

Rifondazione and Europe: A party competition analysis

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Abstract

This paper addresses the attitude of Rifondazione Comunista on Europe (European Integration and the European Union) between 1992 and 2006. This is done through an analysis of its positions and institutional action in the Italian electoral arena and partly based on common assumptions and analytical frameworks of the prevailing literature; that is, party system analysis. Findings show that Rifondazione has achieved two things, that are almost in direct contradiction with each other. Firstly, it gradually increased the use of the issue of European integration to emphasise its radical identity, target the Eurosceptics and other radical sections of the electorate and differentiate itself as clearly as possible from the centre-left. Secondly, it underwent positional realignment towards a softer approach, mostly, through its voting behavior in the Italian parliament and its support for the centre-left governments. A broad discussion assesses the findings of this case study and illuminates larger questions about party attitudes towards European integration.

INTRODUCTION

Apart from being a study which attempts to provide insights into the tactical and strategic considerations of parties, when Europe is put on the agenda, a study of Rifondazione Comunista's electoral attitude towards European integration merits attention due to three main reasons. Firstly, Rifondazione Comunista's first fifteen years coincided with the 'intensive years' of European integration. Especially in Italy, a prolonged process of integrating the country's economy and harmonising it with EU standards has given rise to both government and elite manoeuvres (Giuliani, 2000; Cotta, 1998; Dyson and Featherstone) and party conflict (Conti, 2006); that is it has affected without exception all political actors. Secondly Rifondazione Comunista is not the traditional west European Communist Party, projecting either orthodoxy or reformism, since, especially after 2000 it has found itself in a particular phase of transformation in which, to use its own words, 'innovation' 'experimentation' and 'contamination' at both domestic and European level are put to the test and whose long-term electoral results may not yet be predicted. Thirdly, for mostly analytical reasons, Rifondazione is functioning in a confused party system of 'stable instability', has undergone a fundamental change in leadership and is allowing the 'risk' of institutionalised and organisationally cohesive tendencies, thereby providing food for thought, in terms of the factors potentially conditioning a party's European strategy.

This paper proceeds as follows. The following section outlines the theoretical considerations driving this research, by briefly reflecting on the dominant arguments and insufficiencies of the literature. The second, empirical section outlines the attitude of Rifondazione's towards Europe and is divided in short historical periods each one encompassing different events and developments are different. The concluding section summarises and discusses the findings theoretical connotations. The research was based on the study of party documents (congresses, manifestos and other official party publications), as well as a series of semi-structured interviews.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PARTIES AND EUROPE

The relation between political parties and European integration has been addressed by two kinds of literature. One of them is based on the study of Euroscepticism, that is an analysis party attitudes, either through manifesto analysis or qualitative and historical-comparative studies (Sczerbiak and Taggart, 2002; Conti, 2006; Sitter, 2005; 2003; Taggart, 1998) . The other contends that European parties have responded to the impact of integration, ultimately influencing the direction of the integration process (Ladrech, 2002). At the same time, EU policies increasingly affect domestic policy-making and agenda-setting, forcing the parties to incorporate Europe into their party tactics. As such, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that parties are becoming Europeanized, through projecting their European stances and supporting European policy goals (Kritzinger et al, 2004; Ladrech, 2001).

The two literatures, although substantially different in their theoretical underpinnings, research questions and methodology, have placed focus on the tactical behaviour of parties. In other words, they have both implicitly accepted that attitudes towards European integration are conditioned by party strategies and conscious political decisions. Whether such strategies change mostly because of party system considerations, leadership change or developments at the European level, does not change the fact that they exist. While Martin Bull's (1993) assertion, in his example of the PCI's transformation into the social democratic PDS, that a strategy may not exist, has some coherence, since the specific example of change was a one-off situation, Europeanisation is a long-term process that infiltrates the political, economic and party system of each country and upon which, parties are forced to reflect in order to achieve or balance the goals that as Ladrech (2001) says, they consider

indispensable.

In this sense, the focus has always been on how parties behave in terms of electoral conduct within their domestic party system. That is, how and why they decide to change either attitudes or salience placed on Europe. The general theme, therefore, common in both literatures, is that parties, as actors functioning in a constantly competitive environment, differentiate themselves from other actors, with respect to European integration and how they achieve this. And such differentiation is achieved through the formulation of general views on issues. A party system competition analytical category refers exactly to these general views, before and beyond any specific formulations they undertake, in terms of theoretical argumentation and argument sophistication. In their study on the attitudes of Italian political parties on European integration, Conti and Verzicelli (2003: 4) make a reality-oriented distinction between party elites' *general views* on the integration process and the *formation* (or policy-specific) discourse that touches more elaborately on individual sub-themes. Similarly, Ladrech (2001) outlines five areas of party functions to comprise an analytical framework for the study of party Europeanisation, out of which one is named 'Patterns of party competition'. According to Ladrech's reasoning, as the EU becomes politicized, each party is expected first of all to adopt a pro- or anti-EU stance to stabilize their political base and thereafter target its voters in an opportunistic manner. Nonetheless, salience, under the supposition that it is accompanied by a specific ideology, illustrates mostly the degree of emphasis on European integration. It does not illustrate the type and has to be combined with issue orientation and general stanceⁱ. In retrospect, this study agrees with the prevailing view, that attitudes of parties matter, since they indicate either that parties change party positions towards European integration or remain 'static European actors' (Kritzinger et al, 2004).

However, in both cases there are two insufficiencies. Firstly neither qualitative nor empirical studies tend to outline the general context, within which a party's attitude on European integration is shaped (for exceptions see Dunphy, 2005; Batory, 2003; Johannson and Raunio, 2002; Benedetto and Quaglia, 2007). Especially in one-case studies more general developments, which affect the party's overall strategy have to be linked to its European strategy. Secondly there is no mention of actual voting behaviour, as if this does not matter for the electorate and does not affect perceptions of the party's European attitude. However, in both popular and academic wisdom voting and institutional behaviour does affect the perceived image of parties and therefore may also initiate a change in their strategy. While it is important to examine propositions, propaganda and electoral appeal through programmatic references, it is equally – if not more – important to outline the component of *final action* towards policy, mostly determined through its actual voting in parliament, its subsequent publicisation and the degree to which the party appears confident and ready to discuss it. The actual votes of parties for important EU Treaties and EU-related domestic policies, either in the EP or in the national parliament, are an important indicator of what their party system position is conceived to be, at least by that part of the electorate which directs its attention more on actually implemented policy measures and less on rhetoric. And in extension it also illuminates whether they try to regulate their party system position of either appearing proud of these actions or trying to downplay them.

RIFONDAZIONE COMUNISTA'S ATTITUDE ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Rifondazione was from the beginning host to a variety of views that are in profound tension with one another. Yet, as Hellman (1993:209) predicted, '*as long as it remains a small opposition party, these tensions can generally be avoided*'.ⁱⁱ And so they did in its initial years. As we saw above, the various currents that formed Rifondazione came together partly through their opposition to government participation, and consequently the initial years of the party were free from essential

flirtations with office. This attitude shaped accordingly the character of the party and hence, in part, its orientation to European integration. In the existing literature the inheritance of Rifondazione from the PCI is a moot point and has only been addressed adequately by Bertolino's (2004) extensive account. Especially the ex-Democrazia Proletaria leaders and members were influenced deeply by the PCI's maneuvers during Eurocommunism and its emphasis on activism at the European level.

Yet, in party terms, Rifondazione's utility function at its very beginning was characterised by more coherent ideological rigidity than the late PCI (see Roemer, 2001; Sanchez Cuenca, 2004). At the same time, with the retrieval of the Social Democrats (later DS) into the domain of governing social democracy, the party did not view itself as constrained to the Eurosceptic vote. Most importantly, it was different (before 1995) from the traditional west European communist party in that Leninism was never an important element of the party's culture, especially since most leaders of the party in its original composition had abandoned Leninist referencesⁱⁱⁱ (see Charalambous, 2007).

The Origins of Rifondazione: Chaos and Diversity

Despite popular claims (from various kinds of literature) that Rifondazione's identity was dissonant with the essence of the PCI (Sanni and Reicher, 1998; Bertolino, 2003) a Eurorejectionism had been long abandoned. Its bundle of policy concerns were mostly derived from the theory of Keynes and its attitude to European integration was not revolutionary in the sense of overturning the entire project of capitalist unification. The majority of Rifondazione leaders, including Armando Cossutta, recognized in the first party Congress that simply calling for national sovereignty would be '*a historical and scientific mistake*' (interview, July, 2007, via email). The party's stance on European integration was also a consequence of that the official party position on existing socialism, was largely different to that of, say, the Greek communists. The party, both in its official statements and in the recorded views of its leading elite, praised and committed itself to the ideals of the October revolution but this did not stop it from being flexible or critical of the Soviet Union (Rifondazione, 1992; Sani and Reicher, 1998).

As one interviewee (of the Leninist minority motion) said, '*It is above all important to consider that the party was never in an ideological anti-European opposition tout court; that is, the main subject of denunciation were the modality and the character of European construction*' (interview, July, 2007, via email). Despite that some divergence did happen, on behalf of the Leninist and Trotskyist tendencies of the party, essentially emphasising the neo-colonialist nature of European integration, the majority position was pro-European. The party sought to constitute the main part of the alternative left and remain antagonistic to the government and government-related forces, although the term was actually coined later

The European Union did not appear as a main theme during the first two years of Rifondazione, despite the dire economic situation that Italy was in; under Prime Ministers Amato and Ciampi there emerged a privatization program, transforming major state holdings into joint-stock companies. A raft of deregulation measures placed greater emphasis on the private sector and industrial restructuring hit the labour market hard. These measures were of course criticised by Rifondazione, but neither with the attention Maastricht received in the cases of most parties, nor with the proposed solutions being neatly tied to Europe. The first electoral campaign for the 1992 elections was underlined by emphasis on the communist inheritance and the European theme was only an extension of these claims.

The opposition of Rifondazione to the Maastricht model was united and did not register any significant defections or internal conflict. The party naturally voted against the Treaty of Maastricht

inside parliament and initiated some protest linking Maastricht to the government's character (Battistini, 1992), additionally criticising the process of constructing a single currency as disastrous. The party was undergoing a test, in the sense of facing the challenge of constructing a neo-communist unitary identity against neo-capitalism and in the midst of deciding on whether to join in an alliance with other forces of the centre-left. The issues that predominated in its first Congress and formed the nuclei of public debate, were those of the Italian communist story (relaunching a class perspective against reformism), of opposition to the constitutional reforms of the time, the moral question (centered around the corruption scandals that emerged through the Tangentopoli affair) and the relocation of the social question of class after the rejection of the abrogative referendum on the curtailment of the sliding scale and the march of the Quarantamila of FIAT. What is notable by its absence, was that unlike the case of the Greeks and its Bertinottian era, Rifondazione did not debate the issue of refounding Italian communism with reference to Europe.

Bertinotti Enters but still Chaos

At the beginning of 1993, Fausto Bertinotti left the PDS and in the autumn of the same year he joined Rifondazione Comunista along with other intellectuals and trade union militants led by historic left leader Piero Ingrao. Accordingly, the conflict between Cossutta and Garavini reached a boiling point. On the one hand Garavini proposed discontinuity with the tradition of the PCI and enlargement from the existing confines to other subjects of the oppositional left (something that Bertinotti would do more diplomatically later), while Cossutta on the other hand insisted on a more traditional organizational model with less permeable confines^{iv}. Following a crucial meeting of the Direzione Nazionale on 20th May 1993, the Political Committee of the party met in July and effectively reached a decision upon which Garavini resigned.

This was the beginning of succeeding the anomaly of the so-called "two-headed" party, that effectively sanctioned the existence of multiple entities and that, according to the strongest critics, strongly restricted innovative ideas impeding a real development of internal democratic dialectics (Tranform Italy, 2003: 4). This, however, did not mark the period where Cossutta would prevail over the Garavini group. As Garavini, himself would say, the dilemma over a strategy of responding to the transformations of the political system and that of giving 'space to the ideological niche' remained unresolved (quoted in Bertolino, 2004:92). This was shown by Cossutta's actions, who between July and August, showed the intention of considering seriously an alliance with the PDS, most probably driven by the other members of the leadership, members of the ex PduP.

After Cossutta and Magri, proposed an electoral pact with the other left, the Progressive alliance (Progressisti) reached an agreement in February^v. However, with regard to Europe, there were no initial compromises on the joint programme, which as Cossutta and Magri affirmed, '*it was nice that the text of the programme is the most generic possible and refers to the main principles, on which the left could show its unity, than the other questions of detail*' (quoted in Caponi, 2003: 94)^{vi}. The second Congress of the party once again ignored the European theme in favour of the new emerging reality that was a consequence of the success of Segni's referendum to change the electoral system and consequently the theme of electoral alliance with the PDS. Effectively, the Congress approved the majority motion of forming an alliance with the PDS and paved the way to the final joint programme of the 'Progressisti'. A substantial opposition of 30% existed but the incapacity of the opposition groups to unite behind a single document did not help, even if they did manage to cohere into two coalitions.

Over the course of the Second Congress in January 1994, Fausto Bertinotti was elected to the secretariat, in a period characterised by the ascent of the right wing parties and the repositioning of the PDS further towards the centre. Bertinotti was the founder in 1987 of the political tendency

“Essere Sindacato” within the CGIL (Italian General Workers’ Confederation), that put the democratic question at the centre of trade union activity; all in all, this represented a genuine “left turn” in the Party in that Bertinotti shared with the radical tendencies a protest mentality (see Baccetti, 2003; Hudson, 2000). An increase in the number of the Direzione Nazionale officials from 47 to 56, ensured that the Trotskyist and ex-Cossutiano currents would be guaranteed a strong possibility of conditioning the secretary's attitude (Bertolino, 2000: 35).

The 1994 national and European elections saw Rifondazione essentially keeping a hard-line approach towards the Maastricht criteria; Maastricht was the first opportunity for the party to illustrate its vision of a European Italy and furthermore of a Europe of the people, especially reflecting on its wish not to let its identity become overshadowed by the *progressisti* alliance, as Cossutta's own stance and other interventions in the Congress had shown (Bertolino, 2004: 79-99). At this point, even minimally, it was realised that Europe related to most things upon which Rifondazione sought to base its new radical identity. During this period several articles appeared in the newly established party newspaper *Liberazione*, essentially showing once again that perhaps one of the only things over which the party was united, was European integration. Full employment based on a 35 hour week with no loss of wages, the defense of state education, an end to privatisation and a commitment to public ownership, the defence of pensions and the health service, the defence of the environment and the extensions of democracy were directly linked to the European reality. The main internal disagreement at the time was whether to remain outside the Workers' Parties Forum at the European level.

Rifondazione’s attention to Europe was also evident by a series of ‘against’ rallies; against the parameters of Maastricht, against the monetarist character of European construction and the neo-liberal constituent process, against American hegemony in the Union and against the neo-colonist modality in the EU’s relations with the Middle East and Africa. During the European elections, Rifondazione's argument that there was 'a natural closeness between the EU and the USA' was used extensively, especially since one of its top agenda issues and mobilisation themes was the Balkan wars. Rifondazione's role in the organised labor movement eventually contributed to the downfall of the first Berlusconi government in late 1994 (Hudson, 2000:103) and thereafter appeared hostile also to the Dini government's negotiation of the pension reform, recognising that the moderated reform was just a more gradual process towards the same ends as Berlusconi's attacks. On this basis Rifondazione decided that for the 1996 campaign on the platform of class struggle under the slogan 'Rinascita la Speranza' (hope is reborn), differentiating from the positions of the PDS on all major issues, including foreign policy. Despite this the party mostly utilized its opposition to Europe during European elections and less so in national ones, a clear contradiction with the post-1998 period.

As Luigi Vinci, the head of Rifondazione's EP delegation in 1999 said: *‘the pace of events (during the early and mid-nineties) rarely allowed us to enrich our political struggle with all the necessary reflection. We fought the 1994 European election campaign with a policy of maximum criticism of the Maastricht Treaty and the single currency, but this wasn’t accompanied by a better defined programmed’* (quoted in Dunphy, 2005: 88). This period was marked by extensive internal disagreements, with the Rifondazione parliamentary group going against the organs twice in a period of one year (see Bertolino, 2004). As a last point, it should be, however, noted that in the 1994 congress, where Bertinotti was elected, there were quite a few signs that the party was increasingly becoming inhabited by proponents of a wider European (and Europeanised) left. In delineation of the congress, it was declared that the party must contribute to the construction of *'an international anti-imperialistic movement'*. Indeed, a substantial current of the ex-Democrazia Proletaria group, the same people who were against remaining in the Workers' Parties Forum, would support Bertinotti's election as Rifondazione leader.

The period of crisis: 1996 - 1998

Having had the positive experience of increasing its vote share, as part of the 'Progressissti', in the 1996 elections, and having reached a wealthy 6 per cent in the European elections, Rifondazione would, thereafter support the centrist Ulivo candidate Romano Prodi. This was partly a result of the party becoming pivotal in the Chamber of Deputies. However, it chose not to be a formal part of the coalition as in the previous elections but make the so called *patto di desistenza*, a nation-wide agreement, whereby the Ulivo would not contest seats in a number of single-members districts and support instead Rifondazione, which would do the same in those districts where the Ulivo would run with its own candidates (Di Virgilio, 1998: 15). Rifondazione was thus, able to give its sympathizers the opportunity to vote for the party without jettisoning the fortune of the centre-left coalition. Within this context, it once again differentiated itself on the issue of Europe, fighting the elections on an anti-Maastricht platform, which was accompanied with firm stands against the privatization of public corporations, a steadfast defense of the existing welfare state provisions, more taxes on business and a greater role of state agencies on fighting unemployment (see Sani and Segatti, 1998: 110).

Rifondazione presented candidates for the 1996 elections with a ten point reformist programme and held a series of mass rallies and public meetings, including ones on Maastricht. Indeed, one of the party's ten most salient manifesto issues, during the election was its negative attitude towards the EU, which differentiated it more sharply from the PDS, than any other issue (Campus, 2001: 15). Prodi's objectives during his first 18 months in office had been to enable Italy to enter EMU along with Germany and France in the first wave, through raising taxes, reducing debt and stifling economic demand to a sufficient extent. The very action of supporting a national leader with officially declared goals that are incompatible with its rhetoric carried with it a symbolic ideological dilution of what to expect. However, the party, which was until 1994 officially opposed to a single currency was now following a strategy of pushing the government away from neo-liberalism, despite the small minorities arguing that extensive compromise was being made. Bertinotti's arguments at the time, that Rifondazione should avoid becoming '*a ghettoised minority bereft of any political project*' revealed his attitude on a radical political attitude but pragmatic political action. Also, Bertinotti, unlike Cossutta, supported a single currency and while he opposed the Maastricht conditions, he believed they could be changed, thus placing particular emphasis on the role that Jospin's government in France might play in this process^{vii}.

Also guided by students of manifesto analysis, this period involved a minimal dilution of Rifondazione's Euroscepticism, especially in the manifestos of 1996 (Conti, 2003; Conti and Verzichelli, 2004; Campus, 2001). Bertinotti's belief that the European social model was vastly better than the American one and European integration would enable the European working class to defend its own interests became clear during the 1996 elections and further during the initial co-existence of Rifondazione with the Prodi government. Amidst such claims and the simultaneous crucial electoral support that Rifondazione was giving to Ulivo, the party appeared unable to use extensively its disagreement on the issue of Maastricht in order to oppose the single currency and although rallies took place at regional and local level, the leadership appeared in favor of the single currency. In the 1996 discussions on the budget Rifondazione showed clear signs of leniency with regard to Europe-imposed constraints. Albertini's statement is telling of this: '*The point of landing, which has been reached with the financial institution and which is being reached with this maneuver, represents a compromise that we think acceptable. Specifically, with regard to this decree, to say that the two ties that the Government had proposed to respect - not to ulteriorly affect the yields of the families, available in 1997, and not to engender an inflationary tension on the prices - is, for a remarkable part, achieved*' (Albertini, 1996, online)

The two financial laws of 1996 and of 1997 had as their central purpose the objective fixed by the Maastricht agreement, and they substantially succeeded without party-led workers' protests, partly as a result of the fact that Rifondazione supported the government. While during the congress in December 1996, the leadership affirmed its hostility to the Europe of Maastricht, during the party's support of Prodi, most of its political action was confined to the parliamentary sphere. The leadership was still disoriented due to its internal heterogeneity; in his intervention in "Liberazione" of December 31 1997, Nerio Nesi, the economic spokesperson of Rifondazione, approved the fact that the Maastricht criteria had been reached by the Prodi government. This was the same Nesi who had sometime declared "*we have voted L100,000 billion of cuts, job flexibility, the facilitating of the state subsidisation of cars and motorcycles, the financing of the private schools, the fiscal remission, always without conviction, often with reluctance, always only for the purpose of allowing the Prodi government to go ahead*" (quoted in Maggi, 1998). Truly, it was mostly through policy action that Rifondazione's attitude on European integration changed at the time.

Three factors, however, would downplay the party's compromises. Firstly, following extensive internal debate throughout the support of the Prodi government, it was Bertinotti's change in attitude that would soon lead to a break with the government and, even with a significant electoral cost, ensure the differentiation of the party from the centre-left alliance. While Rifondazione had already rhetorically differentiated itself from the other components of the Ulivo coalition, on various policy matters, such as that of pensions, working time and the occupation of Italian troops, it was at the beginning of 1998 that the party would show signs of practical (voting) aggressiveness towards its partners, which consolidated its popularity among the radical section of the electorate. While party president, Cossutta, voiced his concern over the PCI's tradition and the necessity of being in touch with reality, it was Bertinotti's preoccupations that would attract the support of the ex-DP group and some of the radical sections and thereafter prevail; the attachment to the notion of class struggle and the fear of integrating the lower classes into capitalism. It was partly this view that guided Bertinotti's final decision to break with the Prodi government. Consequently, Cossutta's departure from the party (which entailed dissent from a vast number of its public officials and local deputies) confirmed Rifondazione's outsider status, '*by bringing about the departure of those most ready to bow to the pressures of bi-polar electoral competition*' (Albertazzi et al, 2007: 12). This entailed a halt to Europeanisation-led moderation, which according to the dissidents' later votes in parliament, could continue indefinitely. The split concentrated power in the hands of those championing the oppositional vocation of the party and ensured programmatic continuance on all issues, especially those which related to EU directives.

The second factor that led to the downplaying of Rifondazione's EMU-related concessions, was the use of rhetoric that was equally Eurosceptic - in the anti-capitalistic sense - as previously, at least in character, if not in content. Bertinotti's theoretical vigor must have proven decisive: "*I am referring to the necessity of distinguishing and separating the question of monetary integration and that of Maastricht policies; of not concurring, that is, the closing of itself of a tenaglia, in which and it is demanded of you, to either take it or leave it, with dramatic consequences for the masses in one and the other case. In the first case, because European integration would have the highest social costs; in the second, because it would exclude them from the high points of the international division of labour. It is instead necessary to assume the problem of European integration like a determination of the theatre within which constructing the alternative, and therefore to say, without uncertainties, yes to the single currency, but at the same time to open new terrains of political fight*" (Bertinotti, date, p.45). At the same time, mobilisation relating to the manifestations of the EMU continued (see Musacchio, 1998) and a series of ground-breaking publications by Bertinotti (such as *Le Due Sinistre* and *Le Idee Che Non Muiono*) provided fuel for the radical character to continue its fight.

At the beginning of 1998, the party would publish a political document in which it would elaborate with detail the priority to surmount the difficulty of European monetary policy and to mark the

second phase of the Prodi government (Massari and Parker, 2004: 70-71). With regard to the deep conflict between Bertinotti and DS leader Massimo D'Alema, as Blim (2000: 180) says, unlike D'Alema's view that the Italian economy can grow its way to fuller employment, through greater labour flexibility, '*Bertinotti takes a less optimistic view, seeing capitalism as prone to more contradictions, crisis and ultimately world-wide contraction*'. An essentially Keynesian economic logic was given a Marxist character^{viii}

The third factor that would downplay the moderation was Rifondazione's open proclamation towards more socially inclined political action, at the expense of institutional action^{ix}. This gained prominence firstly during the Bertinotti-Cossutta disagreement and was one of the main reasons why in 1999 the ex-DP group would stand behind the former. Secondly, it was institutionally absorbed by the party, at the 1999 Congress, where an experimentation with collateral organisational forms that occupy the space between the 'circoli' and society would reinforce social radicalism. The social inclination of the new leadership was extended through the simultaneous involvement of the party in the Global Forums and the theoretical and practical initiatives of the Bertinottians, regarding the social movements.

During the Rimini Congress in 1999, two observations are reconfirmed. Firstly, the importance of Europe in the documents of the Congress increased slightly and this was guided by Bertinotti's prevalence. This, more pronounced, shift towards the incorporation of EU-related matters with regard to its opposition status, was presented mostly as an implication of the first motion's innovative proposal, which would subsequently mark the beginning of the formulation of a 'new' type of party. Europe was now a core part of the emphasis placed on the international dimension and Bertinotti's thesis of 'the movement of the movements'; Europeanisation was by no means a parallel dimension affecting the party. This is also obvious by the many references of Bertinotti's motion, not only to issues directly related to Italy, but wider ones affecting the peoples of Europe and ranging from food production to unemployment to ethnic conflicts within the Union (Rifondazione, 1999: 7-9).

Clearer differentiation, more pronounced Europeanisation

While these initial congress elaborations were still not mature, the period starting with 1999 saw the party differentiating itself not only by being Eurosceptic, but also by being Euroenthusiastic, championing the European level as the opportunity for collective struggle with the movements and as the alternative to the American social model. As Bertinotti said in an interview at the time: '*Assuming Europe as a terrain of political action is absolutely necessary*'... '*the national dimension is strategically not suitable*' (Bertinotti, 1997:22; 1999). In fact Rifondazione started pressing for the creation of a European Left party since this fourth congress and with the extensive involvement of the then Rifondazione MEPs, mentioning frequently this (then vague) aspiration during the 1999 European elections. The Majority motion, at the Rimini congress was explicit about the importance of Europe in the opening up to social movements and drew momentum from their increasing presence and mobilizations since 1998: "*First of all we must look to a European dimension of movements that since now was unknown*" (Rifondazione, 1999). In 2001, a sign of adjusting the barycentre towards Europe was political action on the issue of the Tobin tax, presented by Rifondazione as one which would cement a direct relationship between economic choices and political democracy. Several parliamentarians of Rifondazione (including ones of the minority motions such as Luigi Malabarba) and Ulivo took the initiative of gathering 150 million signatures in favour of establishing the Tobin tax in Europe (II Manifesto, 2001).

With regard to the policy moderation on the EMU, a careful look shows that Rifondazione had, indeed made a small turn in its policy rhetoric. In contrast to its 1994 congress (Rifondazione, 1994:

3), the party, necessarily, did not use the issue of EMU as a vehicle for attacking the D'Alema government. The only reference with respect to that simply stated: *'The government intensifies the privatization of the big State companies, much further than as fixed by the EU directives'* (Rifondazione, 1999). Clearly Rifondazione's delicate position in the party system was not and has never been as simple as that of orthodox communists (such as the Greek communist party), which simply bombarded the other parties with accusations of reformism. While a protest party ideologically and relationally, its political position is much more complicated. This was firstly due to its party system position as a potential government supporter and thus contributor to the demise of right-wing governments, and secondly due to the force of the minority currents, which remained much more critical of the process of European integration.

The post-2000 situation signaled a very coherent approach towards European integration. The party was independent between 2000 and 2005, and in addition, faced with a clearly right-wing government, which it stood vertically against. This period was in contrast to the previous one also because Rifondazione, instead of trying to perform balancing acts between Italy's two lefts (as Cossutta aspired), it adopted a strategy of as much differentiation possible from the moderate left^x. The fifth Congress of the party was decisive for its future orientation, in that it proposed a more advanced change in public image. The party was no longer to constitute the *avant guard* of the movements but simply a part of them, thus effectively abandoning the Leninist conception of political struggle, by now cultivated only by the minority motions. What is termed as 'the opening up' to the movements was the main issue of the Congress, and in this respect, Europe constituted a crucial element of the discussion.

The attention of the party was now more clearly centered on the international dimension of the anti-capitalistic struggle (see Baccetti, 1999: 14). As one interviewee said, *'Nowadays, the congressional discussion on the European left always gathers most people'* (interview, April, 2007, Rome). This of course was also used as an electoral weapon; the 2001 electoral programme already showed the signs of the party's decision of opening up: *'Regarding the method (of our political programme), we wanted to produce a bundle of proposals, which wasn't only the result of the elaboration and experience of our party but one that was the result of the confrontation and the standing opposite the ideas and practices of the widest number possible of individual subjects and collectives of the alternative'*.

In this way, the process of European integration, however, has taken the party's internationalism on step further, in terms of the electoral use of the international sphere, towards not only cooperation with the new left (like the Greek SYN or the German Die Linke) This has of course given another color to the leadership of Rifondazione; that of even wider coordination, with at least an initial degree of dialogue with socialist and social democratic forces. In Bertinotti's words in a recent interview, *'There exist internal forces in the Socialist international, and especially in the labourist experience, very similar to those in GUE; this is always true. There exists the possibility of enlarging these critical forces and the Coates initiative has shown this'* (Bertinotti, 2005)^{xi}. It is, perhaps worth noting that Rifondazione MEPs have the highest number of commonly proposed resolutions with Socialist MEPs. A prime example of 'wider cooperation' would also be Rifondazione's contribution, as the only communist co-signatory of the initiative for a European Constituent Assembly. Essentially, reiterating a demand that a new EU Constitution should introduce a reorganisation of powers along genuinely democratic lines and therefore that it should be drawn up by a Constituent Assembly.

By 2004, various sub-projects of Rifondazione's transformation finally took shape. In its programme for the European elections of 2004, Rifondazione explicitly stated its idea for the construction of a 'European identity', that was eventually achieving the task of portraying with practical arguments (like the PEL) that Europeanists are not simply those whose principles coincide

with the EU level decisions, but also those who consider European integration as encompassing a great amount of potential for social sensitivity and class struggle. The birth of the PEL, which coincided with the 2004 European elections, was also a proof, according to the party, that Rifondazione was not alone in its struggles: *'to propose and to experiment an original system of democratic organization founded on maximum participation, on the more and more tightened conjugation between shapes of direct and delegated democracy'* (Rifondazione, 2004).

It is of course worth noting, that for social movements, Europeanisation added new constraints and difficulties, rather than new opportunities, partly because when the European level is clearly involved, they have no clear channel of political representation (Andretta and Caiani, 2005: 297). The Public Organisational Debate, in which the document of Rifondazione for the elections was finalized, included numerous representatives of strong social organizations and associations and their contribution was widely publicised both in speeches and Liberazione appraisals of the situation.^{xii} A suspicion, therefore, arises about Rifondazione's prioritisation, at this point, of the goal of regaining votes from civil society. Bertinotti's presidentship of the PEL and his 'strategic' election as an MEP were also used unstoppably to disseminate the new message and cement new relationships. More broadly, a strong link was consolidated between Rifondazione and pan-European organisations and movements. It is thus, also worth noting, that many of Rifondazione's leading members either were or became later the presidents or secretaries of European-wide projects or organizations.^{xiii}

Moderation unleashed

The eventual turn of the Rifondazione leadership, in 2005, to support the second Prodi government and actually exercise policy making as an official part of it, inevitably brought with it moderation, whose starting point was the previous Congress. The notion of ideological homogeneity being secondary to the formation of the alternative was the foundation of such a strategy. Indeed the wider literature on Italian politics has inevitably commented on that with a similar appraisal of the party's ideological position.^{xiv} It was since the fifth Congress that a degree of ideological dilution was evident: theses 56-63 of the fifth Congress, refer to the necessity of self-reform that aims at developing new social relations and putting at second place the objective of organizational and ideological consolidation: *'In first place is the necessity of shifting the baricentre of the party from the identity and propagandistic aspects to the capacity of constructing political action, relations with other subjects of the alternative'* (Rifondazione, 1999).

According to an interviewer, the opening up to the movements had at least three relevant consequences: *'first, it determined a deep ideological change and reflection in the political culture of Rifondazione Comunista, starting with an approach of the majority of the leadership group, which had as keywords "testing", "innovation", "fusion". The party adopted new values which don't belong to the historical tradition of the labour movement and of the left, such as non-violence, repudiation of power and the new collocation of the contradiction capital-work. Second, the contents and modalities of the revolutionary action were moderated, thus making the party a credible and approachable interlocutor for the government, which influenced also the writing of the agreement with the centre-left in the election of 2006. Third, the promotion of new ways of making politic (inspired by the motto "asking while walking") to determine a new internal class of young people strengthened by the experience of movements or by specific expressions of them (like the "disobedience", the "tutte bianche" and some social centres, especially the ones of the North-east of Italy)'* (interview, July 2007, via email).

The majority document "L'alternativa di societa" made reference to the political and organizational redefinition of a party which aims at satisfying the 'rich questions', which come from abroad, from

the women, from the youth, from the immigrants; who represent diversely the leading subjects of a new revolutionary path and of a radical transformation. Clearly, this change also altered the electoral profile of the party and was both a cause and a consequence for its changed membership^{xv}. Rifondazione was still a protest party, but also one of the widest possible grasp and one which no longer interpreted communism as a heroic idea but as a thought which generates intentions which either promote radical praxis or seek to radicalise the existing praxis. Hence, its position on Europe had to be adjusted accordingly, both by incorporating and analysing issues that concerned its new voters, as well as using Europe more frequently as the potential for the 'alternative', by now the new key word and ideological foundation of the party.

The sixth Congress also contributed to the organizational hardening of the party, apparently needed more than before due to the many practical manifestations of the new path. This consequently ensured that the Europeanised path of the party would go with very little modification from the left wings of the party and more specifically that the issue of the PEL would be one decided solely by the majority motion. As of 2005, no amendable documents were allowed to stand, but simply alternative ones, if voted by the Congress. The Leninist tendency rejected the interpretation of "movement" as a phenomenon of unity, while the Trotskyist one privileged the antagonistic aspects and the one in "opposition", especially in the European scene (De Nardis, 2006).

The reasons why Rifondazione chose the path of government participation are argued with precision by Albertazzi et al (2007:7): *'In essence, the predominantly majoritarian character of the electoral system at the time of the 2005 congress and the increasingly entrenched bi-polar character of the Italian party system meant that without some kind of alliance with the remainder of the centre-left, the party risked the possibility of electoral meltdown'*. It was clear to the leadership, especially from the 2001 results that 1) Rifondazione's voters were voting rationally for the Ulivo, rather than for a party that was risking the return of a right-wing government; 2) party organization and electoral mobilization as indicated by the low ratio of members to voters suggested the need to rely for its support on weakly attached voters that it must struggle to encapsulate (Albertazzi et al 2007: 8). But the party's decision was also guided by financial concerns. Firstly, the fact that Rifondazione's increase in the level of professionalisation (partly related also to its European strategy) was heavily dependent on the party's success in getting its candidates elected to public office. Secondly, the opening up to the movements carried with it the acknowledgement that a movement party would need more financial resources in order to play the role of the movement of the movements, with its manifestations both at national and EU level. Therefore, the party was made more dependent on electoral strategies than it was to start with^{xvi}.

In terms of party system position, however, Europe still constituted an equally forceful argument that set the party apart from the others; the European strategy of the post-1998 era continued unobstructed and with immaculate attention. The main weapon in this period was the European constitution, which the party fought with unprecedented hostility in Italy and at European level, as well as in extensive coordination with the social movements. Its rejection in France and Holland were used extensively by the leadership and within the party press as reverberation of the unsuitability of that Constitution's shape and character (for an example see Bertinotti 2005). Most importantly, this also proved an opportunity to show an 'alternative Europeanism' by proposing a new revised Constitution. As one interviewee said, *'large amounts of resources and mobilization, in terms of conferences, were launched by the party's department of International Affairs'* (interview, April, 2007, Rome). The European Constitution and its related rhetoric and mobilisation worked in a similar way that the split with Prodi did in 1998: that is to downplay the departure from more an orthodox interpretation of Marxist ideology^{xvii}.

Rifondazione diverged substantially from its partners in the coalition during and after the election campaign, being by far to the left of the other parties supporting the Prodi-led coalition (Giannetti

and De Giorgi, 2006). While, Europe was used by Prodi to counterbalance the open support of the Berlusconi government for the American mission in Iraq, Rifondazione was equally dismissive on both. And while the Unione supported the Lisbon Process, Rifondazione's opposition was strict and coherent both in parliament and outside. As Bartolini et al (1998) argue, *'it is true that the coalitions matter above all in the electoral phase and then recede into the shadows leaving the inter-electoral stage to the parties'*. Rifondazione, however, was essentially playing the EU issue on two levels. Two examples by Albertazzi et al (2007: 15), both on its 'flagship' issues of peace and antimilitarism and social assistance are illustrative of this.

One, Rifondazione supported the 2007 Finance Law (*'which, in its own words, was not the flower in the government's buttonhole'*), while also publicly supporting strike action against some of the effects of that law (Albertazzi et al., 2007; see also Calculli, 2007). On the one hand it voted in favor of a budget officially committed to reducing Italy's soaring budget deficit and coming into line with criteria laid down in the European Union stability package, while at the same time, and in line with its extensive rhetoric on budget deficits, it forwarded proposals to postpone planned cuts for schools and local government, and a proposal by Social Minister Paolo Ferrero to increase income taxes for wealthier middle-class layers by around two percent. Secondly, when in 2007 Paolo Ferrero and Bertinotti, portrayed a soft approach to the Government's announcement to accede to US request for expansion of its military installations in Vicenza, Rifondazione was at the same time organizing mass rallies against this action. Such moves, however, also proved that Rifondazione actually managed to make a difference through the exercise of policy making, although this diverged substantially from its proclaimed programmatic positions. At the same time, other moves were simply made in favor of sustaining the government; votes for withdrawal from Iraq according to "technical timetables", in favor of war credits for the "peace mission" in Afghanistan, simply contradicted the proud positions against the EU's militarism.

Did Rifondazione then contradict its flirt with the movements in the 2006 elections and its radical positions on European integration and the EU? The main proposal by Bertinotti to form the most democratic assembly possible, before the primaries, of parties, social and sindacalist movements and local institutions was not to be long-lived (Mafai, 2004). Firstly, one has to bear in mind, that, neither on EU-related matters, nor other issues, did Rifondazione rely on an abstract electoral agreement as in 1998. The new electoral law of 2005 obliged parties and coalitions to present electoral programmes so that from then on there could be no question of Rifondazione coming to an electoral agreement outside the context of programmatic discussions and agreement (Albertazzi et al, 2007: 11) ^{xviii}

On the issue of Europe the party remained stable at least in terms of programmatic positions, but in 2005 more than in 1996, policy action was moderating in direction. Europe, as an inevitable reality, was dealt with as flexibly as possible and based on a cost-benefit analysis that a large number of leaders and members did not agree with. Perhaps, the downplaying of moderation that was also evident in 1998 was achieved by the relative preservation of two competing groups in Rifondazione. As Tom Behan (1999) said, *'In a sense Rifondazione carries within it the same contradictions as its predecessor. It contains on the one hand the parliamentarians who are conducting a bourgeois battle, and on the other hand local branches that have weekly meetings on Che Guevara or the environment, who invite local stewards to speak, who confront the police, throw petrol bombs and support radical struggles around the world'*. What remains to be seen is what the policy rhetoric, the details, which connect the ideology of the members to the ideological profile of the leading elite are.

Conclusions

Rifondazione was from the very beginning a party that was internally tormented by different viewpoints, despite their convergence on revolutionizing capitalism. These viewpoints did not regard only ideological issues but also reflected distinct approaches to the party's organisational crystallization. The party was hence, not as focused on the issue of European integration in its initial years. This was also a consequence of changes in leadership throughout its sixteen years of existence. Its maneuvers, however, would reflect for the greater part of the 1990s its consistency to remain in opposition and gather momentum, thus using Europe in a way that did not essentially dilute ideological principles. Once the composition of the leadership changed and the party became more cohesive in its leading elite, the party would inevitably undergo fundamental changes in its general political orientation, including its tactic on the issue of European integration.

The use of the European public sphere has been increasing since the mid-1990s. The 1990s, as a period of internal conflict (with two splits), a period of wider changes in Italian politics (constitutional and electoral changes as well as change in government) and also one of leadership change did not allow the party to concentrate on the issue of European integration as coherently as later on. Although, it managed to make clear from the beginning that its position in the party system was that of the sole left political actor with Eurosceptic inclinations and a very different aspiration for the future of European integration. Rifondazione's attitude towards European integration has changed in two ways. Firstly the salience of Europe has increased both in terms of party manifestos and in terms of its (own) capacity to shape the party's tactical consideration. Secondly, the attitude of the party, while not changed substantially throughout the period examined, manifested itself into two directions; one characterised as radical and alternative, through rhetoric and programmatic positions and one characterised as pragmatic, as it is evident from its institutional behavior within parliament. In party competition, Rifondazione can combine both moderation and emphasis of its identity on European integration.

While moderation has been evident, Rifondazione has always tried to prove and emphasise in one way or another, the distinctly radical ideological orientation, it has been claiming as a party of the communist family and as the alternative. This has been achieved via three ways. The first one, followed between 1993 and 1998 was taking part in coalitions and institutionally supporting the governments of the lesser evil, while at the same time presenting programmes and arguments in a way that downplayed, its lesser evil support. In this way Rifondazione was undergoing a balancing act, between two arguments that have characterised radical left parties throughout their entire history: the argument of favouring consensus in an attempt to avoid a rightwing government and push the centre-left towards the left, by way of your subsequent policy making potential, and that of distinguishing itself from other political actors, in an attempt to give society a communist stint, until the domestic political environment allowed it to implement the whole or the majority of its original policy programme. The second way, in which Rifondazione has emphasised its radical identity is illustrated, between 1998 and 2005, when Rifondazione was more autonomous and officially a part of the opposition, thereafter, not pressurised by the need to downplay any institutionally-generated moderation. The third was in which radicalism on Europe is maintained is automatically through sustaining a culture of tendencies. Much more radical and Eurosceptic arguments exist within the minority tendencies and with these having organisational capacity and influence among the base, the electoral image of institutional moderation has been additionally counterbalanced.

Finally, the differentiation between institutional and non-institutional strategies in the process of party competition, illuminates larger questions about the validity of party-system based models of Euroscepticism. If policy rhetoric and programmatic positions are given the same attention as voting behavior and the practical manifestations of coalition participation, then Rifondazione's, and most probably most parties' attitudes, and attitudinal realignments on European integration have to

be explained by at least a two dimensional interpretation of Europe's use and impact. Hence, existing theories will need to be revised. Some questions do remain. Firstly, is such double-edged approach of both emphasis and moderation of one's identity also true for other radical or communist parties. And in extension, is it an inherently distinctive feature of radical or protest parties or also something that characterises parties and party families, whose identity is thought to be closer to the centre?

Explanatory Endnotes

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- ⁱ On similar lines is the basis for the approach of Kritzinger and Michowlitz (2003), who operationalise the Europeanisation of Austrian political parties using salience and attitudes.
- ⁱⁱ As Hellman (1998: 200) would go on to predict 'Its fate under an electoral system that forced alliances within broad ideological blocs would be far less certain, which is one reason that Rifondazione is one of the strongest supporters of proportional representation'.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The absence of Leninist orthodoxy from the party's majority was confirmed in all ten interviews with party officials. It was emphasised that Leninism withered away, further after the departure of Cossutta.
- ^{iv} For the opposition to Garavini see (La Rocca, 1993).
- ^v The Trotskyist component at Rifondazione's second congress in January 1994 articulated clearly that electoral agreements were not the main objective of a party which is and must remain different from the moderate left: 'As communists, we do not sacrifice our political autonomy, our alternative proposals, to mere electoral calculations. We are not in politics to win votes, rather we ask for votes in support of a policy. An election campaign is not an end in itself but an opportunity for us to present our programme ... An institutional presence is not the goal of our activity, but only a means – however important – to support workers' struggles as well as a platform for the constant and intransigent denunciation of bourgeois policies' (quoted by Bertolino, 2004: 96).
- ^{vi} Truly, also the entrance of Berlusconi in the party system and the success of his party, Forza Italia in the administrative elections of 1993, amplified the bi-polar nature of competition and exercised a push towards the necessity for a unitary left.
- ^{vii} Abse (2004) argues that it was only when Bertinotti thought that the goal of Italy's entry into the EMU had been achieved that he was prepared to risk triggering Prodi's collapse.
- ^{viii} The national press would label Bertinotti's position as the left one, while Cossutta's the 'right' one. See Corriere della Sera (2007).
- ^{ix} For a thorough analysis of Bertinotti's view on this issue and his disagreement with Cossutta see Baccetti (2003) and De Nardis (2006).
- ^x Bertinotti's 1997 book 'Le Due Sinistre' provided the theoretical and policy backbone of such a strategy.
- ^{xi} It is interesting to remind that during a PEL manifestation with Oscar Lafontaine in Athens, Bertinotti said: 'To fight against neoliberalism, it is not necessary to be either communist, or socialist, or ecologists. It is enough to be free men' (quoted in Bocconetti, 2005).
- ^{xii} For an analysis on the relations between party and social movements see Candeiras (2003)
- ^{xiii} Examples are Fausto Bertinotti (PEL), Luigi Vinci (Associazione Alternative Europe), Marco Berlinguer (Tranform! Italy), Marco Bersani (Attac Italia), Franco Russo (European Social Forum), Ivan Nardone and Roberto Musachio.
- ^{xiv} Both descriptive and more in depth party specific studies report this conclusion. For example Ignazi (2006: 1149) says 'Rifondazione's national Congress, had (not without dissent, however) diluted its more radical positions, following the more pragmatic path of its leader, Fausto Bertinotti'. See also De Nardis (2006) and De Nardis and della Ratta Rinaldi (2006).
- ^{xv} Rifondazione's 2002 statistics revealed that 31,790 members had joined the party for the first time since the 1998 split with Cossutta and that 35.8% of the 2002 membership had been in the party less than three years. As early as 1999, only 27.1% of those who had joined the party at its foundation in 1991 were still members (Abse, 2004).
- ^{xvi} The level of public funding available to Italian parties is perfectly correlated with their vote total (Newell, 2000: 77).
- ^{xvii} Rifondazione pointed out that the PEL was the only party that was unitary in its rejection to the Constitution.
- ^{xviii} Rifondazione would also appear more involved with Europe, also as part of the *Unione* coalition at the elections of 2006. See (Guerra and Massetti 2006).

Appendix

Interviews

Rifondazione: medium age member, Rank/Post: International Affairs Department/ Political Committee (27 April, 2007, Rome and Oct, 2007 via email).

Rifondazione: Medium age member, Rank/Post: Direzione Nazionale/MP/ Second Motion-Essere Comunisti (29 July, 2007, via email).

Rifondazione: medium age member, Rank/Post: Central Committee/ former EDON official (Oct. 2007).

Rifondazione: old member, Rank/Post: Direzione Nazionale/Department of Agriculture (29 April, 2007, Carrara).

Rifondazione: old member, Rank/Post: Direzione Nazionale/ Head of EP Delegation (April 30, 2007m Carrara and Oct. 2007, Brussels).

Rifondazione: Old age member, Rank/Post: Direzione Nazionale, Former Head of EP Delegation (10 April, 20007 and Oct. 2007 via email).

Rifondazione: old member, Rank/Post: Transform! Italy (31 August, 2007, via email).

Rifondazione: medium age member, Rank/Post: Direzione Nazionale/ Head of parliamentary delegation, lower house (29 April, 2007, Carrara).

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