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The impact of populist radical right parties on foreign policy: the Northern League as a junior coalition partner in the Berlusconi Governments

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Despite the populist radical right's (PRR) popularity among political scientists, little scholarship has focused on its influence on foreign policy. This lack of study is due, in part, to a general lack of attention to the role of political parties in foreign policy, both in comparative politics and international relations (IR). This is unfortunate because, due to Europeanization and globalization, the domain of foreign policy has expanded, making foreign policy increasingly a domestic concern and, most importantly, touching on major themes of PRR parties. Combining insights from comparative politics and IR, we theorize the mechanisms, which may facilitate the impact of such parties on foreign policy. Subsequently, we examine whether the Italian Northern League (LN), as a prime example of a PRR party participating in a coalition government, has had an impact on Italy's foreign policy and, if so, what accounts for this (lack of) influence. This paper concludes that, unlike common understanding, the PRR is not persistently anti-internationalist/anti-EU; rather, its position depends on the extent to which international politics helps or hinders the promotion of 'the people'. Second, despite the LN's strong coalition position, it pursued an effective foreign policy mainly regarding immigration policy. Third, IR theories of junior coalition partners and foreign policy should address the nature of the party system and how inter-party electoral competition affects the strength of a junior coalition partner. Fourth, these theories need to acknowledge that party preferences are sometimes trumped by national concerns, as suggested by more systemic IR theories.

Keywords: foreign policy; populism; populist radical right; Italy; Northern League; Berlusconi

Introduction

The populist radical right (PRR) has become a popular subject in both academic and non-academic circles. Interestingly, its significance has been assessed primarily from the perspective of comparative politics rather than from international relations (IR). Scholars of comparative politics puzzle over the rise of PRR parties and mainly investigate the causes of the PRR parties' electoral success and their impact on public policy and government participation (Mudde, 2007, 2013; De Lange, 2012). However, comparativists

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have largely ignored the possible impact that the PRR may have on a country's foreign policy. Similarly, scholars in the IR field have mostly neglected the influence of the PRR. This is due to at least two reasons: first, IR's relative neglect of the role of political parties in general, is partly caused by the impact of systemic theories of IR, which tend to focus on states as unitary actors (cf. Carbone, 2007: 905); second, there is a tendency not to think through the domestic consequences of the expansion of the foreign policy domain over the last 20 years, despite the growing impact of Europeanization and globalization. Attention to PRR parties seems particularly warranted, given their xenophobic and often anti-European and anti-globalization messages. It seems plausible to expect that the more representation PRR parties gain in parliament, the more substantial their influence on foreign policy will be, particularly if they participate formally or indirectly in governmental coalitions.

We seek to answer these questions by combining comparative studies of PRR parties and theories of foreign policy in coalition governments. Building on the notion that international politics has increasingly become a concern of domestic politics because of globalization and Europeanization, we argue that political parties, and the party systems in which they compete, merit more attention in explaining foreign policy. Because international politics increasingly concerns core issues of PRR parties, they are likely to address their governments' foreign policy. However, PRR parties differ in their access to policymaking. After identifying various ways in which PRR parties may affect foreign policy, we examine the situation in which a PRR party is most likely to be able to exert effective influence, that is, as a full member of a government. Because, in the European context, this situation usually involves coalition governments, this examination requires us to build on the theoretical literature of junior coalition partners and foreign policy. The Italian Northern League (*Lega Nord*, LN) is a prime example of such a case. Here, we analyse its influence on Italian foreign policy as a pivotal member of the coalition governments led by Silvio Berlusconi in the 1990s and 2000s. During the 1990s, the LN developed from an exclusively populist regionalist party into a PRR party (Ruzza and Fella, 2009; Zaslove, 2011). In the process, it developed strong positions regarding issues that have important foreign policy implications, such as immigration, European integration, and globalization.

The Italian case is relevant for at least three reasons. First, from the perspective of comparative politics, the LN is one of the few cases in which a PRR party was part of a long-lasting ruling coalition in a European country. Other examples include Jörg Haider's FPÖ/BZÖ coalition with the ÖVP in Austria (2000–07) and the Swiss People's Party (SVP) since the mid-1990s.¹ Second, within the coalition, the LN held the most vociferous views on issues such as migration, European integration, and globalization, that is, issues that overlap with the expanding domain of foreign policy. It is therefore possible that the LN's positions on these issues may influence

¹ The SVP (and its predecessor) has been in government since 1959. However, it was only in the mid-1990s that it radicalised and could be considered a PRR party.

Italy's foreign policy within these domains, either directly or indirectly. Third, from an IR perspective, the Italian case allows us to assess the influence of the PRR on the foreign policy of a significant player in the European Union (EU) and world politics. Italy has long expected to be treated as a major player both in Brussels and globally, formulating its foreign policy goals with this aim in mind. It has consistently sought recognition through G7/8 and G20 meetings and EU summits.

This article is structured as follows. In the first section, we define the PRR and describe its foreign policy positions. In the following theoretical section, we draw and expand upon existing literature on coalition politics and foreign policy to identify factors that potentially explain the foreign policy influence of PRR parties in government. This section is followed by an analysis of the Italian system of coalition politics, particularly since the so-called Second Republic (since 1994), the LN's foreign policy positions, and an overview of the foreign policies of the Berlusconi governments. Next, we assess the influence of the LN on Italy's foreign policy. In the final section, we draw larger and more general conclusions regarding the possible influence of PRR parties on foreign policy.

The PRR: a party family

Populist and radical right parties became electorally successful in Western Europe in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. The origins of the parties in question are diverse. Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s, there was enough common ground on key issues for these parties to be considered a party family (Rydgren, 2005; Mudde, 2007). A growing consensus in the literature refers to this party family as the PRR. The core ideology of the PRR is nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2007). In addition, PRR parties combine support for a market economy with demands for the protection of welfare and opposition to economic globalization (Derks, 2006; Rydgren, 2006; Zaslove, 2008).

This radical right ideology is combined with populism. Populism is defined 'as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" vs. the "corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2007: 23). Populism is a thin-centred ideology because its worldview is considered to be incomplete, that is, it does not possess a fully articulated and coherent perspective regarding the social and political world (Freeden, 1998; Stanley, 2008). Therefore, populism cannot exist on its own and must attach itself to other ideologies, including liberal, radical right, and socialist ideologies. In this article, we are concerned with a specific type of populism: the PRR.

Scholars have largely neglected the foreign policy of PRR parties (for exceptions, see Schori Liang, 2007a; Chrysosgelos, 2010). Nevertheless, their ideology possesses a foreign policy component. From existing studies of PRR parties, it is possible to

identify five foreign policy concerns. First, PRR parties are sceptical of the widening and deepening of EU integration. This scepticism has intensified since the mid-1990s in the aftermath of the various EU treaties following the Maastricht Treaty. In particular, they are weary of the alleged growth of the power of Brussels (Mudde, 2007; Schori Liang, 2007b). However, in addition, PRR parties link EU expansion with security, in particular, enlargement outside the confines of what they consider to be Europe, that is, to include Turkey (Schori Liang, 2007b: 17). Third, and in contrast to their euroscepticism, PRR parties are often supportive of a ‘well-defined European security policy’ (Schori Liang, 2007b: 17) and several parties such as the FN, LN, and the FPÖ have been supportive of a ‘European defence force’ (Schori Liang, 2007b: 16). Their contention is that a European position on these matters will reduce reliance on the United States (Schori Liang, 2007b: 17). Fourth, the PRR tends to fear globalization. Economic globalization is perceived as a threat to the European-style welfare state and domestic employment. Although they profess support for a market economy, PRR parties tend to propose more protectionist policies by raising, for example, trade barriers (Mudde, 2007; Schori Liang, 2007b; Zaslove, 2008). And finally, PRR parties object to the increase in unwanted immigration and the construction of a much-abhorred multicultural society. Immigration is connected with the growing Islamic threat and with EU expansion (Mudde, 2007; Schori Liang, 2007b). Whether PRR parties succeed in translating such positions into policies depends on their access to the corridors of power and the weight they and other parties attach to these issues.

Theory: political politics and foreign policy

In this section, we argue that globalization and Europeanization have increased the weight of domestic factors in foreign policy. As a consequence, political parties have become a more salient player in foreign policy decision making. An interest in PRR parties, however, requires us to look at coalition cabinets and the junior coalition partner literature constitutes the best theoretical starting point for such an analysis.

Domestic factors vs. international factors

The IR discipline has long debated the relative weights of systemic vs. domestic factors in accounting for a state’s behaviour in the international political system (for a discussion in the context of Italy, see Brighi, 2013). Systemic approaches emphasize a country’s continuity in foreign policy under stable systemic conditions and argue that there is little need to look at domestic actors (for an application to Italy, see Ratti, 2012). However, even the most ardent systemic theorist, Kenneth Waltz, asserted that explaining states’ choices may need a theory of foreign policy that incorporates domestic players (Waltz, 1979: 122), a call currently taken up by the so-called neoclassical realists (Lobell *et al.*, 2009; for an application to Italy, see Davidson, 2011; Cladi and Webber, 2011). Although the debate regarding the exact weights of domestic and systemic factors is likely to continue, several

developments suggest that the role of domestic factors has increased over the past decades (cf. Hill, 2003). First, the end of Cold War bipolarity has given states more freedom of manoeuvre in the international political system. As a consequence, domestic players are increasingly important (Verbeek and Van der Vleuten, 2008: 358–361). Second, globalization [defined as the deterritorialization of economic, political, and social relations (Scholte, 2005: 16–17)] has led to the domesticization of foreign policy, that is, global phenomena have ever more direct and indirect domestic consequences (e.g. migration, global warming, humanitarian crises, shifts in production patterns, capital flows), thus mobilizing domestic players to support or oppose such developments; the foreign policies of states thus go beyond the classical notion of territorial security and involve various new domestic issues and players. Third, states seek to control such developments through international cooperation, both through global and regional institutions. The EU is an example of a highly institutionalized regional organization. Because the EU has vastly expanded its policy domains since the mid-1980s through a set of treaty reforms, Europeanization has meant that many more domestic actors in the EU are affected by Brussels and, therefore, seek to affect EU policies not only directly but also through the foreign policies of their respective governments. All in all, the end of the Cold War, globalization, and regionalization have vastly expanded the terrain of foreign policy and increased the importance of domestic issues and players, including political parties, particularly for EU member states (Verbeek and Van der Vleuten, 2008).

Parties as neglected foreign policy actors

The literature on domestic players in foreign policy is vast and covers the role of individuals, small groups, bureaucratic organizations, interest groups, and the media. Most theorizing is dedicated to two major themes: on the one hand, influenced by (cognitive) psychology and organization theory, the focus is on elite decision making (e.g. Hermann, 2001); on the other hand, informed by the literature on opportunity structures, the focus is on the relative openness of political systems to public opinion and interest groups (e.g. Risse-Kappen, 1991). However, both of these strands tend to neglect the indirect role of political parties as a link between societal actors and political decision makers, as well as the direct role that political parties play in elite decision making (Rathbun, 2004: 1–15; Kaarbo, 2012: 1–12). Given the increased role of domestic players in foreign policy, it is important to take a closer look at the role political parties play.

Political parties may operate under four different structural conditions. First, they may be in government, either as a single-party government or as a full-fledged member of a coalition. Second, they may support a government (in most cases, a minority government), sometimes by even explicitly agreeing to a coalition agreement. Third, they may seek to influence the government as an opposition party in parliament. Fourth, they may affect the government from outside the parliament.

These scenarios also apply to the PRR. For example, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ-BZÖ) was a full coalition member of the Schüssel I and II governments (2000–07). The Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) did not officially participate in the Rutte I government (2010–12), but it signed a coalition agreement on certain salient issues. The Danish People's Party supported a minority government (2001–11) without an explicit coalition agreement. The French Front National opposed the French government's policies, sometimes from inside the French parliament sometimes from outside.

We choose to investigate the LN because we anticipate that a political party has the largest chance of affecting its country's foreign policy when it is an official member of the government. Moreover, the LN is the longest-serving PRR party in government,² apart from the Swiss SVP.³ Because our selected case involves the LN as a junior coalition member, we draw on the literature regarding junior coalitions and foreign policy.

The foreign policy of coalition cabinets supported by PRR parties

Relatively little IR research has been conducted on the impact of coalition politics on foreign policy (exceptions include Kaarbo, 2008; Özkeçeci-Taner, 2009). The literature, thus far, suggests that coalition governments adopt more extreme foreign policy positions than single-party governments (Kaarbo and Beasley, 2008). Right-wing coalitions tend 'to push the cabinet toward conflict' (e.g. Kaarbo, 2012: 49–50). Because the LN was a smaller partner in Berlusconi's governments, our research builds on previous studies that consider how junior coalition partners have affected a coalition's foreign policy. Three conditions in particular contribute to a junior coalition member's ability to affect its country's foreign policy (Kaarbo, 1996). The first condition is the extent to which the junior party is able to secure cabinet positions that can be characterized as the locus of authority when a foreign policy issue is tabled as important. This usually involves positions such as prime minister, the minister of defence, and the minister of foreign affairs. Alternatively, this condition can arise when the locus of authority is centralized, for example, in a kitchen cabinet, junior parties may affect foreign policy without occupying key ministries. Second, the more the junior party demonstrates internal unity and the senior coalition party suffers from internal disagreements, the more successful the junior party will be in pushing its foreign policy agenda. Finally, junior coalition partners influence foreign policy if they are able to mount a credible threat to the stability of the government.

² The LN is also referred to as a populist party and/or as a populist regionalist party (see Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005). Here we take the approach that because populism is a thin-centred ideology, it must also attach itself with other ideologies; in the case of the LN, although it is clearly a regionalist party, it attaches itself to the radical right.

³ Although an interesting case, the Swiss political system – in particular, the role played by the executive vis-à-vis the parliament – is too different from the rest of Europe to be analysed as a single case.

Foreign policy positions of the LN

In this section, we trace the rise of the LN and identify the evolution of its foreign policy positions based on the expectation that the end of the Cold War, globalization, and Europeanization have strengthened the role of political parties in determining a country's foreign policy. We will focus on the LN's position on the more traditional foreign policy domain of military intervention and on newer issues related to globalization and European integration.

The rise of the LN

In the immediate post-WWII era (1948–94), the Italian party system was a system of polarized pluralism, in which the Christian Democratic party (DC), enhanced by Cold War fears, succeeded in keeping its main opponent (the communist PCI) out of power [Sartori, 2005 (1976)]. However, in the late 1980s, the Italian party system began to change dramatically, facilitated in part by the rise of the LN. The LN was officially created in 1991, merging several smaller regional parties that had appeared in the 1980s (Biorcio, 1997; Ruzza and Fella, 2009; Zaslove, 2011). The rise of the LN was helped by both the fall of communism, which allowed Christian Democratic voters who feared communism to vote for new parties, and the involvement of almost the entire political class in corruption scandals [the Clean Hands investigations (*Mani Pulite*); Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001]. The LN's success continued, propelling it into government with Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) and the Post-Fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) in 1994. The LN left the government in less than a year, in part because it feared FI's electoral competition and because of disagreements over pension reform. After the fall of the 1994 government, the LN successfully pursued a 'go it alone strategy', competing in the 1996 elections without a coalition partner (Biorcio, 1997). In the late 1990s, the LN's electoral support started to decline, forcing it to return to the centre-right coalition, in part to exert a tangible influence on policy. This turn of fate proved successful: the LN's electoral results slowly increased. Although the LN never reached the heights at the national level that it did during the early 1990s, it continued to be successful at the regional level within its strongholds. It became a permanent and influential player in the Italian party system, participating in the government (2001–06 and 2008–11). The question then becomes what foreign policy positions the LN held under the Second Republic.

The EU

The relationship between the LN and the EU is ambiguous, experiencing two phases. In the early 1990s, the LN did not oppose European integration. In fact, it used Europe to support its argument for decentralization and northern autonomy, although it was often critical of the growing power of Brussels, even in these early years. This changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Tarchi, 2007: 189–192).

Although the party does not reject the general notion of Europe and it expresses support for a Europe of the regions, it also views the EU as an overly centralized, bureaucratized organization and often associates it, in its current form, with globalization (Lega Nord, 1999, 2004; Woods, 2009; Huyseune, 2010; Zaslove, 2011).

Intensifying its opposition to the EU meant that, for example, the LN became increasingly critical of the failed constitutional project; criticizing its lack of democracy and objecting to the lack of reference to 'Christian roots' (Gómez-Reino 2014: 137). In addition, the party became more and more critical of the Euro, and once again, the party's position evolved. At first, it was generally supportive of monetary integration, contending that because Italy as a whole would not meet the necessary requirements, opportunities for an independent North, to join the EU separately, would only increase with monetary union. However, especially since 2002, the LN has been increasingly critical of the Euro, at times even calling for a referendum on the Euro and an eventual return to the Lira (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005; *La Repubblica*, 2005a, 2005b, 2012; Woods, 2009; Gómez-Reino, 2014).

In sum, the LN's position towards European integration is a product of its expected effect on Italy's North. The party supports European integration when it strengthens the North's position in Italy and in Europe and opposes integration whenever it seems to threaten the North's cultural identity and economy. We could thus expect the LN to push Italy's foreign policy towards arrangements that enable more autonomy for the North within the EU and to judge European policies on how they shield the North's economy and culture.

Globalization

Even though the LN currently opposes globalization, it began as a free-market neoliberal political movement representing the industrial districts in the so-called Third Italy (North-eastern Italy). In the late 1990s, although it still supported a market economy, the LN began to actively oppose globalization, asking for protectionism for the small- and medium-sized businesses in the Third Italy (Woods, 2009; Huyseune, 2010). This shift occurred, in part, because of the region's declining global competitiveness and structural changes within the LN's electoral support. Originally, the LN received support from more middle class voters and entrepreneurs, but its support began to change in the late 1990s: the LN attracted more lower middle class and working class voters (Diamanti, 2009). Party leader Umberto Bossi responded by portraying globalization as threat to local production and local traditions [such as traditional Italian (*Padanian*) food products] and by resisting Chinese imports (Bossi, 2003; *Padania: Lega Nord*, 2006).

With the intensification of economic and financial globalization, globalization became entwined with the LN's traditional identity politics. The LN had always argued for the distinct identity and culture of the Italian North (*Padania*), contrasting the frugal, hardworking North with the lazy, spendthrift South (Biorcio, 1997).

However, protection of the Padanian identity was now linked with opposing globalization. All in all, we could expect the LN, as a junior partner in the Berlusconi governments, to be increasingly critical of economic and cultural globalization and to propose more measures to protect the Italian economy and identity and to curtail migration.

Military intervention

The LN, in the early 1990s, placed little emphasis on the role of the military and on issues relating to security. When international events were discussed, emphasis was placed on the party's lack of 'trust' in the United States and its hegemonic tendencies and on the LN's support for multipolarism (Tarchi, 2007: 191). In those cases when the LN was forced to take a position on military matters, it often resisted multilateral operations, particularly those initiated by the United States. Interestingly, the LN's opposition is often clouded in a legalistic argument, suggesting the lack of adequate UN backing. Only when the LN's core ideology was at stake, such as when the democratic transition in Albania in 1995 seemed to provoke a flux of Muslim migrants to nearby Italy, did it support Italian participation in multilateral operations (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012). Towards the turn of the century (and especially after *nine eleven*) the LN became more concerned with issues of security. For example, the LN supported Serbia in the 1999 Kosovo crisis, opposing intervention by NATO. This decision was partially based on its opposition to the Muslim composition of Kosovo (Tarchi, 2007: 193). Since 11 September 2001, the LN's opposition to the United States has softened (i.e. supporting the War on Terror), while at the same time its policies have become more confused, particularly its position vis-à-vis the United States. Even though it supports the War on Terror, it is also often, at the same time, critical of the intentions and motives of American foreign policy, that is, accusing the United States of acting out of self-interest (Tarchi 2007: 194–197). Thus, we may expect the LN's security policies to resist military intervention unless it serves to protect Northern Italy's identity.

The LN and Italy's foreign policy

Building a credible threat: party system change

The fall of the immediate post-WWII polarized Italian party system, ushered in a bipolar party system after the 1994 elections, resting on the two largest parties: the centre-right Forza Italia (from 2009 the People of Freedom, PDL) and the centre-left Democratic Party of the Left/Democrats of the Left (PDS/DS, and later, the Democratic Party, PD). Although the Italian party system has moved to bipolarity in the so-called Second Republic, it remains highly fragmented with a large number of parties. In addition, competition occurs not only between the left and the right blocs but also within these alliances, sometimes even within a single party, particularly the PDS/DS and more recently the PD. The structural conditions of a party

system such as Italy's have implications for the influence of a junior coalition partner such as the LN. Elections are often won or lost by a narrow margin, emphasizing the importance of including smaller parties in an official pre-election coalition (Bartolini *et al.*, 2004; Diamanti, 2007; Albertazzi *et al.*, 2011).

Therefore, in the Italian party system, junior parties carry weight not only because they may occupy relevant ministerial posts, or may exploit differences between their coalition partners, but also because the nature of the party system facilitates their potential as a credible threat to the survival of the government in specific ways that are not fully recognized by the junior coalition partner literature. It is important to distinguish between a threat to the parliamentary survival of a government and an on-going electoral threat not to participate in an electoral alliance (cf. Bardi, 2007). The former refers to the situation in which the junior coalition partner may threaten to actually leave the government. The latter points to the need to form pre-electoral alliances in Italy's Second Republic. This is based first, on Italy's 1993–2005 mixed member majoritarian and post-2005 bonus-adjusted PR list system (Farrell, 2011: 179) and, second, on the fragmented, bipolar nature of the party system. The combination of these conditions encourages pre-electoral alliances, but among a narrow group of possible choices. In Italy, a junior coalition partner may thus not have enough seats to bring the government down (i.e. the LN between 2001 and 2006) but may still play the on-going electoral alliance game. Moreover, in such bipolar, fragmented systems, unified junior parties will be better capable of exploiting coalition and senior party disunity. Until 2013, this has been the case in Italy for the LN in the centre-right alliance and for *Rifondazione Comunista* in the centre-left alliance.

If the fragmented bipolar nature of the Italian system gives extra weight to smaller parties, this is particularly relevant for the LN. The LN held a privileged position within the coalition (often above its electoral strength; cf. Bolleyer, 2007; Albertazzi *et al.*, 2011). This was due to three factors: first, the LN's electoral strength in the North; second, despite their differences there was also a degree of ideological affinity between the LN and FI/PDL; finally, the special relationship between Berlusconi and Bossi (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, 2010; Diamanti and Lello, 2005; Albertazzi *et al.*, 2011). As a result, the LN was often given extra weight within the centre-right coalition.

Before assessing the LN's influence on Italian foreign policy under the Berlusconi governments, we examine the conditions that affect its capacity to act. We will do so by distinguishing between four coalitions.⁴ The first, lasting between May 1994 and January 1995, consisted of Berlusconi's FI, Bossi's LN, Gianfranco Fini's MSI-AN, the CCD and the UDC. The second coalition (Berlusconi II) was composed of FI, AN, the LN, and the smaller Christian Democratic parties (the CCD-CDU). This coalition lasted until 2005, when AN and the UDC (the CCD-CDU having merged

⁴ We mention only the most important coalition partners.

into the UDC), having grown wary of the LN's strength and influence in the coalition, used FI's loss in the regional elections to demand more power. That coalition was succeeded by Berlusconi III, which consisted of the same parties and lasted until losing the regular elections scheduled for 2006. After a 2-year period of a centre-left coalition, Berlusconi re-entered government, winning the early 2008 elections with a new party, *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL), which was a fusion of FI and AN (Berlusconi IV). Again, the LN was the other main party in the coalition, while the UDC decided not to join the coalition.

Table 1 presents the distribution of key foreign policy posts in the Berlusconi governments. Because key posts in foreign policy may also refer to departments that have a foreign policy role but that do not belong to the traditional troika of prime minister, defence minister and foreign affairs minister, we include the ministries that can be assumed to have most influenced the LN's salient foreign policy issues: portfolio's relating to the EU,⁵ migration (Interior), and globalization (Economics/Finance). The LN clearly lacked access to the classic foreign policy triangle, apart from 1994, when it occupied the unofficial portfolio for the coordination of the policy that related to the EU. Moreover, in the 2001–06 coalitions, it did not hold ministries vital to its foreign policy concerns either. This changed when the LN secured the Interior and Agriculture Ministries in 2008.

Under the short-lived Berlusconi I government, LN heavyweight Maroni held the post of Deputy Prime Minister, but the LN maintained its distance from FI, as LN leader Umberto Bossi refused to take a government seat. In this short period, the LN proved its threat potential in 1994 when it brought down the government over a proposal for pension reform that the LN rejected as evidence of Brussels' unfair conditions for Italy's eligibility for the Euro, which the LN had doubted anyway (Schludi, 2005: 115) and which also threatened the LN's electoral base (Thompson, 2009: 103). The June 1994 European elections had already shown that FI successfully competed for the LN's vote in its core constituencies. The LN thus chose to distance itself from FI (Ignazi, 2014: 53–55).

Under Berlusconi II, the LN obtained access to the locus of authority through an inner cabinet consisting of the three leaders of the main coalition partners (cf. Crisciello, 1994). More importantly, Bossi personally moved closer to Berlusconi, although Fini was officially Deputy Prime Minister. Healing the rift caused by the LN's ending of the first Berlusconi government, Berlusconi and Bossi developed a special relationship, often referred to as the 'northern axis' (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005; Diamanti and Lello, 2005). This reinforced the LN's position in the coalition at the expense of AN. Even after the merger of FI and AN into the PDL and despite Bossi's reduced involvement due to his stroke in 2004, Berlusconi realized the

⁵ Because of the Common Agricultural Policy, Agriculture is an important department. In Italy, departments officially related to the EU appear as *Politiche Comunitarie* or *Politiche Europee* (both with portfolios), as well as *Coordinamento delle Politiche Unione Europea* (without portfolio; see <http://www.governo.it/Governo/Governi/governi.html>). In Table 1, we use the term European Integration.

Table 1. Key foreign policy posts in the Berlusconi governments

Post	Berlusconi I 1994–95	Berlusconi II 2001–05	Berlusconi III 2005–06	Berlusconi IV 2008–11
Prime Minister	Berlusconi (FI)	Berlusconi (FI)	Berlusconi (FI)	Berlusconi (FI/PDL)
Foreign Affairs	Martino (FI)	Ruggiero (2001–02) (Independent) Berlusconi (January to November 2002) (FI interim) Frattini (2002–04) (FI) Fini (2004–05) (AN)	Fini (AN)	Frattini (FI/PDL)
Defence	Previti (FI)	Martino (FI)	Martino (FI)	La Russa (AN/PDL)
European Integration	Comino (LN) (without portfolio)	Buttiglione (UDC)	La Malfa (PRI)	Ronchi (AN/PDL) (May 2008 to November 2010) Berlusconi (PDL) (November 2010 to July 2011) Bernini Bovicelli (PDL) (July–November 2011) Maroni (LN)
Interior	Maroni (LN)	Scajola (FI) (2001–02) Pisanu (FI) (2002–05)	Pisanu (FI)	
Agriculture	Poli Bortone (MSI-AN)	Alemanno (AN)	Alemanno (AN)	Zaia (LN) 2008–10 Galan (PDL) April 2010 to March 2011
Economics/Finance	Tremonti (FI)	Tremonti (FI) (2001–04) Siniscalco (Independent) (2004–05)	Siniscalco (Independent) (2005) Tremonti (FI) (September 2005–06)	Tremonti (FI/PDL)
Treasury	Dini (Independent)			

Source: *European Journal of Political Research*, *Political Data Year Book*, and the Italian government website. See: <http://www.politicaldatayearbook.com/Chart.aspx/108/Italy> and <http://www.governo.it/Governo/Governi/governi.html>

importance of consulting his LN counterparts regularly, maintaining his special relationship with the LN (cf. Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, 2010). Although between 2001 and 2006, the LN could not bring down the government by its sheer numbers, it still posed an electoral threat, as the bipolar, fragmented nature of the party system made the LN an indispensable member of the centre-right election alliance. This was regularly confirmed in regional and European elections, during which the LN often proved successful by playing the security and immigration card. Under Berlusconi IV, the LN remained an essential pre-electoral ally, but in addition, it could deprive the government of a majority by withholding support (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2010).

Italy's foreign policy under the Berlusconi coalitions

Given the changing nature of foreign policy and subsequent domesticization, and the considerable overlap between the LN's concerns and the expanding terrain of foreign policy, the LN could be expected to influence Italy's foreign policy, especially regarding European integration, globalization, and military intervention. Its influence may be direct – for example, regarding immigration and opposition to Europe – while it may be more indirect regarding other issues, such as military intervention. We mainly discuss the foreign policies of Berlusconi's governments in the 2000s, as his first cabinet lasted for too short a period (~8 months) to expect major foreign policy changes (cf. Cladi and Webber, 2011: 201–211). Even so, in EU matters, Berlusconi I immediately adopted a hard line by blocking Slovenia's accession talks (Carbone, 2007: 908).

European integration

As argued above, the LN has been ambiguous in its relationship with the EU, fearing the EU's increased policy competencies but welcoming the EU as an instrument in promoting regional autonomy and thwarting migration. However, by the late 1990s, the LN had moved to a distinctive anti-EU attitude, particularly on three issues: the Euro, EU expansion, and the constitutional treaty. In the early stages of Berlusconi II, this shift clearly affected the government's attitude towards the EU – for example, the LN's lukewarm reception of the Euro project and its campaign against non-partisan Foreign Minister Renato Ruggiero, who resigned ostensibly over the centre-right's tepid reception of the Euro (*La Repubblica*, 2002). However, the doubts that EU member states held about Italy meeting EMU criteria, and about Berlusconi's government being in disarray over the EMU, effectively reduced Italy's prestige within the EU. This result was reinforced by the dispute over the Italian government's failed nomination of Rocco Buttiglione as European Commissioner in 2004 and Berlusconi's performances in the European Parliament and at European summits. Berlusconi noted the cool winds in Brussels but had to accommodate the Euroscepticism of both the LN and members of his own FI (Bindi, 2011). Important clashes occurred over the

constitutional treaty, particularly when it was proposed to give Italy fewer seats than France in the European Parliament (Quaglia *et al.*, 2009: 78). Berlusconi's solution was twofold. Seeking to calm the Eurosceptic voices in the government, he appointed Franco Frattini, a man considered to be personally loyal to him, as Foreign Minister in 2002. He also worked towards making the previously Eurosceptic AN acceptable in Brussels by nominating Fini as Italy's representative to the European Convention. Thus, Berlusconi not only strengthened Italy's position within the EU but also managed the tensions within his coalition. Whereas the LN could distance itself by beating the anti-EU drum, Berlusconi drew AN and Fini closer together through a more pro-European stance. Fearing growing support for the EU within the centre-right coalition, the LN objected to Berlusconi's move. The LN vocally opposed the constitutional treaty and voted against it in the Italian Parliament. When Fini and Berlusconi did not object to possible future Turkish entry into the EU, the LN also held demonstrations in Milan criticizing Fini and Berlusconi (*La Repubblica*, 2004).

The Berlusconi IV government developed an even stronger pro-EU position. Between 2001 and 2006, the Berlusconi II and III governments discovered that their stubborn attitude in Brussels made them few friends. More importantly, Frattini's role as Foreign Minister in the new government was crucial. Having been a European Commissioner between 2004 and 2008, Frattini had transformed into a Europhile, giving voice to this position within the cabinet. Because AN and FI had distanced themselves from the LN on EU issues since 2002, the LN was less effective in exploiting FI's internal divisions over Europe. In 2008, the Lisbon Treaty passed through the House of Deputies and the Senate. Although the LN voted with the government, it remained critical (*Corriere della Sera*, 2008a, 2008b).

In sum, the LN initially utilized its position to promote Eurosceptic policies. However, when Italy's prestige was called into question, Berlusconi moved the government towards a more pro-European position despite the LN's continued objection. FI and the LN were involved in a complex domestic game often played out over EU issues. The diverging attitudes of the LN and FI/PDL towards the EU enabled the LN to be part of the government and still criticize Berlusconi, thus distinguishing itself with its electorate. The LN could, as a result, accomplish its electoral objectives without having to pose a threat to the survival of the government.

Globalization: migration and protectionism

The LN has systemically opposed the perceived negative consequences of globalization in all of its dimensions: economic, cultural, political, and social. One focus has been the threat foreign companies pose to Italian employment, particularly in the formerly successful Third Italy, the LN's major stronghold. This opinion translated into protectionist demands, particularly against China. The LN unsuccessfully pushed for more protection and tariffs and took on China and the WTO as the major opponents of Italy's economic interests (Woods, 2009). However, the

LN's major concern has been migration caused by the push from instability in Africa, the Balkans, and the Near East and the pull of Italy's informal economy. Stricter legislation resulted under Berlusconi II and IV, particularly the Bossi-Fini Law of 2002 and the 2009 Security Package (Zincone, 2006; Cento Bull, 2010).

The Bossi-Fini Law was the result of the politicization of immigration, fuelled by the LN in the late 1990s. Once in power, the centre-right coalition, in particular Bossi and Fini, drafted new legislation on immigration. The purpose of the law was to create stricter policies and to reverse the 1998 centre-left legislation (the Turco-Napolitano Law). It explicitly linked migration to Italy with work by requiring employment before issuing a residence permit. Linking migration to foreign policy, the government also sought to securitize immigration by calling for the use of the army to patrol Italy's borders and coastline to combat illegal immigration (Colombo and Sciortino, 2003; Einaudi, 2007).

In 2009 the centre-right government, with the LN's Roberto Maroni as Interior Minister, passed a controversial security law. This new law criminalized illegal immigration, made marriage and family reunification for immigrants more difficult, and sought to create civilian patrols to enhance local security (Cento Bull, 2010: 420–422). Sparked by grappling images of boats full of immigrants reaching already overcrowded Italian islands, such as Lampedusa, the government increased its efforts to control borders and the coastline, at times even challenging international and European law. In addition, the security package coincided with the government's deployment of the army against immigrants and a 'crackdown' on Roma (*The New York Times*, 2008; *EuObserver*, 2008b). The actions of the Berlusconi IV government, particularly regarding the Roma, invoked the ire of the European Parliament (*EUObserver*, 2008a, c), while its actions were often less scrupulous regarding migrant boats. For example, it provoked tensions with Malta when it refused boats with migrants from reaching its shores (Agence France Presse, 2009; *The New York Times*, 2009).

Italy had long hoped that Europe would help protect its porous borders. Through the EU's FRONTEX, it expected the EU to contribute to patrolling the Mediterranean and to ensure that migrants would not always reach Italy as a first destination. Because its huge coastline makes Italy an attractive target for illegal immigration, Italy is perceived to suffer from the EU's rule that migrants' cases have to be processed in the EU country that they reach first. However, when FRONTEX proved to be a rather ineffective policy instrument, Italy turned to countries such as Libya and arranged more effective means of patrolling the seas on a bilateral basis (Cento Bull, 2010: 421; Paoletti, 2011).

In sum, the LN proved less successful in achieving anti-globalization policies (i.e. related in particular to economic globalization), while it proved more successful regarding migration. The case of migration illustrates the complex nature of contemporary foreign policy and the intertwining of domestic and foreign policy in an era of Europeanization and globalization. Holding a key ministry (Maroni at Interior) added to the LN's structural capacity to influence policy in this area.

The LN emphasized migration because it directly relates to the party's notion of economic and cultural identity. The analysis also shows that the LN's attitude towards the EU depends on the degree to which it is associated with LN's core issue: the people's identity. As long as the EU protected 'the people' from immigration, for example, through FRONTEX, the LN welcomed EU policies. When this proved ineffective, the LN helped steer Italy unilaterally towards a bilateral agreement with Libya.

Military interventions

Since the end of the Cold War, Italy has been eager to increase its participation in multilateral military missions. This was part of a strategy to boost Italy's international reputation. The end of the Cold War, and the increased strength of countries such as Brazil and India, posed a threat to Italy's desired status as a secondary power (Giacomello and Verbeek, 2011). The G7/8 (of which Italy had long been a member) gave way to the larger G20. Attempts in the United Nations to create permanent seats on the Security Council for Germany and Japan posed a threat to Italy's relative position. Frequent participation in peacekeeping missions was deemed essential to a campaign launched to prove Italy's value (Tallarigo, 2007; Cotichia and Giacomello, 2011; Ignazi *et al.*, 2012). This path was pursued by both centre-left and centre-right coalitions. At the same time, the junior parties in these coalitions had great difficulty in accepting these policies. This was as true for *Rifondazione Comunista* in the centre-left coalitions (1996–98; 2006–08)⁶ as for the LN in the centre-right coalitions. The LN's reluctance is rooted in various motives, including a general opposition to the deployment of Italian soldiers abroad, tapping into pacifist sentiments, crosscutting the entire Italian political landscape, and into distinct anti-American sentiments. At the same time, the LN supported the deployment of Italian forces to Afghanistan in 2001 (cf. Croci, 2005: 64), serving the LN's desire to combat Islamic terrorism, an enemy fitting the LN's worldview.

Iraq. Until the early 2000s, the LN's position did not pose a problem because Italy's foreign policy towards troop deployment was based on a 'bipartisan consensus' – the LN's position served its electoral purpose but mattered little to Italy's foreign policy. This changed when the 'bipartisan consensus' disappeared, parallel to the rift within the EU, over support for American plans to consider waging war in Iraq from the summer of 2002 onwards (Carbone, 2007). Berlusconi's government had to be cautious when deciding whether to participate in the 2003 Iraq war: internationally, it sought to reconcile support for the United States with European unity; domestically, it faced fierce popular protests, constitutional difficulties, and a hostile President. The centre-left opposed the war, making

⁶ Under Prodi I (1996–98) *Rifondazione* was a pivotal, formally external supporter of the government, but did not provide ministers; under Prodi II (2006–08) it rejoined the government, supplying a minister.

parliamentary support unlikely. The centre-right coalition itself walked a tightrope between its commitment to the War on Terror, its fear of being seen as too close an ally of the United States, and the pacifism of some of its constituents (cf. Davidson, 2008: 44): indeed, over 40% of centre-right voters indicated that they opposed the war (Della Porta and Diani, 2004: 252).

Given this predicament, in March 2003, the government offered only political support for the war, including American use of Italian airspace and fields (Davidson, 2011), but embraced the opportunity to contribute to operations in post-Saddam Iraq in April 2003. Nevertheless, Berlusconi had to present the Italian mission (Operation *Antica Babilonica*) as a United Nation rather than American request, and had to frame it as a mission of reconstruction and development to obtain the LN's support (Ignazi *et al.*, 2012: 75–78). Although the LN was only one of the many factors in the March 2003 decision, it clearly helped narrow Italy's foreign policy options over post-Saddam Iraq: not only the decision that inaugurated Operation *Antica Babilonica* but also the 2005 decision to announce its conclusion by 2006. By then, the LN feared being tied down in an American conflict and suffering too many casualties (*Corriere della Sera*, 2004). The LN helped Berlusconi pre-empt the end of the mission before the 2006 general elections.

Libya. Similar difficulties arose when Italy was deciding whether to join the international community and protect the Libyan population in the wake of uprisings against the Khadafy regime in February 2011. In the early stages of the conflict, Foreign Minister Frattini warned against supporting Libya's opposition, as this would risk establishing what he called a 'caliphate' across the Mediterranean, facilitating the arrival of more migrants from Africa and the Maghreb to Italy. Indeed, both centre-left and centre-right Italian governments had sought reconciliation with the Khadafy regime, resulting in an Italian-Libyan friendship treaty only 3 years before the Arab Spring erupted (Paoletti, 2011). The treaty ensured that Libya would patrol the Mediterranean Sea for economic migrants in boats paid for by the Italian government. Moreover, the treaty guaranteed Italy's energy company ENI exclusive access to Libyan oil and gas resources. Italy thus hoped to solve the problem of the malfunctioning of FRONTEX and ensure the delivery of energy. The LN's support thus related nicely to its concern about migration and the EU's inability to produce secure borders. Maroni's position as Interior Minister, and as one of the LN's leading figures, played an important role (Marchetti, 2010).

However, as soon as its energy vulnerability became clear, Italy changed course over Libya. When the Libyan opposition proved capable of producing and transporting oil, Italy recognized the Libyan government-in-exile. This decision was motivated by Italy's vital interest in energy access and in protecting the position of ENI against competing firms from France and Britain, which were hoping to take over ENI's exclusive position in the country in the wake of the Anglo-French support for the Libyan rebels. The LN's migration concerns in Italy's foreign policy towards Libya disappeared as soon as the high politics of energy became salient (Koenig, 2011).

Conclusion

In this article we examined the role of political parties in foreign policy because the end of the Cold War, globalization, and regionalization have strengthened the intertwinement of international and domestic politics and thus the role of political parties, especially in EU countries. Specifically, we investigated whether PRR parties that are part of coalition governments, influence their countries' foreign policy. Because such parties mostly play the role of a junior partner in a multiparty coalition, we have built and expanded upon the existing literature on junior coalition parties and foreign policy. Our prime example involved the case of Italy's LN in the Berlusconi governments.

Our main theoretical finding is that factors that account for a junior coalition party's success, such as access to decision making, presenting a credible threat, and the ability to exploit the divisions within coalition partners, are themselves contingent upon the structure of the country's party system. The LN's influence was conditioned by the bipolar structure of Italy's party system and the high fragmentation of the two broad coalitions operating in the context of the bipolar party system, which reinforced the outcome of intermediate elections. Both conditions determined the electoral stakes of the Berlusconi governments and increased the LN's importance to the coalition, thus raising its threat potential.

Second, the PRR's success in pursuing a foreign policy agenda depends on the demands of the other actors in the coalition. For example, the LN was the most anti-immigrant party in the coalition, but in addition, it found allies in both the AN and FI/PDL in all Berlusconi governments in the 2000s. However, it was less successful in mustering their support for policies to resist economic globalization: the higher degree of consensus on this issue among its coalition partners meant there were no internal divisions to exploit. Regarding more traditional foreign policy areas, such as military intervention, the LN merely played an indirect role. Although not decisive, its support of the War on Terror, coupled with its reluctance to intervene in conflicts abroad, added to Berlusconi's calculations not to intervene in Iraq. However, its influence over the government's policies regarding Libya was more direct, in part due to the overlap with concerns over immigration and security, which were reinforced by FRONTEX's poor performance in controlling the EU's southern borders.

Another finding is that PRR parties do not always take straightforward positions regarding foreign policy, as is sometimes suggested in the PRR literature. The LN does not reject European integration outright. The party might accept some form of integration as long as it facilitates regional autonomy, contributes to protecting Italy's borders, and serves to protect Italian farmers and industries. When investigating PRR parties and foreign policy, it is thus essential to weigh the salience of issues by assessing how close they are to the core of PRR ideology in a specific country. For the LN, migration is a highly salient issue. It has thus increasingly come to judge Europeanization and globalization in terms of what they mean for

protecting ‘the people’. When the EU and the global economy caused an influx of migrants in the 2000s, the LN contributed to stricter regulation under Berlusconi II. It first embraced the EU in building a common frontier guarded by FRONTEX, but under Berlusconi IV, it reverted to bilateral diplomacy (with Libya) to keep out migrants. Despite its rhetoric, the PRR is not inherently anti-European: its position is contingent upon what it perceives the EU to be able to do for ‘the people’.

Furthermore, our case study of the LN suggests that a coalition’s foreign policy is not the exclusive product of domestic political factors but is also constrained by the international environment. When in 2001 the LN’s Euroscepticism seemed to threaten Italy’s standing in the EU, the government moved towards a more pro-EU stance. When Italy’s vital energy interests were better served by the new provisional government in Libya than by the Khadafy regime, the Italian government changed sides, despite the LN’s call for abstinence in the conflict. On these issues, despite its strong concern with migration during the Libyan crisis, the LN would not take the strong position as a junior coalition partner that the Italian political system had granted it. This implies that theories seeking to explain a country’s foreign policy from a domestic political perspective (the so-called ‘second image’ literature) should incorporate the literature that theorizes international systemic constraints on foreign policy. In the IR literature, neoclassical realism seeks to advance this position (for Italy, see Davidson, 2011) but neglects the role of parties. In the comparative politics literature, the international environment is mostly absent. Thus, it is time for both sides to meet. The PRR and studies of populist parties, both left and right, offer an ideal source for comparative case studies. Such studies might focus on the role of junior parties in similar coalitions, such as Italy’s *Rifondazione* in the Prodi centre-left governments. They might also compare similar parties in coalitions of different party systems, such as the role of the People’s Party in Switzerland.

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