

Beyond welfare chauvinism? Populist radical right parties' social policies and the exclusion of migrants from national welfare in Italy

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Abstract

The present article contributes to the advancement of the understanding of the social policies of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) by focusing on the case of Italy during the Conte I government (June 2018-September 2019). By taking the Italian PRRP, the League, as an example, it investigates the *ideological* and *rhetorical* frames exploited by PRRPs to promote and legitimize cuts in welfare generosity toward migrants when they hold governmental positions. The specific welfare benefit under observation is the 2019 means-tested Citizenship Income (*Reddito di Cittadinanza*, RdC). The article relies on the theoretical framework by Abs (2021), showing that PRRPs exploit two different frames to promote restrictive social measures against migrants during national elections and in their manifestos, i.e., the welfare chauvinism (WC) and the welfare producerism (WP) frames. The article assesses whether, and to what extent, PRRPs transpose these frames into their governmental action. Furthermore, it also examines which of these frames ruling PRRPs are most likely to exploit. The findings show that, when in a ruling position, the League supports exclusive solidarity (i.e., the exclusion of TCNs from access to RdC) by exploiting the very same ideological and rhetorical frames exploited during the electoral campaign, i.e., both the WC and WP. It does not try to frame welfare cutbacks in more morally and politically acceptable terms in light of Western European democratic standards. This article confirms that PRRPs tend to de-emphasize social issues in their discourses and hold a clear-cut position only with regard to migrants' entitlement to the benefit, adopting a clear nativist approach. Moreover, the analysis points out that the overused concept of *welfare chauvinism* is *not* fully adequate to illustrate the PRRPs' social policy formula.

1. Introduction

The present article contributes to the advancement of the understanding of the social policies of populist radical right parties (PRRPs henceforth) by focusing on the case of Italy during the Conte I government (June 2018-September 2019). Over the past 15 years, welfare state research has focused more and more on the “multidimensionality” (Rovny 2013; Abs et al., 2021) of PRRPs' welfare preferences. The concept of *multidimensionality* refers to the fact that PRRPs may have different preferences with regard to two distinct dimensions of welfare politics. These are: 1) the level of generosity (spending effort, amount of social benefits and resources) the welfare state should pursue and 2) the recalibration of welfare expenditure, i.e., which social policy domain should be financed and which should not (investing in human skills or substitute income). This work is mainly interested in the first dimension. Namely, it considers PRRPs'

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preferences about whether welfare generosity should be extended to a specific group, i.e., migrants.

More precisely, the article investigates how PRRPs promote and legitimize cuts in welfare generosity toward migrants when they hold governmental positions. When asking *how*, the article refers to the *ideological* and *rhetorical frames* exploited by PRRPs, i.e., the social construction of migrants' deservingness and un-deservingness of their host country's national welfare. The article builds on former research about PRRPs and social policies. In particular, it refers to a recent contribution by Abs (Abs et al., 2021) which argues that three interrelated frames inform the welfare agenda of PRRPs, especially during national elections. Namely, these parties advocate for social closure on the basis of the deservingness criterion of identity (welfare chauvinism), on the criteria of control, attitude and reciprocity (welfare producerism), and on an antagonism between the people and the establishment (welfare populism). This latter frame is not relevant to the article's purposes, since it does not deal with the topic of migrants' entitlement and disentanglement to national welfare.¹ Thus, it is not considered by the article's analysis. Conversely, the welfare chauvinism (WC) and the welfare producerism (WP) frames are relevant since PRRPs exploit these in their electoral manifestos in order to promote and legitimize restrictive social measures (cutting welfare benefits or even excluding from them) against some groups in society, among which, migrants.²

Nevertheless, this study deals primarily with PRRPs' electoral strategies. However, the fact that they rely on these frames in their electoral manifestos does not automatically imply that they transpose one or both frames (WP, WC) into their governmental action. For example, they may eventually abandon the identity-based WC frame, since it openly clashes with the "sense of duty and moral responsibility" (Mair 2014, p.587) arising from parties' governmental positions (cfr, paragraph 2).

Against this backdrop, the present article addresses the following research question:

RQ. *Do PRRPs exploit the ideological frames underlying their welfare agenda (WC, WP) to promote migrants' disentanglement to national welfare when they hold governmental positions? And if so, which of these frames are they most likely to exploit?*

Italy is a relevant example since, during the Conte I government, the League (one of the government coalition members and commonly classified as a PRRP) pushed for the introduction of some restrictive measures targeting non-EU migrants within the framework of the newly approved Citizenship Income (*Reddito di Cittadinanza*, RdC hereafter), a means-tested minimum income scheme introduced in 2019 as a replacement of the previous minimum income scheme, the *Reddito di Inclusione* (Jessoula and Natili, 2020).

Theoretically speaking, this work makes a twofold contribution. First, it assesses whether and to what extent the theoretical framework by Abs (2021), distinguishing between WC and WP, can be a useful tool to understand PRRPs' governmental action,

¹ Welfare populism pertains to the attribution of blame to elites for the sub-optimal implementation of welfare arrangements

² It is important to remember that native citizens are not exempted from this logic. In several cases, PRRPs exploit welfare producerism also in regard to natives who do not fulfill the deservingness criteria of control, attitude and reciprocity. In this article, I only consider welfare producerism to the extent it is applied to migrants.

beyond their electoral strategies. Moreover, the analysis identifies which of these frames ruling PRRPs are most likely to exploit. Secondly, the article complements former research specifically focused on the League's imprint on Italian welfare policy. A recent study has shown that the party's input was visible in specific areas like pensions and family social policies (Meardi and Guardiancich, 2022), but it has not yet investigated its influence on the anti-poverty policy. Another contribution has argued instead that the League accepted the introduction of the RdC in exchange for tightened eligibility conditions for non-EU migrants (Jessoula and Natili, 2020). However, this work does not go deeper in examining how exactly the League promoted the introduction of these restrictive measures, i.e., the ideological and rhetorical frames it exploits.

The article is organized as follows. To begin with, I illustrate the most relevant contributions in the literature about PRRPs and social policy. Secondly, I illustrate the article's hypotheses and methodological approach. Thereafter, I carry out the analysis of the selected case-study. To conclude, I move to illustrate the article's main findings and implications against the backdrop of the literature about PRRPs and social policies.

2. PRRPs and social policy

2.1. From the new winning formula to a more multifaceted scenario

Historically, radical right parties have tended to promote a specific type of "winning formula" (Kitschelt, 1995), made up of the combination of neoliberal views on economic issues – free trade and minimal state intervention in economy – and authoritarian views on socio-cultural issues – law and order, morality and authority, national way of life and opposition to immigration, with special attention to Muslim immigration. Some scholars have argued that since the mid-1990s, several PRRPs have started revising their electoral agendas and have made a real "programmatic shift" (Kitschelt and McGann 1997, p.115). Namely, they have started to pay increased attention to welfare state issues and policies for welfare redistribution, positioning themselves very close to left-wing socio-democratic parties, which traditionally own this issue (Kitschelt and McGann, 1997). Hence, for some of them, the new winning formula (NWF) is a combination of conservative and authoritarian stances on cultural and (relatively) left-wing positions on socio-economic issues; i.e., they support expansionary welfare proposals (Ibid).

However, in the wake of a growing academic interest in RRP's economic and welfare stances in the last decades, scholars have challenged the NWF argument as well. Some of the most recent studies have shown that, against the expectations of the NWF, RRP do not adopt a clear position on the socio-economic dimension in their political agenda. Conversely, they engage in position-blurring by deliberately avoiding precise social and economic placement (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020). Namely, they either de-emphasize social issues altogether or present "vague, contradictory, or ambiguous positions" (Rovny 2013).

Finally, some additional contributions have argued that RRP's welfare state stances are to be seen in light of the multidimensionality of the political conflict about welfare politics (Enggist and Pingerra 2021; Rathgeb 2021; Busemayer et al., 2021). Such conflict is defined as *multidimensional* since it hinges on two main dimensions. The first one concerns the level of generosity the welfare state should pursue, i.e., the spending effort

(amount of social benefits and resources) to be made. The second dimension concerns the recalibration of welfare expenditure, i.e., which social policy domain should be financed, and which should not (investing in human skills or substitute income). In such a scenario, political parties can adopt different preferences in regard to both dimensions.

PRRPs typically present blurry or moderate stances on the first dimension, whilst they express clear preferences and provide unambiguous, clearly discernible stances on the second. Namely, they explicitly support consumptive policies (such as pensions) while cutting social rights for the unemployed and opposing a progressive welfare recalibration that would cover the new social risks of non-standard workers – typically women, the young and the low-skilled (Enggist and Pingerra 2021; Rathgeb 2021; Busemayer et al., 2021). As Enggist and Pingerra point out, these features “do not come out of nowhere” (Enggist and Pingerra 2021, p.119) but they correspond to the attitudes and preferences of PRRPs voters, as Busemayer has shown (Busemayer et al., 2021).

This work is focused on the first dimension, i.e., the level of generosity of welfare policies. Scholars agree that, while PRRPs tend overall to de-emphasize this aspect, they only present clear social policy positions with regard to a nativist, exclusionary stance towards immigrants. This is commonly defined as “welfare chauvinism” (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2018, 2020; Otjes et al. 2018; Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2016). In simple terms, RRP explicitly aim to reduce the national spending effort made for migrants, by limiting their access to national welfare benefits and programs. By contrast, they argue that these should be reserved to national citizens (and, some times, permanent residents).³

Most of this research is focused on PRRPs’ electoral manifestos and welfare agenda when they are in political opposition. In recent times, several PRRPs obtained electoral gains, and thus managed to increase their bargaining power in the policy-making process (Afonso, 2015). This occurred, for example, in Denmark (Agersnap et al., 2019; Careja et al., 2016; Jorgensen and Thomsen 2016), Austria (Pelinka 2002; Kriesi et al., 2014; Ennsner-Jedenastik 2020) and the Netherlands (Chueri, 2019). As a result, scholars have started examining if this increased power is also leading to alterations in social policies in a welfare chauvinistic direction.

The overall assessment so far seems to provide a positive answer. Studies on PRRPs by Akkerman and De Lange (2012) and, most recently, Chueri (2019) have shown that the role of PRRPs, as members of government coalitions, in the adoption of restrictive social policies affecting migrants, cannot be ignored (Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Chueri 2019). Moreover, Careja (2016) distinguishes between direct and indirect welfare chauvinism in policy reforms and frameworks in the Danish social and labor market-related policies. They have been promoted by the Danish People’s Party (DPP), one of the most successful PRRPs in Europe (Careja et al. 2016). The former explicitly limits access to welfare for migrants. The latter instead envisages cutbacks or limitations directed to larger target groups, but where migrants are over-represented among benefit claimants (Ibid). Careja shows that most of the chauvinist laws promoted by the DPP between 2001 and 2011 contain measures which indirectly target some migrant groups (at least in the Danish case). In addition, the party promoted several instances of direct chauvinist welfare policy reforms, although these are still a minority compared to the indirect ones (Careja, 2016).

³ As this research highlights, it is sometimes unclear whether PRRPs refer to national citizenship, ethnicity, or residence as the identity criterion for accessing social benefits and services

2.2. Welfare chauvinism and welfare producerism

A recent contribution by Rathgeb (2021) highlights that both PRRPs'⁴ preferences for consumption policies and for welfare chauvinism (in manifestos and as government partners) fit into a broader *producerism* ideology. He argues that hard-working and tax-paying “makers” (employees, employers, constituting the core male workforce) need to be liberated from the economic burden imposed by self-serving “takers” (immigrants, “corrupt elite”). More precisely, this model distinguishes between “takers from above” and “takers from below”. The former are the corrupt elites and the “party cartels” among mainstream parties and organized interests, who abuse tax money for corrupt practices at the expense of national workers. The latter are immigrants (especially those from outside the EU) who are portrayed as abusers and “lazy free riders” (p.642): i.e., they exploit national public welfare without contributing to it.

According to this view, the PRRPs' preference for consumptive policies (such as pensions) is justified as necessary to protect the social rights of the core male workforce. Moreover (and most relevant to our purpose) restrictive proposals and policy reforms against migrants (the “takers from below”) are justified and legitimized precisely to avoid such (supposed) welfare abuses by migrants. According to the makers-takers framework, therefore, migrants' exclusion is primarily based on their economic (lack of) contributions, not so much on their citizenship or residency status. In simple terms, the line between WC and WP is fairly blurred.

On the contrary, Abs argues that welfare chauvinism is not part of a broader policy of producerism, but WP and WC are rather two distinct frames informing the PRRPs' welfare agenda – especially during national elections (Abs et al., 2021). His work builds on the so-called deservingness logic (van Oorschot 2000, 2006). Such a logic deems different population subgroups worthy or unworthy of receiving social help from the welfare state (welfare benefits) to different extents according to five criteria of deservingness: control, attitude, reciprocity, identity, need (usually referred to by the acronym CARIN).

The first deservingness criterion is control. It looks at whether and to what extent the situation of need of benefit claimants is beyond their control and/or to what extent they can be held responsible for such a situation. The guiding logic is that the less control, the more they are deserving. The second criterion is attitude. It is focused on claimants' behaviors which have to comply with socially accepted “good morals” (for example they should not cheat on their need status to obtain social support and, once obtained, they should show they are grateful for it). The more they are compliant, the more they are deserving. The third criterion, reciprocity, looks instead at the degree of reciprocation by the benefit claimants. This is generally intended in economic and monetary terms. It primarily looks at the extent to which welfare claimants have contributed to the host society group in the past, i.e., before making their claims for social benefits. Past contributions are typically measured by looking at one's previous working activity and/or taxes paid and/or insurance contributions into the system (the “earned” support) (van Oorschot 2000, 2006).

⁴ His analysis is especially focused on the case of the PRRP FPO in Austria.

The fourth criterion is identity, addressing the (extent of) proximity and distance of benefit claimants to/from the perceived ethno-majoritarian group in society. From survey research, it emerges that this criterion is usually conceived in terms of either formal citizenship status or ethnic-based identity (and sometimes both). The closer to “us” in terms of citizenship, residence (i.e., the acquisition of formal citizenship or permanent residency) or ethno-cultural characteristics, the more deserving. Finally, the need criterion simply looks at claimants’ actual condition of need, generally measured through low income and earnings. The greater the level of need, the more they are deserving (van Oorschot 2000, 2006).

Both the WC and the WP frames point back to the deservingness logic; they differ exactly in terms of the deservingness criteria on which they are based. WC is based on the identity criterion, opposing national citizens and/or residents against non-citizen migrants in access to national welfare (in line with the previous definition of welfare chauvinism). Conversely, WP is based on the principles of reciprocity, control and attitudes (a mix or only just one of these). Through an analysis of electoral parties’ manifestos of four different PRRPs (among which is the League), Abs shows that exclusionary social policy reforms against migrants in PRRP manifestos are usually based on both WP and WC, as two distinct strategies. Namely, migrants are excluded both because they are not formal citizens (or residents) and because of their supposed dishonest behaviors, unwillingness to search for a job and lack of economic contributions to the system (Abs et al., 2021).

3. Hypotheses

This article shifts the focus from PRRPs’ electoral strategies to their governmental action. When in government, PRRPs (like their mainstream counterparts) are subject to responsibility constraints. Responsibility requires parties to act “from a sense of duty and moral responsibility” (Mair 2014, p.587), i.e., within the bounds of accepted practices and following known legal and procedural rules and conventions. These can be, for example, those laid down in the Constitution, or in treaties of international organizations to which a country belongs (Mair 2014). Accordingly, restrictive social reforms excluding or limiting migrants’ access to national welfare are clearly at odds with PRRPs’ responsibility function. Namely, they explicitly challenge fundamental Western democratic rules, and notably the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of nationality and ethnicity. Indeed, this is embedded in both national Constitutions and Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned studies on PRRPs’ governmental action with regard to migrants and welfare have shown that they are usually indifferent to responsibility constraints.⁵ Namely, they continue to advocate for exclusionary social reforms targeting immigrants, either directly or indirectly (Careja et al., 2016). In several cases, they even manage to implement these reforms (Careja et al., 2016; Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Chueri 2019). Building on this, the article is interested in understanding *how* (i.e., the rhetorical and ideological frames by which) *ruling* PRRPs legitimize and

⁵ To be sure, they are indifferent to such constraints in other policy fields as well (Akkerman and De Lange 2012).

promote these welfare restrictions, with respect to national and European public opinion and democratic institutions. As mentioned in the introduction, I investigate whether the theoretical framework by Abs (2021), distinguishing between the WC and WP frames, can be a useful tool for understanding PRRPs' governmental action too. I argue that three views are possible.

The first view argues that, once in government, PRRPs are not likely to use either one of the two frames used during elections – neither WP nor WC. This view is based on two factors. Firstly, both frames already emerge very clearly in the political manifestos of almost all PRRPs, especially during electoral campaign (Abs et al., 2021). Accordingly, national and EU public opinion and institutions in most cases already know very well to what extent WC and WP inform PRRP social policy agendas. Secondly, we have just mentioned that ruling PRRPs are typically indifferent towards the duties and moral responsibility characterizing governmental parties (Mair 2014; Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Chueri 2019). Based on this, they may not feel the need to further explain and legitimize their exclusionary view towards migrants, which they already did in their manifestos. Building on these considerations, I derive my first hypothesis:

H1: when holding a governmental position, PRRPs do not exploit the ideological frames underlying their welfare agenda (WC, WP) to promote migrants' disenfranchisement.

The second and third views claim instead that ruling PRRPs do exploit these ideological frames, consistently with their social policy agenda during elections. However, the second view argues that they only exploit the WP frame, i.e., promoting migrants' exclusion based on the reciprocity, attitude and control deservingness criteria. As seen, these criteria differentiate solidarity according to what one has done or can do for society, the types of behaviors adopted and the extent to which one can be blamed for one's neediness respectively. Since they do not point back to citizenship and/or ethnicity, one may argue that none of these criteria explicitly clash with the democratic anti-discrimination principle (although they finally lead to migrants' exclusion from welfare benefits). Thus, when relying on them, PRRPs may argue that restrictive reforms are not even really discriminatory, but they are rather a way to protect hard-working national citizens (in Rathgeb's words, the "makers", 2021) from welfare and economic abuses by free riders, lazy migrants (the "takers form below", cfr. Rathgeb 2021). Moreover, this frame does not apply to migrants exclusively. Conversely, PRRPs use it also to limit welfare access for native citizens who get welfare benefits without making any contributions, do not make efforts to look for a job and/or behave in an improper way (cheating on their incomes or not showing gratefulness for the social help received). In light of this, while far from being unquestioned, this frame may eventually make restrictive social policies against migrants overall more morally and politically acceptable, in light of considerations of economic and social necessity and fairness.

By contrast, the WC frame, based on the identity criterion of deservingness, prompts an explicit nativist differentiation of solidarity, excluding migrants only because of their citizenship and/or residence status. This is explicitly and unequivocally at odds with the democratic anti-discrimination principle. In addition, given its focus on national identity, this frame cannot apply to native citizens, but it only refers to non-citizens migrants. Based on these considerations, I build my second hypothesis:

H2: when holding a governmental position, PRRPs prefer to exploit the WP frame (rather than WC) to promote restrictive social policy measures against immigrants.

Nevertheless, PRRPs may also apply a third, different reasoning. Given their typical indifference to “duty and moral responsibility” (Mair 2014, p.587) as governing parties (Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Chueri 2019), they may choose to employ the identity criterion of deservingness, i.e., the WC frame, irrespective of rules of moral and political acceptability. The WC and the WP frame are not mutually exclusive. PRRPs may exploit both or just one of them to promote restrictive social measures against migrants, as they do during national electoral campaigns. The third and last hypothesis therefore claims that:

H3: when holding a governmental position, PRRPs rely on the WC and the WP frames (both or just one of them) to promote restrictive social policy measures against immigrants.

4. Methodology and data

4.1. Italy as a case-study

I test my hypotheses in a specific case-study, i.e., Italy, during the Conte I government. It was the 65th Cabinet of the Italian Republic, supported by a coalition composed of the left-wing populist party *Movimento Cinque Stelle*, Five Stars Movement (MS5) and the PRRP, the League (previously Northern League). A few months after its establishment, this government introduced the RdC scheme, one of the warhorses of the M5S. The League pushed for the introduction within it of some restrictive measures targeting a specific category of migrants, i.e., those from outside the EU, also defined as third-country nationals, TCNs (Jessoula and Natili, 2020).

More precisely, the party put forward an amendment to Article 2.1. of the Decree Law (establishing the beneficiaries of the RdC and the entitlement rules). The amendment imposed a temporary ban to access to the RdC for non-EU migrants, until they fulfill 2 additional requirements (beyond ISEE⁶ certification): 1) showing evidence of 10 years' uninterrupted residency in Italy (rather than 5 years, as before) and 2) presenting, as a proof of their income status, a certification attesting to the absence of movable property and real estate abroad, in their home countries. This certification does not substitute the ISEE, but constitutes an additional requirement for extra-EU migrants only. Both 1 and 2 were embedded in the final law and precisely in Art. 2.

In light of the above, this case provides an ideal setting for studying how PRRPs frame and promote restrictive measures against migrants. Indeed, I argue that this case provides leverage for the generalization of the results to other countries and PRRPs. Namely, in spite of some specific peculiarities, the League is a good representative of the PRRP family in (Western) Europe. Previous studies have pointed out that the League's ideological profile with regard to social policy and the migration-welfare nexus is very

⁶ ISEE (Indicatore Situazione Economica Equivalente, Indicator of the equivalent Economic Condition) is the certification showing the actual economic condition of families (based on earnings, wealth and properties).

similar to that of other PRRPs across Europe. That is, like other PRRPs, it claimed for welfare restrictions for migrants during past electoral campaigns, relying on both the WC and the WP ideological frames (Abs et al., 2021). Moreover, the League is a member of the *Europe of Nations and Freedom* group in the European Parliament, alongside the French *Rassemblement National*, the Belgian *Vlaams Belang*, the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, and the Austrian FPO. Given all the above, there are reasons to believe that the League's governmental action is not so different from that of other PRRPs.

4.2. The Italian context: an overall summary and differences from previous research

Italy was originally the only Southern-European country included within Esping-Ander- sen's sample of countries and it was assigned to the Conservative-corporatist cluster (Ferrera, 2010). With the conceptualization of a fourth welfare regime, the Southern or Mediterranean welfare state regime (Ferrera 1996, 2010), Italy is typically considered a member of the new cluster, together with Spain, Portugal, and Greece (Ferrera 1996, 2010; Sciortino 2004).

Like other Southern European countries, Italy has an overall lower social expenditure and a much larger expenditure for pensions (both old age and survivor), as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), than the EU average (Ferrera 1996, 2010). In addition, the Italian welfare system traditionally makes very limited use of means-tested benefits and programs – less than half the European average (Ibid). This is paired to the significant role of the compulsory social insurance program in providing social provisions (Ferrera 1996, 2010; Sciortino 2004; Natili 2018; Jessoula and Natili 2020). However, these traditional mechanisms have recently begun to be brought into question. Social assistance minimum income protection schemes have acquired a new importance, at both citizens' and politicians' level (Natili 2018; Jessoula and Natili 2020). This has marked the end of "Italian exceptionalism" (Jessoula and Natili, 2020).

Since 2017, two welfare schemes have been approved. The first one is the Inclusion Income, *Reddito di inclusione sociale*, approved in 2017 by the center-left Gentiloni government. It was designed as an in-cash means-tested monetary benefit conditional on claimants' income, aiming at promoting active inclusion through individualized plans and service provision. However, due to severe budgetary constraints, it was one of the least financed, generous and inclusive minimum income schemes in Europe and only a limited number of poor individuals could receive it (Jessoula and Natili, 2020). The second is the RdC. Like its antecedent, it is an in-cash, means-tested type of program, based on applicants' income and especially the family income. Only families whose income is below a given threshold can apply and legitimately obtain the benefit. Accordingly, applicants have to present ISEE certification.

The RdC was initially drafted as a Decree-Law (num.4/28 January 2019) and then turned into final law (num. 26 of 28 March 2019) between February and March 2019. It dealt with two major topics: the introduction of the new minimum income scheme, the CI, and a new pension reform (*Quota 100*), overhauling the former 2011 Fornero pension scheme. Quota 100 consisted of an early retirement scheme for people aged at least 62 and having contributed for at least 38 years (the quota refers to the sum of the two minimum thresholds). Jessoula and Natili (2020) highlight that the League accepted the

introduction of the RdC in exchange for the tightened eligibility conditions for non-EU migrants as well as the approval of the reform pension. The latter, indeed, was designed by Lega deputy labor minister Durigon and it matches the League's (and PRRPs' overall) emphasis on old age and retirement and the defense of generous state pensions for people who have contributed all their lives.

Beyond the study by Jessoula and Natili, some other scholars have dealt with the most recent Italian social policy reforms and the League's role in them (Giannetti at al, 2020; Meardi and Guardiancich 2022). These studies have argued that the League influenced the policy priorities of the Government more than the M5S did, being able to "reap the fruits of governing" (Giannetti at al, 2020, p.15) thanks to its increasing popularity over time. They claim that the League's input was more visible in the specific areas of pensions and family social policies than in that of the RdC, with the exception of the introduction of the restrictive measures toward migrants (Meardi and Guardiancich, 2022), being thus in line with what Jessoula and Natili say (2020). However, these previous studies have touched the topic of the RdC, and especially the restrictive measures by the League, only marginally, without going deeper into an examination of how, exactly, the League promoted the introduction of these measures. By contrast, the present article specifically addresses this topic, delving into the League's rhetorical and ideological discourse so as to better clarify its social policy formula and notably how it frames the migrant-welfare nexus.

4.3. Method and data

As for the specific method used, I test the hypotheses by means of an in-depth qualitative content analysis of the speeches made by politicians and deputies of the League. I select those speeches where they discuss and illustrate their views of the RdC and notably the restrictive measures against non-EU migrants put forward by the League. The specific text's passages under examination are those where they speak in support of such measures and explain their reasons for doing this. By focusing on them, I examine the specific rhetorical and ideological frames politicians use to legitimize these restrictive measures and whether they exploit such frames as expected in the article. With regard to the types of speeches selected, I focus on official speeches first (on the topic of RdC and in particular the restrictive measures by the League), made by Matteo Salvini, the Federal Secretary of the League since 2013 and Minister of the Interior during the Conte I government, through the League's primary communication channels: declarations on social networks, interviews in TV or newspapers. It goes without saying that Salvini is continually active on social networks and television, and he made several relevant speeches. This analysis is focused on those speeches he made in the period he was Minister of the Interior (June 2018-September 2019), both before starting the negotiations with the M5S for the introduction of the RdC and during negotiations. Given its role in the government, we can presumably expect that in this period Salvini speaks in behalf and highlights the ideological view of the League as a governing party. All the relevant speeches were collected by a key word search on Salvini's official webpage, *Lega per Salvini Premier*, where all the most important declarations by the politician and the events he takes part in are uploaded. I have manually transcribed his oral speeches (e.g., on TV) in written form. Secondly, I focus on parliamentary speeches (by Salvini or other

deputies of the League) held at the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Senate, during which the Decree-Law was translated into final Law. These took place between February and March 2019. I focus merely on the debates where the design and approval of the RDC is discussed, while neglecting those which touch on other topics (especially the pension reform). From a preliminary analysis, it emerges that the RDC issue is discussed during the Chamber's 145th and 146th sessions (20 and 21 March respectively). I took the written transcripts of these debates from the official website of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.⁷

Parliamentary speeches are a more valid exploratory tool to examine the frames employed by politicians than social policies and laws (Keskinen, 2016). The latter are indeed usually very vague, putting forward general rules and norms, without clearly specifying the logic and justifications behind them. On the contrary, during parliamentary debates, politicians often have to provide longer and more well-developed explanations for their policy preferences, also to respond to the criticism of the opposition (Ibid). Moreover, given the continuous confrontation and the need for articulating quick counterarguments, parliamentary speeches are generally more dynamic, also envisaging the re-formulation of politicians' arguments and frames. Thus, they are likely to offer wider material for investigating the ideological and rhetorical frames employed, eventually also capturing different facets of them.

The article explores the relevant frames in politicians' speeches by assigning to the text passages in set 1 a number of "categories" (or "codes"), i.e., several conceptual labels that foster the understanding of the data (Ibid). Five main categories are used: four of them correspond to the deservingness criteria underlying the WC and WP frames: identity (WC), control, attitude and reciprocity (WP). The last one is an additional residual category, ("others"), corresponding to other criteria and frames not conceptualized in the literature, which may eventually emerge from the analysis.

By assigning to the relevant text passages one or more of these categories, I extract from politicians' speeches the specific deservingness criteria and corresponding frames they use to legitimize the chauvinist welfare measures targeting the RdC. A more detailed illustration of the types of categories, coding frame and procedure is provided in Appendix A. To make the reading smoother, in the analysis I only quote some short sections and specific words from the passages analyzed, as examples of the frames exploited by politicians. I present a more detailed overview of politicians' speeches in Appendix B. In order to improve the efficiency of the research, I rely on MAXQDA, an advanced piece of software for qualitative data analysis, to code the qualitative data and analyze them (Kuckartz, 2019).

5. Analysis

Overall, both Salvini and other deputies of the League deliberately avoid taking a clear position on the topic of the RdC. Every time journalists or other deputies ask for their views, they tend to answer in a vague way, saying that this question should rather be put to the deputies of the M5S. They hold a clear-cut position only with regard to migrants' entitlement to the benefit, adopting an explicit nativist view, which emerges clearly in the amendment they put forward to the original RdC Law text. This finding is in line

⁷ See: <https://www.camera.it/leg18/1>.

with previous studies about PRRPS, showing that they tend to de-emphasize social issues and, in particular, present blurry stances on the first dimension of welfare (i.e., the level of generosity of welfare policies) with the only exception of nativist stances against migrants (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020; Rathgeb 2021).

A more thorough review of the data selected reveals that Salvini addresses the specific topic of migrants' entitlement/disentitlement to the RdC in two cases only (at least, during the period under analysis). The first time is during an interview conducted in September 2018 by journalists of *La Repubblica*,⁸ an Italian daily general-interest newspaper. The interview does not specifically deal with the topic of migrants' entitlement/disentitlement to the RdC, but the journalist also asks him about his position (and that of the League) in that regard. On this occasion, Salvini clearly states that such a measure should be reserved exclusively to Italian citizens. He justifies and promotes such a view by relying on both the WC and the WP frames, thus complying with H3. He declares that the League is working on an amendment introducing restrictions for non-Italian citizens. The party wants the introduction of these restrictions, he says, in order not to "give away money for free" to migrants who "are not Italian citizens" (i.e., the WC frame) and "wander the country without working or making any effort to get employment" (WP). From this speech, it emerges that *national citizenship* is the main identity criterion informing the WC frame. Thus, migrants⁹ are considered as less deserving of social support through the RdC (and therefore they should not get access to it) because formally they are not Italian citizens. As for the WP frame, this is articulated around the deservingness criterion of *control*. The reference to migrants "wandering around" and their unwillingness to search for a job reminds us of such a criterion.

The second time Matteo Salvini directly and explicitly deals with this topic is when he is invited on the Italian TV broadcast *Non è l'arena*, in February 2019.¹⁰ In this case, he relies mainly on the WP frame to promote the restrictive measures. At the time, the amendment to Article 2.1 (temporarily banning migrants' access to the RdC) had already been presented and the approval of the final version of the RdC was under discussion. When asked how the League managed to compromise with the M5S on the subject of the RdC, he answered that it was possible thanks to the introduction of some "controls" within the text of the D-L. These aim to prevent both nationals and migrants (TCNs) from cheating the system by making false declarations about their income and residence to obtain the RdC. He then adds that many of these cheaters are migrants. In this case, WP against non-EU migrants hinges especially on one of the three deservingness criteria, i.e., *attitude*. That is, politicians argue that migrants should be temporarily banned from the RdC because they are fundamentally dishonest people, ready to cheat in order to obtain more economic advantages for themselves, at the expense of Italian people living in extreme poverty. However, the WP frame is exploited also against national citizens, in that Salvini explicitly states that also many Italian citizens tend to adopt these dishonest behaviors.

During the parliamentary debates preceding the approval of the final law envisaging both the RdC scheme and Quota 100, Matteo Salvini does not directly address the topic

⁸ I found the relevant video on the Facebook webpage Lega-Salvini Premier.

⁹ Here, he refers generically to "immigrants" without specifying any groups (ex., EU, not EU).

¹⁰ I found the relevant video on the Facebook webpage Lega-Salvini Premier.

of migrants' entitlement to the RdC. He rather leaves the floor to other deputies who promote the restrictive measures by relying, again, on both the WC and WP frames (H3). With regard to the WC frame, it remains somewhat unclear whether politicians of the League refer to national citizenship or residence as the main identity criterion for accessing the RdC. Since they introduce the 10 years-residence requirements, one may expect that residence is the criterion used.

On the other hand, during the parliamentary sessions analyzed, they explicitly state that the government (and the League in particular) aims at defending the (social and economic) interests of *Italian* citizens against those of non citizens "coming from the other side of the world" (20 March, Column 145, Pos. 198). Accordingly, the measures put forward by the League aim exactly to favor citizens over non citizens in access to the RdC. Besides this explicit statement, all through the sessions, the deputies of the League repeatedly stress that both the Quota 100 and the RdC are measures in support of *Italian* citizens, to meet the needs of that part of the *Italian* population (people who used to be employed or self-employed but lost their jobs and currently live below the line of economic and social poverty). These statements seem to suggest that *national citizenship* is the main identity criterion for the entitlement or disentanglement of migrants, more than (or to a larger extent than) residence. That is, migrants are considered as less deserving of social support through the RdC because formally they are not Italian citizens.

"With the two measures that we, the League, have introduced [...] we want to make sure, we are sure, that this benefit [i.e., the Citizenship Income] will go primarily to Italian citizens and not to immigrants! Our government was elected by Italian citizens and it pursues the interests of Italian citizens, not those of non-Italian citizens coming from the other side of the world".

(Deputy Edoardo Ziello, the League, 20 March, C.145, Pos. 198).

As far as the WP frame is concerned, it especially hinges on the *attitude* criterion of deservingness (similar to what is observed in the speech by Salvini on TV). Once again, migrants are blamed for their (supposed) dishonest and usurping behaviors (in Italian, they are called *furbetti*). More specifically, politicians argue that, in the previous years, most migrants declared less property and income than they actually had, in order to be entitled to the former minimum income schemes (21 March, C.146, Pos. 1072). This way, migrants took away several social and economic resources, that may otherwise have been spent to improve the welfare services for Italians living below the poverty line (Ibid). Some of them even left Italy to spend the money received abroad, in their home country (20 March, C.145, Pos. 200). In the politicians' view, this phenomenon was especially made possible by the fact that administrative controls by frontline social workers were too light in previous years, and were therefore unable to assess the real estate and income situation of people claiming the benefit (Ibid).

In light of this, the League politicians argue that the new restrictive measures are necessary in order to ensure that Italian citizens will be given priority in the allocation of the new RdC measure, contrary to what occurred for the ReI (20 March, C.145, Pos. 200). Accordingly, the 10-year requirement is intended to make it a longer and more difficult procedure for migrants to apply for the RdC. In the politicians' view, this should discourage them from applying, finally ensuring that more resources are left for Italian citizens. Furthermore, the second requirement (the additional certification from migrants) aims

at preventing migrants from doing the same for the RDC as well. By asking migrants to present additional certification, the government will be able to strengthen control over migrants and make it more difficult to declare less property, earnings, and income than they actually have (21 March, C.146, Pos. 1072). As a result, this second measure will prevent and reduce the possibility of cheating at the expense of Italians. In simple terms, this may be a strategy “to cut the problem out at its root” (20 March, C.145, Pos. 200).

“Because, Mr. President, that was what happened with the previous minimum income scheme: the majority of migrants who took the Inclusion Income played dumb and did not declare all their real properties, in order to get the benefit. Some of them even went to spend it in their country of origin rather than here in Italy! This situation was also likely to create economic damage to our country and a fiscal loss for our citizens who lost a lot of resources we wish the Government could rather have spent to help them. We, on the other hand, said: more barriers to the access to benefits for migrants, to cut the problem out at its root and prevent cheating practices, so as to make sure that more resources are left for Italians”.

(Deputy Edoardo Ziello, the League, 20 March, C.145, Pos. 200).

“It is required, for those who present an ISEE declaration, given that there are patrimonial requirements to be respected, that the embassy of the state of origin certifies that the foreigner who applies to obtain the Citizenship Income, is not cheating us, is not trying to fool us again, as happened with the inclusion income, for which many foreigners did not declare all their actual properties and real estate and stole money from Italians citizens”.

(Deputy Riccardo Molinari, the League, 21 March, C.146, Pos. 1072).

From the speeches analyzed, it seems that the League¹¹ mobilize the WC and WP frames to promote non-EU migrants’ exclusion. Namely, non-EU migrants are to be temporarily banned from the new RdC *both* because they are not Italian citizens (i.e., the *identity* criterion) *and* because they violate some good morals by cheating on their properties and incomes (i.e., the *attitude* criterion). Based on this, we can conclude that the League’s ideological and rhetorical frames (WC and WP) reflect the party’s welfare agenda during elections.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The present article has applied the theoretical and analytical framework by Abs (Abs et al., 2021) to PRRPs’ governmental action. It has investigated whether PRRPs transpose the ideological and rhetorical frames underlying their welfare agenda during elections (WC, WP) into governmental action. In addition, it has examined which of these frames ruling PRRPs are most likely to be exploited. To answer these questions, the analysis has tested three different views. The first states that ruling PRRPs do not exploit any of these frames. The second view claims instead that they only exploit the WP frame. Indeed, it may eventually make restrictive social policies against migrants overall more morally and politically acceptable in light of the rules of moral and political acceptability within

¹¹ In the person of its leader and Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini but also some other deputies defending the amendments during the parliamentary sessions.

Western democracies, especially the nondiscrimination principle. Conversely, the third view argues that PRRPs may choose to exploit also the identity criterion of deservingness, i.e., the WC frame (either together with the WP frame or not), coherently with their electoral rhetoric and irrespective of rules of moral and political acceptability.

The analysis has focused in particular on the case of the League and the introduction of the RdC during the Conte I government (2018-2019). The results bring empirical evidence to the third hypothesis. That is, when in a ruling position, the League supports exclusive solidarity (i.e., the exclusion of TCNs from access to RdC) by exploiting the very same ideological and rhetorical frames exploited during the electoral campaign (differently from what is expected in H1). Moreover, the party relies on both the WC and WP (H3); it does not try to frame welfare cutbacks in more morally and politically acceptable terms in light of Western European democratic standards (in contrast to H2).

As previously mentioned, some studies on the League and its imprint on Italian social policy already exist. In particular, the work by Meardi and Guardiancich (2022) has shown that the party's input was visible in some specific areas like pensions and family social policies. In addition, Jessoula and Natili (2020) have showed that the introduction of the restrictive measures towards TCNs within the RdC was the result of a compromise between the League and the M5S; namely, the League accepted the introduction of the RdC only in exchange for these measures. However, none of these studies has examined how exactly the League promoted the introduction of these restrictive measures, i.e., the ideological and rhetorical frames exploited. By delving into this specific aspect, this work therefore complements former research on the Italian case.

Beyond the specificities of the Italian case, the article relies on this case to contribute to the advancement of the understanding of PRRPs' social policies. As argued in 4.1., the findings observed for the League can be quite extensively generalized to other PRRPs across European countries too. When examined from a wider perspective, these findings have two major theoretical implications in the literature about PRRPs and social policies.

First, they confirm some trends already highlighted by some previous studies (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020; Rathgeb 2021; Enggist and Pingerra). Except for some cases, Salvini and other deputies of the League tend to de-emphasize social issues and specifically the RdC, in their official and parliamentary speeches. They hold a clear-cut position only with regard to migrants' entitlement to the benefit, adopting a clear nationalist approach, emerging in the amendment they put forward to the original RdC Law text (Ibid).

Secondly, by showing that the League exploits both WC and WP, the article's findings point out that the overused concept of *welfare chauvinism* is *not* fully adequate to illustrate the PRRPs' social policy formula, in particular with regard to migrants. While the identity criterion (formal citizens, residence and eventually ethno-cultural characteristics) remains undisputedly a key element of PRRPs' social policy reforms and rhetoric targeting migrants, it is complemented by other deservingness criteria looking at migrants' behaviors, attitudes and willingness to (economically) integrate in the host country. In light of this, this work aligns to some previous studies (Abs et al., 2021; Rathgeb 2021; Enggist and Pingerra 2021) in saying that research on PRRPs must go beyond the welfare chauvinism concept to better understand these parties' social policy formula.

I am aware of the limitations of the present study. The analysis has voluntarily neglected some factors that may have an impact on PRRPs' action in the social policy field. Among others, countries' specificities may matter. For example, as suggested by Abs (Abs et al., 2020), the different types of national welfare regimes may moderate the emphasis of PRRPs (also when in office) on particular deservingness criteria to be applied to migrants (and possibly also to national citizens). Another factor may be the different types of policy areas, i.e., whether PRRPs promote and implement social reforms in the means tested (like the RdC), or rather universal policy field. Future research can incorporate the present findings to further investigate these matters, including new countries in the analysis and adequately comparing them.

Finally, this study has focused exclusively on the first dimension of the political conflict about welfare politics, i.e., about the level of generosity of national welfare expenditure (Enggist and Pingerra 2021; Rathgeb 2021; Busemayer et al., 2021). By contrast, it has not considered the second dimension, namely the recalibration of welfare expenditure (which social policy domain should be given priority). While both dimensions are undoubtedly relevant in the Italian political panorama, I decided to focus especially on the first one for two reasons. Firstly, the topic of TCNs' disentanglement to the RdC acquired great relevance and visibility during the period under observation, by both politicians and public opinion, including NGOs, legal groups and associations, etc. Accordingly, I argue that a deeper analysis of how the League promoted disentanglement was necessary to shed light on this whole matter. Secondly, focusing on a single specific dimension has allowed me to carry out a deeper and more detailed analysis. Further studies can complement the present analysis, by delving into the debate around the recalibration of welfare expenditure in Italy (second dimension).

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Parliamentary debates analyzed:

Session No.145, 20 March 2019, available at: <https://www.camera.it/leg18/410?idSed-uta=0145&tipo=stenografico#sed0145.stenografico.tit00030>

Session No.146, 21 March 2019, available at: <https://www.camera.it/leg18/410?idSed-uta=0146&tipo=stenografico#sed0146.stenografico.tit00020>

Appendix A.

The coding procedure and coding frame

Qualitative content analysis is a more appropriate method for testing the article's hypotheses than its counterpart, quantitative content analysis (Keskinen, 2016). The quantitative method counts words and occurrences within the texts. Conversely, the qualitative one systematically examines themes and patterns and the overall sentiments within the selected texts. Thus, it is suitable to the article's research question since it allows for an in-depth and systematic examination of politicians' rhetoric with regard to migrants, namely the ideological and rhetorical frames they use to legitimate and promote migrants' exclusion from the RdC. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to simultaneously capture both politicians' explicit and implicit references to the ideological and rhetorical frames under investigation (Schreier, 2014). Indeed, it may sometimes be the case that politicians do not explicitly refer to any of the existing frames, but they rather develop the discourses in such a way that they point back to one or both of them, or eventually to additional and still unexplored frames. By contrast, a purely quantitative analysis of the texts fails to capture these latent meanings since it only focuses on the explicit meanings (Ibid).

The article extracts the relevant frames from the texts' passages under examination by relying on a number of "categories" (or "codes"), i.e., several conceptual labels that foster an understanding of the data (Ibid). Empirically speaking, categories are "those aspects of the material about which researchers would like more information" (Schreier, 2014, p. 75), namely the deservingness criteria (and the corresponding frames, either WC or WP or both) in this article. Categories can be created before or while analyzing the content (Kuckartz, 2019).

Ex ante categories are called deductive because they originate from previous knowledge of the researcher, from the research question or from the existing literature. They are concepts that exist and have been formulated before reading the text and independently of it (Kuckartz, 2019). *In vivo* categories are created from the text itself, during the analysis: they are inductive (Ibid).

This work deals with deductive categories, built starting from the literature. They correspond to the specific deservingness/undeservingness criteria highlighted in the relevant literature: identity, control, attitude, reciprocity. By assigning the relevant text passages (i.e., those in which politicians speak in support of the restrictive measures introduced in the RdC and explain their reason for doing so) one or more of these categories, I extract from politicians' speeches the specific deservingness criteria and corresponding frames they use to legitimate the welfare chauvinist measures targeting the RdC. Based on Abs' (Abs et al., 2021) analytical framework I know that when the identity category applies then the WC frame is at play. Instead, when the other three categories/criteria apply (one or even all), then politicians are using the WP frame. In line with the traditional qualitative content analysis, each category is marked by one or several indicators. These are words, sentences, and broader considerations in the texts which enable me to immediately recognize the category at play (Schreier 2014; Kuckartz 2019). Here below, I show a summary scheme of the article's coding system.

- Identity
 - Indicators: words related to the identity semantic sphere (“citizens”, “residents”, “Italians” and “not Italians” and/or other similar ones); reasoning and considerations that explicitly give formal citizens (or residents) priority over non-citizen migrants in access to the RdC;
- Control
 - Indicators: words related to the control semantic sphere (“control”, “held responsible”, and/or other similar ones); reasoning and considerations that blame non-EU migrants for their own situation of need and low-income (for example, because they are unwilling to actively look for a job so to increase their income);
- Attitude
 - Indicators: words related to the attitude semantic sphere (“ungrateful”, “dishonest”, and/or other similar ones); reasoning and considerations that portray non-EU migrants as ungrateful and/or dishonest or in some other negative manner (from a moral and behavioral point of view);
- Reciprocity
 - Indicators: words related to the reciprocity semantic sphere (“contribute”, “awarding”, “actively engaging”, and/or other similar ones); reasoning and considerations that stress that non-EU migrants have not contributed enough to the Italian social and economic growth through their past working activities.

Relying on well-defined indicators is useful for making clear where one code ends and another one begins. In fact, each category is applied to one or more sentences and textual passages only when words and discourses are consistent with that category’s indicators. This in turn allows for the assessment of which deservingness criteria are used to justify the restrictive measures targeting the new RdC and whether these criteria correspond to those hypothesized in the article.

Besides, indicators are useful for applying the same categories to all the material in a consistent manner, i.e., always applying the same category when the same indicator is observed. The consistency of the coding frame increases, in turn, the reliability and replication of the overall analysis. In order to improve the efficiency of the research, I rely on MAXQDA, an advanced piece of software for qualitative data analysis, to code the qualitative data and analyze them (Kuckartz, 2019).

Appendix B. Text excerpts analyzed¹²

Speeches by Matteo Salvini (Ministry of the Interior, the League), posted on the official Facebook webpage Lega-Salvini Premier:

When asked about the RdC:

“So, are you asking me what I think about the Citizenship Income? The Citizenship Income is a measure promoted by our coalition partner, the M5S. [...] The League is working on an amendment to reserve such schemes to Italian citizens only. I will accept the Citizenship Income, as long as it is a measure to help Italian citizens. The League does not want to give away money for free to those people who are not Italian citizens, wander the country without working or making any effort to get employment in Italy”.

(Interview by La Repubblica, September 2018)

“We agree on this measure, but we are negotiating to introduce more controls (the ones proposed by the League). Luigi [i.e., the Minister of Labor Luigi di Maio] and I will discuss this point further in the next few weeks. The League does not want to undermine the efforts made to support 5 million Italians living under the poverty line, so we are trying to find a compromise between helping people in need and avoiding cheating by dishonest people and abusers. [...] All those people who declare false properties and lower incomes just to obtain entitlement to the Citizenship Income, if caught, have to go to prison – no ifs, not buts! I refer especially to migrants from outside the EU. I know that many of them are behaving this way and I want to stop them!

(TV interview during the TV broadcast *Non è l'arena*, February 2019)

PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES

Speeches by Deputy Edoardo Ziello (The League) during the 45th parliamentary session of the Chamber of Deputies, on 20 March 2019:

“I move now to talk about the Citizenship Income. It is clear that we, as a party, had not thought of introducing a Citizenship Income during the election campaign for the general election of 4 March. However, we have always said one thing, namely that the 5 million poor Italians who are in our country because of the wrong and wicked policies of the Democratic Party, these Italians were and are a priority for us” (20 March, Column 145, Pos. 193-194).

“Citizenship Income is not a purely poverty-alleviation, welfare measure, it is also and above all a measure that is linked to reintegration into the labor market. With this measure, we guarantee that all the beneficiaries of the Citizenship Income will be people who are totally obliged to follow a path, who will not sit on their sofa and live merely on the money received, as some deputies of the Democratic Party do” (20 March, Column 145, Pos. 195-197).

¹² Translation from Italian by the author.

“This new law represents a new pact for social inclusion. Surely, thanks to this pact for social inclusion, a lot of Italian citizens will be included in a path of inclusion that will also guarantee them the right to return to be or feel protagonists of their community [...]. Then, with the two measures that we, the League, have introduced, namely residence for ten years for all non-EU citizens and the additional certification attesting to the absence of property abroad, we want to make sure, we are sure that this benefit [i.e., the Citizenship Income] will go primarily to Italian citizens and not to immigrants! Our government was elected by Italian citizens, and it pursues the interests of Italian citizens, not those of people coming from the other side of the world. [...] Because, Mr. President, that was what happened with the previous minimum income scheme: the majority of migrants who took the Inclusion Income played dumb and did not declare all their real properties, in order to get the benefit. Some of them even went to spend it in their country of origin rather than here in Italy! This situation was also likely to create economic damage to our country and a fiscal loss for our citizens who lost a lot of resources we wish the Government could have rather spent to help them. We, on the other hand, said: more barriers to access to benefits for migrants, to cut the problem out at its root and prevent the cheating practices, so as to make sure that more resources are left for Italians” (20 March, Column 45, Pos. 198).

Speeches by Deputy Riccardo Molinari (The League) during the 46th parliamentary session of the Chamber of Deputies, on the 21 March 2019:

“A few months ago, the League and the Five Stars Movement, alone against everyone, against all the opposition, against all the national and international commentators, engaged in a tug-of-war with the European Commission. This occurred because the Commission had a clear objective regarding our financial law: not to make us apply these two social measures, the Citizenship Income and the revision of the Fornero pension system. Because the idea of Brussels was that the wrong recipes, which have led our country to have one third of Italian families at risk of poverty and 5 million living under the poverty line, those recipes should not be questioned. Therefore, this government and this majority are a government and a majority that are subversive with respect to those dogmas. Namely, we are demonstrating that, if you want to do battle for Italian citizens, if you want to do battle for social justice, nothing can hold: Italian citizens are right when they vote well and when they have leaders who do the things they promise. Well, these two measures are measures which, as I was saying, respond to the demand for social rights and social protection and meet the needs of a significant part of the Italian population, which is the part that has become poorer in recent years” (21 March, Column 146, Pos. 1068).

“The measures we proposed are to be seen as a way to make the Citizenship Income even more effective. It is required, for those who present an ISEE declaration, given that there are patrimonial requirements to be respected, that the embassy of the State of origin certifies that the foreigner, who applies to obtain the Citizenship Income, is not cheating us, is not trying to fool us again, as happened with the inclusion income, for which many foreigners did not declare all their actual properties and real estates and stole money from Italians citizens” (21 March, Column 146, Pos. 1072).