

## **The Northern League in the 'Red Belt' of Italy**

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*Abstract: In recent years the Northern League has begun to acquire growing support in the regions of Central Italy (the so-called Red Belt). With the principle objective of clarifying the reasons for the League's expansion here, an investigation was undertaken to assess the hypothesis that growing concern generated by the phenomenon of immigration, as well as the inability of the red sub-culture to supply adequate responses to the demands of the peripheral territory, have given the League greater chances for success. In this way I proceed to a quantitative analysis aimed at reconstructing the electoral evolution of the League and at identifying its strongholds within the Red Belt; the analysis is enriched by in-depth interviews with national and provincial secretaries from the party. Results confirm the hypothesis and highlight the importance of a third aspect: the League's constant effort to put down territorial roots.*

**Keywords:** Northern League, Red Belt, ethno-regionalist parties, political sub-culture

Since the end of the 1980s, ethno-regionalist parties, among which, with the necessary care, one can also include the Northern League, have acquired a position of particular importance throughout Europe, achieving in many cases extraordinary election results. Examples include the recent successes of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie in Belgium, of the Scottish National Party in the United Kingdom and of the League itself in Italy.

Various factors have contributed to this success: growing disaffection towards the current élite and the traditional political parties; new migratory flows towards the European continent; the European integration process, experienced, in many regions, as a threat to the realisation of greater autonomy, etc (De Winter and Türsan, 1998; Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2002; De Winter et al., 2006). But what is of particular interest, giving centrality to the question of the relationship between politics and the territory, is that ethno-regionalist parties are increasingly winning significant levels of support even outside their territories of origin. In this

way they have gone beyond mere ethnic demands to become significant challengers of the major parties.

This is the case of the Northern League (Tronconi, 2009). In fact, beginning with the parliamentary elections of 2008, the League began to expand even into the regions of Central Italy: those characterised by the presence of a distinctive political sub-culture which has always fostered the success of left-wing parties.<sup>1</sup> This poses a question about the reasons for the expansion: on the one hand, in fact, we have an ethno-regionalist and populist party which has – or had – among its principle objectives, a fight against the welfarism of Southern Italy; the creation of a Po Valley identity; opposition to immigration.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Red Belt has a cultural tradition based on the values of labour, equality and solidarity which, at first glance, would seem to have nothing in common with the previous objectives. Therefore, up until a few years ago, the northern boundary of the red regions seemed to constitute a limit beyond which the League could not hope to gather much significant support. But this – to repeat – was true only until a few years ago.

In the parliamentary elections of 2008, in fact, in the Red Belt of Italy<sup>3</sup> the League obtained 4.4 per cent of the vote, and elected ten candidates to Parliament. In the European elections the following year it obtained 7.3 per cent, and one Euro-representative; and in the regional elections of 2010 it won 9.5 per cent and elected eleven councillors. In 2010, the *Carroccio*<sup>4</sup> was the third-largest party after the Popolo della Libertà (People of Freedom, PdL), the main centre-right party, led by Silvio Berlusconi, and the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD), the main centre-left force. So what has been happening? How is it that the apparent dam formed by the red regions no longer seems able to check the advance of the League? We will attempt to provide adequate replies to these and other questions in this article.

The few analyses that have been dedicated to the subject either refer to a single province/region (Giordano, 2001; Anderlini, 2009; Barbieri and Carlone, 2010), or are of a purely journalistic nature (Stefanini, 2010). The only hypotheses that it has been possible to formulate based on the results of the above-mentioned studies and of studies regarding other European ethno-regionalist parties (De Winter and Türsan, 1998; De Winter et al., 2006) are, therefore, the following:

- the growing attention and worry generated by immigration – and by phenomena often perceived as connected to immigration, e.g. crime and safety – have given the League greater chances for success outside of its traditional zones of influence;
- the red sub-culture may have lost its ability to respond adequately to the needs expressed by the territory, especially in peripheral

areas – creating political space that has been filled by the initiatives of the League.

The validity of these hypotheses has been checked by means of a research strategy that is both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

Under the first heading, a preliminary reconstruction was made of the electoral history of Bossi's party from the European elections of 1989 (when the *Carroccio* appeared for the first time in the red regions) to the regional elections of 2010, distinguishing the results obtained in the North, in the Centre and in the South of Italy – the intention being to see if the reasons for the League's expansion into the territories of the Red Belt are of a predominantly local nature or if they are, rather, connected with dynamics operating at a national level. Through simple percentage calculations we then attempted to identify the League's strongholds within the Red Belt and to establish their distinctive characteristics: here the intention was to bring out possible territorial differences present in an area which at first glance might appear to be homogeneous.

Under the second heading, some of the principal protagonists of the League's success (national and provincial secretaries) were interviewed. Thanks to their roles, they were able both to provide useful information in response to the questions asked and to confirm or otherwise the hypotheses formulated.

### **The League's electoral performance, 1989 to 2010**

As already mentioned, especially from the last two elections onwards, the Northern League began to achieve significant results even in the Red-Belt regions, even though the vote gap separating these regions from those of Northern Italy is still quite large. However, the trend in the results obtained in the Red Belt, over the past two decades, is similar to that found in the Northern regions: the successes and failures of the party happen at the same time in both areas. This means that the factors underlying the League's expansion outside of its areas of origin, as well as those underlying the contraction registered, for example, in the European elections of 1994 and 1999, are, first of all, of a national nature. In commenting on data analogous to those analysed here, Roberto Biorcio (2008, 2010) points out that three major upsurges can be identified in the League's electoral history: one took place at the parliamentary elections of 1992; another at the parliamentary elections of 1996, and a third at the European elections of 2009 and the regional elections of 2010 (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

At the time of the first upsurge the *Carroccio* sought to highlight issues that would make it the main vehicle for criticism of the pervasive power of the established parties. It is especially the events of *Tangentopoli* ('Bribe City') – leading to the disintegration of the two major governing

parties, the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats, DC) and the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party, PSI) – which foster the anti-political self-promotion of the League: a League that defends the ambitions of the productive North – in particular those of the small businesses among which it has its bastions of support – from the arrogance and corruption of the capital, and which promotes the autonomy of the Northern regions (see, with regard to this phase, Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001).

The second upsurge coincided with the declaration of its secessionist project. Especially in order to emphasise its antagonism and ‘otherness’ with regard to the political forces now open to federal reform of the State, the League demanded independence for ‘Padania’ – an imaginary entity with not-clearly-defined boundaries; which could be constructed only thanks to rites, symbols and celebrations (from the march to the sources of the Po River, to the recovery of the ‘Alpine Sun’, and the election of Miss Padania), and which ignored the significant differences among the various territories of the North.<sup>6</sup> It is no accident, then, that the increase in votes in the Red Belt was much more limited than that registered in Northern Italy (Figure 1).

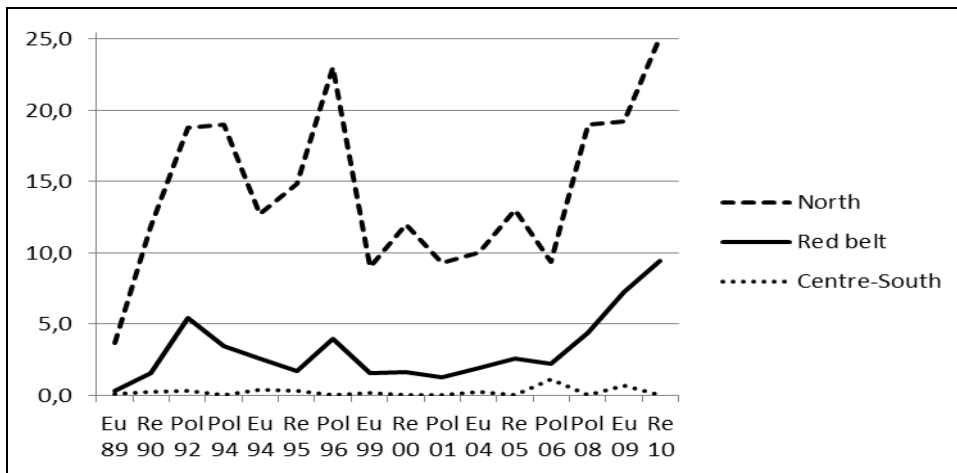
The third upsurge, which took place at the European elections of 2009 and the regional elections of 2010, was generated by various factors. They included: the instability of the centre-left government (the executive presided over by Prodi lasted, in fact, only two years); the decision of the two principal forces of the centre right, Forza Italia (FI) and the Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance, AN), to merge to form a new political entity, the PdL – which channelled the votes of those critical of the merger toward the *Carroccio*. But what was most significant was opposition to the growing number of non-EU immigrants and, more generally, to the processes of globalisation. This allowed the League to assume a position as the defender of local communities and made it the ‘party of frightened men’ (Diamanti, 2009; see also Feltrin et al., 2010).

Voting trends are similar regardless of whether one considers the four Red Belt regions individually or as a whole, and moreover they reflect national-level trends. The only peculiarity lies in the broad differences between Emilia Romagna and the other regions, and which make the former a sort of pivot between the North, where the League obtains its best results, and the rest of the red zone, where it nevertheless achieves significant levels of support (Figure 2).

### **Within the Red Belt**

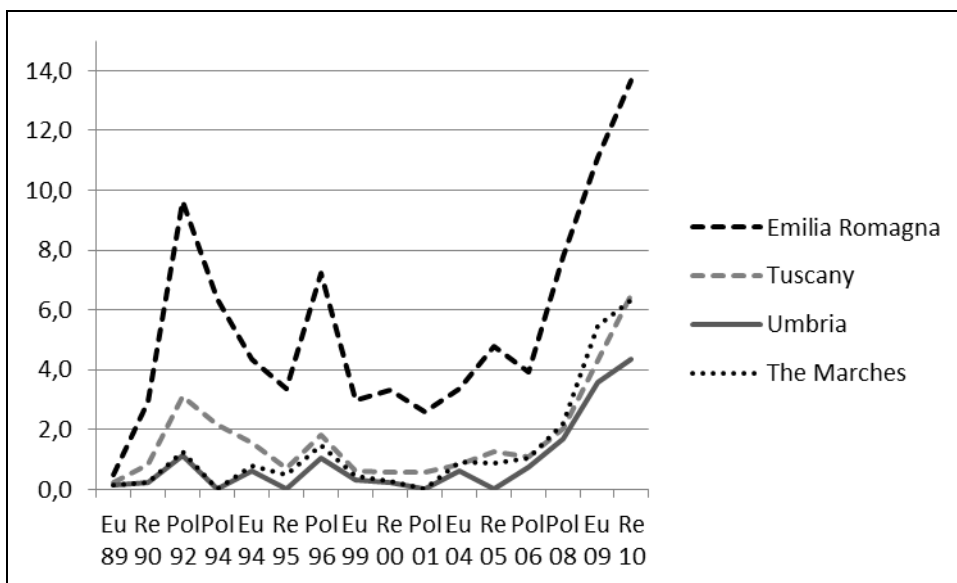
The Red Belt is not homogeneous. Within it there are enclaves that do not share its sub-cultural traditions, and which have been classified as white zones: the area of Lucca, which before Italian unification constituted (like

Figure 1: Electoral results of the Northern League



Source: Elaboration of data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Regions of Tuscany and the Marches.

Figure 2: Electoral results of the Northern League in the Red Belt regions



Source: Elaboration of data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Regions of Tuscany and the Marches.

Massa Carrara) an independent state; the southern provinces of the Marches, where at the beginning of the last century the practice of sharecropping and scant levels of proletarianisation fostered the development of Catholic associationism; the territory of Piacenza, where

the predominance of small land-ownership obstructed the expansion of the Communist party and its ideals (Ramella, 2005; Diamanti, 2009).

Therefore in order to identify the League's strongholds in the red zone, and to examine the reasons for its expansion in this area, it is worth exploring the territorial differences within it. For each of the red regions, we have considered those towns in which the *Carroccio* obtained, both in the 2009 European and the 2010 regional elections, a percentage of the vote greater than the third quartile calculated on a regional basis.<sup>7</sup> In all, 180 towns (68 in Emilia Romagna, 54 in Tuscany, 15 in Umbria and 43 in the Marche) fall into this category (see Appendix) out of a total of 966 (equal to 18.3 per cent).

First, it is true that in some of the areas that once distinguished themselves as white enclaves – the areas of Lucca and Piacenza – League support today is very strong;<sup>8</sup> but it would be without foundation to claim the existence of a relationship between current and previous political colourings: the League is successful even in areas where the red sub-culture has traditionally been strongly rooted, and yet has not managed to break through in all the territories of past DC hegemony, such as the southern Marche.

One might also assume, given the characteristics of the third upsurge, that the League's greatest successes are to be found in towns where the incidence of immigration has been strongest – and where, therefore, problems of interethnic coexistence are likely to be at their greatest – but the available data do not support this hypothesis: in 97 of 180 League strongholds the resident foreign population as a percentage of the total is, as of 1 January 2009, lower than the corresponding percentage for the red region to which the individual towns belong (source: elaboration of Istat data; <http://demo.istat.it/>).<sup>9</sup>

Nor can the high level of support enjoyed by the *Carroccio* be attributed, as hypotheses based on the studies of Hechter (1975) might suggest, to economic imbalances found in the area: the League obtains votes in towns with an average income per inhabitant both above and below the regional average (source: elaboration by the Centro Studi Sintesi of data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Istat; [www.ilsole24ore.com/speciali/ricchezza\\_comuni/index.shtml](http://www.ilsole24ore.com/speciali/ricchezza_comuni/index.shtml)).

Instead the results of a simple analysis of the socio-geographical characteristics of the 180 League strongholds have proven more useful; these appear, first, to be towns of small or very small dimensions: in fact, 68.3 per cent of them have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, and 93.9 per cent do not exceed 15,000 (Table 1); only one city (Arezzo) is a provincial capital.<sup>10</sup> Figure 3 demonstrates, moreover, that the majority of these towns are situated along the ridges of the Apennines of Tuscany and Emilia, Umbria and the Marche; in fact, 56.7 per cent are totally mountainous and 10.0 per cent are partially mountainous territories; 67.8 per cent have a low

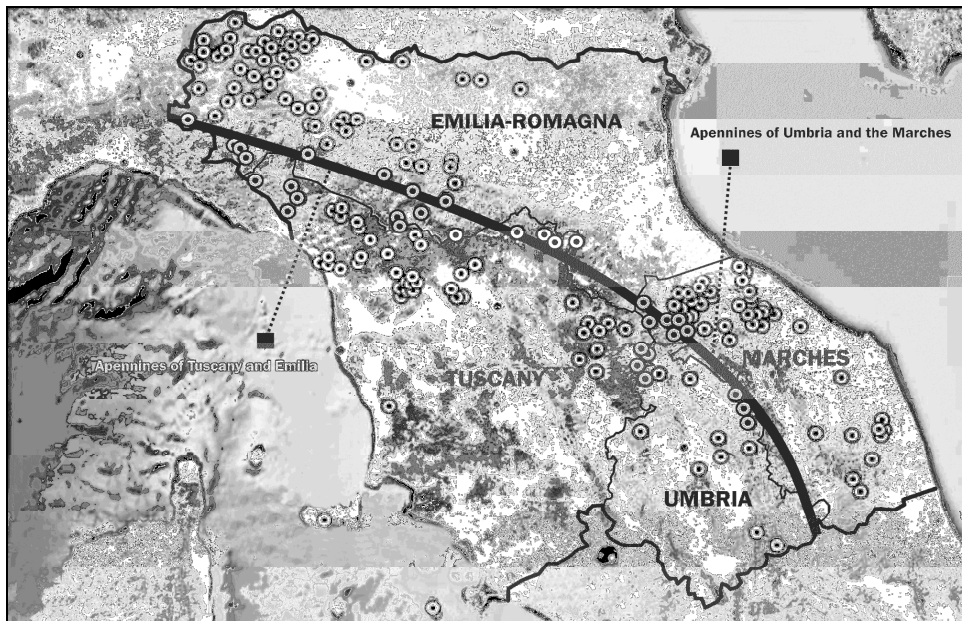
level of urbanisation (source: elaboration of Istat data, statistical map of the towns).

**Table 1: Sizes of towns having high levels of League support**

<i>Inhabitants</i>	<i>Nr</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
Fewer than 5,000	123	68.3	68.3
5,000 to 9,999	35	19.4	87.8
10,000 to 14,999	11	6.1	93.9
15,000 to 34,999	9	5.0	98.9
35,000 and over	2	1.1	100.0
Total	180	100.0	

Source: elaboration of Istat data (<http://demo.istat.it>).

**Figure 3: Northern League strongholds in the 'Red Belt'**



Source: Elaboration of data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Regions of Tuscany and the Marche.

The territory of the Red Belt, therefore, seems to be marked, as Anderlini (2009) found in relation to Emilia Romagna, by a profound cleavage separating central and urban areas, where the hegemony of the Left remains intact, from the peripheries, where, in contrast, the Left has

difficulty and the League achieves its best results.<sup>11</sup> Anderlini's plausible suggestion is that

many people voted for the League to emphasise the lack of representation of the territory and to give an aggressive form to a certain accumulation of social demands. A sort of symptomatic vote, in which expectations of order (social/territorial) mix with desires for vindication (of the peripheries towards the centres) and identity patterns (what is genuine, autochthonous, concrete, homogeneous, direct, simple, against what is contaminated, mixed, abstract, intermediate, complex) (Anderlini, 2009: 745).

The peripheral areas of the central regions are, in fact, characterised by greater social tensions than elsewhere (given the importance of populations that feel threatened by immigration) and by a traditional culture of marginality, based on the conviction that urban growth has brought the impoverishment of rural areas. So the League is successful in peripheral areas 'because there it finds the conditions in which it can take root' (Anderlini, 2009: 750). Indeed, the pioneering studies of Diamanti (1993, 1996) identified the original roots of the League in the 'deep North' of small and medium-sized hill towns.

### **League expansion in a climate of 'community feeling' and erosion of the Red sub-culture**

With the objective of developing these ideas, it was thought useful to interview the national secretaries in the four regions that make up the Red Belt, along with the provincial secretaries of the areas (the provinces of Arezzo, Lucca, Modena, Parma, Perugia, Pesaro and Urbino, Piacenza, Pistoia) in which the *Carroccio* has widespread support.<sup>12</sup>

Interviews covered the following topics: reasons for the League's electoral successes and differences in electoral performance as between large cities and small centres; the League's internal organisational structure and relations with the local PdL; local issues in need of greater attention; the work of the regional government and its ability to protect local interests; profile of the League's electorate and the sense of belonging to the Po Valley community.

Obviously the information that can be drawn from interviews is insufficient for identifying what leads significant numbers in the Red regions to vote for the Northern League: for these purposes it would be necessary to carry out a sample survey of Northern League voters, which, given the resources available to us, was not possible. As we have said, the topic under examination is largely unexplored, and surveys have rarely gone beyond the territory of Emilia Romagna. The one conducted between March and April 2008 by the research centre, 'Tolomeo Studi e Ricerche',



involving 1,464 League voters of the North and used by Feltrin, Fabrizio and Morcone (2010) is particularly useful. Its authors identified six reasons for voting for the League, which are essentially a combination of the levels of empathy expressed by interviewees with certain ideas expressed in the questionnaire. These reasons have various levels of importance in explaining the success of the League (+ minor importance; ++ intermediate importance; +++ significant importance). They differ according to the political affiliations of the voters who were questioned: interviewees who had voted for the centre left in 2006 but turned to the Northern League in 2008 cited certain reasons for their change in voting habits. Those who had voted for the centre-right parties, and then changed to the Northern League cited different reasons. Those who had voted for the League in both 2006 and 2008 cited different reasons again from the two groups previously mentioned.

- fear for their material wellbeing ('because we are getting poorer and because of the (economic) crisis') (+++);
- antipathy towards the supporters of the Unione ti Centro (Union of the Centre, UdC), FI and AN ('because I don't want to vote PdL') (+++);
- security issues ('because the League is the only party seriously concerned with safety and immigration') (++);
- a negative judgement of the Prodi government ('because the centre left governed poorly') (+);
- League mayors ('because the League governs well on a local level and is in contact with representatives of the area') (+);
- anti-political protest ('because we're sick of the parties and politics') (+).

The interviews could at best reveal what might be the orientations of the electorate in the - informed but nevertheless debatable - opinions of the party officials - and some of their suggestions have been used as evidence. But their views are used mainly to clarify the characteristics of the local context that may have assisted the League as well as the strategies and initiatives the party has adopted to mobilise support. When, therefore, the term 'reasons' is used (for the expansion, for success, etc.) the reference is not to voters, but to the context, to the environment in which the League operates, and to how this compares, as we will see shortly, with a political sub-culture which shows palpable signs of weakening.

Interviews lasted about 30 minutes and were recorded and subsequently transcribed. In order to provide coherent and homogeneous interpretations our analysis of the transcriptions focussed on the commonalities expressed by interviewees while respecting, and giving due weight to, divergent opinions. The information gathered is particularly

rich, and therefore it is necessary, for reasons of space, to dwell only on that which is really useful for clarifying the reasons for the expansion of the League in the Red Belt and the real nature of this party. The information refers to three different, but related areas: the interests of the peripheral territories; immigration; the organisational structure of the League.

Before analysing the interviews, it is necessary to recall the fundamental traits of the two large sub-cultural traditions – the ‘white’ one in the North East of the country and the ‘red’ one of the central regions – which for a long time were salient features of Italian politics. Both, in fact, are characterised by a socio-organisational fabric that leads

to the reinforcement of a sense of community and of solidarity [...]; [by] exposure to communication flows and information in large part specific to each sub-cultural environment; [...]; [by] the existence of a homogeneous body of values and convictions transmitted in the first instance through the family (Mannheimer and Sani, 1987: 86).<sup>13</sup>

The concept of territorial sub-culture also includes reference to interests, which are of particular importance to the hypothesis we are attempting to evaluate. As various authors (for example, Bagnasco, 1996) have recognised, the presence of the sub-culture harmonises the interests of the individual and those of the local society; for local-government activity is oriented to protecting the cross-class interests ‘of the community’:

local administrations, the Members of Parliament representing these zones [...] protect local interests in contractual and sometimes conflictual relation with the centre [...] they comply with the demands and pressures of entrepreneurial and social subjects [...]. They adapt to the reasoning and demands of the local context; they prefer to comply, without interfering with them too strongly (Diamanti, 1996: 32).

The secretaries we interviewed shared the perception of a general inability of local governments to meet the needs of peripheral territories, and this could be interpreted as an indicator of a progressive ‘thawing’ of the red sub-culture, at least from the perspective of the protection of local demands.<sup>14</sup>

The questions that cause the greatest concern among the inhabitants of the peripheral zones, according to respondents, are the economic crisis, the lack of infrastructures and growing immigration. In some areas, such as Altotevere Umbro, the secretaries who had been interviewed claimed that there is a widespread demand for support, which is justified by the pivotal role the area has always played in the regional economy. In other areas, on the other hand, the wish for a marked local requalification is triggered by a constantly poor economic performance as well as the lack of a clearly defined identity. In nearly all areas, residents call for a marked

improvement of the infrastructural links with both the major towns and the other regions, in addition to more investments and easier access to credit for small enterprises.

A more in-depth line of reasoning must be followed regarding the increase in immigration and the effects that this generates in terms of crime – one of the most widely discussed topics in Western Europe. It is certainly no accident that this topic, historically one to which the League has given considerable emphasis, constitutes, for those interviewed, a priority which requires the greatest attention; besides, at the last election the centre right sought to win support by playing the insecurity card, with regard to which the arguments and proposals of Umberto Bossi, leader of the *Carroccio*, appeared more genuine, determined and convincing than those of the other political leaders (see Mastropaolo, 2008).

Often, the reasoning of respondents reflects established preconceptions; sometimes they betray incipient racism. Thus they stress the priority of the needs of Italians before those of immigrants; immigrants' constant transgression of the rules; the excessive solidarity often shown towards them; the need for tough anti-immigration laws; the electoral benefits that the centre left would gain from an increase in the number of resident immigrants; the perception that Italy is a conquered country etc. Behind these affirmations, however, lies a more profound question regarding the loss of territorial identity, the transformation of the community in which one lives.

Local development policies which have created large commercial poles on the outskirts of the inhabited centres, associated with inadequate integration policies, have in fact led to a rapid transformation of the features of the urban fabric: long-standing residents of the historical centres have shown a growing propensity to move toward the better-served semi-central zones and to spend more of their leisure time outside of the city walls; at the same time a large number of the immigrants have settled in often run-down dwellings in city centres. All of this provokes a sense of confusion, a fading of former consolidated reference points, especially in those small border communities where the presence of one who is 'different' is noticed immediately and where – some of the secretaries emphasised – people no longer feel free to leave their keys in their front doors.

Inadequate responses to the economic crisis, the failure to realise infrastructural projects and an excessive openness with regard to immigration constitute, therefore, the main reasons for dissatisfaction with the majority that governs the Region, which is not judged positively. In fact, in the areas where the League is strong, regional government is perceived, according to those interviewed, as being distant, absent, interested in the areas only with regard to taxation or during election campaigns. And representatives of the regional majority are considered to

be subservient to 'old' concepts of power, to be unable to grasp the changes that have taken place in society, and to be lacking in ideas.

What respondents protest against, finally, is a supposed indifference toward their communities, which they believe to be victims of an identity crisis; and for 'political representation, the reference of Bossi's party to the local/regional community seems to intercept the desire for community emerging in contemporary society' (Natale, 2008: 16).

It is against this background that the significant organisational efforts of the *Carroccio* in the territories within the Red Belt have been made. Its organisational structure is like a pyramid: first of all there are the national (or rather, regional) secretaries; then the provincial ones, and finally the city ones. Over the years provincial and city offices have multiplied: the territory of Parma is an example of this, where, from 2008 to the present, there has been an increase from three to approximately twenty city secretariats. Where it is not possible to establish an office, reference persons are nevertheless present, and these often operate in more than one city. There are also informal operational groups. Local party committees consist, for the most part, of persons who are not professional politicians. They are persons, chosen, above all, for their dedication to the League's cause; for the League's regulations distinguish between two different forms of membership: supporters, without decision-making powers, and ordinary-militant members, whose activism is subject to annual verification by the local sections (see Biorcio, 2010).<sup>15</sup> According to our interviewees, these leaders or reference persons are usually greatly appreciated by the population, since they are unassuming, accessible persons, uninterested in personal economic benefits, and actively committed in an area where League members tend to be regarded with diffidence.

Thanks also to this effort to put down roots in the territory, the League, in conclusion, seems to fill a void of political representation which could have opened through the inability of the regional political class adequately to safeguard the interests of the peripheral areas, and with the consequent thawing of the red sub-culture, which once found in its ability to comply with the demands of the local context one of its strengths. As, in fact, two careful scholars have recognised, the 'League has based its appeal on its ability to give voice to the needs of the territory, to use a term that has lately come back into fashion' (Calise, 2008: 6). Meanwhile

Italian parties, even those of the Left, have abandoned the territory and have, without regret, chosen the path - allow me to simplify - towards Americanisation. They are no longer based on party sections, or a capillary presence among citizens, but on leadership, primaries and image strategies, though ones of extremely mediocre quality (Mastropaolo, 2008: 20).

## Conclusion

Reconstruction of the electoral history of the League has shown that, in the first place, the reasons for its expansion outside its original territories are closely connected with national-level dynamics. In recent years, as has emerged both from the reflection of other scholars and from the testimony of the secretaries interviewed, it has been above all the issue of immigration and the worries that this generates, that have induced voters to place their trust in a force which, more than others, has made anti-immigration one of its most salient themes. In this sense, the first of the hypotheses formulated seems to be confirmed. Our analysis has, moreover, allowed an in-depth study of this question, bringing to light the sense of loss of community generated by inadequate policies for local development and for the integration of immigrants.

Subsequently it has been seen that the *Carroccio* obtains its best results in the small rural centres of the Apennines of the Red Belt. In this sense, the interviews allow, once again, to clarify the reasons for the centre-periphery cleavage: local administrators seem unable to take care of the needs expressed by peripheral communities. The function of mediation and protection of community interests, typical of the red sub-culture, seems to be progressively evaporating. This frees up political space that has been immediately occupied by the initiatives of Bossi's party: the second hypothesis too seems therefore to be confirmed.

Finally the importance of the League's efforts to put down roots in the territory through the opening of new offices and the constant commitment of its militants was investigated: an effort that goes against the tide represented by the current organisational transformations going on in the major Italian parties, particularly attracted by 'liquid' party models, to use Baumann's term, which have recently gained popularity.

However the recent scandals – involving the leader of the Northern League, members of his immediate family and high-ranking exponents of the party, from Francesco Belsito, treasurer, to Rosy Mauro, vice-president of the Senate and founder of the *Sindacato padano* (Sinpa), under investigation for serious fraud, misappropriation and money-laundering – seem to have damaged the League both in its territories of origin and, to an even greater degree, outside this area. The charismatic leader of the League was forced to resign and his status as an unquestioned point of reference for militants and supporters of the *Carroccio* has been greatly compromised. Pre-existing internal factions, until then confined to the shadows, came out into the open: from the 'magic circle', formed by a group ultra-faithful to Bossi (which included Rosy Mauro, Federico Bricolo, president of the League's senators and Marco Reguzzoni, group leader in the Chamber), to the 'dreaming barbarians' of Roberto Maroni (new secretary of the League), and the Venetians (led by the region's governor Luca Zaia); and the League, in a sort of historical nemesis, betrayed the anti-political and anti-

party-dominated function which had ensured its success at the beginning of its political activity. Faced with this new *scenario* it is quite possible that the League's initial expansion in the territories of the Red Belt is destined to be brusquely interrupted.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The substantial voting continuity, registered in elections in the post-war period to the end of the 1960s, has been interpreted as reflecting the presence of two political sub-cultures – 'white' (or Catholic), in the North-East, and 'red' (or Leftist), in Central Italy. This interpretation is based on the idea that changes in the composition of the population – which inevitably take place over time – do not alter in the slightest way the results of electoral competitions. This is because new generations are supposedly socialised to a patrimony of political culture which forges both their sense of political belonging and, as a consequence, their voting choices.

<sup>2</sup> Not all agree that the Northern League belongs to the category of ethno-regionalist and populist parties. Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001), for example, question the League's claim that the people of Northern Italy belong to a single ethnic group. Similar questions have been asked by Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro (2002). Moreover Cento Bull and Gilbert feel that the populist interpretation does not allow an exhaustive understanding of the causes of the League's success. In this sense they suggest the adoption of an approach composed of two levels of analysis, structure and agency, which translates into the study of the League under three different headings: structural factors; the programme of the party and its vision of the world; the nature of its electorate (for further clarification see Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> I use here an expression taken from Baccetti and Gabelli (1998) and from Ramella (2005), to indicate the four regions of Central Italy – Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and the Marches – in which the parties of the Left have always enjoyed very high levels of support. The term 'belt' is, moreover, not new in territorial analyses of election results; we find it, for example, in political analyses of the United States to indicate the 'Bible Belt', which distinguishes the states of the South, where the Republicans enjoy large majorities, from the Northern and, especially, coastal states, where the Democrats are in a majority.

<sup>4</sup> This is another term for the League, which refers to the cart bearing the city emblem around which, in 1176, the battle of Legnano was fought between the troops of the Germanic Holy Roman Empire and those of the Lombard League.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the electoral history and other aspects (organisation, characteristics of the electorate, etc.) of the League see also Tarchi (1998) and Ruzza (2006). It should also be pointed out that in the recent mayoral elections of May 2011 the League suffered a setback caused, in the opinion of the most careful analysts, by the sexual scandals in which Silvio Berlusconi, head of government and leader of the party with which the League was allied, was allegedly involved.

<sup>6</sup> Bagnasco (1996), for example, reveals that capitalist development in the North followed three different models: a neo-Fordist model in the North West; that of the production of services, with its capital in Milan; and that of small business, typical of the foothills of the North. On the boundaries of Padania, article 2 of the

party statute, approved in 2002, establishes that the political movement of the League consists of 13 national sections, whose headquarters are situated, according to the provisions of article 5, in the historical capitals of the respective 'nations', defined also as ethnic-geographical communities: Alto Adige-Südtirol; Emilia; Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Liguria; Lombardy; the Marches; Piedmont; Romagna; Tuscany; Trentino; Umbria; Valle d'Aosta-Vallée d'Aoste; Veneto. Article 5 also provides, however, that: 'The Federal Council can, after special deliberation, decree the birth of other Nations [...]. The definition of the territorial boundaries is at the discretion of the Federal Council' ([www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/lega\\_nord\\_statuto.pdf](http://www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/lega_nord_statuto.pdf)). In fact two other national sections have recently been added to those recognised in the statute: Abruzzo and Sardinia.

<sup>7</sup> It would have been more logical, given the objectives of the study, to conduct the analysis not region by region, but for the entire red zone. But the discrepancy between Emilia Romagna and the other regions would have made the result too unbalanced: the majority of towns with high levels of League support would have been concentrated almost exclusively in the territory of Emilia-Romagna. For this reason when we speak here of League strongholds we refer to the strongholds of the individual regions.

<sup>8</sup> In 11 out of 16 towns in the area of Lucca and in 19 of 32 towns in the area of Piacenza, which today can be defined as strongholds of the League, the DC obtained, at the general election of 1976, a percentage of the vote higher than both that obtained on a national level and that deriving from the sum of the two principal leftist forces (the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party, PCI) and the PSI).

<sup>9</sup> This is not valid, however, for the League stronghold in the Marches, where relatively large numbers of foreigners can be found.

<sup>10</sup> The smaller towns include Palmiano (203 inhabitants) and Frontino (317 inhabitants), both in the Marches.

<sup>11</sup> In suggesting this, Anderlini refers to the classical theory of cleavages advanced in the mid 1970s by Sidney Tarrow (1977). On this topic see also Ruzza (2006).

<sup>12</sup> The interviews were conducted in July and September 2010. In some cases, the difficulty encountered in reaching representatives holding important elective positions - members of the Italian and European Parliaments - made telephone interviews necessary.

<sup>13</sup> On the concept of culture and sub-culture see also the classic texts of Almond and Verba (1963 and 1980).

<sup>14</sup> The theory of the progressive thawing of the red sub-culture was proposed by Francesco Ramella in *Cuore rosso* (2005). According to Ramella, the thawing process which has its roots in the decline of ideologies, the crisis of the mass party and the disappearance of the PCI, which have tended 'to unhinge voters from the political and organisational policies of the 'membership vote', making voter behaviour more unstable and political competitions more open [...]. This does not mean the electoral collapse of the PCI's successor parties or of the centre-left coalition, nor the fading, almost by magic, of a wealth of political traditions which, rather, continue to influence the behaviour of voters. However, the undisputed hegemony of the post-communist parties has faded, while their

organisational decline has significantly weakened their social roots and their ability to *encapsulate* the vote' (Ramella, 2005: 9 and 55).

<sup>15</sup> In order officially to open a section, there must be no fewer than 5 'activists' and 15 'supporters' enrolled in the Northern League.

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### Appendix:

#### Northern League strongholds in the 'Red Belt'

Emilia Romagna:

*Province of Fermo*: Sant'Agostino.

*Province of Forlì-Cesena*: Tredozio.

*Province of Modena*: Cavezzo; Fanano; Fiumalbo; Guiglia; Lama Mocogno; Marano sul Panaro; Montese; Prignano sulla Secchia; San Felice sul Panaro; Serramazzoni; Zocca.

*Province of Parma*: Albareto; Bedonia; Busseto; Calestano; Compiano; Corniglio; Fornovo di Taro; Langhirano; Lesignano de' Bagni; Medesano; Mezzani; Neviano degli Arduini; Pellegrino Parmense; Polesine Parmense; Terenzo; Tizzano Val Parma; Traversetolo; Varano de' Melegari.

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*Province of Piacenza:* Agazzano; Alseno; Besenzone; Bettola; Bobbio; Cadeo; Calendasco; Caorso; Carpaneto Piacentino; Castell'Arquato; Cortemaggiore; Farini; Ferriere; Fiorenzuola d'Arda; Gazzola; Gragnano Trebbiense; Gropparello; Lugagnano Val d'Arda; Morfasso; Nibbiano; Ottone; Pecorara; Pianello Val Tidone; Piozzano; Podenzano; Ponte dell'Olio; Pontenure; San Giorgio Piacentino; San Pietro in Cerro; Vernasca; Villanova sull'Arda; Ziano Piacentino.

*Province of Reggio Emilia:* Castellarano; Guastalla; Toano; Viano.

*Province of Rimini:* Casteldelci.

Tuscany:

*Province of Arezzo:* Arezzo; Badia Tedalda; Bibbiena; Capolona; Castel Focognano; Castiglion Fibocchi; Chitignano; Chiusi della Verna; Pieve Santo Stefano; Pratovecchio; Sansepolcro; Sestino; Subbiano.

*Province of Firenze:* Firenzuola; Marradi; Palazzuolo sul Senio.

*Province of Grosseto:* Isola del Giglio.

*Province of Livorno:* Campo nell'Elba.

*Province of Lucca:* Altopascio; Bagni di Lucca; Barga; Camaiore; Fabbriche di Vallico; Forte dei Marmi; Giuncugnano; Montecarlo; Pescaglia; Piazza al Serchio; Pietrasanta; Pieve Fosciana; Seravezza; Sillano; Villa Basilica; Villa Collemandina.

*Province of Massa-Carrara:* Aulla; Bagnone; Licciana Nardi; Zeri.

*Province of Pisa:* Casale Marittimo.

*Province of Pistoia:* Abetone; Buggiano; Chiesina Uzzanese; Cutigliano; Massa e Cozzile; Montecatini-Terre; Ponte Buggianese; Quarrata; Sambuca Pistoiese; San Marcello Pistoiese; Uzzano.

*Province of Prato:* Carmignano; Montemurlo; Poggio a Caiano; Vaiano.

Umbria:

*Province of Perugia:* Assisi; Bettona; Citerna; Città di Castello; Costacciaro; Fossato di Vico; Gualdo Tadino; Monteleone di Spoleto; Monte Santa Maria Tiberina; Nocera Umbra; Passignano sul Trasimeno; Pietralunga; San Giustino; Scheggino; Valfabbrica.

The Marches:

*Province of Ancona:* Castel Colonna; Filottrano.

*Province of Ascoli Piceno:* Comunanza; Palmiano.

*Province of Fermo:* Monteleone di Fermo; Monte San Pietrangeli; Rapagnano; Torre San Patrizio.

*Province of Macerata:* Loro Piceno; Monte San Giusto; Serrapetrona.

*Province of Pesaro-Urbino:* Acqualagna; Auditore; Belforte all'Isauro; Carpegna; Cartoceto; Fermignano; Fossombrone; Frontino; Gradara; Isola del Piano; Lunano; Macerata Feltria; Mercatello sul Metauro; Monte Cerignone; Monteciccardo; Montecopiolo; Montefelcino; Montelabbate; Montemaggiore al Metauro; Petriano; Piandimeleto; Pietrarubbia; Saltara; Sant'Angelo in Lizzola; Sant'Angelo in Vado; Sant'Ippolito; Sassocorvaro; Sassofeltrio; Serrungarina; Tavoleto; Tavullia; Urbania.