genuinely Manichean way, divided, according to Mudde, into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, «the commons» versus «corrupt elites», which, as a result, means that “politics should be the indication of *volonté generale* of the people” (Mudde 2004: 543). This definition must be replenished by two other elements, important in the context of eponymic meaning. The first one is populist rhetoric, expressed in, among others, exposed politics us-them, excessive linguistic emotionality, anti-elitism, and anti-intellectualism. The latter is a populist leader, who personating an utterer of the commons, constitutes “the most gracious way of authenticating and certifying their political role, coming to power which is arbitrary and unable to control in spite of democracy, and at the same time, assuring impunity to themselves” (Karwat 2006: 5)

The terms as mentioned above: ‘leadership’ and ‘populism’ constitute the basis of the analysis of the phenomenon focusing on the Italian political leaders. Its primary functions are to coapt the mechanisms of leadership formation and refer them to the phenomenon of populism. On this basis, two hypotheses have been formed. Firstly, despite the homogenous character of the Italian political culture, some distinctions in its creation by certain politicians can be noticed. Even though the leaders derive from various sides of the political scene, it appears that the offered direction of developmental or social changes is not the most critical *differentia specifica*, but so-called «fashion politics». Secondly, in times of populism, leadership is a subject to permanent evolution that is influenced by transformations of a way of practicing politics and new methods of communicating with the voter.

Since the research area for such formulated subject area remains extremely wide, it is necessary to confine to the most representative examples. Such figures are the three well-known Italian politicians: Silvio Berlusconi, Beppe Grillo, and Matteo Renzi. The analysis of their actions and interpretations in the context of the title terms will serve as a conceptual network co-created by the following categories: political system, leadership styles, political image, leadership competencies, media policy.

In the course of the analysis, the comparative method was adopted as the leading one. Its application in the space of one Italian political system allows to capture the differences between the examples of leadership discussed.

Italy – a case study

The aim of these considerations is the attempt to read the phenomenon of populism in the context of contemporary transformations characterizing the crisis of leadership. It is worth remembering that it is unreasonable to try to define populism as right-wing or left-wing. After all, as Margaret Canovan notes, populism “can be both one or the other – all depending on the combination of varieties that is currently under discussion” (Canovan 1981). This is an essential statement in the context of Italian political practice, so strongly marked in the last quarter of a century by the populist trends of different ideological provenance.

Although the phenomenon of ‘neopopulism’, strongly associated with economic processes, usually refers to such regions as Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, the categories describing it are also applicable to the Italian context (Grassi 2004; Patiño Aristizábal 2007). Through the gradual delegitimization of traditional political institutions, neopopulism establishes a new form of representation and political identification. The crisis of representation, the weakness of the democratic system and the elimination of the model of the welfare state have made it possible for the “revival” of populist leaders. Supported by a personal charisma, they appear like the providences of the savior of the nation, the defender of the lost social order.

The phenomenon of neopopulism described in Italy thus occurs in the early and polymorphic form. What is more, the analysis of the process of the power alternation of recent years allows distinguishing three variants of the mentioned phenomenon between which dynamic succession occurs. Marco Revelli describes them with three “forms” and three “figures”, and their names derive from the names of the “eponymous heroes”: Berlusconiism, Grillism, and Renziism (Revelli 2017: 120). Although there are many differences between them – the time of appearance, the scope of power and political culture, there are also common formal references. Three of them seem to be the most important.

First of all, all three political “forms” are marked by a strong personalization. Confirmation is even the name used, inseparably connected with the person who, de facto, invents and plays the main role on the political scene. Also the scope of personalization has been significantly increased through the process of mediatisation of the political arena (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). Secondly, all three politicians have introduced a kind of «disintermediation» mechanism. He points to a specific style of communication and action based on a direct relationship with the audience; because it is undefined, it allows to expand traditional social and

cultural areas, limited by the existing political forces. In this way, the addressees are all “people” (*populos*), while the style of the message is popular (where “pop” refers to mass culture). Thirdly, the creators of these neo-populist forms try to present themselves and their groupings in the context of rupture, i.e., differentiation from existing elites and the indication of a new beginning. This is served by distancing oneself from the past or present and stigmatizing the existing order. This feeling is reinforced by the use of rhetoric, full of hyperbole and promises without coverage.

The references mentioned above make all three forms of Italian neopopulism similar to each other. However, it is worth pointing out and discussing the features that differentiate them, which will allow to understand the specificity of the Italian political scene to a greater extent in relation to the leadership and accompanying populist rhetoric.

Silvio Berlusconi: «telepopulism»

When, in March 1994, Silvio Berlusconi won the election, he was a completely unknown politician, both on the national scene and on the international forum. The support obtained at the level of 47% was more surprising, much less that none of the polls, analytical centers or the means of social communication expected such a scenario two months before the elections². Other example is his personal success in the 1999 European election. In spite of the fact that 30% of voters did not go to the polls, he received record 6 million personal votes. Berlusconi transformed the election into a national referendum on his personal leadership (Mazzoleni 2000: 327).

The political provenance of the new parliamentarians who were candidates from the Berlusconi's lists was also unknown. The created political being constituted of all the features that political scientists describe as an instant party: a party born of nothing but the will of efficient leaders who coagulate heterogeneous forces around them, transforming them into a massive base (Pela 2004: 266). Also, the leader of the new formation in politics was an absolute

² The result given concerns the center-right bloc concentrated around S. Berlusconi and his Forza Italia. The alliance also included the Christian Democratic Center emerging from the Christian Democrats and two new parties - the Union for the Center and the Liberal Democratic Pole. In the southern regions, the coalition started under the name of the Good Government pole (together with the National Alliance), while in the northern regions - the Freedom Pole (along with the Northern League). In some constituencies, the center-right letters were supported by radicals from the Marco Pannelli list.

beginner: a billionaire and entrepreneur who never worked in public administration, nor was he a member of any party.

The Forza Italia party, despite having undergone an evolution at different times, was basically on the right side of the political scene, with strongly marked anti-etatism and economic liberalism. The party referred to the concept of ideological Christian Democrats – social Catholicism, the traditional family model, and strong anti-communism. It was looking for potential voters among representatives of liberal professions, artisans, and traders. At the same time, along with the expanding program offer, it sought to expand its coverage of the ever-wider political space – from the right, through the center, to the center-left. This resulted in generalism in formulating program content and ideological indistinctness. Behind the complex character adopted by Berlusconi's party there was primarily the calculation resulting from the application of political marketing techniques. The economic and adaptive character has proven to be an apt response to the demand from “electoral clients”; besides, this was in line with the political consortia at the time, cultural changes and changes in the sphere of the value of Italian society (Bokszczanin 2014: 108-109).

The construct of Forza Italia was characterized as a “centrist, liberal-people's party and social liberal”. However, it did not have anything from the traditionally understood party, i.e., the model for all the grand parties of the so-called First Republic. Most of the deputies elected from its lists were the heads of the Public Advertising Agency, which ran the election campaign. A new, qualitatively political formation emerged, reminiscent of the organization of the post-political era. Ideological content remains then secondary to the “packaging”, which consists of an image built using political marketing techniques. They are used to create needs and win voters (product consumers) (Józwiak-Di Marcantonio 2011).

Berlusconi himself personified two characteristics typical for neopopulism – robust personalization and absolute novelty, which he brought to the world of politics. Rhetoric complemented it, an example of which is the “message to the Italians”: a carefully directed speech in which a known press magnate announces the decision to “step down into politics”³.

³ “Italy is a country that I love. This is where my roots are, my hopes, my horizons. This is where I learned, from my father and through life, my entrepreneur's craft. This is where I also made a passion for freedom. I decided to fight and deal with public affairs because I do not want to live in a non-liberal country ruled by immature groups and people attached to the political past”. Concerning the famous speech of S. Berlusconi (26th January 1994) and the history of its origin: [Barbacetto 2014](#).

In Berlusconi's political creation, a unique feature can be noticed, which distinguishes it from the previously known varieties of populism, which were called “tele-populism” (technologically modified populism) by Pierre-André Taguieff (2003). This is the effect of including the television into the political activity, which modifies the relationship between the leader and the people, between politics and the public. Thereby, traditional representative democracy was combined with a “video-policy”, as it was described by Giovanni Sartori (1999; 1989). The role of the «new demagogue» was primarily to celebrate one’s individuality; towards the people he became a man of all promises, reaching every kind of society, like television. Although Berlusconi was not the first or the only one, he showed a unique ability to use television in a political game. His political message was present not only in the news or debates, but also in entertainment programs, soap operas or commercials. He became an outstanding «hero of teleculture», able to place his strategy of subversion in a threefold exaggeration – of the events, images, and individualization (Augé 2000: 128-129).

The last of the features of Berlusconi's populism is the promise of immediacy, which is accompanied by the rejection of the complexity of the decision-making processes envisaged by the constitution (Biorcio 2015: 72); This is an example of the speed and effectiveness of the new class of non-professional politicians and especially their leader (Orsina 2013: 171). Berlusconi’s “party-company”, as noted by M. Revelli, brought together a different galaxy that combined former conformism with a new rebellion, the reactionary conservatism of the formerly silent majority, and futurism of modernists without principles. Election engineering has created a geographically different logic with all existing populisms: in the north with the ethnopopulism of the Northern League of Umberto Bossi, in the south with post-fascist populism and the late qualunquism of Gianfranco Fini. In this way, despite such significant heterogeneity, a relatively stable consensus was guaranteed (Revelli 2017: 128).

Beppe Grillo: «cyber-populism»

Twenty years after Berlusconi’s decision to enter politics, a new type of neopopulism appeared on the Italian political scene. In February 2013, also unannounced and contrary to the expectations and with unexpected sizes, *Il Movimento 5 Stelle*⁴ recorded the electoral success.

⁴ In the first start of the parliamentary election, the Five Star Movement received 25% support to the Chamber of Deputies (109 seats) and 23% to the Senate (54 seats). In 2018, with 35% support, to both chambers – 227 seats and 111 seats respectively.

When the majority of the population expected the victory of the Party of Democratic of Pier Luigi Bersani, Beppe Grillo⁵ was placed in the spotlight.

Epiphany of the Grillo's movement is to a large extent the effect of indifference to the existing right-left division and traditionally expressed political culture: it is preferably a natural movement, rather than a political one, seeking support from each side of the political scene. He managed to gather nearly 40% support, both among employees and employers, while at the same time almost monopolizing the voices of young voters. As a result, he marginalized the role of television as an instrument of creating consensus and managing election preferences. The virtual network took its place as a new type of media world. In this way, the dominating role of declining Berlusconiism was taken over along with the innovative cyber-population, which allowed the emergence and expression of a new *populos* – “people of the network”. Modern technological solutions and applied rhetoric have allowed for revolutionary changes in the approach to politics. The technical possibility of direct democracy emerged: snapshot, remotely participative, integral, and even – in some respects – integrating. The network has become the basis for organizational techniques, enabling informal meetups or local gatherings, in which unfamiliar people participated thanks to using social networks.

Particularly noteworthy is the idea of Vaffanculo Day (*Fuck-off Day*), also known as V-Day⁶. This day served public mobilization for collecting signatures under the social initiative of changes in the existing electoral law. In this way, Grillo continued the *Clean Parliament* initiative, initiated in 2005 on his blog, demanding to ban sentenced people from contesting a seat the parliament, the term of office for parliamentarians (two legislatures) and modification of electoral law by introducing a preferential vote. The first V-Day took place on September 8, 2007, in many Italian cities and front of embassies abroad. More than 336,000 were collected at that time. Signatures, with the required 50,000 on a universal initiative, were described as a huge

⁵ At this point, one should also mention Gianroberto Casaleggio, co-founder of the Five Star Movement, which was referred to as the “guru”. In addition, he was the head of an IT and publishing company dealing, among internet marketing and blog administration of Beppe Grillo and Antonio di Pietro, known primarily as the prosecutor who conducted the investigation in the nineties of *Mani pulite*, which revealed the scale of corruption at the tops of power (*Tangentopoli*), cfr. Di Majo 2013; Mello 2013.

⁶ The name had a fourfold reference: 1) the Allied landing in Normandy during World War II, which symbolized the “invasion” of Italian citizens for bad politics; 2) the film V for Vendetta (its symbol was used in the logo of the Movement), often referred to in the context of the principles of political renewal; 3) shout “Fuck you” directed towards bad politics; 4) reference to the Roman numeral five.

success⁷. The movement was bonded mainly as an opposition, and the applied rhetoric was based on postulates of breaking and renewing, grew in importance. The term ‘grillism’ began to appear in the proper circulation (Serra 2007).

V2-Day was organized on April 25, 2008, and the goal was to collect signatures for projects of three abrogation referendums. The questions were to address the liquidation of the financing of publications from public funds, the press law and the Gasparri Act determining the government's powers in the spheres of radio and television. The initiative, organized under the slogan *Free information in a free country* was held on nearly five hundred sites in Italy and abroad. As a result, almost 1,300,000 signatures were collected. Together with the social referendum initiative they were then submitted to the Court of Cassation. As in the case of the first V-Day the whole event was broadcast by the private satellite station EcoTv.

As Carlo Freccero notes, Grillo is not only a political entrepreneur who first invested in the network – in a duet with Casaleggio⁸ (Casaleggio & Grillo 2016) – but the one who managed to connect new media with the old (Freccero 2013). It is a kind of media hub, able to manage his blog, also playing its role as a TV comedian, skilfully attracting the attention of the media. His verbal excesses or arrogance presented to political competitors have become an essential part of everyday news. He skilfully combines three types of activity: virtual in cyberspace and real among people, being an ancient means of socializing politics, and media on the front pages of the most widely read newspapers. In this way he sanctions the Manichean division between the "pure people" and the corrupt "political class"; in the name of the appeal directed directly to the sovereign people, the official political society is marginalized. The expression of this is the famous “*Arrendetevi!*” (“Give up!”) shouted on the eve of voting (Revelli 2017: 133).

The movement of the Five Stars was replaced by the horizontal right-left distinction with the vertical up-down scheme, citing its demonstrative transversality. Often, by evaluating the tone of the speech, he took on the role of the advocate of the people expropriated by the power of bureaucratic, financial and party oligarchs. Confirmation is a series of battles conducted during the birth of the Movement, which concerned ecological, pacifist, anti-authoritarian or participatory issues. The primary goals are still focused on activities for the direct democracy of

⁷ The date chosen referred to September 8, 1943 and the Proclamation of Badoglio, which was to influence the subsequent escape from the country of King Viktor Emanuel II and the “death of the fatherland” in the last years of the war.

⁸ B. Casaleggio died on 12 April 2016.

citizens, a universal type of social state, protection, and strengthening of the common and public good (basic income, investment protection for the school, state health) (Biorcio 2015: 105). Noteworthy, the ideological diversity present in the content of the electoral program in many points remains different and even contradictory to those that can be found in the parties or movements of the populist European right.

Matteo Renzi: «top-down populism»

Matteo Renzi is an example of one of the most daring careers in the political history of Italy. At the age of 19, he served as the secretary of the Florentine department of the Christian Democrat *Partito Popolare Italiano*, and ten years later he became the chairman of the province of Florence. At the age of 34, he was elected mayor of Florence. At the age of 39, being the head of the Democratic Party, Renzi became the head of the government, thus becoming the youngest prime minister in the history of Italy⁹.

The idea that accompanied Prime Minister Renzi was as follows: use populist measures and at the same time take over the undecided electorate. It resonated with the desire to move away from the rigid party structures, the worn-out political and institutional system for the model of governance, corresponding to the systemic balance and social order of the European Community. This brings to mind the action, as Mario Draghi put it, under the control of an “automatic pilot”, providing political balance and a veil for mass consent. The broad social base was created by populist rhetoric and transgressive legitimizing attitudes (“downstairs”) of politics consistent with the main ideas desired and dictated “upstairs”. Institutional instruments could also be used for this purpose. This is the sense of Renzi’s experiment and his “government populism”. It is a new type of populism that Marco Revelli (2017: 136) calls post-twentieth-century, post-ideological and post-democratic.

Against the background of contemporary neopopulists, Renzi differs from the classical approach – it is preferably a hybrid form: partly fighting and partly ruling. It also combines elements of both above-described Italian forms. In the model of «telepopulism» Berlusconi directly addressed the citizens, all using a television or other media, and multiplying promises to resolve almost all the problems which the other parties and their leaders did not even undertake.

⁹ He held The Prime Minister Office from February 22, 2014, to December 12, 2016. More on the political biography of M. Renzi, see his book: Renzi (2011; 2012; 2013; 2017).

In turn, using the rhetoric proved to be close to the anti-cast approach of Grillism: as *il Rottamazione*¹⁰ aggressively opposed adversaries in his party. The “old guard” was accused of misunderstanding the modernity, which was expressed in the clinging to left-wing ideas. Renzi demanded a total abandonment of his former identity in favour of the “New Party”, open to the external electorate, both centrist and right-wing. He promised the “National Party” in which he designed for himself the role of a strong leader. In this way, a new style was created: the Florentine in the service of pop-politics brought to the border of the aesthetic product (Revelli 2017: 137).

The main character of the political scene subordinated to its main character. Like an American sitcom: rolled shirt sleeves, always on the run, with a smartphone in hand, chatting like a teenager; with management meetings arranged for 7:00 in the morning; obscene phrases spoken frivolously, like *enfant terrible*. His first speech, as the head of government at the Senate, went down in history when he made the impression of a man preparing for “scrapping”: a hand in his pocket, talking over his shoulder, not looking at the auditorium, but at television cameras and the invisible audience “outside”, low substantive value. The whole scenography revealed the intention of omitting the institutional representatives and addressing directly to the wide public whom he considered his people. In this way he humiliated the first (declassified to the caste considered to be ballast and destined for liquidation), to give satisfaction to the other, winking at them communicatively (“*strizzare l’occhio*”). As a result, the head of the executive addressed the nation directly against the part of the legislation suitable for dismissal (Revelli 2017: 138).

Renzi’s example highlighted the presence of a new kind of populism in Italy, which emerged not from the margins, but from the very centre of power – not “from below” (from the people), but “from above” (from the government). Thus, the most significant disadvantages of the Italian political system were confirmed: the crisis of trust and the sluggishness of politicians, the crisis of representation and its institutions, the crisis of the party and the political class. Diagnosis is not just about style or communication; it refers to the genetic problem of institutional structures and the political imagination that surrounds them. This is the result of the repeated practice and several of its creators, the effect of the process initiated by the appointment

¹⁰ Rottamazione in Italian means ‘scrapping’. Such a nickname was given to Renzio, suggesting that from the very beginning his program was reduced – in simple terms – to one slogan: the history of all previous generation politicians should be scrapped as soon as possible.

of the technical government of Mario Monti, the explosion of the Five Star Movement, the re-election of Giorgio Napolitano, until its end with the government of Renzi (Revelli 2015).

Conclusion

In the face of the above analyses, a legitimate question about the reasons for the increase in the importance of populism in contemporary democratic systems arises. Two factors, according to Pippa Norris and Ronald F. Inglehart, seem to be particularly important: the economic insecurity and cultural backlash (Norris & Inglehart 2016). The first one concerns economic inequalities that also affects the electoral behaviour of citizens. This is mainly the result of changes taking place in post-industrial societies in the fields of economics, the labour market and within social structures. These changes are often accompanied by a definite trend towards increasing income and growing inequalities in wealth. It is based on the assumptions of the economy of knowledge, technological automation of work, departure from the manufactory industry, globalization processes (flow of labour, goods, citizens, and capital), weakening of existing ties and neoliberal politics. The sense of uncertainty accompanying these phenomena has aroused by old resentment towards social and political decision-makers. Thus, the persistent divisions are destabilizing: the number of unskilled workers is growing steadily, the unemployment rate, dependence on social benefits, rental of flats, incomplete families and the spotted suppressed white population living in areas where the majority are anti-inclusive immigrants; nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments are intensifying, which is why extremist parties and populist movements are gaining. Aspiring to the position of leaders, they accuse “those” (so-far governing) of the collapse of economic growth, loss of job and shrinking social security.

In turn, the presence of the second factor proves that the social reactions against the progressive cultural change are also responsible for the increase in the populist wave. This applies to the so-called silent revolution referring to the change in values that gave citizens a sense of security in the post-war period. With time, however, there has also been a shift towards post/material values such as cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, support for left-wing Libertarian parties (e.g., greens), human rights, gender equality, etc. The observed process was progressively moving towards continuous progress. Meanwhile, a new generation entering the stage, contesting progressive ideas and behaviours, revealed a desire to return to the state before which

rejected by the older generation. The younger have become more sensitive (and vulnerable) to populist rhetoric, which proposes a return to traditional values and behavioural patterns (Norris & Inglehart 2016).

These two, overlapping and at the same time, strengthening causes led to the emergence of new social divisions in Italy, for example, cosmopolitan liberals and populists facing the past and tradition. In turn, it has caused the emergence of new divisions in political parties, hitherto traditionally left-wing or right-wing (Gauchet 2017). Following the Taguieff classification, one can point to the bipolarity of Italian populism. On the one hand, the xenophobic identity-national pole, which, as a form of ethnonationalism, becomes an expression of the contestation of various varieties of progressive globalization – financial, cultural or communicative. On the other hand, there is a protest and social pole. While the former focuses on *ethnos*, the latter – on *demos* (Taguieff 2003: 177).

These processes directly influenced changes like leadership, creating new leaders on the Italian political scene. The differences between them are determined not so much by the direction or scope of reforms expected by society, but by personal style and applied rhetoric. Despite the fairly homogeneous character of Italian political culture, there are differences in the creation of leaders. This is confirmed by the conviction of Marco Tarchi, responding to the first of the hypotheses that Italy is a country of many populisms (Tarchi 2008). Their specifics are closely related to the most important actors of the Italian political scene in recent years, representing its different wings – Berlusconi, Grillo and Renzi.

The rise of populism causes the idea of leadership to constantly evolve which is a consequence of changes in the way that both the politics and the methods of communicating politicians with voters are practised. This conclusion confirms the second hypothesis. The distinct approach of leadership to populism has been further strengthened by the increased use of new social communication means. There is a visible phenomenon of the influence of media factors on populist movements, as well as populist movements on the media (Mazzoleni 2008: 59)¹¹. As a result, the crossroads of technology and social change have exerted and will continue to have a significant impact on the perception of policy in the future. In the context of an

¹¹ The comparison of populist phenomena confirms that the rise (and, in some instances, the fall) of populist leaders and movements is due to their ‘life-cycles’, what is affected by both the way the media portrayed their event and the success of their own media management strategy. Gianpietro Mazzoleni, analysing European populist phenomena, emits four separate phases of interaction: *ground-laying phase*, *insurgent phase*, *established phase*, *decline phase* (Mazzoleni 2008: 59-62).

apparent decline in the importance of almost all intermediate social and political structures (family, trade unions, parties), new technologies have asked *coup de grace* for all kinds of brokers. The «uberization» of politics has followed (Mény 2016: 22). The world in which Facebook, Twitter, Uber or TripAdvisor are increasingly important, shape social opinions and promote the exchange of experience, they allow direct contact between the “audience” and “actors”. As a result, more and more people are gaining the right to speak on the political forum; however, the dissemination of discourse is not always associated with its substantive value. The result is a change in leadership, the danger of populism falling short, which rarely sets high standards for itself (leaders) and its voters. Therefore, among the postulates to counteract the populist wave should lie a deepened reflection on such a model of democracy which will be in harmony with new threats, new technologies and new expectations of individuals and both small and large communities.

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