The Five Star Movement and its role in (post) crisis Italian politics

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DRAFT VERSION – COMMENTS ARE WELCOME

Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference in Prague
September 7-10, 2016

Abstract
This paper is a single-country case study and its aim is to analyse the development and structural changes in the Italian populist Five Star Movement (M5S) before and after it became a relevant part of the Italian political system. The M5S started as an extra-parliamentarian protest movement rigorously governed by an indisputable leader Beppe Grillo but especially after the parliamentary elections in 2013 it became the most popular subject in the country with a significant number of deputies in both chambers of parliament which forced the movement to adopt a series of structural changes. The main goal of this paper is to analyse the structural factors which helped the M5S to obtain such unprecedented results and become a strong player in Italian politics using long-term frustration with political elites and the poor functioning of the current Italian political system. The M5S, as a classic example of a protest party, used more an anti-political and anti-establishment rhetoric in order to attract people from both parts of the political spectrum without ideological distinction. More recently, the party has focused more on mainstream topics and shown strong office-seeking attitudes. That is why the secondary goal of this paper is to analyse this shift in the party organization towards a more institutionalized subject with less direct and arbitrary control from the leader and to explain the main structural factors which contributed to this change.

Keywords: Five Star Movement, Beppe Grillo, Italy, populism, cleavages

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1. Introduction

According to many Italy is a country historically connected with the development of populism where this phenomenon found fertile ground and over the years has dominated the local political discourse. In Italy populism found its ‘paradise’ (Zanata 2002, 286), and ‘triumphed over the classical political parties (Hermet 2001, 396).

The collapse of the ‘frozen’ party system of the First Republic in the early 1990s hand in hand with personalization and de-ideologization of Italian politics contributed significantly to the development of populist tendencies in the country. Together with the growing discontent and frustration of the population and with unresolved consequences of the economic crisis it led to a reaction in the form of an increase of ‘anti-politics’ populist movements, especially Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S). This movement unlike populists in the past can’t be regarded as extreme in terms of its location on the left-right scale. On the other hand, it tries to stay ‘beyond’ party system, which leads to the paradox that the M5S is by many regarded as a leftist (even by its own elected representatives), while its rhetoric is a mix of all sorts of ideas with an important element of the radical right thoughts (Biorcio and Natale 2013).

The aim of this paper is to indicate, with the help of structural factors, to what extend economic crisis and a long-term frustration from elites led to the establishment of the M5S as one of the strongest political subject in the country. The secondary goal is to show how the movement reacted to this unprecedented success by focusing more on mainstream topics and by changing its own organisation structure to a less direct and arbitrary control from the leader in order to become a stable part of the Italian party system (and thus overcome short-lived fate of the majority of non-institutionalized populist movements).

First, it’s necessary to mention specifics of Italian populism, which goes beyond the European standards, which might explain why populism in Italy has significantly fewer negative connotations than in other European countries. Consequently, the development of the economic and subsequent political crisis is mentioned, which among other things resulted in a large shift of recently educated people to the M5S advocating radical ‘rescue’ of Italy (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013). The last section of the paper shows what problems the Five Star Movement had to cope with after their electoral breakthrough in 2013 and how it influenced its institutionalization and shift in party organization.

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2 M5S deputies considered in 2015 as their closest political subject the radical Left, Ecology and Freedom party (Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà, SEL) with which they also manifested the highest match in voting in the parliament, 81% (Farinelli and Massetti 2015, 220).
2. Causes of the success of populism in Italy

Views on Italy as a unique case of populism are based on historically deep-rooted knowledge of the country as an ‘anomaly’ (Sassoon 2013, 280). Italian intellectuals and media criticized the country for its ‘innate inefficiency’ (Patriarca 2010, 25), ‘stagnation in the past’ ( Isnenghi 1998), or for its ‘pathological abnormality’ (Mammone and Veltri 2010). They have seen causes of this situation in ‘abnormal’ historical development – the absence of ‘bourgeois revolution’, late nationalization, and the lack of a unifying role of the state together with non-linear history without previously common lived experience (Sassoon 2013, 286). Or as Luciano Cafagna put laconically ‘an Italy without Italian, a unification without unity, a nation excommunicated, and a centralism without centre (Cafagna 1999, 220).

Sergio Romano considered as the main causes of this ‘anomaly’ the existence of ‘two Italies’ with different concepts of society; the myth of anti-fascism, on which the Italian Republic was founded; and the power ambitions of the Catholic Church interfering in the political life of the country (Romano 2013, 81–87). These are the reasons which have led to the lack of a common ethos, an ordinary Italian man was seen as socially isolated suspicious person of particular interests moving on the axis of ‘family-church-community’ (Putnam 1993) without interest for the general welfare (Tullio-Altan 1989).

However, the concept of the ‘Italian anomaly’ has been questioned by many authors as a historical construct (Fabbrini 1994, Newell 2010, Lazar 2013). Nevertheless, the collapse of the party system of the so called First Republic and the subsequent two decades of Berlusconi’s political dominance led in the society to strengthening the narrative of ‘anomaly’, in this case ‘permanent political crisis’ increasingly widening gap between state institutions and civil society. Among the main symptoms can be included 1) low accountability of institutions to the demand of the people, in other words, a chronic inefficiency of the administration and the judiciary system, accompanied by widespread corruption (Diamond a Morlino 2005); 2) weak control mechanisms and feeling of voters that there were left alone without any political influence (Sartori 2006, Newel 2010); 3) low representation leading to the encapsulation of political parties in a form of partitocrazia and to the perception of mainstream parties as part of the ruling elite being in the opposition towards ‘the people’ (Cotta a Verzichelli 2008).

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3 The term ‘anomaly’ in this context can be understood as a specific path to modernity and a unique historical development that led to a ‘frozen’ political system and social immobility which could be put in contrast to idealized models of other countries like the United States or the United Kingdom (Lazar 2013, 322).

4 It’s a form of regime where the main part of political decisions is taken in party secretaries rather than in the parliament or political parties themselves (Capozzi 2009).
Another important fact which influenced the development of populism in Italy was the shift of cleavages in the Italian society in the 1990s. During the First Republic the society was divided by four traditional lines: 1) socioeconomic cleavage built on ideological differences between the Left and the Right; 2) religious cleavage based on the conflict of the Catholic Church with the secular segments of society; 3) foreign policy issue resulting from the paradigm of the Cold War (USA versus USSR); 4) 'democratic' cleavage based on the relationship of political parties and their voters to a liberal democratic regime, namely the conflict between the so-called 'constitutional arc' and extreme left and right (Morlino 2013, 341). However in the 1990s these cleavages either completely disappeared (the end of the Cold War, transformation of the MSI and the PCI in democratic parties), or have been significantly weakened (retreat of the Church from the political space, reducing the importance of ideology in political party programs).

Moreover, at the same time, the whole party system of the First Republic completely disintegrated due to corruption scandals lately known as Tangentopoli. Together it resulted in a strong anti-party sentiment and demand for “new” political parties that would differ from the old ones compromised (Tarchi 2008, 87). Some authors presented this call for radical changes always coming at a time of political crisis as an example of the above mentioned ‘anomaly’ (Galli della Loggia 2013), when in fact it can be considered a phenomenon present in every democratic society (Rosanvallon 2008, 1).

The so called Second Republic contributed to the rise and success of populism in the country even more than the previous decades. Never-ending series of unfinished contradictory structural reforms led to political ‘immobilism’ and to the dominance of bipolarism without check and balances common in the Westminster model and connected to the personal power of Silvio Berlusconi (Pasquino 2006; Grilli di Cortona 2007). It was thus an ideal period for the establishment of the ‘new’ political parties with a strong anti-political appeal acting as improvised groupings of different orientations and using ad hoc opportunities to assert themselves in the Italian political system (Taguieff 2003, 80). Among these populist parties and movements in Italy we could include not only the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) in which populism is the content of its political program but also Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and small Italy of Values (Italia dei valori, IdV) of a former prosecutor Antonio di Pietro. These two parties used populism merely as a form, tightly connected with the party leader and his political style (Tarchi 2015).
When the economic crisis fully hit Italy in 2009 the country was already dealing with severe long-term problems.\textsuperscript{5} Slow growth rate, high debt rate, rising youth unemployment and corruption tiredness gradually led to increasing discontent with the ruling elites and to the loss of confidence in state institutions. In 2000 almost a decade before the outbreak of the economic crisis only 11% of the population at least partially trusted political parties (Sandri and Telò 2013, 270). In 2011 this confidence has fallen to a mere 4% and the government had trust of 12% of Italians, which was with the exception of Greece (8%) the lowest score in Europe (Demos 2012). For Italy, the economic crisis has acted more as a catalyst to existing problems and thus accelerated the crisis of mainstream political parties and the ‘destructuring’ of the whole party system of the Second Italian Republic (Bosco and McDonnell 2012; Ceccarini, Diamanti, and Lazar 2012). In practice, this meant the gradual erosion of Berlusconi’s People of Freedom (Popolo della libertà, PdL), collapse of support by scandals affected Northern League and ideological inconsistency and indecision of the centre-left Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD), which failed to win the support of voters disappointed by the parties of the fourth Berlusconi’s government (Newell 2013). This constellation was on the other hand fully exploited by a new ‘political animal’ on the Italian political scene denying existing classification of political parties – the Five Star Movement of popular comedian Beppe Grillo (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013). He intentionally targeted the disgruntled voters of traditional parties using classic populist rhetoric combined with some new elements typical of ‘modern’ politics of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century (blog as the cornerstone of the movement, on-line organization of ‘meetups’ and everyday use of new social media).

Based on above mentioned causes we can identify three structural factors which greatly helped to the success of Beppe Grillo and his Movement: 1) \textbf{Collapse of the bipolar party model} – the fall of Berlusconi’s fourth government in autumn 2011 marked the end of ‘fragmented bipolarism’ and opened political space for newcomers to whom also helped the subsequent period of the caretaker government of Mario Monti, who had to implement the necessary austerity measures. This destructuring of party system caused high electoral volatility, which in the parliamentary elections in 2013 reached 39.1, which exceeded the value from 1994, from the first elections after the collapse of the First Republic (D’Alimonte, Di Virgilio, and Maggini 2013, 30). Unlike the nineties, however, the high volatility in 2013

\textsuperscript{5}In 2009 the GDP of Italy fell by 5.5\% and the annual budget deficit was also 5.5\%. On the other hand high public debt has been a long-standing problem since the 1980s. Before the economic crisis Italy had public debt at the rate of 106\% of the GDP which in 2013 increased to 127\% (Verney and Bosco 2013, 401).
was achieved without changing the voting system and the demise of the ‘old’ political parties. For that reason we cannot speak about the end of the Second Republic or the collapse of political system, voters only express their grievances and ‘deserted’ from traditional political parties to those offering new anti-party rhetoric (Verney a Bosco 2013, 415).

2) Social delegitimization of political elite – repeated scandals of established political parties were one of the main causes of the loss of voters’ confidence in the existing political representation, and contributed to strengthening the climate of anti-establishment and anti-politics. It was evident especially after scandals linked to the financing of the Northern League and the Italy of Values. Their populist rhetoric based on criticism of corrupt parties in opposition to their own ethics and moral purity turned against them. Both parties had to cope with a large outflow of disillusioned voters which in the case of the IdV led to its demise and the LN managed to survive only at the cost of replacement of the leader and leaning towards sharp anti-immigrant and anti-Islam rhetoric.

3) Economic crisis – although the crisis has hit Italy a very hard way, it was not the main cause of the rise of populism in the country. Its impact was more indirect in the form of political pressure on South European countries from the European Union and its institutions (Bosco a Verney 2012). The loss of credibility among European partners eventually led to the fall of the Berlusconi’s government and forming of Monti’s coalition, whose politics of reform packages and austerity measures helped to the subsequent success of the M5S.

3. ‘New’ populism of the M5S
Since its beginning, the Five Star Movement is linked with the former TV comedian Beppe Grillo and its development can be divided into six phases. Initially, Grillo in his comedy sketches ignored political issues, but after a series of corruption scandals and the formation of the Second Republic he started to go round the country and glossed in his performances former political development. From the perspective of his future opinions it’s interesting that at that time he was strongly opposed to use of modern technologies, during one of his shows he even smashed a computer with a hammer (Santoro 2012, 32). The second phase of the development of the future movement, Lorenzo Mosca called it ‘latent’ (Mosca 2014, 41), began in January 2005 when Grillo started to work closely with the marketing specialist Gianroberto Casaleggio and at his instigation he chose a blog as the main tool of political communication. There he gradually shifted from general comments on globalisation and lifestyle to harsh criticism of political parties, in that time particularly Silvio Berlusconi and
his PdL (Santoro 2012, 41). Grillo thus put aside his role as a comedian and became a political entrepreneur (Biorcio and Natale 2013). He also invited his followers to create online groups on Meetup called ‘Beppe Grillo’s friends’ as platforms for internet discussions.

The growing dissatisfaction with the ruling ‘caste’ Grillo further utilized in the third phase when he moved from the web to the squares and organized the first so-called ‘V-day’ which was held in Bologna and in other Italian cities on 8 September 2007. He presented a platform for a ‘clean parliament’ (ban of all convicted persons from the parliament and two terms limit of holding a seat). The second ‘V-day’ was held in Turin on 25 April 2008 against the ‘caste of journalists’. Following the success of both events Grillo instigated a transformation of Meetup groups from on-line platforms to local backbone cells of the future movement where people could meet face-to-face (Passarelli, Tronconi, and Tuorto 2013). At the beginning of 2008 there were 63,000 ‘Beppe Grillo’s friends’, currently (July 2016), there are 1,310 Meetups with more than 158,000 members (Blog di Beppe Grillo 2016a). These certified electoral lists took part in municipal elections in 2008 and 2009.

This passage also led to the fourth phase of the movement development in which in March 2009 the Florence Charter (Carta di Firenze) was approved by Grillo’s supporters and thus the Five Star Movement as a political entity was founded. The Charter defined a common programme based on environmentalism and identifying the main issues, the so called five stars: water (to maintain public ownership of sources of drinking water), environment (post-materialist defence of local resources and territory), mobility (enhancement of a public transport at the expense of the private), development (of local production), and energy (transition to new energy sources) (Passarelli, Tronconi, and Tuorto 2013, 148). The Charter also officially drew up the certified electoral lists which competed under the unified banner of the M5S in the municipal elections in 2009 (Mosca 2014, 43). The first success came in the regional elections in the spring 2010, when the movement received 7% of votes in Emilia-Romagna, respectively the following year in municipal elections in Bologna with nearly 10% of voter support (Bosco and Verney 2012, 148).

The success of the M5S in the municipal elections in 2012 is connected with the beginning of the fifth phase, in which the movement became a relevant and competitive political force at national level. The M5S gained over 150 local representative seats and in Parma even managed to occupy the position of the mayor (Bordignon a Ceccarini 2013, 430).

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6 ‘V-day’ stands for Vaffanculo-day (an insult to politicians) and also recalls a famous novel and subsequent film V for Vendetta (Mosca 2014, 42).
7 At present, there are seven programme areas – state and the citizens, energy, information, economy, transport, health, and education (Blog di Beppe Grillo, 2016b).
The breakthrough moment came in the general elections in February 2013 with a result of 25.6% of votes and 108 deputies (and 54 senators) becoming the first party in the Chamber of Deputies (Ministero dell’Interno 2013).  

What kind of programme Grillo used to achieve such a formidable result? Unlike some other populist actors, the M5S can’t be considered as a single issue party. On the contrary, its programme is a mix of left-right themes. The base has been Grillo’s continuous critique of economic and political power of large corporations; defining against ‘consumerism’ and domination of money; and the fight against further European integration, including the question of the Euro (Maggini 2014). The main target of Grillo’s attacks have been two ‘castes’ – corrupt political elites looking for their own economic benefits and biased Italian media, who write in the pay of the former (Bordignon a Ceccarini 2013, 433). As part of his vision of direct democracy, Grillo came up with suggestions on how to return power to those who are the true ‘owners’ of the state (citizens), who alone can perform a constant monitoring of their ‘employees’ (politicians). This control can be achieved only by a maximum transparency using internet technologies (Bordignon a Ceccarini 2013, 434). The M5S has built its programme on two macro-thematic areas – ‘neo-environmentalism’ (defence of local environment, renewable energy, fight against major construction projects – bridge over the Strait of Messina or high velocity railway corridor in Val di Susa) and ‘morality’ (transparency, responsibility, deliberative democracy, and limited power of politicians) (Passarelli, Tronconi, and Tuorto 2013, 148–152).  

These programme points Grillo promoted using the classic populist rhetoric based on the anti-elitist approach and the dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, i.e. on the difference between the virtuous people and corrupt elites (see Mény and Surel 2002). Grillo thus offered black-and-white vision of the world and presented his struggle against traditional political parties as a struggle of life and death, old and young blood, or as a clash of David and Goliath (Bordignon a Ceccarini 2013, 435). Grillo reinforced his message by both verbal and nonverbal communication and by mocking his opponents, often accompanied by theatrical gestures (Calise 2010). Using specific jargon, nicknames and hyperboles he also repeats the

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8 Excluding the votes of Italians abroad (M5S gained 9.7% and 1 seat). In these elections the M5S managed to attract 19 % of the ex-voters of the PD, 18 % from PdL, 25 % coming from the LN and massive 51 % of those who previously voted IdV (Diamanti, Bordignon, and Ceccarini 2013, 214). It’s no coincidence that the biggest shift of votes took place among populist parties themselves.  
9 Grillo used the same technique as the founder of modern Italian populism, Guglielmo Giannini – deliberate distortion of names of his adversaries. E.g. Mario Monti became ‘Rigor Montis’, Pier Luigi Bersani ‘Gargamella’, Silvio Berlusconi ‘psiconano’ and Matteo Renzi ‘Renzie’ or ‘ebetino di Firenze’ (Repubblica 2012).
same phrases over and over until the audience on the internet starts to accept and defend them as their own ideas.

The above mentioned success in the general elections in February 2013 led to the sixth and so far the last stage, Mosca calls it the phase of ‘institutionalization’ (Mosca, 2014, 44). The movement gained a significant representation in both chambers of parliament and thus strengthened and stabilized its position on the political scene; on the other hand it’s too fast grow meant a problem for the internal organisational structure and for the whole process of institutionalization. The internal structure was too fluid and unprepared for the electoral success of 2013. The absolute control of the movement by Beppe Grillo from ‘outside’ together with his persisting anti-institutional appeal and voluntary political isolation led to a severe stress in compactness of the M5S parliament group (Franzosi, Marone and Salvati 2015, 110). The next paragraph shows what changes they have to adopt in reaction to these issues in order be competitive in the next general elections scheduled for 2018.

4. Changes in organizational structure

From organizational point of view, the Five Star Movement can be characterized as a ‘hybrid’ party (Pedrazani and Pinto, 2013; Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013). The Movement was originally formed by diffusion (spontaneous initiatives of isolated local groups under the brand the M5S controlled by Grillo) rather than by penetration from above (see Panebianco 1982). At the very beginning, the M5S showed signs of a ‘cyber party’, with Beppe Grillo’s blog being in the centre instead of a classical party secretariat. The M5S was a highly personalised entity with a dominant role of the leader and with Beppe Grillo being an absolute owner (together with Casaleggio) of the M5S logo, name, and symbol (Calise 2010; Vignati 2015). On the other hand the movement structure also contained elements typical for mass parties – relevance of extra-parliamentary groups, important role of volunteers and activists, funding through small contributions, and a clear division between ‘followers’ (being part of the movement network with rights to participate in intraparty elections) and ‘supporters’ (Farinelli and Massetti 2015, 215).

In other words, the movement could be characterised as a ‘meta-organisation’, a sort of strataarchy with a high level of decentralization and autonomy of local meetups (Lanfrey 2011, 144). However, these groups have been under ‘the ownership’ of Grillo as some form

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10 Typical example of this strategy is post-electoral negotiations between the M5S representatives and then secretary general of the PD, Pier Luigi Bersani, in direct streaming (YouTube 2013).
of franchises (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013, 438). This absolute authority has been clearly manifested in the movement non-statuto, in which it’s stated that the M5S is not a political party, nor won’t be in the future, and doesn’t have governing bodies, instead it’s organized around the Grillo’s blog (Blog di Beppe Grillo 2009). These premises soon went under the pressure of too quick grow of the movement, especially after the local elections in 2012. Moreover, this expansion was multiplied by the success in the general elections in 2013 and by the fact that the M5S became less ‘cyber-mass party’ and more a ‘catch-all’ party that lacks a precise ideology and thus could present itself to a heterogeneous electorate with diverse expectations and objectives (Diamanti 2014, 13).

It was clear that the M5S can no longer function as a classic protest movement with a lack of decision-making and with a problem of missing voto di appartenenza.11 So the institutionalization of the M5S and its organization structure became imminent, even more with rapidly increased number of the Movement members in elected positions (Passarelli, Tronconi, and Tuorto 2013, 140). This meant to transform the Movement into an organization accepting the existing rules of politics and adopt an office-seeking behaviour (Biorcio 2014). As Diamanti puts, institutionalisation also means having to face other issues, in the case of the M5S namely construction of a managing group and organisation structure in order to consolidate itself as a stable part of the Italian party system (Diamanti 2014, 12).

However, Grillo, in fear of losing ‘programme purity’ of the movement, responded to the new reality by strengthening of internal discipline, which included a ban on participation in TV discussions and expulsion of ‘dissenting’ members through on-line plebiscites. On the other hand, all public communication on behalf of the M5S was handled by Casaleggio Associati, a PR company owned by Gianroberto Casaleggio.12 Movement MPs thus couldn’t exercise any control over the public image of their movement and were seen as mere ‘executors’ of the will of the people which is identical with the M5S programme. Grillo even called for the abolition of art. 67 of the Italian Constitution (prohibiting of binding mandate) and proposed an institute of recall election (Falletti 2014).

This authoritarian style with zero tolerance for internal critique along with the heterogeneous opinions inside the Movement resulted in expulsion or leaving of 19 deputies and 18 senators, which makes 23 % of all elected representatives of the M5S. Contributing

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11 This method of voting was typical mainly to the First Italian Republic and then existing two subcultures – ‘red’, associated with the Communists and ‘white’ connected with the Catholic Church and the Christian Democrats.

12 Casaleggio Associati was paid by money returned by the Movement MPs according to their ‘code of conduct’. In 2014 the company received over one million euro (Farinelli and Massetti 2015, 218).
factor (and another flaw in the Movement organisation structure) to these numerous loses was a non-transparent system of choosing candidates for the general elections, so called *parlamentarie*. This on-line bottom-up selecting mechanism was designed by Grillo and Casaleggio who imposed their rules on who could vote and who could be voted\(^{13}\) which led to a very low turnout, many candidates win their contest with less than 100 votes (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013).

Rigid control over party discipline, unclear process of selecting candidates, and low ‘personal space’ of deputies were signs of a high risk of party switching (*voltagabbana*), so common during the Italian second republic (see Heller and Mershon 2005). All this led to ‘slowed institutionalisation’ which, according to Janda’s theory of institutionalisation, could be reversed only in response to the unsatisfactory election results (see Harmel and Janda 1994). This occurred only a few months after the general elections. In the local elections in May 2013 the M5S managed to attract to the polls only its core ‘identifying’ voters who had high trust in Beppe Grillo and used internet as their primary source of information (Biorcio 2014).\(^{14}\) These constituted only 40 % of voters who supported the Movement in the general elections (ITANES 2013). The same situation repeated in the European elections in May 2014. The M5S with its ambivalent ‘Europhile Euroscepticism’ got 21.2 % of votes and 17 seats and lost heavily to the victorious Democratic Party (Corbetta and Vignati 2014). They failed again to win support over ‘occasional’ voters, those who decide whom to vote for less than a week before the elections (they constituted significant 30 % of the Movement electorate in the general elections; Biorcio 2014, 50).

Faced with this stagnation of the election results Grillo decided to change the structure of his movement and to speed up the process of institutionalisation in order to overcome the vague anchoring of the Movement in the Italian political system accompanied with a lack of readiness to take over of government responsibility (Corbetta and Vignati 2015). In November 2014 he introduced the creation of *struttura di rappresentanza*, first governing structure in the Movement’s history. Within that framework he forwarded most of the daily agenda to the newly created Directorate composed of five MPs selected personally by Beppe Grillo and confirmed on-line by the members of the Movement.\(^{15}\) The most important task the

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\(^{13}\) In this selection only members registered in the Movement before September 30, 2012 could vote. Candidates had to have past experience in local or regional elections (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013).

\(^{14}\) Only bigger town where the M5S succeeded was Ragusa in Sicily. In all other cities they didn’t pass to the second round.

\(^{15}\) Five proposed Directorate members (Alessandro Di Battista, Luigi Di Maio, Roberto Fico, Carla Ruocco, and Carlo Sibilia) were overwhelmingly confirmed by 92 % of on-line voters (Reppublica 2014).
new governing body started to deal with was mediation between Grillo’s leadership and elected officials in the Parliament and on the local level with the goal to stop defections among M5S’s deputies and senators and suppress the growing dissent of local mayors and councillors (most notably in Parma and Bologna). To do so, the Directorate came up with a set of rules of internal procedures and created the ‘Appeals Commission’ under whose jurisdiction passed disciplinary hearings with dissenting members (Franzosi, Marone, and Salvati 2015, 111). From the creation of this mechanism in January 2015 in 20 months only one senator was expelled from the Movement.

Another change which helped on-going institutionalization of the Movement was the alteration of the media strategy. Beppe Grillo on several occasions expressed his ‘tiredness’ of politics and especially after death of his long-time political companion Gianroberto Casaleggio in April 2016 he retreated more in the seclusion and kept the position as ‘guarantor’ of the Movement. On the other hand the five members of the Directorate and ‘spokesmen’ from both chambers started to appear regularly on TV shows, give interviews to Italian journalist and present official Movement positions on their own behalf. Nevertheless this doesn’t mean Grillo relinquished control over his movement or went completely out from public life, he is still managing his blog and recently he started to campaign for ‘no’ in upcoming constitutional referendum in October 2016.

Advancing party institutionalization was apparent during the campaign before the local election in May 2016. In anticipation of the potential breakthrough in big cities the M5S started to organize local political operatives, toned down previous anti-politics rhetoric and campaigned more as a classical political party focusing on local issues than a protest movement using frustration and anger in the society. Even Beppe Grillo didn’t play a key role in the campaign. He didn’t fill the headlines with his bombastic statements; instead for the first time in the Movement, the actual candidates became the faces of the elections and had to show their political capabilities on their own. This has been most visible in the elections in Rome where the candidate of the M5S, 37 years old lawyer Virginia Raggi, confirmed her ‘pole position’ and won in the second round run-off against Roberto Giachetti from the PD with 67 % of votes (Repubblica 2016). She is first women ever as well as the youngest person in that position.

Her election also marked a change in approach of what candidates the movement base prefers. She ran the campaign based on her previous political experience (she was elected to Rome city council already in 2013) and in the movement primaries she defeated Marcello De Vito, a grassroots activist who was the M5S’s nominee for the Mayor in the same elections.
She was in fact criticized by some activists to be too close to old political establishment (Il Fatto Quotidiano 2016; Il Tempo 2016) and in the same time praised by mainstream media which had previously been critical of the Movement. As even The Economist noticed: “A talented debater, Ms Raggi, illustrates how Italy’s second-biggest political group is increasingly coming to resemble a normal conventional party” (The Economist 2016).

Local victories in Rome and Turin showed the ability of the M5S to attract an electoral majority, including moderate voters previously scared-off by too radical and anti-system rhetoric of Beppe Grillo. With his less dominant position in the Movement the process of institutionalization may result in the fully stabilized political party with young and dynamic political leadership. Recent polls from July 13 in fact showed that the M5S is currently the most popular party in Italy (30.6 %) and would have a good chance to beat Renzi’s PD in the second round of the general elections (IPSOS 2016). However, the path to the electoral victory is not given; there is still a big Grillo’s influence over the Movement’s ideology and development. He is still the main reason why the M5S’s heterogeneous electorate holds together, which makes the question of his succession even more important. His successor won’t have the aura of the ‘founding father’ and in order to deliver an electoral victory he will have to rely on fully institutionalized party. The other option is the classical populist way to oblivion.

5. Conclusion
The main goal of this paper was to analyse the structural factors which helped the M5S to become a key player in Italian politics. The economic crisis wasn’t the main factor which set off the success of Beppe Grillo and his movement but together with political crisis, delegitimization of political elite, and the collapse of bipolar model connected to the fall of Berlusconi’s fourth government and subsequent Monti’s austerity measures resulted in an increase of the already considerable public dissatisfaction with political elites and in a shift of the population to simple solutions offered by populist actors like the M5S.

The Movement could be considered as a new political actor with original characteristics of so-called ‘internet populism’ (Corbetta 2013). The M5S, as a classic example of a protest party, used more an anti-political and anti-establishment rhetoric in order to attract people from both parts of the political spectrum without ideological distinction.

16 In case of a potential run-off between the M5S and the PD, the former would win by net 8 points (56 to 44 %) (IPSOS 2016).
However, its rhetoric and political style are based on traditional formulas of Italian populism. Not without reason Grillo is often compared to the pioneer of European populism Guglielmo Giannini ans his Common Man’s Front (*Fronte dell’Uomo Qualunque*) (Tarchi 2015, 357).

From the organization point of view the M5S has undergone crucial changes towards more institutionalized party which declares its readiness to bear government responsibility. Recent victories in the local elections gave them an opportunity to show their competence in major executive positions. Ongoing softening of radical anti-establishment rhetoric together with building an institutionalized party structure could attract a significant part of moderate voters who are disappointed by politics of Matteo Renzi or who feel unrepresented after the political demise of Silvio Berlusconi. As the date from current polls show, a vast majority of the right-wing voters (supporters of the LN, FI, FdI) would support the M5S in the second round of 65 % of the voters of the FdI, 55 % of the LN and 45 % of the FI would support the M5S in the run-off against the Democratic Party who would attract only 10-20 % of the right-wing voters. The rest of them intend to stay home (IPSOS 2016). 65 % of the voters of the FdI, 55 % of the LN and 45 % of the FI would support the M5S in the run-off against the Democratic Party who would attract only 10-20 % of the right-wing voters. The rest of them intend to stay home (IPSOS 2016).17

The Five Star Movement succeeded in mobilizing local activists around issues that other political actors ignored but at the same time raised unrealistic expectations (Biorcio and Natale 2013, 125). Thus the main goal for the Movement is to become a fully institutionalized political party which can turn their protest ‘occasional’ voters into a consolidated loyal electoral base which will help them to win the general elections scheduled for 2018. The question of a possible disputed succession in the leadership after Grillo’s departure and persisting heterogeneous ideological background of the Movement members and supporters could severely hamper this process.

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17 This scenario was confirmed by the results of the local elections in May 2016; most notably in Turin, where Chiara Appendino from the M5S attracted an overwhelming majority (84 %) of voters who in the first round supported candidates from the LN, FI and independent Roberto Rosso. On the other hand, the incumbent mayor and veteran PD politician Piero Fassino got only 8 % of these votes. This allowed the victory of Appendino even though she trailed Fassino by 10 % in the first round (Istituto Cattaneo 2016). In general, the M5S won 19 out of 20 second round run-offs in these elections, mostly against the candidates of the PD.
Bibliography


