

'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 the EU Referendum 2016

Rinella Cere

Introduction

Italy is one of the core founding members countries of the European Economic Community (EEC), along with Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the then West Germany; and, for most of its post-Second World War 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 (Five Stars Movement), henceforth M5S, 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 affected media coverage of European Union (EU) 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

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role in the change, especially monetary union, introduced in 2002, and the ‘uncontrolled’ exchange rate that resulted in twofold increases in the prices of goods and services (of course this was a national problem rather than a European one, as the same problem did not arise in quite the same way in the other countries which introduced the euro).

The EU referendum 2016 followed hard on the heels of the December 2016 Italian referendum on constitutional reform promoted by the then Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of the centre-left Partito Democratico (Democratic Party). That referendum had been called to introduce a reform of the Italian constitution and, while it was a complex process which cannot be described in detail here, suffice it to say that it was opposed both by the right and some of the left-wing 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, or Chamber of Deputies) and the Prime Minister’s hands. In the event, Renzi lost (it was a simple yes/no referendum), but this referendum was also largely reported as a verdict on the EU and its future by social media (the favoured medium of communication of M5S) as well as by much of the centre-right press; these media capitalized on the ‘No’ to the reform and somewhat arbitrarily circulated the idea that Italy was now on course to call a referendum on membership of the EU in the same way as the United Kingdom (UK) has done. Alongside this, on the left of the political spectrum, there was also a call to reform the democratic process within the EU in order to make it more accountable to the people of the individual countries and to combat policies of austerity, along the lines of movements such as European Alternatives (<https://ea10.eu/it/>) or DiEM25 (<https://diem25.org/>).

The following chapter examining Italian media coverage of the British EU referendum in 2016 confirms that Italy is still a stronger supporter of the EU than a country like the UK, albeit with some qualifications about the nature of its democratic processes and neoliberal economic policies, but not quite in the same measure as when I analysed media coverage of the Maastricht summit (Cere 2001).

from **m**aastricht to ‘**b**rexite’

Since its establishment with the Maastricht Treaty signed in February 1992 (the summit took place on 9–10 December 1991), the EU has forged ahead with many of its commitments, from the establishment of the Schengen

Agreement, which abolished internal borders between the signatory countries (currently 26), to the introduction of the eurozone in 1999, followed by the currency itself on 1 January 2002 (currently 19 countries) and the gradual enlargement to include countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The EU currently has 28 members, soon to be 27 with the departure of 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 rebates to the UK's economic contribution, still a key factor in 2016 during the Brexit (Britain's exit from the EU) campaign. In 1991, I compared the UK and Italian media coverage of the Maastricht summit. In doing so, it not only confirmed the hypothesis that anti-European feelings were circulated and reinforced regularly in news broadcasts across all the main UK terrestrial channels (then BBC, ITV and Channel 4), but also that these were pitted against a 'mythical' national unity, which was again debunked in the 2016 EU referendum results with Scotland and Northern Ireland voting for remaining in Europe. This theme of internal division, which I will discuss below, was definitely taken up in Italian media coverage.

As against this, Italian broadcast news coverage of the Maastricht summit (then provided by the three main public service channels, Rai1, Rai2 and Rai3) revealed total support for the Treaty and its outcome. In that study I had argued that the reasons behind this strong pro-European stance were based on the fact that Italy was a relatively young nation state and that, as argued by Paul Ginsborg (1994: 643–644), it had undergone a process of 'nazionalizzazione debole' (weak national identity formation) 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-national body like the EU (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, entirely changing the generally pro-European stance. This will become evident in the analysis below, which examines the media coverage of the UK's 2016 EU referendum and the Brexit result.

the rise of PoPulism: 'anti-Politics' made in Italy

Right-wing populism is on the rise and the Brexit campaign was a good example of this with its insistence on immigration, tightening of borders, national control and presumed anti-politics, normally dressed up

as criticism of the ruling elite (the paradox of course is that the leaders of anti-politics themselves emerge 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, the ongoing rule in Russia of Putin and more recently the referendum victory of Erdoğan in Turkey, three leaders who undoubtedly make a perfect ideological fit with political populism. In Italy, in recent years we have seen this phenomenon fully characterized by figures and parties like Umberto Bossi and his Northern League, and Silvio Berlusconi and his party, formerly Forza Italia (also a national football slogan loosely translatable as 'Go on Italy') and now Il Popolo della libertà (The People of Freedom) (Ruzza and Balbo 2013). The 'anti-politics' of the Italian populist parties has always had an anti-European core which, however, only properly found support after the financial crisis and the dire economic effects of this on all European nations, but especially the Mediterranean countries, Italy included.

In 2013, in the same vein of anti-politics, the organization led by the political satirist/comedian Beppe Grillo and his M5S movement ran in the national elections and won an unprecedented share of the vote, over 25% and nine million votes. 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 1980s and early 1990s. These have resulted either in the parties' restructuring or in their complete demise, as was the case for the Christian Democratic Party which ruled Italy for most of the post-war years right up to the 1980s, and the smaller but influential Socialist Party which governed in coalition, alongside many other parties, right up to the *Tangentopoli* (kick-backs) trials of the early 1990s. These parties and many others of the centre and centre-left were significant players in Italy's relationship with 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 has dealt in particular with its relationship to the EU. What has become evident, however, from the media 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 EU. These have also sought reinforcement from one another in the run-up to their national elections and referendums, including Brexit. Photo opportunities have been relayed across the media involving

Nigel Farage, Beppe Grillo, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini (the current Northern League leader) and Geert Wilders, in an unprecedented show of anti-European 'solidarity' (France's presidential elections in May 2017 were the latest of such tests with Marine Le Pen of the Front National running as a candidate).

Since the introduction of the neologism made up of the initial letters 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 for referendums to decide about membership of the EU. Italy is no exception and the word 'Italexit' has appeared in many articles covering the implications of Brexit for Italian anti-European parties, but the political picture is far more complicated in Italy as contradictory messages about Europe have circulated especially since the more recent emergence of the political formation M5S.

the italian Press and the eu referendum 2016

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; 2017 figures from the Federazione Italiana Editori Giornali (FIEG) of 58 papers, most of them regional (reflecting the continuing regional character of Italian political culture), reveal a readership of over 4 million from a total population of just over 60 million, with the paper copies still having a much larger readership than the digital versions, in spite of the increased digitization of Italian society and with nearly 40 million active Internet users (Soluzione Group 2017). It is, however, important to consider that the main national titles, 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, 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*, a Turin-based

paper with a national distribution, still majority-owned by the Agnelli family (founder of the FIAT car manufacturing company), also aligned to the political centre. There are several other papers, with a much smaller readership, across the entire 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 known as the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party).

The British referendum received 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-wing papers was one of support for the Remain camp; however, within these there were some important differences in the argumentation and reasons for their support. The right-wing press frame was predictably supportive of the Brexit camp, but again with some distinctions among different titles.

Similarly, a content analysis of three major newspapers in 13 European countries, along with Russia and the USA, undertaken by the European Journalism Observatory in the week that followed the referendum, found that the majority of the press analysed was critical of the UK's vote to leave the EU, with the exception of Russia. In the particular case of Italy, a substantive sample of 249 articles was considered from the two major papers mentioned above (*Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*) and also 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 Italian coverage of Brexit (see immediately below), 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' (European Journalism Observatory 2017). 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 with either the Lega Nord and/or the former Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance) in the last twenty years, right up to his Government which ended in 2011.

In my own analysis of the press coverage of the EU referendum 2016, I picked out three dominant themes: the economic fallout, with related articles about the role of the European Central Bank (ECB); immigration and the openly racist campaign of the Leave camp, including extensive coverage of the killing of MP Jo Cox; and populism and its electoral base in the UK and the division in the vote.

the Economic imPact of 'brexit'

Many articles in the Italian papers concentrated on the economic impact of the referendum in relation to the UK, Italy the EU and even international relations. On 24 June, the day immediately after the referendum and the victory of the Brexit campaign, the markets' negative response was covered in all the papers, left and right, albeit with different concerns. In the same vein, sterling's immediate loss of 10% of its value against the euro was also mentioned across all the papers. Metaphors of doom abounded 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 EU as a whole.

La Repubblica dedicated many articles to the economic fallout of the UK referendum, concentrating on the effects of the fall in value of sterling against the euro but also how the latter was itself under pressure as a result of this outcome, and how the ECB was dealing with this crisis. Alongside its national editions, this newspaper has ten local sections dependent on regional distribution in Bari, Bologna, Firenze, Genova, Milano, Napoli, Palermo, Parma, Roma and Torino. These concentrated on questions relating to the effects on the local economy, one example being an article from the Emilia Romagna section titled 'Brexit, Emilia, all the fears regarding exports' (Anon, *La Repubblica*, 26 June 2016a); London is one of the region's biggest markets, with product sales there worth about €3.5 billion. This type of coverage was replicated, however, in all the various regions covered, from Sicily to Piedmont.

Il Corriere della Sera and *La Stampa* in particular also carried many articles on the financial markets post-referendum with discussions about its effect on the Milan Stock Exchange; similar language was used across the two papers, with the word 'panic' in all the titles and subtitles. Right-wing papers like *Liberò* and *Il Giornale* adopted similar titles (for example, 'Stock Exchanges slump' [Editorial, *Il Giornale*, 24 June 2016a]), but the analysis of the economic outcome in both papers, especially in *Liberò*, veered towards a connection with and a prediction about potential future developments, namely requests for similar referendums on the part of many countries in Europe, the total suggested in the title was 32, though this clearly includes some of the candidates in line to join (Editorial, *Liberò*, 24 June 2016b).

L'Unità, two days after the referendum, dedicated its first 15 pages to the British referendum with extensive coverage of many related issues. Its front page on 25 June (see figure), with its 'Italianate' English title 'Disintegration Day', also carried a subtitle about the collapse of



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catherine Meurisse, sopravvissuta alla
stirge di Charlie Hebdo. racconta la sua
ricerca di leggerezza P.18



Perche ora
si volta pagina

1...:-
pagina. il tuo giornale
1 Euro al giorno

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Disintegration Day

- Brexit È la tempesta perfetta. Europa nel panico. Populisti in festa. Cameron si dimette
- Crolli storici dei mercati e eventi di secessioni. Renzi: l'unica via d'uscita È rifare l'Unione P.2-0

Adesso apriamo
il cantiere Europa

1...:-
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giovedì, 11.05.2016

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Staino



Trump, Le Pen, Salvini
Estremisti scatenati

• I nazionalisti continentali spemmo
nell'effetto domino. Il magnate
americano esulta in Scozia: non sa che
lì i cittadini erano contro la Bre.it P.5-9

«Estatò
uno schiaffo
all'austerità»

«Ascoltiamo
il disagio
dei cittadini»

«Solo il Pd
può arginare
una Italexit»

Il bisogno di
un partito vero

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I saggi maestri Jedi dietro la comunicazione del Pei. Pietro Folena presenta il libro di Graziella Falconi P. 21

the markets, with indexes down in all the financial centres of Europe, coupled with a political comment about 'secessionist winds', including an interview with David Martin, the leader of the Scottish Labour MEPs in the European Parliament, on page five. The contextualization of the economic impact of Brexit received further in-depth coverage in an interview with the French economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi: 'It's a no to austerity. If the EU does not change, soon other Brexits' (De Giovannangeli, *L'Unità*, 25 June 2016). In another economics-related article in *L'Unità*, there was also a mention of the worst collapse in the value of sterling since Black Wednesday in 1992. This kind of economic contextualization is typical of the left-wing 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 target of many critical articles in the centre-left and left-wing press in Italy in the run-up to the referendum. With the results in, and the victory of the Brexit vote confirmed, 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 UK nationals post-referendum in the Italian press than in the British press (from a sample of all the British and Italian papers on 25 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 hours the world has changed'; 'Brexit, now facing the risk of a shock' [Molinari, *La Stampa*, 24 June 2016]), ran 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 pensions and work and visa status for both groups: 'Many foreigners fear having to leave London and many British people having to leave the EU' (Anon, *La Stampa*, 24 June 2016b).

A large part of the coverage in the press, but also a theme within the talk show and broadcast news analysed below, concentrated on the effects of Brexit on Italian immigrants in the UK. The Italian Iniziative e studi sulla multiethnicità (ISMU Foundation) has traced migration flows into Italy over the last two decades, its most recent report showing

that the immigrant population has grown from 750,000 to 5 million, meaning that Italy has gone from being an emigration to an immigration country (Cesareo 2014). Despite this, there still remains a substantial population drain, especially among the younger generation. A report from the Migrants Foundation for 2015 tells 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 1960s, 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 of them professionals, have left the country for European destinations, the highest number going to Germany, followed by the UK, Switzerland and France (Huffington Post 2016). Another important element of this report is a change in the provenance of the Italian emigrants: although the majority still originate from the South of Italy, increasingly there are also substantial numbers from the industrialized North.

Il Giornale, which, as mentioned in the study above, was predominantly pro-Brexit, paradoxically relayed a news item carried on social media about an Italian waiter being told to go home and give up his job to a British person: ‘Now, Italian, you can go home so that a British person can take your place’ (Nenzi, *Il Giornale*, 24 June 2016). He was emphatically described as the ‘first victim of Brexit’ (24 June 2016). Very little is verifiable about this story, which was taken from a Facebook site. This is one of the few examples which follow a more ‘tabloid’ logic in reporting the consequences of Brexit on Italian immigrants. *La Repubblica*, in a more serious discussion in its Palermo edition, also covered the immigration question, specifically in relation to Sicily, alluding to ‘Those twenty thousand Sicilians “prisoners” of Brexit’ who, the article argues, ‘feel somewhat disoriented’ as to what the future holds (Giorgianni, *La Repubblica*, 25 June 2016).

Populism, anti-Politics’ and the Brexit Voter

The left-wing press concentrated many articles on the reasons why Brexit won in the 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 across 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 the working-class vote has partially moved away from left-wing parties towards populist organizations already discussed above such as the Northern League and M5S.

Il Manifesto published articles in translation by various English commentators. One by Karel Williams, 'Why the working class has voted leave' (1 July 2016), delves in-depth into the socio-economic reasons for the working-class vote for Brexit; Williams insists on the paradoxical case of the Brexit 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; granted, *Il Manifesto* is not a large circulation newspaper but it is not minuscule either at nearly 40,000 copies (by way of comparison, such a circulation is four times larger than the British Communist Party paper, the *Morning Star*). Many other articles in *Il Manifesto* were serious pieces of journalism, where connections were made between populist politics and the vote for Brexit. In particular, it gave a great deal of space to the different positions within the different countries of the UK. Two examples, one before the referendum and one after, underline this: 'Belfast for Remain, nearly' (Terrinoi, *Il Manifesto*, 21 June 2016); 'Brexit divides the UK' (Clausi, *Il Manifesto*, 26 June 2016). The second article included an in-depth discussion about the meeting that took place between Theresa May and the leaders of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, especially about their joint opposition to a hard Brexit.

This discussion was 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. In the article 'Where are you going, England?' (Beasdale, *Il Manifesto*, 25 June 2016), consideration was 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 et al. 2016).

In a similar vein, many articles in *L'Unità* discussed the new 'anti-politics' of populism, concentrating particularly on its grass-roots support in Italy with a rather extravagant title on 25 June, 'Our home-grown euro jackals led by Grillo's somersaults', although the article itself offers a serious analysis of the impossibility under present Italian constitutional rules of calling a referendum of the kind called in the UK. M5S was discussed, along with its many contradictory messages about staying in or leaving Europe, as well as the Lega Nord and yet another new right-wing

formation, Polo Sovranista (Pro-sovereignty Bloc), which incorporates La Destra (The Right) and Azione Nazionale (all remnants of fascist parties), which are openly anti-European. *La Repubblica* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* also published a number of articles before and after Brexit about the populist trajectory of contemporary politics, especially in relation to home-grown movements like the Northern League and M5S. (*Il Fatto Quotidiano* is a relatively new left-leaning daily established in 2009, whose current editor, Marco Travaglio, has written extensively on corruption scandals in Italy, especially in relation to Berlusconi.)

Porta a Porta Political talk Show:
the ‘English’ myth extended

On 24 June, all television news broadcasts on the Rai (Radiotelevisione italiana) public-service channels had as their first item the results of the Brexit referendum. Similarly, the commercial channels (Berlusconi’s three channels and LA7) had extensive news coverage of the Brexit result and its implications. In terms of ‘election specials’, Rai1 offered *Porta a Porta* (Door to Door), a weekly fixture in its schedule, on the night of the referendum (I will discuss this in more detail below), while Rai3 broadcast a *TG 3 speciale Brexit* on the following night (24 June 2016). Also, on the 24 June, the independent commercial channel LA7 dedicated a special programme to coverage of the results of the referendum. There is no space in this chapter to discuss all these ‘specials’ in detail, but they were very much in line with the rest of the press in Italy, favouring the Remain argument. The third channel of the Italian public-service broadcaster, Rai3, which produces the TG 3 newscasts, has a left-leaning political allegiance, unlike Rai1.

Nearly 2 million Italian viewers watched the political talk show *Porta a Porta* on the evening of the UK’s EU 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 long-standing conservative host Bruno Vespa. It was an extended programme that, as the title suggests, broadcast well into the night, lasting over three hours and ending just before the final result, which proved wrong the ongoing evening predictions of a victory for the Remain vote (blown up in percentages as part of the visual background to the show). One of the main characteristics of the programme was its usually long list of guests

consisting of politicians and various social actors from across the political spectrum. On this occasion, guests also came from the economic and media worlds.

I have chosen to discuss *Porta a Porta* here as it runs 'against the grain' of Italian coverage of the UK's EU referendum and is a perfect illustration of 'performing talk' (Haarman 1999: 1), a mix of politics and entertainment, and the nearest thing to 'tabloidization' of politics in Italy. The other reason 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 UK membership of the European project (unlike the French). They also added that this support is motivated by two factors: first, '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 second, somewhat more instrumentally, 'that Italy hoped that the UK could provide a welcome balance to the dominance of the Franco-German partnership' (2016: 2). Needless to say, successive British governments have not 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 (ranging from members of the leading party in the present Coalition Government [Partito Democratico] to a number of representatives from the opposition), as well as leading figures from the world of business, finance and academia. Also different was 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 2016 EU 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, with no action by the host to stop it).

The myth-making exercise which circulates in Italian culture about the UK and England in particular alluded to above (in Italy as elsewhere, these two terms often stand as one and the same, without distinction, much to the chagrin of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) was interspersed with sections of talk and external report items: for example, one of the reporters was stationed in an East London pizzeria. These various light 'breaks' incorporated performances by a pipe band in tartan uniforms (it was in actual fact a 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 1960s; a dubious account of the role of Shakespeare in British culture and the celebration of the fourth centenary of his death falling precisely in the year of the referendum, albeit with a humorous comment about the indecisiveness of one of 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 slightly self-demeaning and nostalgic note of Italy 'losing' this special, original and superior friend as well as a partner member of the EU. *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 fell short of communicating an informed message about the political and economic implications of Brexit for the UK, Europe or Italy.

Conclusion

The Italian title of this chapter 'Little England Beats Great Britain' (Severgnini, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 24 June 2016) is a reference to the way people of the different nations within the UK voted, but also, less openly, it is suggestive of some 'inward-looking' stances evident in parts of England and Wales (England and Wales voted to leave the EU, whereas Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain). It was penned by *Il Corriere della Sera*'s London correspondent, Beppe Severgnini, inside the Reform Club, (named after the Great Reform Act of 1832 which modified the electoral system to grant the vote to small landowners, tenant farmers, shopkeepers and all male property owners, while still of course excluding working men [women were to

wait far longer for the vote]) where he was based along with other foreign correspondents on the ground. The article, unequivocally pro-Remain, was couched in a discussion about an institution (the Club) and its building, which purports to represent the best of Britain: democracy, progressive liberal values and tolerance. Counter to that was what Severgnini described as the *perfida* (perfidious, perhaps better translated as vicious) campaign of the Leave side about immigrants. He went on to argue that the UK is no longer a superpower, but rather a middle-sized 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 did not appear directly relevant, the overall message was that the UK was not so much leaving, as 'running away [...] slamming the door behind it' (Severgnini, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 24 June 2016). A similar title, 'La Piccola Inghilterra' (Little England), also appeared on the front page of *L'Unità* a couple of days later on 26 June 2016, and in the following article references were made to the isolationism and xenophobic tendencies of Little England (Boldrini, *l'Unità*, 26 June 2016).

Two days after the UK's EU referendum an opinion poll asked Italians whether they still trusted the EU and the figure was below 40% compared to the earlier one in 2010 of 55%. Nonetheless, in a poll which asked the more specific question of whether to stay in or withdraw from the EU, the results were somewhat different: 53% were in favour of staying in and 39% wanted to leave, the rest being don't knows. The results perhaps reflected the Machiavellian character of the opinion poll: the 55% total was reached with two qualifications to the question: one, which stated that it 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%) (Risso, *L'Unità*, 26 June 2016). The majority of the press coverage seems not to 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 regarding how and why the British people voted against what many see as their own interests.

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