Foreword

As 2017 begins with redrafted maps of power in various parts of the world, it is worth looking at how political parties or groups tend to support one another, or merge to form alliances that are supposed to enable them to obtain more power or legitimacy. From a communication point of view, these logics intended to gain power through gathered forces can be even more interesting to focus on when they lay upon shared strategic purposes yet divergent ideological bases. That is what Mrs Buonaroti's text is about: contrasted ideas and contrasted goals, even opposite ones, combining in order to gain benefits.

These dynamics, which can be seen as strategic or very pragmatic, can lead to discourse adaptations from the parties or groups that feed them in order to deal with paradoxes or contradictions between one another. The alliance of the Five Star Movement (MoVimento 5 Stelle, abbreviation: M5S) with the UK Independence Party (UKIP) within the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (EFDD) during the 2014 European elections constitutes a fruitful opportunity to study this coherence challenge. It is all the more intriguing to look at the discursive devices those two political actors experimented since the M5S tried to escape this alliance at the very beginning of January 2017, though unsuccessfully. This failed attempt subjected it to align itself with the arguments in favour of the 2014 alliance.

As you will see through the reading of Mrs Buonaroti's research, her conclusions underline how the leader of M5S, Beppe Grillo, was astute enough to convince his electorate to accept and support the alliance with the UKIP in 2014, whereas this electorate initially saw this alliance as a negative move. Three years later, we can add that his astuteness seems to have been a contingent strategy.

Indeed, one of the core differences between the M5S and the UKIP is their degree of euro-scepticism, that led the former to promote a radical change from within the European Union – an anti-establishment campaign – whereas the latter advocated a total exit from it – i.e. the Brexit campaign. This ideological divide turned into a concrete dilemma when the 2016 referendum about Brexit resulted in the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. As M5S' leader Beppe Grillo tried to join the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) a few months

later, in January 2017, 80 % of M5S voters were in favour of this break up with UKIP, showing that the arguments that once convinced them to support an alliance with UKIP had mostly become obsolete. ALDE members' refusal of the transfer left Grillo with no other choice than coming back to the EFDD. A step back to a narrative synergy that this study enables us to understand better.

In fact, M5S and UKIP had, until then, dealt with their ideological divide by stressing their mutual benefits and common critics towards Europe's lack of democracy and politics of austerity. The analysis of their narratives and their evolution throughout the 2014 campaign highlights rhetorical differences that tended to soften as the campaign became stronger and bolder. By proceeding to a discourse analysis, the research details how both parties expressed divergent points of view in increasing similar communication stances. This communication strategy seemed to work as both parties obtained good results at the elections, reinforcing their legitimacy as European political actors.

To examine closely how this communication strategy has taken place and has evolved, the study uses a selection of speeches and written posts. The selection criteria are clearly explained in the text and are based on logical and historical reasons. The corpus is built on three timespans: before, during and after the campaign. This division allows the reader to pay attention to typical structures and strategies used by each party and to compare them at various stages. The work of Marzia Buonaroti is thus a methodological contribution that can serve as a model to study the evolution of discourse strategies in a comparative way.

Her work examines the structures of discourse, the syntax, the lexicon, the topics and the rhetoric of the selected communication products of the two political groups. Moreover, the author carried out interviews with one MEP of each party, offering a deeper understanding of this particular alliance and the way it was managed.

What was, and still is , at stake here is the consistency of public discourses that have to convey both ideological differences and organisational unity. Consistency is usually a key principle to apply in order to communicate efficiently. It even constitutes a principle of efficient leadership in several studies on political communication. However,

one of the particularly original elements that the research brings to light is how incoherence might not be a problem, or might not seem an issue, as long as one can invoke the principle of pluralism.

As a matter of fact, Mrs Buonaroti describes how the political and organisational cohabitation between M5S and UKIP drained opposite votes inside the European group EFDD, along with a discourse of normalisation about these recurrent differing positions. What emerges from the text is a balancing act between independence and coordination, antithetical positions and strategic union that the two parties have played with flexible rules depending on their needs.

This research is therefore a relevant example of the importance of documenting as well as of analysing traces of communication from a grounded point of view, to go back and forth from texts to contexts. By analysing the political discourse in a dynamic way, it contributes to explain how political claims can be reversed according to contingency. Fortunately or not, this may remain a constant issue to study, especially in the field of public and political communication, as M5S' last turnaround demonstrated.

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