

**‘Little England Beats Great Britain’: Italian Media Coverage of the EU Referendum 2016**

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## **'Little England beats Great Britain': Italian Media Coverage of Brexit**

### **Abstract**

This chapter analyses the coverage of the UK Referendum to leave the European Union in the Italian press and a key broadcast political talk show, taking as its focus the changed context of the Italian political landscape with the rise of populist anti-European political movements from the Northern League to the various incarnations of Berlusconi's parties, to the more recent political formation of Five Star Movement, which has diminished the Italian people's traditional support of the European Union. In Italy, as it has been the case in other European countries, the press and media aligned to progressive parties of the left and centre-left camp have predominantly voiced their support to the Remain campaign, while their opposite for the right and centre right-parties and coalitions have supported the Brexit campaign.

### **Introduction**

Italy is one of the core countries of the founding members of the European Community, along with Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands and the then West Germany and, for the most part of its post-World War 2 history, has been a strong supporter of the European unification project. In the last two decades, however, with the rise of new political formations such as the *Lega Nord*, the entrance into the political arena of Silvio Berlusconi, and more recently with the establishment of the '*Movimento 5 Stelle*', MS5 henceforth (5 Stars Movement),

there has been a marked change and anti-European sentiments have become more widespread in the political culture as a whole.

This in turn has also affected the media coverage of European Union affairs and has steered the views of the Italian public towards a more negative reading of the European unification project. Other factors have also played a role in the change, especially monetary union, introduced in 2002, and the 'uncontrolled' exchange rate that has resulted, with twofold increased prices in goods and services (of course this was a national problem rather than a European one, as the same problem did not arise quite in the same way as in the other countries which introduced the Euro).

The referendum in 2016 about introducing constitutional reforms<sup>i</sup> promoted by the then Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi of the centre-left *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Left), on the heels of the Brexit referendum, which it lost (it was a simple yes and no referendum) was also largely reported as a verdict on the European Union and its future by social media (the favoured medium of communication of M5S) as well as much of the centre-right press; these media capitalised on the 'NO' to the reform and somewhat arbitrarily circulated the idea that Italy is now on course to call a referendum on the membership of the European Union in the same way as the UK has done. Alongside, on the left of the political spectrum, there is also a call to reform the democratic process within the European Union, to make it more accountable to the people of the individual countries and to combat policies of austerity.<sup>ii</sup>

The following chapter about the media coverage of the British referendum confirms that Italy is still a stronger supporter of the European Union than a country like the UK, albeit with some qualifications about the nature of its democratic process and

economic neoliberal policies, but not quite in the same measure as when I analysed the media coverage of the Maastricht Summit, more than a quarter of a century ago.<sup>iii</sup>

### **From Maastricht to Brexit**

Since the establishment of the European Union with the Maastricht Treaty signed in February 1992 (the summit took place in December 9-10, 1991), the Union has forged ahead with many of its commitments, from the establishment of the Schengen Agreement, which abolished the internal borders between the signatory countries (currently 26 countries), to the introduction of the Eurozone in 1999, followed the currency itself on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2002 (currently 19 countries) and the gradual enlargement to include countries of the former Eastern Bloc; the European Union has currently 28 members, soon to be 27, minus the UK.

The UK, ever since it joined in 1973, has been a 'reluctant partner'; this was probably most visible during the Thatcher government, with its endless demands for fees rebate to the UK economic contribution, still a key factor in 2016 during the Brexit campaign. The Maastricht summit, which media coverage I analysed in depth in 1991, comparatively with the Italian media coverage, not only confirmed the hypothesis that anti-European feelings were circulated and reinforced regularly in news broadcasts across all the main terrestrial channels (then BBC, ITV and Channel 4) but that these were pitted against a 'mythical' national unity, which were again debunked in the Brexit referendum results, with Scotland and the North of Ireland voting for remaining in Europe. This theme of the division within, which I will discuss below, was definitely taken up in the Italian media coverage.

On the other hand Italian news broadcast coverage of the Maastricht summit (then the three main public service channels, Rai1, Rai2 and Rai3) revealed a total support for the Treaty and its outcome. In that study I had argued that the reasons behind this strong pro-European stance was based on the fact that Italy was a relatively young nation-state and that, as argued by Paul Ginsborg it had undergone a process of '*nazionalizzazione debole*' (weak nationalism) (Ginsborg, 1994: 643-644) and hence looked to Europe for its identity. Another argument was tied to the fact that Italy could only function properly as a state if it looked to a supra political body like the European Union (this is still the case today). Fast forward 25 years, and 28 countries later: the unquestioning Europeanism long embedded in Italian political culture and media institutions alike has undergone some important transformations, without, however, changing entirely the generally pro-European stance. These will become visible in the analysis below of the media coverage of the UK referendum to exit the European Union.

### **The rise of populism: 'anti-politics' made in Italy**

Right-wing populism is on the rise and the Brexit campaign has been a good example with its insistence on immigration, tightening of borders, national control and presumed anti-politics, normally dressed up as a criticism of the ruling elite (the paradox of course is that these leaders of anti-politics themselves generate from those same elites). This is a phenomenon that has not been exclusive to European countries, as we have seen with the election of Trump in 2016 and the ongoing rule in Russia of Putin; two leaders who undoubtedly make a perfect ideological fit with political populism. In Italy, in recent years we have seen this phenomenon fully

characterised in figures and parties like Umberto Bossi and his Northern League and Silvio Berlusconi and his party, Forza Italia and now Popolo della libertà (Ruzza and Balbo, 2013). The 'anti-politics' of the Italian populist parties have always had an anti-European core which, however, has only properly found support after the financial crisis and the dire economic effects of these on all European nations, but especially the Mediterranean countries, Italy included.

In 2013, in the same vein of anti-politics, the organisation, led by the political satirist/comedian Beppe Grillo, and his M5S organisation, run in the national election and won an unprecedented percentage of the vote, over 25% and nine million voters. This new political formation is the latest development in a political culture which has seen enormous transformations in political support for traditional centre and centre-left parties caused by the upheaval of the corruption scandals of the 80s and early 90s. These have resulted in either the parties' restructuring or in their complete demise, as for the Christian Democratic Party, which ruled Italy for most of the post-war years right up to the 80s and the smaller but influential Socialist Party which governed in coalition, alongside many other parties, right up to the '*Tangentopoli*' (kickbacks) trials of the early 90s. These parties and many others of the centre, and centre-left, were significant in the Italian relation to the European unification project as they were largely supportive as well as promoters of a federalist idea of Europe.

Many studies have recently concentrated on the phenomenon of populism although none have dealt in particular with its relationship to the European Union, but what has become evident from the media and post-Brexit, is that most countries have now substantial political populist elements which have made their core objective the withdrawal of their countries from the European Union. These have also sought

reinforcement from one another in the run up to their national elections and referendums, including Brexit. Photo opportunities have been displayed across the media, between Nigel Farage, Beppe Grillo, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini (the current Northern League's leader and Geert Wilders, in an unprecedented show of anti-European 'solidarity' (France presidential elections in May 2017 will be the latest of such test with the running of the Front National Marine Le Pen as a candidate).

Since the introduction of the word composed by the initial of Britain and the word exit many countries have followed suit and much European media coverage has adopted this linguistic shorthand to indicate the trend fuelled by right-wing populist parties to call on referendums to decide about membership of the European Union. Italy is no exception and the word 'Italexit' has appeared in many articles covering the implications of Brexit for Italy anti-European parties, but the political picture is far more complicated in Italy as contradictory messages about Europe have circulated especially from the newer political formation M5S.

### **The Italian press and Brexit**

Italy does not have a tabloid press and celebrity, entertainment and lifestyle news remain largely consigned to weeklies and monthlies. The only available dailies which are exclusively leisure-oriented are the sport papers which, on Mondays (following the weekend sports fixtures), exceed the readership of most of the national newspapers. It is also the case that newspaper readership is low compared to other European countries; recent figures from the FIEG (Federazione Italiana Editori Giornali) of 58 papers, most of them regional (reflecting the continuing regional character of Italian political culture), reveal a readership of over four million, within a

total population of just over 60 million, with the paper copies having a much larger readership still in comparison to the digital version,<sup>iv</sup> in spite of increase digitisation of Italian society and with nearly 40 million active Internet users.<sup>v</sup> It is, however, important to consider that the main national papers, which have a combined readership of nearly half of the above figure, are information-heavy papers with politics, national and international, heading the selection of news values; a trend that can be traced back to the origins of the press in Italy following national unification in 1861 (Sorrentino, 1995:27).

The two national papers with the largest readership are *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*, respectively of the centre and centre-left of the political spectrum. The third largest is *La Stampa*, the Turin-based paper that has a national distribution, with still a majority ownership of the Agnelli family (founder of the FIAT car industry), also aligned to the political centre. There are several other papers, with a much smaller readership, across all the political spectrum, from left to right and only one newspaper still aligned to a political party, *L'Unità*, formerly the organ of the Italian Communist Party, founded by Antonio Gramsci in 1924, now *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Left).

The British referendum received a wide coverage across all the daily press in Italy, as well as being the main news item on the front page of all of them the day after the result was announced. The main frame for all the centre, centre-left and left papers was one of support for the Remain camp, however, within these there were some important differences in the argumentation and reasons for the support. The right-wing press frame was predictably supportive of the Brexit camp, but again with some distinctions among different titles.



Similarly in a content analysis of three major newspapers in 13 European countries, along with Russia and the US, undertaken by the European Journalism Observatory in the week which followed the referendum found that the majority of the press analysed was critical of the UK referendum to leave the European Union, with the exception of Russia. For Italy, a substantive sample of 249 articles was considered from the two major papers mentioned above (*The Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*) and from the right-wing paper *Il Giornale* (owned by Berlusconi's media and publishing companies, respectively Fininvest and Mondadori). As in my qualitative analysis of the coverage of Brexit, Italy was found to be in line with most of the European press in its pro-remain trend, with the exception of Berlusconi's paper, which the study described as having some of 'the most enthusiastic pro-Brexit coverage'.<sup>vi</sup> This is not surprising given the ownership of the paper and the anti-European stance taken by the various coalition governments formed by Berlusconi's party<sup>vii</sup> with either the *Lega Nord* and/or former *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance) in the last twenty years right up to his last one, which ended in 2011.

In the analysis of the press coverage of Brexit I picked out three dominant themes: the economic fallout, with corollary articles about the role of the European Central Bank; immigration and the openly racist campaign of the Leave camp, including extensive coverage of the killing of MP Jo Cox; populism and the election constituency in the UK and the division in the vote.

### **The economic impact of Brexit**

Many articles in Italian papers concentrated on the economic impact of the referendum, both in relation to the UK, Italy, the EU, and even in international

relations. The 24<sup>th</sup> of June, the day immediately after the referendum and the victory of Brexit, the markets' negative response is covered in all the papers, left and right, albeit with different concerns. In the same vein, the sterling immediate loss of 10% value against the Euro is also mentioned across all the papers. Metaphors of doom abound in the coverage of the economic implications of Brexit as well as in other areas of analysis, especially on the political and economic future of the European Union as a whole.

*La Repubblica* dedicates many articles to the economic fallout of the UK referendum, concentrating on the effects of the sterling fall in value against the euro but also how the latter is also under pressure as a result of this outcome, and how the ECB (the European Central Bank) is fronting this crisis. This newspaper has various local sections, dependent on regional distribution, alongside the national one;<sup>viii</sup> these concentrate on questions of the effects on the local economy, one example is the article from the Emilia Romagna section: '*Brexit Emilia tutti i timori per l'export*' (Brexit, Emilia, all the fears for export) as this region has in London one of the biggest markets with a sale of products to the tune of 3.5 billion euro. This type of coverage is replicated, however, in all the various regions covered, from Sicily to Piedmont.

In particular, *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* also carry many articles on the financial markets post-referendum with discussions about its effect on the '*Borsa di Milano*' (Milan's Stock Exchange); similar language is used across the two papers, with the use of the word 'panic' in all the titles and subtitles ('panico borse' and 'panico in borsa', respectively). Right-wing papers like *Libero* and *Il Giornale* also adopt similar titles ('Borse a picco'- Sinking Stock Exchanges, in *Il Giornale*) but the analysis of the economic outcome in both papers, especially in *Libero*, veers towards

a connection and a prediction about potential future developments, namely the requests of similar referendums on the part of many countries in Europe.<sup>ix</sup>

*L'Unità*, two days after the referendum, dedicates its first 15 pages to the British referendum with extensive coverage of many related issues. Its front page (25.06.16, see figure) with its 'Italianate' English title 'Disintegration Day' also carries in its subtitle about the collapse of the markets, with indexes down on all the financial centres of Europe, coupled with a political comment about '*venti di secessione*' (secessionist winds), including an interview with David Martin, the Labour leader in Scotland on page five. The contextualisation of the economic impact of Brexit, receives further in-depth coverage with an interview with the French economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi: 'It's a no to austerity. If the EU does not change, soon other Brexits'. In another economic-related article in *L'Unità*, there is also a mention of the worst collapse in the value of sterling since Black Wednesday in 1992. This kind of economic contextualisation is typical of the left press in Italy.

### **Brexit and immigration**

Immigration was the dominant theme of the Leave campaign in Britain and the openly xenophobic campaign of the conservative press, both tabloids and broadsheets, was the basis for many critical articles in the centre-left and left press in Italy in the run up to the referendum. With the results in, and the victory of the Brexit vote, the discussion in the press changed to the theme of the status of immigrants in the UK and conversely many articles also mentioned the status of UK nationals in the EU and in Italy. Significantly, I saw more articles on the implications for the UK nationals post-referendum in the Italian press than the in the British one

(from a sample of all the British and Italian papers on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2016, two days after the referendum). On this day, *La Stampa*, besides carrying more than one article with apocalyptic titles and subtitles: '*Brexit, in 24 ore il mondo è cambiato*' (Brexit, in 24 hours the world has changed); '*Brexit adesso si rischia uno choc*' (Brexit, the risk of a shock), it also followed it up with articles about immigrants' fear of having to leave London (the metropolitan-centred view of immigration is obvious here as if all immigrants resided in London) and conversely UK citizens having to leave the EU, and topics relating to pension, work and visa status for either groups: '*Molti stranieri temono di dover lasciare Londra e molti britannici di dover lasciare l'Ue*' (Many foreigners fear having to leave London and many British people to leave the EU).

A large part of the coverage in the press, but also a theme within the talk show and broadcasts news analysed below, concentrated on the effects of Brexit on Italian immigrants in the UK. Although Italy, in recent years, has transformed from an emigration to an immigration country<sup>x</sup> (Cesareo, 2014), there remains still a substantial population exit, especially for the younger generation. A report from the Migrants Foundation for 2015 tell us that there is still a constant trickle, if not a flow as in previous emigration waves (Italy, at least right up to the late 60s was still exporting manual labour migrants to mainly European countries, principally Belgium, Germany and France): 107.000 Italians, with the largest proportion in the 18-34 year range, many professionals, have left the country for European destinations, the highest number went to Germany, followed by the UK, Switzerland and France.<sup>xi</sup> Another important element of this report is a change in the provenance of the Italian emigrants, and although the majority are still alighting from the south of Italy, increasingly there is also substantial numbers from the industrialised north.

Paradoxically *Il Giornale*, which as mentioned in the study above, was predominantly pro-Brexit, relays a news carried on social media about an Italian waiter being told to go home and leave his work to a British person ('*ora ITALIANO te ne torni a casa così un britannico prende il tuo posto*'). He is emphatically described as the 'first victim of Brexit' (24.06.2016). Very little is verified about this story and is just taken off a Facebook site. This is one of the few examples which follow a more 'tabloid' logic in the reporting of the consequences of Brexit on Italian immigrants. *La Repubblica*, in a more serious discussion in its Palermo edition, also covers the immigration question, specifically in relation to Sicily: 'Quei ventimila siciliani "prigionieri" della Brexit' (Those twenty thousand Sicilians 'prisoners' of Brexit), who the article argue 'feel somewhat disoriented' as to what the future holds (25.06.2016).

### **Populism, 'anti-politics' and the Brexit voter**

The left press concentrated many articles on the reasons Brexit won in Labour heartlands. The three left-leaning newspapers, *La Repubblica*, *Il Manifesto* and *L'Unità* dedicated a number of articles to a more serious analysis of the reasons for the working class vote for Brexit. The themes ranged from the rise of the right, populist politics and the economic consequences of neoliberal ideology. These were also linked to a shared trajectory in Italy where working class vote has partially moved away from left parties towards populist organisations, already discussed above such as the Northern League and M5S.

*Il Manifesto* published articles in translation by various English commentators, one by Karel Williams: '*Perchè la working class ha votato per il leave*' (Why the working

class has voted for leave, 01.07.16) delves in-depth into the socio-economic reasons for the working class vote for Brexit; Williams insists on the paradoxical case of the Brexit's slogan of taking back control, when in reality working class people have already lost control of their lives. This kind of in-depth class analysis is rarely available in the press in the UK; certainly *Il Manifesto* is not a large circulation newspaper but it is not minuscule either at nearly 40.000 copies.<sup>xii</sup> Many other articles in *Il Manifesto* are serious pieces of journalism, where connections are made between populist politics and the vote for Brexit. In particular it gives much space to the different positions within countries of the UK. Two examples, before the referendum and one after, underline these: '*Belfast per il «remain», o quasi*' (Belfast for Remain, nearly, 21.06.16); '*Brexit divide il Regno unito*' (Brexit divides the United Kingdom, 26.06.16), the second article has an in-depth discussion about the meeting that took place between May and the leaders of Wales, North of Ireland and Scotland, especially about their joint opposition to a hard Brexit.

This discussion is also taken up in articles about the death of the MP Jo Cox, which again received extensive coverage in the Italian press as well as on television broadcasts; in the article '*Dove vai Inghilterra?*' (Where are you going England?, 25.06.16), a consideration is given to the rise of extreme right-wing ideologies and how they are appropriated by disturbed individuals. However, as I have seen in other such coverage, the Italian press tends to favour political explanations over psychological ones. (Cere, Jewkes and Ugelvik, 2016).

In a similar vein, many articles in *L'Unità* discuss the new 'anti-politics' of populism concentrating particularly on its basis in Italy, with a rather extravagant title: '*Gli eurosciacalli nostrani guidati dalle capriole di Grillo*' (The homegrown euro jackals lead by Grillo's somersaults, 25.06.16), although the article itself is a very serious

consideration of the impossibility under the present Italian constitutional rules to call a referendum of the kind called in the UK. M5S is discussed, along with its many contradictory messages about staying or leaving in Europe, as well as the *Lega Nord* and yet another new right-wing formation '*Polo Sovranista*' which incorporates *La Destra* and *Azione Nazionale* (all remnants of fascist parties), which are openly anti-European. *La Repubblica* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*<sup>xiii</sup> also published a number of articles pre- and post-Brexit about the populist trajectory of contemporary politics, especially in relation to the home-grown movements like the Northern League and M5S.

### **'Porta a Porta' political talk show: the 'English' myth extended**

All Italian television news on the public service three channels (Rai, Radiotelevisione italiana) had as their first item the results of the Brexit referendum. Similarly, the commercial channels (Berlusconi's 3 channels and LA7) had extensive news coverage of the Brexit results and its implications. In addition, two of the Rai channels Rai1 and Rai 3, had special programmes dedicated to the referendum; the first *Porta a Porta* (Door to Door), a weekly fixture of Rai1 schedule, on the same night of the referendum, which I will discuss in details below and the '*TG 3 speciale Brexit*' on the following night (24 giugno 2016). Also, on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the independent commercial channel, LA7, dedicated a special programme to the coverage of the results of the referendum.<sup>xiv</sup>

Nearly two million Italian viewers watched the political talk show *Porta a Porta* (Door to Door) on the evening of the UK referendum with the title '*La lunga notte di Brexit*' (The long night of Brexit). This programme is a long standing feature of Rai1's

schedule, led by its equally longstanding conservative host Bruno Vespa. It was an extended programme, which as the title suggests, broadcast well into the night, lasting over three hours and ending short of the final result, which turned the ongoing evening prediction of the victory of the Remain vote (visually blown up in percentages as choreographic background to the show). One of the main characteristics of the programme is usually the long list of guests of politicians and various social actors across the political spectrum. On this occasion, guests also alighted from the economic and media world.

I have chosen to discuss *Porta a Porta* here as it is an example 'against the grain' of the Italian coverage of the UK referendum and a perfect illustration of 'performing talk' (Haarman, 1999: 1), a mix of politics and entertainment, and the closer example of 'tabloidization' of politics in Italy. The other reasons for looking at this political talk show in particular, is that it typifies a peculiarly Italian cultural conception of the UK, based on the myth that the UK (read England) is a superior country (and friendly to Italy). Micossi and Perissich (2016) have recently argued that Italy has always been a supporter of the UK membership of the European project (unlike the French). They also added that this support is motivated by two factors: one 'a long tradition of friendship that, with the exception of the Second World War, goes back to the UK's support for the *Risorgimento*' and two, somewhat more instrumental 'that Italy hoped that the UK could provide a welcome balance to the dominance of the Franco-German partnership' (Micossi and Perissich 2016: 2). Needless to say successive British governments never paid much attention to Italy's sympathy and support: 'Despite several attempts on the Italian side, this strategy has always led to disappointment; Britain, despite some polite noises, never really took any notice.' (*ibid.*: 2).



This show is very distant from the journalistic culture which produced the Brexit coverage discussed above in the press, nonetheless, sections of the show followed some of the same themes: for example on the topic of immigration, the economic impact, the death of the MP Jo Cox, the 'reluctant' European partner, and somewhat surprisingly, a heated discussion about the internal conflict within the conservative party. The treatment, however, was very different, partly due to the nature of the interaction between political guests from opposing parties - these ranged from members of the leading party in the present coalition government (*Partito Democratico*)<sup>xv</sup> to a number of representatives from the opposition - and the organisation of disagreements, or rather the lack of it, the disregard of turn taking and 'extended disagreement sequences' (Diani, 1999: 149) which often strayed from the Brexit referendum itself and into the ongoing problems of Italian governance (with a particularly excruciating sycophantic comment about the health of Berlusconi by a panel member from his party, Renato Brunetta, and no action from the part of the host to stop it).

The myth-making exercise which circulates in Italian culture about the UK and England in particular (in Italy as elsewhere, these two terms often stand as one and the same, without distinction much to the chagrin of Scotland and Wales) alluded to above were interspersed between sections of talks and external report items; a reporter was stationed in an east London pizzeria. These various light 'breaks' incorporated performances by a pipe band in tartan uniforms (it is actually an existing Roman pipe band); a lookalike Beatles band (whose music was rather good even if the wigs weren't) followed by the 'Beatles story', a visual item 'studded' with archival material from the sixties; a dubious account of the role of Shakespeare in British culture and the celebration of the four hundred years anniversary of his death

falling precisely in the year of the referendum, albeit with a humorous comment about the indecisiveness of one the famous lines in Hamlet: 'to be or not to be...in Europe'. It all came across as rather stereotypical and incongruous and with a slight subordinate and nostalgic note of Italy 'loosing' this special, original and superior friend as well as a member partner of the European Union. *Porta a Porta* fits rather neatly into the categories that Dahlgren introduced as 'Newer [TV] formats' and especially the third category, that of 'infotainment' (1995: 54-55); ultimately it falls short of communicating an informed message about the political and economic implications of Brexit for the UK, Europe or Italy.

## **Conclusion**

The title of this chapter '*Little England batte Gran Bretagna*' ('Little England beats Great Britain', 24.06.16), is a clear reference to the way people of the different nations within the UK voted, but also less openly about the 'inward looking' stance of parts of English society. It is penned by the *Corriere della Sera*'s London correspondent, Beppe Severgnini, inside the Reform Club<sup>xvi</sup> where he is based along with other foreign correspondents on the ground. The article, undoubtedly pro-remain, is couched in a discussion about an institution and its building which purports to represent the best of Britain: democracy, progressive liberal values and tolerance. Counter to that is what he describes as the '*perfida*' (perfidious, perhaps better translated as vicious) campaign of the Leave vote about immigrants; he goes on to argue that the United Kingdom is no longer a super power, but rather a middle size power that knows how to do some things well, but clearly not others, such as

calling this referendum. A very different tone to the one described above in the talk show.

Alongside the lesson in history and architecture about the Reform Club, which does not appear directly relevant, the overall message is that the UK is not so much leaving, as running away: '*Il Regno Unito scappa...sbattendo la porta*' (The United Kingdom runs away...and slams the door). A similar title '*La Piccola Inghilterra*' (Little England) also appears in the front page title of *L'Unità*, a couple of days later on the 26.06.16, and in the following article references are made to isolationism and xenophobic tendencies of little England.

Two days after the Brexit referendum an opinion poll asked Italians whether they still trusted the European Union and the figure was below 40% compared to the earlier one in 2010 of 55%. Nonetheless, a poll which asked the more specific question of whether to stay or withdraw from the European Union, the results were somewhat different perhaps reflecting the Machiavellian character<sup>xvii</sup> of the opinion poll: 53% were in favour of staying in and 39% to leave, the rest don't know. The majority of the press coverage seems not reflect the first figure above of 40% in its predominant support for Remain, perhaps underlining the fact that the press is only read by a small section of the population. Overall the coverage was serious, although somewhat apocalyptic in tone. On the other hand, the political talk show, resorted to a form of political and cultural populism which left unclear many issues into the how and why the British people voted against their interest.

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<sup>i</sup> The referendum called by Matteo Renzi to introduce a reform of the Italian constitution is a complex process which can't be described here in details. Suffice to say that it was equally opposed by the right as well as some the left political forces in Italy. In one of its prime aims, which was to abolish the second house (The Senate), it was generally perceived by constitutionalists, as well as the more informed general public, as a move to concentrate powers in the first house (*La Camera*, the Chambers of Deputies) and the Prime minister's hands.

<sup>ii</sup> Along the lines of European Alternatives, <https://ea10.eu/it/>; or DiEM25, <https://diem25.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> See my publication in the bibliography, Cere, 2001.

<sup>iv</sup> Federazione Italiana Editori Giornali, <http://www.fieg.it/> (accessed 13.03.2017).

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.digitalpr.mobi/digital-in-2017-tutti-i-numeri-del-digitale-in-italia/> (accessed 22.02.17.)

<sup>vi</sup> <http://en.ejo.ch/latest-stories/will-kill-us-make-us-stronger-europes-media-covered-brexite> (accessed 8.03.2017).

<sup>vii</sup> Berlusconi's party has undergone many different incarnations; the party in his fourth and last term in government was named *Il popolo della libertà* (2008-2011), formerly called *Forza Italia* (also a national football slogan, loosely translatable as Go on Italy).

<sup>viii</sup> *La Repubblica* is a national paper which is printed in ten different local editions: Bari, Bologna, Firenze, Genova, Milano, Napoli, Palermo, Parma, Roma e Torino.

<sup>ix</sup> The title is a bit odd as it mentions 32 countries, clearly including some of the candidates in line to join: '*Effetto domino, l'Europa è spacciata? Le 32 bombe che la cancelleranno*' (Domino effect, is Europe a goner? The 32 bombs that will erase it).

<sup>x</sup> The report by the Fondazione ISMU (Iniziativa e studi sulla multiethnicità) traces the migrations flows into Italy of the last two decades. According to the report, the immigrant population of Italy has grown from 750.000 to five millions. The report also claims that Italy is no longer an emigration country but its opposite; see Cesareo, V. (ed.), *Twenty years of migrations in Italy: 1994-2014*, McGraw-Hill Education, Milano 2014.

<sup>xi</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2016/10/06/rapporto-migrantes-emigrati\\_n\\_12370826.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2016/10/06/rapporto-migrantes-emigrati_n_12370826.html) (accessed 15.03.2017).

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<sup>xii</sup> To give an idea, it is worth considering that it has a circulation four times larger than the British Communist Party paper, the Morning Star.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Il Fatto Quotidiano* is a relatively new left leaning daily established in 2009. Its current director, Marco Travaglio, has written extensively on corruption scandals in Italy, especially in relation to Berlusconi.

<sup>xiv</sup> There is no space in this chapter to discuss all of these programmes in detail, but these 'speciali' were very much in line with the rest of the press in Italy, which was in favour of the Remain argument. The third channel of the Italian public service broadcast, Rai3, has a left leaning political allegiance, unlike Rai1.

<sup>xv</sup> The guests on the programme were: Beatrice Lorenzin, Health Minister; Renato Brunetta, President of Forza Italia deputies in parliament; Barbara Lezzi, from M5S, Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Foreign Department for the Senate, Giulio Tremonti, Gruppo Autonomie and Lega Nord; Mario Orfeo, Director of Tg1, Alberto Baban, President of Small Industry, Confindustria; Giovanni Sabatini, Director General ABI (Italian Banking Association); Luca Barbareschi, Gustavo Piga, Professor Political Economy, Tor Vergata University, Rome, Gianluca Verzelli, Deputy Director Akros Bank.

<sup>xvi</sup> The Reform Club is named after the Great Reform Act of 1832 which modified the electoral system to allow the vote to small landowners, tenant farmers, and shopkeepers and all male property owners; this of course still excluded working man (women were to wait far longer for the vote).

<sup>xvii</sup> The 55% was reached with two qualifications to the question: one, which stated that is better to stay in as Italy is weaker in comparison to the UK (24%) and two, it is more helpful to stay in for Italy (29%), reported in L'Unità, 26.06.16.