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Giada Malugani

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**Technocratic Populism in the Context of
Contemporary Europe: Silvio Berlusconi and
Andrej Babis**

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Giada Malugani

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Supervisor: PhDr. Martin Mejstřík

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Declaration

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In Prague on
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Giada Malugani

References

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Abstract

In recent years, technocratic populism had continuously gained more relevance both in academic literature and mainstream media; nonetheless, due to the recentness of the phenomenon, scholarly publications are yet to agree on an universally accepted definition defining technocratic populism. Similarly, the publications discussing political actors vis-à-vis technocratic populism are scarce. The present dissertation aims at summarizing the working definitions of technocratic populism and testing them against the political careers of Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi, aiming at identifying whether or not these two former prime ministers can be described as technocratic populist actors. As of today no academic publication has delved into this comparison even though these actors appear very similar to one another: both are extremely wealthy businessmen turned politicians amid domestic political crises and both have quickly become relevant political actors in the European political arena. In order to conduct the research, this dissertation identifies five parameters defining technocratic populist actors; subsequently, the two aforementioned former prime ministers are discussed as case studies compared to the working definition of technopopulism derived from the existing academic literature. In doing so, the present research aims at expanding the literature discussing real-life cases of technocratic populism, presenting a methodology which allows for the replicability of this research with respect to other contemporary political actors identifiable as technocratic populist ones.

Keywords

Technopopulism, Andrej Babis, Silvio Berlusconi, Populism, Technocracy

Abstrakt

V posledních letech technokratický populismus neustále nabýval na významu jak v odborné literatuře, tak v mainstreamových médiích, nicméně vzhledem k novosti tohoto fenoménu se odborné publikace zatím neshodly na všeobecně přijímané definici technokratického populismu. Stejně tak je málo publikací, které by se zabývaly politickými aktéry ve vztahu k technokratickému populismu. Předkládaná disertační práce si klade za cíl shrnout pracovní definice technokratického populismu a otestovat je na příkladu politické kariéry Andreje Babiše a Silvia Berlusconiho s cílem zjistit, zda lze tyto dva bývalé premiéry označit za technokratické populistické aktéry, či nikoliv. Do dnešního dne se žádná akademická publikace tímto srovnáním nezabývala, přestože se tito aktéři jeví jako velmi podobní: oba jsou mimořádně bohatí podnikatelé, kteří se stali politiky uprostřed vnitropolitických krizí, a oba se rychle stali relevantními politickými aktéry na evropské politické scéně. Za účelem provedení výzkumu je v této disertační práci identifikováno pět parametrů definujících technokratické populistické aktéry; následně jsou oba výše zmínění bývalí premiéři diskutováni jako případové studie v porovnání s pracovní definicí technopopulismu odvozenou z existující odborné literatury. Cílem tohoto výzkumu je tak rozšířit literaturu zabývající se reálnými případy technokratického populismu a představit metodologii, která umožňuje replikovatelnost tohoto výzkumu s ohledem na další současné politické aktéry, které lze identifikovat jako technokratické populisty.

Klíčová slova

Technopopulismus, Andrej Babis, Silvio Berlusconi, Populismus, Technokracie

Název práce

Technokratický populismus v kontextu současné Evropy: Silvio Berlusconi a Andrej Babiš

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Introduction

In the Autumn of 2013, in the wake of the results of the Czech elections, *The Economist* commented on Andrej Babis' surprisingly high success as runner-up in his first participation in political elections by publishing an article interestingly titled "Central Europe's Berlusconi? Czech Elections" (Economist Intelligence Unit N.A. Incorporated 2013). This is the first record of Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi being compared to one another in mainstream media. Notably, it is still one of the few available mainstream media articles on the internet discussing these two political leaders together. However, a decade after the debut of Babis in the Czech political arena, there are many obvious common features between these two notable European politicians of the twenty-first century. Both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi were extremely successful businessmen before entering politics, they both have been – at some point in time – the richest individuals in their respective home countries, both owning prominent national media outlets, and lastly, they were both extremely quick in rising to ministerial offices soon after founding their respective political parties. Along the same lines of mainstream media outlets, no scholarly publication - so far - has focused on detailing the similarities and differences between these two European political actors and their political parties, ANO in the Czech Republic and Forza Italia in Italy. Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to assume that academic research has not noticed the likeness between the two former prime ministers. Multiple scholarly publications briefly mention similarities between Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi nonetheless, none of them researched these similarities in depth (Hajek 2017, 280; Skolkay et al. 2022, 44; Saxonberg and Heinisch 2024, 365; Bustikova and Babos 2020, 497). Therefore, one cannot avoid questioning why such a comparison has not been the focus of any academic publication in the field of political science. This dissertation attempts at filling this gap by comparing the two above-named former prime ministers and discussing their political

careers vis-à-vis one of the most striking political phenomena in contemporary Europe: technocratic populism.

Technocratic populism is an expeditiously rising phenomenon in the context of contemporary Europe, the relevance of which is steadily mirrored both in academic and mainstream publications. Nonetheless, due to the recentness of this phenomenon, there are still significant gaps in theoretical scholarly publications defining technocratic populism. Hence, despite the great quantity of scholarly ink spilled on defining technocracy and populism separately, technocratic populism still lacks an universally accepted definition. In researching such a definition, the recently published book by Bickerton and Ancetti titled *Technopopulism; The New Logic of Democratic Populism* must be considered one of the key texts to approach the study of technocratic populism. It is from reading this book that the aim of this dissertation has come to being, as stated by the authors '[we] suspect that many of the core ideas we develop here are applicable to other countries in [Western] Europe that we did not discuss' (Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 40). Even though these authors do discuss technocratic populism with respect to Italy, it is with reference to Movimento Cinque Stelle - the Five Star Movement -, and, as stated by the authors themselves, they do not focus on Central/Eastern European countries. Therefore, as explained above, the existing literature discussing technocratic populist as it manifests in contemporary case studies is limited and, as in the instance of Bickerton and Ancetti - who discuss case studies in Italy, Spain, and France - the focus of such papers is sub-regional – that is Southern/Western Europe. Because of this sub-regional focus in the existing literature, this dissertation attempts at discussing two European case studies from different sub-regions. Moreover, the aforementioned superficial commonalities between Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi can – equally superficially – be associated with technocratic populism, the scope of this research is therefore to identify potential deeper links common to these two political actors and definable as technocratic populist features. That is to mean, this dissertation

aims at dissecting the differences and commonalities between these two political actors vis-à-vis the theoretical definitions of technocratic populism. This aim is summarised in the research question: How can Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi be identified as technocratic populist actors?

Structure of the Research

Regarding the structure of this dissertation, the research is presented as follows. (i) Firstly, the Theoretical Framework is introduced to the reader; this chapter presents the political theories that are the core of the argument of this paper. This chapter presents a detailed discussion surrounding the definitions of populism, technocracy and finally, technocratic populism. In these regards, the work of numerous scholars and their definitions of the aforementioned political phenomena are analysed in depth and compared to each other, concluding in a summary presenting the working definition of technocratic populism based on which the case study research is conducted. (ii) Followingly, the Methodology chapter of this dissertation is presented; this concerns the explanation of case-study methods, justifies the choice of this methodology for this research, and provides a detailed explanations of the parameters of the research, allowing for its future replicability. The following two chapters concern the introduction of the two case studies individually; (iii) Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia first and (iv) Andrej Babis and ANO following. These chapters succinctly present these actors' respective political career and discuss them vis-à-vis the definitions of technocracy, populism, and technocratic populism detailed in the Theoretical Framework chapter. (v) The following chapter delves into the main inquiry of this paper, applying the chosen methodology to the comparison between Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis regarding their technocratic populist tendencies. This chapter individually discusses each parameter of comparison introduced in the Methodology chapter and then summarises the findings of the analysis to provide a cohesive answer to the previously stated research question. Concludingly, this paper

summarises the findings of the present dissertation and suggests further lines of research relevant to the discussion surrounding technocratic populism and the applicability of the research to further case studies.

Limitations

The main limitations of the present research are linked to the selected methodology, as this dissertation only focuses on the research of two case studies, its findings cannot be generalised as understanding the entirety of the manifestations of technocratic populism in Europe. Therefore, the aim of this research is not the understanding of technocratic populism as a generalised political phenomenon; rather, because of the relative freshness of technocratic populism as a topic of research in scholarly publications, this dissertation aims at filling the gap regarding the lack of a direct comparison between Berlusconi and Babis in English language academia. Even though the number of technocratic populist actors in Europe is limited, this dissertation further limits it to only two case studies. This choice has been forced by the scope and length requirements of the present dissertation; nonetheless, as explained in detail in the Methodology chapter of this research, the methods through which this research is conducted are thoroughly explained with the aim of making this study reproducible and applicable to other contemporary political actors and parties in Europe. In regards to avenues of further research, as explained previously, a sub-section of the Conclusion chapter is dedicated to this.

1. Theoretical Framework

As discussed above in the Introduction of this dissertation, the concept of technocratic populism – also referred to as technopopulism – is central to the argument of this research. Therefore, it is critical to establish a clear definition of this phenomenon, on which the subsequent chapters of this dissertation are constructed and made understandable to the reader. While there is no universally accepted definition of technocratic populism among scholarly publications (Bickerton and Ancetti 2017b, 187), in the past decade, academic research on this rising trend has significantly expanded and multiple researchers have presented and thoroughly debated multiple definitions of technopopulism leading to a comprehensive understanding of this political phenomenon. The present chapter aims at concisely exploring these studies in order to establish a working definition of this contemporary phenomenon. In defining technocratic populism it is critical to firstly construe technocracy and populism as two distinct concepts. As proposed by Pastorella, these two political trends are the Scylla and Charybdis of democratic ruling in contemporary Europe, representing two of the most influential and potentially dangerous trends affecting democracy in the present era (Pastorella 2015, 948). Notwithstanding, as further analysed in the following sections, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the consequences of these political phenomena on the functioning of democracy. Primarily, the definition of these concepts within the scope of this dissertation aims at simplifying the understanding of technocratic populism, however, one must not ignore their individual relevance within the political arena. While technocracy and populism might initially appear in contradiction with one another (Drapalova and Wegrich 2021, 643; Bickerton and Ancetti 2017a, 328), the existence of technocratic populism as a rising trend in the contemporary international political arena proves wrong this initial assumption. Nonetheless, it is important in the understanding of these political phenomena that all definitions proposed by scholarly publications represent “ideal types” which are unlikely to precisely match real-

life scenarios. Moreover, the definitions provided in this chapter should not be understood as an all-encompassing summary of the existent literature due to the scope of this research, as the focus on populism and technocracy is limited to the elements of these phenomena which influence technocratic populism. However, these definitions act as prototypes against which real-life cases are contrasted, hence they represent the stepping stone of any case study discussing technocratic populism (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014, 655).

The rise of technocratic populist leaders and parties is an increasingly relevant phenomenon globally, but it has been especially prominent in Southern and Central/Eastern Europe as traditional forms of party politics have progressively lost the trust of the population (Hanley 2018, 79; Drapalova and Wegrich 2021, 641). These tendencies are visible both in Italy and the Czech Republic – subjects of the present research - and are rooted in the unsteadiness of these countries' economies and the higher levels of corruption compared to other European countries (Hanley 2018, 83; Havlik 2019, 369; Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020, 489).

1.1 Defining Populism

Populism is often discussed in mainstream media as a product of the third millennium and contemporary popular dissatisfaction with mainstream political parties (Fuentes 2020, 52), and is usually associated with right-wing politics (Taggart 2004, 270); nonetheless, academic research has been concerned with this phenomenon far longer than the last couple of decades. The term populism first appeared in the political realm in the late 1890s in the United States of America within the context of the agrarian movements and as *narodnik* in the Russian Empire around the same period (Fuentes 2020, 53; Caramani 2017, 59; Barr 2009, 38; Urbinati 1998, 110). However, it is only in the last decades that populism has gained a central role in academic research regarding political science (Van der Walt 2020, 173). Because of this recent scholarly interest in the phenomenon, as of today the definition of populism is still subjected to debate and defies consensus among academics (Abt and Rummens 2007, 407; Barr 2009, 29; Lupo

2019, 251; Schroeder 2020, 13). Mainly, this confusion arises from the multiple manifestations of populism in contemporary global politics; manifestations of populism span throughout the entire political spectrum, from far-right to far-left (Rico et al. 2017, 449; Moffitt and Torney 2014, 381; Fieschi 2004, 235). Furthermore, scholarly research has highlighted regional differences in the manifestations of this phenomenon around the world which heighten the difficulty of clearly identifying an universal definition of populism (Canovan 1999, 4; Rooduijn 2014, 573).

The contemporary scholarly debate surrounding the definition of populism is often framed around the negative connotations of the term and the threat it poses to democracy (Fuentes 2020, 47; Canovan 1999, 6). Populism is often negatively associated with heightened emotionality (Fieschi 2004, 238; Van der Walt 2020, 177); as argued by Rico et al. anger and fear are often identified as the main factors sustaining the popularity of populism (Rico et al. 2017, 445; Drapalova and Wegrich 2021, 643). In a similar manner, according to Pabst the roots of the support of populist actors are found in a deep feeling of injustice among the population which does not view the political system as meritocratic (Pabst 2022, 69). However, the discussion surrounding the relationship between populism and democracy is highly debated by scholarly publications (Huber and Schimpf 2016, 107). Some scholars regard populism as a concrete threat to the rule of democracy (Havlik 2019, 370; Urbinati 1998, 112). While others, argue that populism must be discussed as a practical response to the malfunctioning of contemporary democracies (Hakhverdian and Koop 2007, 402); according to Taggart ‘the tensions within European representative democratic practices, ideas and institutions mean that contemporary Europe provides fertile territory for populism’ (Taggart 2004, 269). Similarly, Caramani argues that populism is a response to the gap in democratic representation that is formed between traditional political parties and the people when the former lose the trust and loyalty of the latter (Caramani 2017, 58). In this regard, populism should not be interpreted as

opposite to democracy (Havlik 2019, 370). For instance, Uber and Ruth identify populism as a corrective to liberal democracy (Uber and Ruth 2017, 464). In these regards, populism can be understood as a medium towards better inclusiveness in democratic contexts, as it provides a voice for those who do not feel represented by mainstream political parties (Kaltwasser 2012, 185). Accordingly, scholars often attribute the rise of populism to crises of party politics (Havlik 2019, 369; Caramani 2017, 54). Populism is therefore presented as an alternative to party politics rather than an alternative to democratic ruling (Stanley 2008, 97; Semenova 2020, 590).

Regarding the context and scope of this dissertation, the definition of traditional party politics is not analysed in depth, however, every reference to traditional party politics – also referred to as mainstream party politics - rests on the definition provided by Bickerton and Ancetti. Accordingly, party politics is based on

the mediation of political conflicts through the institution of political parties and the idea that the specific conception of the common good that ought to prevail and therefore be translated into public policy is the one that is constructed through the democratic procedures of parliamentary deliberation and electoral competition (Bickerton and Ancetti 2017b, 187).

As introduced above, scholarly publication offer numerous different definitions of populism. Bickerton and Ancetti define populism as

a mode of political action that involves: an ideational component, which construes society as divided in a ‘pure people’ and ‘corrupt elite’, while maintaining that the latter has a right to govern itself in the name of a voluntaristic conception of popular sovereignty; an organization component, consisting in a claim to exclusive representation of the people by a personal leader, validated through plebiscitarian

means by a direct appeal to a disorganised mass, which bypasses intermediary bodies (Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 28).

Similarly, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser define populism as

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 6).

These definitions both stress one of the central elements of populism; the antagonism between “the elite” and “the people”. It is clear that populism is inherently identified in its relationship to “the people” (Fieschi 2004, 237). In this context, “the elite” is identified as the traditional actors of party politics – such as left- and right-wing political parties – that are unable and unwilling to rightfully represent the will of the people (Barr 2009, 31; Caramani 2017, 54). This ruling class is framed in populist discourses as self-serving, power-hungry, and corrupt (Wolkenstein 2015, 112; Van der Walt 2020, 178; Fuentes 2020, 50). Nonetheless, as discussed by Urbinati, the very nature of populism is utterly dependent on the existence of “the elite”; the externality of populists from the mainstream political arena – another identifying element of populism – would not be possible in the absence of traditional elites (Urbinati 2019b, 112). According to populist political actors, “the people” are the rightful holders of political legitimacy, hence, it is their direct political decisions that should be upheld (Van der Walt 2020, 178; Wolkenstein 2015, 111). In this regard, populist political actors favour what Canovan discusses as “direct democracy”, meaning that democratic power should be given back to the people in the form of referendums and legislations based on popular initiative (Canovan 1999, 2).

As exemplified by these definitions, scholarly publications disagree on the nature of populism in the context of the political arena. Mudde defines populism as a thin ideology, a stance which is supported by most scholarly publications (Schroeder 2020, 13). Among these there are Abt and Rummens who define populism as ‘a thin-centered ideology which advocates the sovereign rule of the people as a homogenous body’ (Abt and Rummens 2007, 409). In this context the definition of populism as a thin ideology – similar to feminism and nationalism - means that populism itself is lacking its own individual ideological standing, rather it is supported by more concrete political ideologies, which are referred to as “thick ideologies” (Neuner and Wratil 2022, 554; Schroeder 2020, 14). Therefore, according to this school of thought, populism can easily adapt and co-exist with other political ideologies (Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 308). A similar stance is supported by Urbinati, who defines populism as a “style of democracy” arguing that populism could not stand by itself in the political arena, rather, it is grounded in the principles and practices of democracy (Urbinati 2019b, 113). Other scholars, such as Bickerton and Ancetti and Wolkenstein, reject the idea of populism as an ideology, they define it as a “practice” or a “framework” within which actors conduct politics (Wolkenstein 2015, 112; Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 28). Similarly, Aslanidis is also critical of the definition of populism as a thin-ideology; rather, populism should be analysed as a discourse invoking popular sovereignty (Aslanidis 2016, 96). Bustikova and Guasti partially agree with both of the aforesaid definitions, arguing that populism is both an ideology and a strategy (Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 306). A similar approach is endorsed by Urbinati who defined populism as a representative process understood as a medium through which the collective can obtain power (Urbinati 2019a, 5). In regard to populism discussed as a political strategy, these scholars discuss it as the capacity of populist actors to build and exploit a direct relationship with “the people” (Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 307).

One of the core elements of populism, common to all the aforementioned definitions is the focus on “the people”. According to populist perspectives, the people must be regarded as an homogenous group (Van der Walt 2020, 178; Abt and Rummens 2007, 409). A further characteristic of populist politics is the stress on egalitarianism, which is mainly argued in opposition to the elitism of corrupted traditional political parties (Fieschi 2004, 238). However, this view of the people as an homogenous group can be more exclusionary than the apparent inclusivity of the term. The exclusionary nature of populism is among the main critiques of this political phenomenon; in discussing the people, populist political actors often exclude minorities, such as religious groups and immigrants (Wolkenstein 2015, 113; Canovan 1999, 5).

Another frequent feature of populist political actors is personalism. Scholarly publications have identified a strong link between populism and extremely charismatic leaders, which are often outsiders to the mainstream political arena and tend to present themselves as saviours of the nation against the aforementioned corrupt traditional political elite (Canovan 1999, 6). Charisma is often one of the common characteristics among populist leaders and likely a key reason for their success in elections; highly charismatic actors are successful in presenting themselves as the sole legitimate leaders able to rightfully represent the people in the political arena (Caiani and Graziano 2016, 244). As charismatic individuals, populist leaders often present themselves – and their political parties - as the only legitimate government caring for the preservation of democratic ruling (Scanni 2023, 1016). Populists claim that they are the only actors within the political arena to represent and speak for “the people” as a whole (Canovan 1999, 4; Semenova 2020, 592; Van der Walt 2020, 176). Populism rejects the nature of political plurality, traditional political parties are not seen as rivals in elections, rather, they are identified as “corrupt elite”. Therefore they are the main enemies not only of the populist party, but also – and principally - of the people who deserve rightful and honest political

representation (Havlik 2019, 371). Accompanying the rejection of traditional party politics, personalist parties also tend to distance themselves from traditional political ideologies, rather, they often rely on the previously stated claim of representing “the people” as their main electoral technique (Barr 2009, 40).

In conclusion, the present section has demonstrated that much scholarly ink has been spilled in defining populism, which is a significantly older phenomenon than what mainstream media portray. Therefore, the discussion of these academic publications has provided a clear and concise list of features that are characteristic of populism. Even though there is some disagreement among scholars as to whether populism is a thin-centred ideology, a framework, or a strategy, academic publications are virtually unanimous in defining the core elements of populism. As discussed before, populism is often the response to a crisis of the traditional elite, therefore, the core antagonism of populism is that between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite. In this regard, populism argues for popular sovereignty, meaning that politics should be an expression of the general will of citizens. As argued by populist actors, the *volonté générale* is not respected by mainstream political elites who are power hungry and corrupted. Regarding populist actors, they are defined by viewing the people as an homogenous mass, as stated above, there is a general will which is tangible and irrefutable. Finally, even though it is not a defining feature of populism per se, most scholarly publications have observed that populism is often associated with high personalism, meaning that populist parties are often lead by charismatic populist leaders.

1.2 Defining Technocracy

Similarly to the academic debate concerning the definition of populism, the academic literature on technocratic governance is not unanimous in defining this concept, which is often under-researched in academia in comparison to its prominence in contemporary politics (Brunclik and Parizek 2019, 760; McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014, 666; Caramani 2017, 59).

Furthermore, similar to the aforementioned definition of populism, technocracy is also subjected to heavy regional differences, which complicate the identification of an universally applicable definition of the phenomenon (Hanley 2018, 81). Scholarly publications have observed that technocratic governance is a globally rising phenomenon and it has been increasingly researched in the context of the European Union since the financial crisis of 2008 (Hanley 2018, 78; Wratil and Pastorella 2018, 450). However, similarly to the research on populism it would be erroneous to state that technocratic actors have appeared in politics only during the last few decades. As discussed by Centeno, technocrats were heavily present in the first governments elected by the newly independent countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the democratization of Latin America in the 1980s (Centeno 1993, 308). Notwithstanding, the existing literature is yet not representative of the real-life influence of technocracy in the political arena. As discussed by Hanley, technocratic governments have been mostly analysed in scholarly publications in negative terms; rather than identifying the defining characteristics of technocracy, publications have focused on the elements that are in opposition to the identity of technocratic governance (Hanley 2018, 80). For instance, McDonnell and Valbruzzi define a technocratic government as one in which ‘all major governmental decisions are not made by elected party officials, policy is not decided within parties which then act cohesively to enact it, and the highest officials are not recruited through party’ (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014, 656). This definition is aimed at underlining the main points of contrast between technocratic governance and the more traditional party politics, discussing technocracy by the characteristics this phenomenon does not possess rather than the ones it does.

As argued by Elliott, the roots of contemporary technocratic governance are found in this exact opposition to traditional party politics. Hence, technocracy is understood as a response to the corruption and clientelism of traditional political parties in the twentieth century (Elliott

2020, 88). As discussed by Caramani, technocratic governance criticised mainstream party politics by accusing it of favouring political decisions that would gain approval from the people and media outlets rather than decisions based on professional expertise and unbiased decision making processes (Caramani 2017, 58). As argued by Wratil and Pastorella, technocratic governments are more likely to emerge in contexts in which traditional party politics is going through a crisis and losing the trust of the population (Wratil and Pastorella 2018, 451). In this regard, an obvious link between technocracy and populism is established; both political phenomena reject and oppose traditional party politics and condemn the democratic processes. Moreover, it is instances in which mainstream parties are experiencing a crisis that both technocracy and populism find fertile soil to strengthen their position in the political arena. Nonetheless, technocracy is not solely defined in negative terms or by its similarities to populism; the previously discussed definition is then posed in positive terms by McDonnell and Valbruzzi themselves who state that the basic requirements to define a government as technocratic are: to be led by a technocratic prime minister, to have the majority of ministers to be technocrats and having a mandate to change the status quo (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014, 664). A technocratic political actor can be succinctly defined by their educational level; these individuals have received an elitist education and have specialised knowledge in governance which is then applied at the highest level of power within the given context of their mandate and role within the established institutions (Centeno 1993, 310; Elliott 2020, 88).

Regarding the definition of technocracy, Centeno defines it as

the administrative and political domination of a society by a state elite and allied institutions that seek to impose a single, exclusive policy paradigm based on the application of instrumentally rational techniques (Centeno 1993, 314).

According to Scanni, the “rational techniques” discussed by Centeno can be strongly identified with technological developments which allow the application of economic management techniques to governance (Scanni 2023, 1011). Alike, Bickerton and Ancetti define technocratic governance as

a mode of political action involving an ideational component, which consists in the claim to a particular type of competence or expertise that presumptively entitles its successor to legitimately rule over others; and an organizational component which involves a direct relationship of trust between the possessor of this competence and those he or she is supposed to rule over in this way (Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 32).

Within this context, politics is viewed by technocratic actors as a science, which regards all citizens as equal and is able to precisely identify the most advantageous political changes required for their wellbeing (Kenneally 2009, 48). Even though the definitions provided by the aforementioned scholars are not identical, it is evident that there is a consensus in academia regarding the nature of technocratic governance, which is not identified as an ideology, but as a practice. Drawing from the above-discussed difference between ideology and practice – or mode – it is clear that technocracy cannot stand alone in the political scene, rather it is based on thick-ideologies, such as left- and right-wing stances on the political spectrum. Therefore, there is not a common ideology underlying technocratic governance, rather, technocratic actors appear to share a similar approach to politics among themselves; this approach does not have a direct link to any political inclination of the right-left spectrum (Centeno 1993, 312).

In regards to the relationship between technocratic governance and democratic ruling, Pastorella notes how superficial understandings of technocracy appear to make this political phenomenon incompatible with democracy (Pastorella 2015, 948). However, as discussed by

Rosanvallon and Goldhammer - and supported by Scanni - technocratic elements are often strengthening democratic ruling rather than weakening it. As technocratic actors are not looking for the support of the population, their political decisions are considered more impartial than those of traditional political elites (Rosanvallon and Goldhammer 2011, 88; Scanni 2023, 1009). Along the same lines, another one of the central elements of technocratic politics is the incontestability of rightful governance. According to technocratic political actors, there clearly are right and wrong policies, the former of which they regard only themselves as capable of delivering (Bickerton and Ancetti 2018, 139). In these regards De la Torre argues that technocratic actors often appeal to their professional expertise in order to gain legitimacy, claiming to have moral superiority and progress at the forefront of their political ambitions (De la Torre 2013, 39).

In conclusion, technocratic governance can be superficially, summarised as the “rule of the experts”; however, as demonstrated by the discussion of the existing scholarly literature concerning the topic, defining technocracy is more complex than simply “rule of the experts”. Similarly to populism, technocracy is also identified as a thin-centred ideology which has been present in the political arena for longer than understood by common knowledge. As discussed above, the goal of technocracy is to change the status quo, meaning the imposition of ‘a single, exclusive policy paradigm based on the application of instrumentally rational techniques’ (Centeno 1993, 314). In this regard, similarly to populism, technocracy is also identified as response to a crisis of traditional party politics which has lost the trust of the citizens. Moreover, technocratic governments are identified as led by a technocratic prime minister, who appoints the highest officials in government through other means that are not recruitment from political parties. In this regard, technocratic actors are defined as having received an elite education and being highly specialised in their field, hence, they view politics as a science with clearly identifiable “right” and “wrong”.

1.3 Defining Technocratic Populism

The previous two sections of this chapter have discussed in detail the different definitions of populism and technocracy proposed by the contemporary academic literature. Nonetheless, the theoretical focus of this dissertation is on technocratic populism. In these regards, the previously discussed definitions of populism and technocracy are particularly useful in defining technocratic populism. As underlined by Drapalova and Wegrich, technocracy and populism might superficially appear as opposed to one another; specifically, the focus on “the people” of populism appears to be in direct antagonism to the central idea of technocracy: political ruling of the experts (Drapalova and Wegrich 2021, 643; Scanni 2023, 1008). This is also reiterated by Esmark who argues that ‘technocracy is fundamentally at odds with the practical experiences of the ordinary citizens’ (Esmark 2017, 503). This superficial opposition is clear in the discussed definitions of populism and technocracy. Populism rests on the basis that a legitimate political leader should represent the will of the people, rightfully and unmediated. Conversely, technocracy argues for the rule of expert political actors who are not biased by association to political parties lying on the right-left spectrum. Moore et al. reiterate this juxtaposition by arguing that ‘populism is a backlash to technocracy and technocracy is a backlash to populism’ (Moore et al. 2020, 731). Hence, these authors argue that populism and technocracy accuse each other of posing great danger to democratic governance. Nonetheless, the detailed analysis of both these phenomena has highlighted how populism and technocracy have common basic features. According to Bustikova and Guasti, technocratic populism is also a “thin ideology” which rejects the left-right political spectrum and promises “the people” a model of governance which is based on technical expertise (Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 304). In these regards, the definition of technocratic populism can be strongly linked to the aforementioned definition of populism provided by Mudde. Therefore, technocratic populism can be discussed as similar in nature to populism. Nonetheless, the previous paragraphs have

also demonstrated how scholarly publications define technocracy as a ‘thin-ideology’, so one can conclude that populism and technocracy can be equated in regards to their nature within the political arena. Hence, technocratic populism belongs to the same ideological category of populism and technocracy, as a thin ideology technocratic populism can rest upon other ideologies, such as the left-right political spectrum. In these regards, as discussed in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, it is unlikely to find real-life scenarios that perfectly match the definition of technocratic populism provided by political theory. Rather, it can be combined with any political ideology in the traditional party politics spectrum. Therefore, technocratic populism – as well as its two components: technocracy and populism – can be identified as a challenge to traditional party politics (Bickerton and Ancetti 2017b, 186).

Furthermore, technocratic populism can be identified as a response to the “crisis” of party politics (Bickerton and Ancetti 2017a, 333; Caramani 2017, 54; Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020, 485). The previous sections of this chapter have highlighted how both populism and technocracy individually are widely considered to be reactionary phenomena to the malfunction of traditional party politics. Correspondingly, technocracy and populism converge in their opposition to party politics (Bickerton and Ancetti 2017a, 332). Both political phenomena reject traditional party politics as the ideal form of democratic representation, both technocracy and populism regard themselves as superior and more democratic than party politics (Caramani 2017, 60). Along the same lines, both technocratic and populist actors claim to be the only legitimate actors aiming at the preservation of democracy (Foster et al. 2021, 79).

Caramani identifies four elements of overlap in the basic ideas of populism and technocracy; both phenomena identify “the people” as a unitary and homogenous society (Caramani 2017, 60). Technocratic populism regards “the people” as having one unitary goal and will, disregarding individuality among the population (Gaus et al. 2020, 337). Both

technocracy and populism – and consequently technopopulism - support the existence of an objective and definable will of the people, which is not properly represented by traditional party politics. Secondly, they both believe politics should not be pluralistic, elites should represent the interest of the unitary society, hence, they argue for mass political representation (Caramani 2017, 60). Following the same logical reasoning, both populism and technocratic governance argue for “unmediated” politics, meaning that the contact between the governing body and “the people” should be direct and not distorted (Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020, 487; Caramani 2017, 61). Lastly, both political phenomena argue against the horizontal accountability of the elites, as it would interfere in their goal of materializing the needs of the people (Caramani 2017, 61).

These overlaps and similarities between technocracy and populism are the basis on which technocratic populism as an independent political phenomenon is born. Aprasidze and Siroky argue that technocratic populism is a mixture of some of the main characteristics of both phenomena, taking the direct connection between leader and electorate from populism and the legitimization by expertise of technocracy (Aprasidze and Siroky 2020, 580). Nonetheless, these scholars fail in providing a cohesive and universally applicable definition of technocratic populism, both because of the novelty of the topic in academic research and because of the lack of universal consensus in defining populism and technocracy separately. One of the working definitions provided by scholarly publications is that of Bickerton and Ancetti. These scholars summarise the aims of technopopulist actors as the rightful representation of the people and the capability to competently mutate their will into policies; underlying the basic elements of technocratic populism as the combination of claims to representation of the people as a whole and claims of expertise (Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 23). Similarly, according to Guasti, common elements between technocracy and populism include the ‘non-pluralistic conception of society, the existence of a unified general interest, and an unmediated relationship between the people and the elite’ (Guasti 2020, 473).

In conclusion, while the existing academic literature has not yet produced an universally accepted definition for technocratic populism, it has delivered all necessary elements to formulate a working definitions of this political phenomenon. Technocratic populism is a thin-ideology which manifests itself in opposition to traditional party politics, often as a response to the latter undergoing a crisis. Technocratic populism delegitimises mainstream political parties as it argues for unmediated and rightful political representation of the citizens. In this regard, technocratic populism argues for the governance of experts who are capable of turning the will of the people into reality. Regarding the understanding of “ the will of the people”, technocratic populism views the people as homogeneous, meaning there is a tangible and identifiable political desire which is shared by all individuals who are part of the electorate.

2. Methodology

The main chapter of this dissertation focuses on the discussion and analysis of technocratic populist elements applied to the political careers of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and Andrej Babis in the Czech Republic. In these regards, for the purpose of this research the two aforementioned political actors, their political parties, and their respective political careers are discussed as comparative case studies. Case study research is defined as a form of qualitative research, focusing on a limited number of real-life phenomena which are comprehensively analysed through non-experimental research methods (Gerring 2007, 1138; Yin 2018, 15). The aim of case study research is to comprehensively understand a small number of cases in order to comprehend wider phenomena applicable to a wider number of cases. In this regard, a comparative case study methodology has been picked for the present research as it allows for in-depth and comprehensive understanding of Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi; by comparing these two detailed researches, the aim of this dissertation is to understand generalisable features that can serve as a basis of identification for technocratic populist political actors.

Regarding the structure of this research, as previously stated, the two case studies are introduced first and then discussed separately. Subsequently, the comparative chapter of this dissertation is introduced, analysing the two case studies vis-à-vis each other. Discussing the case studies individually allows for a clearer understanding of each individual actor's feature that resonate with populism, technocracy, and technocratic populism. The two case studies are analysed through the lens of qualitative research, basing the discussion on the prior analysed existing academic literature focusing on the theoretical discussion of technocratic populism. In doing so, the reader has the possibility of thoroughly getting acquainted with the case studies and the political theory on which this research is based, allowing for a meticulous comprehension of the comparison undertaken in the comparative chapter. More specifically,

this dissertation implements a multiple case study analysis, which, as defined by Yin is the study of ‘two or more organizations in the same manner’ (Yin 2012, 8). In the context of the present dissertation, these organizations are the political careers of Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis. Particularly, multiple case study research entails the setting of a selected number of parameters against which each case study is compared and analysed. The same set of observations are analysed in both the aforementioned case studies (Gerring 2007, 1139).

This research method is ideal-fitting to the scope of the present research. The scope is the identification of these variations across the case studies and, conclusively, the documentation of generalizable conclusions and trends on the broader topic of research. In the instance of this dissertation, the variations in technocratic populist elements in the governments of Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis provide the elements for the generation of a general contextualised conclusion of the manifestations and effects of technocratic populism in the context of contemporary European governments. In these regards, one of the main defining elements of case study research is the contextualization of the research findings. Moreover, multiple-case study research is particularly fitting to the discussion of technocratic populism. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is no universally accepted definition of technocratic populism among scholarly publications. As such, it is particularly helpful to design specific parameters against which to discuss potential technocratic populist political actors and prove or disprove them as such.

In the context of this dissertation, five parameters of comparison are identified on the basis of the definition of technocratic populism provided in the Theoretical Framework chapter. These elements are used to compare the two case studies discussed in this paper. These elements are also serving as a basis for the establishment of the consequences of technopopulist governance and establish whether there is a clear link in the consequences of technocratic populism among different European countries. Even though discussing technocratic populism

solely in the context of Italy and the Czech Republic is not exhaustive, as mentioned previously, it is a useful base to discuss the phenomenon of technocratic populism in Europe and this methodology and findings can be easily compared with other countries and leaders.

Regarding the five parameters of comparison, they are titled as follows:

- i) The first parameter is the opposition of technocratic populist actors to the established elites.
- ii) The second parameter is the claim to straightforward and unmediated representation of the citizens.
- iii) The third parameter of comparison is the critique of technocratic populism to pluralist representation.
- iv) The fourth parameter, is the rejection of technocratic populist actors of the mainstream right-left political spectrum.
- v) The fifth parameter is the externality of technocratic populist actors from the political arena.

Each one of these parameters is individually explained in the Discussion and Comparison chapter of this dissertation; particularly, for the purpose of clarity, the explanation of each criterion and its comparison to the case studies are analysed together.

3. Silvio Berlusconi

3.1 Overview of Silvio Berlusconi's Political Career

Silvio Berlusconi, often referred to as *il Cavaliere* – which translates to the Knight in English – was one of the most influential yet divisive and controversial political actors of Italian politics in the twenty-first century until his death in the summer of 2023. Silvio Berlusconi has been, arguably, the most consistent and prominent actor in contemporary Italian politics both in his role as prime minister – he held office for four governments - and in the position of leader of the opposition (Fabbrini 2013, 154). The Knight first entered the political arena in 1994, as the political parties of post-war Italy were going through a profound crisis which led to the end of the First Republic (1946-1992) (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016, 305; Pasquino 2007, 40; Campi 2021, 32). The early 1990s were tumultuous times for Italian politics. The political scandals of *mani pulite* and *tangentopoli* shed light on the deep corruption of the public sector involving politicians and bureaucrats belonging to some of the most influential political parties of the time, such as the Christian Democratic Party and the Socialist Party (Vannucci 2009, 233; Giglioli 1996, 382). Therefore, the First Republic came abruptly to an end, leaving a vacuum of power in the Italian political arena – as of today none of the relevant parties of the First Republic exist anymore (Guzzini 1995, 28). The crisis that led to the demise of traditional political parties left a void in Italian politics, facilitating the rise of new political actors (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999, 320). In opposition to this newly discovered corrupt elite, Berlusconi presented himself to the citizens of Italy as a charismatic, genuine and external alternative leader (Fella and Ruzza 2013, 40). Opposing himself to the elites of the First Republic, Berlusconi portrayed himself as an ordinary citizen aiming at realizing the dreams and needs of the Italian population (Korosenyi and Patkos 2017, 616). This strategy was successful as, just months after the creation of his political party, Berlusconi was elected Prime Minister of Italy in 1994 (Korosenyi and Patkos 2017, 618; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2012, 613; Ruzza 2010,

263). Since then, Berlusconi's party Forza Italia – which translates to 'Go Italy' in English - has been one of the main parties in the Italian political arena, of which Berlusconi was the sole president until his death in June 2023 (McDonnell 2013, 2018; Baldini and Ventura 2024, 1). Even posthumously Forza Italia has not appointed a new president; as of 2024 the party has a secretary – current Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Tajani – and Berlusconi has permanently been given the title of Funding President of the party (Baldini and Ventura 2024, 3).

Berlusconi's career in office spanned from 1994 – when he won his first elections – until the demise of his last government in 2011 (Dominijanni and Casarino 2014, 167; Fabbrini 2013, 153). Following his first electoral win in 1994, the entrepreneur-turned-politician proceeded to win two more general elections in 2001 and 2008 (Fella and Ruzza 2013, 39; Korosenyi and Patkos 2017, 612). These multiple electoral victories resulted in Berlusconi being among the longest-serving prime ministers in post-war Europe (Newall 2018, 1; Alomes and Mascitelli 2013, 40; Criscitiello 2022, 179). Moreover, the political coalition which Berlusconi led following the 2001 elections was the biggest one in the history of the Republic of Italy (Mascitelli and Zucchi 2007, 129). Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to discuss the role played by Silvio Berlusconi in Italy as solely that of a prominent politician. Even before joining the political arena in the early 1990s, Silvio Berlusconi was a widely known face to the Italian public. Before participating in the 1994 elections, Berlusconi was known by most as an extremely successful businessman (Newell 2023, 284; Wodak et al. 2021, 370). The Forza Italia founder first rose to publicity as he started managing a numerous and successful series of businesses in Milan in the 1970s (Alomes and Mascitelli 2013, 40). Among these Berlusconi developed the biggest private television network in the country - Mediaset – and the publishing house Mondadori (Vigna et al. 2016, 225; Eco 2015). Furthermore Berlusconi also bought one of the two main football teams of Milan – AC Milan (Porro and Russo 2000, 350). These

economic ventures – among others - made him the richest man in Italy as of 2013 (Alomes and Mascitelli 2013, 40). At the height of his political career, in 2005, Berlusconi was ranked the 25th wealthiest person in the world with a personal fortune of 12 billion US dollars (Bowornwathana 2009, 87). Berlusconi's role as a successful entrepreneur is central to understanding his role as politician, especially in regards to his ownership of the Mediaset television network. His television enterprises not only provided an ideal platform for political propaganda, but also represented one of the main sources of information to the public in regards to the aforementioned political scandals of the early 1990s (Baldini and Ventura 2024, 9). Moreover, in addition to his private television networks, during his time in office as prime minister, Berlusconi also controlled public television channels. In total, Berlusconi was in control of six out of the seven main Italian broadcasters while being prime minister (Fabbrini 2013, 160). Therefore, it is clear that Berlusconi's position as media tycoon and billionaire has provided a strong basis on which he was able to build his subsequent political career. It is arguable that Berlusconi's charisma and wealth were a great novelty that shook the Italian political arena and were instrumental in the Knight's triumph in his first elections and subsequent decade-long prominence in the Italian political arena.

Moreover, there is consensus among scholarly publications that Forza Italia can be certainly defined as a personalistic party. The core constant element of the party for almost three decades had been the focus around the figure of Berlusconi, making Forza Italia the prototype of personalist parties in the contemporary context (McDonnell 2013, 221). Alongside the central role played by its founder, Forza Italia has always been characterised as a very informal party regarding its internal structure. Oftentimes the candidates who would run in elections – both at the national and European level – were selected by Berlusconi himself, who would meet potential candidates at informal gatherings hosted by himself in his private residencies (Baldini and Ventura 2024, 3; Paolucci 2006, 168). Hence, the personalistic traits

of Forza Italia have been central in the shaping of the party's role in Italian politics over the last three decades. Even though Forza Italia has performed very successfully at the national level, it has never been equally successful at the local level. Particularly, in regards to the municipal elections, Forza Italia's candidates have obtained only two positions as mayors in the six biggest Italian cities – Rome, Milan, Turin, Genoa, Palermo, and Naples - over the past three decades (Baldini and Ventura 2024, 4). Therefore it is clear that the party's popularity and identity itself have been interlinked with the persona of Berlusconi himself who has, by far, been the most politically successful member of the party.

Regarding the ideological standpoint of Silvio Berlusconi – and subsequently Forza Italia – there is consensus among scholarly publication that Berlusconi's election in 1994 and his subsequent central role in Italian politics are the stepping stone for the development of populism in the context of Italian politics (Ruzza and Balbo 2013, 164; Bickerton and Ancetti 2014, 23). While it might be argued Berlusconi is not the ideal-type example of technocratic populist governance in Italy, it is undisputable that his time as prime minister represented the starting point of populist politics in Italy, hence Berlusconi can be defined as the father of technocratic populism in Italy. Particularly, Berlusconi's portrayal of himself as firstly an entrepreneur and secondly a politician has allowed for his role in Italian politics as an expert in the economic sector, mainly due to his personal success.

Moreover, even if not strictly linked to his political career, it would be impossible for any academic research to ignore the highly mediatic scandals which have concerned the Forza Italia leader throughout the years. In particular, Berlusconi's political career was successful despite numerous scandals, including a number of judicial investigations into his business activities (Ruzza and Fella 2011, 159). Even though Berlusconi has been involved in multiple scandals, the most notables ones being of sexual nature, it appears that they have not hindered the support of his electorate and his standing a central figure in Italian politics (Garcia 2011, 292).

Nonetheless, these scandals - of which the Knight came out successfully - are a clear example of how the Forza Italia's leader charisma and personal trait had been central to his political career. It is obvious that Berlusconi was not a traditional political leader, a characteristic which he maintained throughout three decades in the political arena. It is from this characterization of Berlusconi as an outsider to traditional party politics – in every understanding of the word – that the connections between him and the theoretical definitions of technocratic populism can be argued. Based on the broad characteristics and contextualization of Berlusconi's presence in politics, the following section of the present chapter highlights how the Knight fits within the previously established definition of a technocratic populist political actor, both in regards to the populist and technocratic elements of this political phenomenon. Within this discussion, the rest of this chapter introduces the causes, consequences, and characteristics of the rise to power of technocratic political parties and leaders within the context of contemporary Europe, an analysis which will further be explored in more depth in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

3.2 Silvio Berlusconi as a Technopopulist Leader

In discussing Silvio Berlusconi as a technocratic populist leader, it is critical to identify the basic overlapping elements between the theoretical definition of technocratic populism and the real life political career of the Forza Italia founder. Even though they do not openly identify Berlusconi as a technocratic populist leader, the words of Furlong succinctly define what are the basic elements composing Berlusconi's identity as a technocratic populist political actor. According to Furlong, Berlusconi's business endeavours 'enabled him to claim to be an outsider, a non-political leader with proven experience, a role model for the successful Italy he claimed was being held back by the incompetent, venal and extremist politicians' (Furlong 2015, 79). While Furlong's quote is not exhaustive in defining Berlusconi as a technocratic populist leader, it does offer a basis on which to dissect the elements composing technocratic

populism vis-à-vis the case study of Berlusconi's political career. Along the same line, Castaldo and Verzichelli argue that even though Berlusconi's governance does not fit the ideal-type of technocratic populism, many of the elements of his governance and role in the Italian political arena can be clearly identified within this theoretical framework (Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020, 489). Therefore, the following section is dedicated to the analysis of technocratic populist elements within the context of Berlusconi's life as a politician.

3.2.1 The “Anti-Elitism” of an “External” Candidate

First and foremost, as discussed in depth in the previous chapter, one of the main characteristics of technocratic populist actors is to identify themselves as “external” and “anti-elitist”. In this regard, Silvio Berlusconi clearly fits the ideal-type definition discussed above. Most strikingly, the Forza Italia founder quickly gained political approval – winning the first elections he was a candidate in and becoming prime minister – as an external candidate, without previously actively participating in the Italian political arena neither at the national level nor at the local one. More specifically, in his critical rhetoric towards the most popular political parties of the First Republic, Berlusconi presented himself as an alternative leader to the traditional elite; hence, he himself was the first actor to define himself as an ‘external’ candidate. Given the political scandals that shook traditional political parties in the early 1990s, citizens lost faith in them, namely the Christian Democratic Party and the Socialist Party which disappeared from the Italian political scene (Mancini 2007, 112). In this context Berlusconi found the ideal vacuum in the political scene to initiate his political career and successfully pursue the idea of an external candidate being elected as Prime Minister of Italy. For instance, one of the strategies Berlusconi utilised to dismiss traditional political parties in electoral campaigns was criticizing their rhetoric and word choices. Berlusconi drew a sharp divide between himself and other political actors by condemning their use of “political jargon” – *politichese* in Italian (Campus 2010, 227). In doing so, Berlusconi underlined his juxtaposition to the elites of traditional party

politics, advocating for the usage of lexicon that is understandable to “ordinary” citizens, arguing he himself was an ordinary Italian citizen. Particularly, in regards to Berlusconi’s critique of the elites, it is clear that the populist identity of the politician surpasses that of extremely wealthy businessman. Even though it might appear contradictory that the wealthiest man in the country portrayed himself as an ordinary citizen, Berlusconi’s rhetoric underlines the populist traits of Forza Italia’s political stances. In his rhetoric Berlusconi is shedding the light on his difficult understanding of heavy bureaucracy and complex political jargon, lending a hand to the Italian citizens who, according to his propaganda, are equally lost in the futile complexities of mainstream political parties.

Moreover, one specific instance clearly displaying Berlusconi’s populist approach - antagonist to traditional electoral politics - is the politician’s presentation of the *Contratto con gli Italiani* – which translates to “Contract with the Italians” in English. Just one day before Italian citizens approached the polls to cast their votes in May 2001, Berlusconi appeared on a popular political daytime television program. During the broadcast, the politician signed a contract in which he promised the population that he would fulfil five goals if he were elected again, were four of these not to be achieved he would not run for office again (Mascitelli and Zucchi 2007, 130). The day after, Berlusconi was elected once more as Prime Minister of Italy, nonetheless the promised goals of the *Contratto con gli Italiani* were not met. While Berlusconi failed to deliver most of his commitments, he ran again for office at the following elections in 2006; in this elections he lost against the centre-left candidate Romano Prodi with just a 0.07 per cent difference in votes between the two candidates (Galam 2007, 580; Mariotti 2011, 37). Despite Berlusconi’s poor record as prime minister between 2001 and 2006 and his subsequent loss at the elections, Berlusconi was elected as prime minister for a third time in 2008 (Pasquino 2008, 345; Fella and Ruzza 2013, 39). In this context, the Contract with the Italians is a further example of the “opposition to the traditional elite”, which further identifies Berlusconi as a

technocratic populist political actor. Even though it is clear that Berlusconi was one of the main protagonists in Italian politics between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, it is equally obvious that the Knight himself attempted to distance himself from traditional politics even while he was in office as Prime Minister of Italy. This anti-elitist sentiment was manifested either through publicly charismatic moves such as his television appearances, or with the underlining of his identity firstly as a businessman and secondly as a politician (Alomes and Mascitelli 2012, 41; Porro and Russo 2000, 359; Wejnert and Woods 2014, 44). In this regard, it is clear that Berlusconi is a populist political actor, relying on his personality and portraying himself as a leader for the entire Italian population, who is not a detached politician such as those belonging to the political elite of the First Republic.

In this regard, Berlusconi's charisma has become one of the main identifying features of his three decade long political career. This distinctive trait also fits within the ideal type of a technopopulist leader. As mentioned in previous chapters, personalism, approachability, and charisma often define the rhetoric of populist political actors. In these regards, Berlusconi's charisma has proven instrumental for his political success. As argued by Wejnert and Woods, Berlusconi was particularly skilled in blurring the line between his rhetoric techniques and his political messages, making the personalism of Forza Italia and his charismatic appearance central elements of his political career (Wejnert and Woods 2014, 44). Even though it would be erroneous to credit Berlusconi's political success solely to his charisma, it is arguable that his success was greatly aided by the changes made in the structure of the Italian government and elections in 1993 (Paolucci 2006, 165). The proportional system was replaced with a majoritarian one, allowing political leaders to individually compete against each other in campaigns ultimately based on personal popularity and relatability (Mancini 2007, 113).

Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, technocratic populism is a thin ideology, in these regards, Berlusconi's ideology is no different than the ideal-type technocratic populism

discussed by the existing literature. As he rose into the political arena, Berlusconi did not adhere to any established political ideology. Rather he based his party on a mixture of anti-communism, anti-partisanism and anti-statism (Campi 2021, 33). As defined by Ragazzoni, Forza Italia was an empty shell, designed to appeal to the maximum amount of voters possible (Ragazzoni 2020, 7). Forza Italia's ambiguous ideological standing clearly reflects in the populist nature of the party, which claimed it could be representative in the political arena of the entire Italian population. The ideological confusion of Berlusconi's political career is exacerbated by the Forza Italia leader's charisma. Rather than being linked with a clear ideology, Forza Italia was more deeply interlinked with the personalization and clientelism of Berlusconi's central role (Bickerton and Ancetti 2014, 23). The votes Berlusconi obtained were not based on the quality of his political ideas, rather they were linked to his charisma and Berlusconi's convincing rhetoric that he was the only possible candidate able to lift Italy from the political crisis the country was going through (McDonnell 2013, 220). A clear demonstration of the success of this technique is evident in looking at Forza Italia's electorate. Berlusconi was able to pitch votes mostly from a section of the population that aligned with centre-right political inclinations, such as the former electorate of the Christian Democratic Party; however, Berlusconi was also able to pitch votes from the former electorate of the Socialist Party (Diamanti and Mannheimer 1994, 32). Therefore, as Berlusconi debuted into the Italian political arena, it is clear that he was not elected prime minister because of a specific political ideology, but rather, his populist rhetoric.

3.2.2 The Skills of a Businessman Turned Politician

In regards to the technocratic elements of the Knight's political career, Berlusconi can be identified as a technocratic leader mainly through the organization of his party and subsequently his approach to his role as prime minister. Forza Italia is often defined in scholarly publications as a business firm party (Ragazzoni 2020, 7; Paolucci 2006, 168; Mariotti 2011,

42). Its organization is therefore stemming from Berlusconi's role as business magnate. As discussed by Mazzoleni and Voerman, business firm parties are lacking a clear ideological standpoint within the political arena, while being strongly shaped around the identity of their leaders. Furthermore, these parties focus on running electoral campaigns from an entrepreneurial point of view (Mazzoleni and Voerman 2017, 784). In this context, as discussed by Hopkin and Paolucci, Forza Italia is not the setting for collective decision-making, rather, Berlusconi surrounded himself with skilled advisors who often times were Berlusconi's former employers and business partners (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999, 323). Forza Italia, as suggested by its lack of success in local elections, was an extremely centralised party, local branches of the party were almost non-existent and the party structure was inefficient (Paolucci 2006, 168). Rather, the party structure was centred around Berlusconi, whom the party aimed at marketing the most attractive actor in elections in the same way any company would market a product (Kopecek 2016, 729). In these regards, even though Berlusconi did not appoint numerous technocratic ministers during his time in office as prime minister, one can argue he was the ultimate technocrat himself; in this context personalism and technocracy must not be misunderstood as mutually exclusive. Hopkin and Paolucci list the main characteristics of a business firm party leader as 'personal popularity, organisational advantages, and crucially, access to unlimited professional expertise in mass communications' (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999, 322); all of these traits are clearly applicable to the case of Silvio Berlusconi's leadership. This characteristics of business-firm parties are clearly similar to the definition of technocracy provided in previous chapters. On this matter, the professional expertise of business-firm parties can be categorised within the 'competence or expertise that presumptively entitles its successor to legitimately rule over others' that Bickerton and Accetti describe as one of the main components of technocratic governance (Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 32). Furthermore, both scholarly publications on technocracy and those discussing business-firm parties

underline the organizational component of these political actors, which – as explained above – is analysed in very similar manners by both theoretical definitions. Organizational components are therefore discussed as one of the basic identifying elements of both business-firm parties and technocracy as not defined by democratic election processes. Rather they are based on individual levels of expertise and parties elites are appointed based on their personal links to the leader.

Regarding Forza Italia's political propaganda, Berlusconi based his technocratic rhetoric on a populist one, underlying his skills as a self-made man who could translate his entrepreneurial skills into political ones (Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020, 488). The political crisis of the early 1990s gave Silvio Berlusconi the ideal setting in which to “commercialise” his charisma, making him, as defined by Pasquino, a ‘true political entrepreneur’ (Pasquino 2007, 41). Arguably, Berlusconi's political success can be credited – to a significant extent – to his success in marketing Forza Italia as any other product one aims to sell the public, in these regards, Berlusconi framed his political propaganda in the context of merchandising and advertisement techniques (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999, 326). With respect to his discussion, according to Paolucci, Forza Italia can be defined as a patrimonial organization, meaning that the only goal of the party was the political success of its leader rather than the broader political success of the entire party (Paolucci 2006, 166). Moreover, throughout the years, Forza Italia has been significantly economically dependent on Berlusconi's businesses, which heavily financed the party (Ragazzoni 2020, 7).

In addition, the technocratic nature of Forza Italia leader can also be recognised in his political campaigns, nonetheless, Berlusconi's political success cannot be solely based on his identity as a media entrepreneur. Rather, it can be clearly linked to his success as an entrepreneur; Berlusconi himself ran his political campaigns like he did his media company, being extremely savvy in his utilization of marketing, advertisement and commercial aims

(Campus 2010, 227; Fabbrini 2013, 157). In doing so Berlusconi framed his political career around his success as an entrepreneur, using his accumulated wealth and successful business enterprises as proof that he could also successfully run the country as he did his firms (Fabbrini 2013, 159). Particularly, the ownership of multiple television channels gave Berlusconi the ideal platform to conduct his political propaganda, giving Forza Italia an enormous advantage on his political competitors (Morlino 1996, 12).

3.2.3 Was Berlusconi a Technocratic Populist Actor?

As argued by Castaldo and Verzichelli particularly in regards to the technocratic elements of his governance, Berlusconi does not fit the ideal-type of technocratic populism, nonetheless, these scholars argue that Berlusconi was the blue print on which more overtly technocratic populist governments in Italy based their political rhetoric (Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020, 490). Differently, as discussed by Mariotti, the main characteristics of Forza Italia under the leadership of Berlusconi were technocratic populist ones. Namely, Forza Italia represented a change in the political arena for two main reasons: the business mentality underlining the party's organization and the strength of his leader as a charismatic and anti-elitist political actor (Mariotti 2011, 36). Specifically, as highlighted in previous sections of this chapter, Berlusconi represented a novelty in the Italian political arena. As such, the scholarly discussion on the connection between Berlusconi's political career and the theoretical framework of technocratic populism is posthumous. Notwithstanding, there are clear technocratic populist elements that can be identified in the Knight's approach to political life.

Firstly, as discussed by Paolucci, the business skills of Berlusconi himself were one of the main advantages he had in his debut in politics in the 1990s (Paolucci 2006, 166); therefore, Berlusconi's technocratic nature could not be discussed in the traditional sense of technocracy. Rather, the technocratic aspects of Berlusconi's political career are strictly interlinked with the populist ones. Berlusconi argued for the governance of business experts, supervised by him,

the most successful self-made entrepreneur of the contemporary times. This which would benefit the entire Italian population. According to this political narrative, it is a logical conclusion that Berlusconi could be defined as technocratic populist leader. Even though, as briefly introduced above it could be argued that Berlusconi's government was not a technocratic one per se, it is clear that the Forza Italia's leader frequently used technocratic rhetoric in his political campaigns and portrayed himself as a technocratic populist actor during them.

In conclusion, this chapter has clearly shown how scholarly publications, notwithstanding mostly unknowingly, have clearly defined Silvio Berlusconi as a technocratic populist actor. As discussed in the previous chapters, the theoretical definition of technocratic populism is more recent than Berlusconi's political career. Nonetheless, Berlusconi could be identified as one of first real-life example of successful technocratic populist rhetoric in the arena of European politics. It is the specific novelty of his political career that makes Forza Italia and his leader an ideal example to which to compare other established technocratic populist actors in the continent. The following chapters of this dissertation delve into the analysis of Andrej Babis as a technocratic populist leader and how his political career stands vis-à-vis that of Silvio Berlusconi.

4. Andrej Babis

4.1 Overview of Andrej Babis' Political Career

Andrej Babis first appeared in the Czech political arena in 2011 with the foundation of his political party: Akce Nespokojených Občanů, which translates to Action of Dissatisfied Citizens in the English language. Colloquially the party is referred to with the acronym ANO which means “yes” in the Czech language (Hajek 2017, 275). The party stemmed from the already existing civil association of the same name: Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (Ostra 2022, 246). ANO first ran in the 2013 elections succeeding as the second most voted party entering government in a centre-left coalition with the Social Democrats (CSSD) which gained the most votes in the elections (Hajek 2017, 275; Sarovec 2019, 62; Cisar and Stetka 2016, 286). Babis' electoral results were impressive, as ANO ran for the first time in elections it obtained almost 20 per cent of the total votes cast (Kopecek 2016, 726). Within the aforementioned coalition government Babis was appointed Minister of Finance, a title he held until 2017 (Stulik and Naxera 2022, 43). Alongside ANO, the 2013 elections witnessed an unprecedented number of new parties voted into government. After the elections, 30.5 per cent of parliament members were representers of parties which had not previously been in government (Guasti 2020, 276). Subsequently, ANO won the 2014 European Elections and, in the same year, it was the party to receive the greatest number of votes in the municipal elections (Cirhan and Kopecky 2017, 117). In the following general elections in 2017 Babis became Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (Bustikova and Guasti 2018, 169; Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 287). During its second election, ANO obtained almost one third of the total votes cast during the election (Bustikova and Babos 2020, 500). Until 2021, the ANO founder led a minority coalition with the Social Democrats (Stulik and Naxera 2022, 39; Bustikova and Babos 2020, 500). In January 2023 Andrej Babis ran for President of the Czech Republic, losing the election to Petr Pavel, who is currently the president of the country (Bláha 2023, 1). Babis' loss of popularity can

partially be accounted to his legal disputes with the European Commission, which argued that Babis had a relevant conflict of interest regarding to the financial matters of Agrofert and his political offices (Brusenbauch and Marek 2023, 392).

Similarly to Berlusconi's entry into politics discussed in the previous chapter, the success of Babis as a newcomer to the Czech political arena was aided by the political crisis of the early 2010s, including the high degrees of perceived corruption within the government and established traditional parties (Just and Charvat 2016, 91). Principally, the population was shocked by the fall of the government in 2013 and the arrest of the head of the prime minister's office on corruption charges (Hlousek and Kopecek 2019, 40). In addition, following the 2008 financial crisis the Czech Republic suffered from rising levels of unemployment, economic stagnation, and increasing public debt (Havlik 2019, 374; Hlousek and Kopecek 2022, 33). Therefore, the traditional parties which had been the protagonists of Czech politics since the early 1990s were starting to lose the trust of the population, subsequently they left a void for new parties to fill (Kopecek 2016, 726; Bustikova and Babos 2020, 498). Within this tense political environment, Andrej Babis centred his political rhetoric around the idea of fighting against the corruption of the established political elite and their disinterest in the wellbeing of the Czech citizens (Eibl and Gregor 2021, 259; Cisar and Stretka 2016, 287).

It is critical to mention that before being a politician, Andrej Babis was – and still is - an extremely successful businessman. Babis has been among the wealthiest Czech citizens over recent decades, as of 2017, his personal fortune amounted to 95 billion crowns, which as of 2024 amounts to a little over 4 billion US dollars (Stulik and Naxera 2022, 43). According to Forbes, as of 2024, Babis is the 920th wealthiest individual in the world (Forbes 2024). His wealth has increased substantially since his political debut in 2011, when the ANO leader had a personal wealth of around 1 billion US dollars (Giglioli 2020, 322). Babis' wealth mainly derives from the Agrofert holding company which the ANO leader owns (Hlousek and

Kopecek 2017a, 93). As most millionaires in the Czech Republic, Babis became extremely wealthy through the processes of privatization in the 1990s, which included his acquisition of Agrofert of which he was the sole owner until 2017 (Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 284). In 2017, because of the Conflict of Interest Act, Babis was forced to surrender his direct ownership of Agrofert which was transferred to a trust fund; however, the ANO founder continues to hold indirect control on the company (Hlousek and Kopecek 2022, 34). As a former employee of the state-owned Petrimex and a member of the Communist Party in the 1980s, Andrej Babis took advantage of the fall of communism through the acquisition of one of Perimex's subsidiaries, the aforementioned Agrofert (Giglioli 2020, 322). Agrofert encompasses over two hundred companies mainly in the agriculture and chemical sectors making it the largest private employer in the Czech Republic (Kopecek 2016, 731; Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 284). Furthermore, in 2013, Babis acquired the media outlet MAFRA, which is one of the biggest of the Czech Republic encompassing newspapers, magazines, TV channels and a radio station (Waschkova and Kotisova 2022, 533; Waschkova and Metykova 2015, 11). According to the European Federation of Journalists, as of 2019, Andrej Babis was in control of approximately 30 per cent of the private media in the Czech Republic (European Federation of Journalists 2019, 2). Babis' success in the Czech political arena can be partially associated with his savvy debut as a media owner, thus, the ANO founder created for himself the ideal platform for his electoral propaganda and shielded himself from the opposition's scrutiny (Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 286).

4.2 Babis as a Technocratic Populist Leader

It is central to the argument of this dissertation to clearly identify the technocratic populist traits of both Andrej Babis and his political party. Differently from Berlusconi, multiple scholarly publications identify the ANO leader as a technocratic populist actor (Hartikainen 2021, 2; Bustikova and Babos 2020, 497; Guasti 2020, 473). Notwithstanding, due to the

complex definition of technocratic populism discussed in previous chapters, it is instrumental to the scope of this research to discuss in detail the technocratic and populist features of the former Czech prime minister. Andrej Babis can be identified as a technocratic populist leader beginning from the way he portrayed himself and his party since his political debut in 2013; the ANO founder had often underlined his successful business endeavours as means of claiming legitimacy to his political career (Ostra 2022, 246). In doing so he utilised his personal charisma to appeal to the entirety of the Czech electorate (Hajek 2017, 281). The following sections explore in more depth these technocratic populist traits.

4.2.1 'We are not Like Politicians'

First and foremost, one can identify populist elements in the political career of Andrej Babis by analysing ANO's rejection of political plurality. As such, ANO did not discuss the political arena as a fair competition between different political actors, rather Babis' party claimed to be the only one that could rightfully represent the will of the Czech citizens (Havlik 2019, 378). Since its debut in the political arena ANO's rhetoric has always been one of opposing the ruling elite, which the party and his leader condemn as inadequate, inefficient, and corrupt (Ostra 2022, 246). Babis argued that the "hard working people" of the Czech Republic were deserving of an uncorrupted and competent leader, by which he covertly meant himself (Cisar and Stetka 2016, 286; Smolik and Dordevic 2020, 74). Andrej Babis portrayed himself as an affable businessman who entered politics not because of his wanting to become a politician, but because of the will to make positive change for the benefit of the Czech population (Snegovaya 2020, 558). This political message is very evident in the slogan which ANO created for the 2013 elections 'We are not like politicians. We work hard' (Kim 2020, 626).

In these regards, Andrej Babis was skilled in utilizing contemporary means of communication – such as social media – to communicate his political message to the Czech population. As previously stated, most populist leaders rely strongly on personal charisma to

transmit their message to the electorate and Andrej Babis fits this model, particularly, his technocratic claims are strongly supported by communication skills and performances (Hartikainen 2021, 2). For instance, Babis regularly used Facebook streaming videos to communicate with the public. These videos were part of a series called “Čau lidi” – “Hello People” in English – in which the ANO founder provided a mixed discussion of personal topics and political ones, adopting a down-to-earth and approachable rhetoric (Skolkay et al. 2020, 46; Klimes 2022, 390). Furthermore, similarly to the Contract with the Italians by Berlusconi discussed in the previous chapter, one week before the 2017 elections, ANO sent a letter to all Czech households titled *Andrej Babis’ Contract with the Citizens of the Czech Republic* (Rut 2023, 127). This is a clear instance in which ANO adopted the populist rhetoric of viewing the entire voting population as a homogenous mass, claiming political representation across and outside of the mainstream right-left political spectrum. In these regards, ANO’s view of the Czech population is not exclusionary, Babis views the entire Czech population as homogenous (Cisar and Stetka 2016, 287). Therefore, it is clear that since the beginning of his political career Andrej Babis has incarnated two of the basic features of populism: anti-elitism and claims to representation of the people as a whole (Ostra 2022, 246).

Subsequently, Andrej Babis can be identified as a technocratic populist leader concerning his ideological stance within the right-left political spectrum. In these regards, Babis’ party lacks a clear position on the right-left political spectrum (Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 278; Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 303). Therefore, the position of ANO within the Czech political arena is fitting within the ideal-type definition of populism. ANO presents itself to the electorate as weak in regards to its ideological standpoint, rather, the most prevalent feature of the party is the rejection of the established elite and its corruption. Accordingly, ANO voters were not appealed by the party’s standpoint on the right-left political spectrum, rather citizens voted for ANO because of the party’s rhetoric and its stress on Babis’ competency as a

businessman (Havlik 2019, 374). Therefore, ANO's voters were extremely heterogenous, they were not defined by political attitudes or social class (Snegovaya 2020, 564).

While the party may lack a clear ideological standpoint, the focus around which the party is organised is clear: Andrej Babis. ANO is a highly personalistic party, as stated by Andrej Babis himself 'the party is me' (Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 303). It is evident that Babis is a highly charismatic political leader, the identity of ANO is rigidly linked to its founder's leadership. According to Andrej Babis, ANO was built around the idea of 'I pay, I decide' (Hanley 2017; Just and Charvat 2016, 97). In these regards, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the identity of the party and that of his founder itself, becoming obvious that the sole aim of the existence of the former is the political success of the latter.

4.2.2 'Running the State as a Firm'

One of the most striking features of Babis as firstly, Minister of Finance and, secondly Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, is his continuous active identity as business man and media tycoon (Dawson and Hanley 2016, 27). While maintaining public office, Andrej Babis never distanced himself from his entrepreneurial endeavours, rather, the ANO founder often utilised his two identities to reciprocally support one through the other; for the purpose of this dissertation, it is critical to discuss Babis' use of his business abilities to legitimise his political standing. Firstly, with reference to the link between technocracy and Andrej Babis, his party, ANO can easily be defined as a business-firm party (Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 285). Using a synonym, ANO is an entrepreneurial party which identity is that of the private project of an entrepreneur who is central to the shaping of the party itself (Hlousek and Kopecek 2017a, 93; Saxonberg and Heinisch 2024, 384). According to Hlousek and Kopecek, even though they are not identical, business-firm parties can be defined as a sub-group of entrepreneurial parties (Hlousek and Kopecek 2017b, 87). For the purpose and scope of this research the theoretical definition of entrepreneurial party cannot be thoroughly discussed, hence, this dissertation

implements the definition provided by Hlousek and Kopecek, which includes three main characteristics defining an entrepreneurial party. Firstly, these parties are defined by the central role of their leader who holds significant influence over the party members and then uses the party as a vehicle to achieve his political and entrepreneurial means (Hlousek and Kopecek 2017b, 87). Moreover, entrepreneurial parties are defined by the presence of experts within their highest ranks and the centralised stress on the business background of their leaders (Hlousek and Kopecek 2019, 38). Similarly, Hartikainen also describes ANO as an entrepreneurial populist party, discussing it as ‘socially moderate and centred around a highly trusted leader with a background in business, who claims that he will run the country like a business’ (Hartikainen 2021, 2). In these regards, this definition of entrepreneurial populism can be closely equated to the definition of technocratic populism discussed in previous chapters. According to this political idea, conducting the state as a firm would allow for increased efficiency and faster positive change which would not be hindered by overly bureaucratic mechanisms and disagreements among parties in government (Hlousek and Kopecek 2022, 34). It is through the advertisement of these technocratic features that Andrej Babis first approached the Czech political arena, clearly establishing him as a technocratic actor within the political realm.

Another feature of ANO which clearly manifests the technocratic nature of the party is the presence of “experts”. The majority of Babis’ enterprise in ANO was composed of his own business partners (Ostra 2022, 246). 67 per cent of the party elite of ANO was previously employed in a managerial position (Cirhan and Kopecky 2017, 124); among these, one out of five had been officially employed by Agrofert at some point in their life (Cirhan and Kopecky 2017, 126). In doing so, the ANO leader underlined the necessities of capable professionals in government, who can be identified as the “experts” mentioned in the ideal-type theoretical definition of technocratic governance. The prevalence of personal connections within ANO

translated to the government once Babis was elected prime minister in 2017, when the composition of the government matched the one described in previous chapter as technocratic populism. The vast majority of ministers during Babis' government were personally picked by the leader among the ranks of his business colleagues and non-partisan experts (Bustikova and Guasti 2019, 303; Hlousek and Kopecek 2022, 34; Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 286). Moreover, the presence of "experts" in the political career of Andrej Babis was not only limited to his time in office, as early as the 2013 elections, ANO employed business-like electoral strategies, such as classifications of the electorate and market research in order to succeed in the political run (Skolkay et al. 2022, 46; Hajek 2017, 278). It is clear that the technocratic features of ANO and Babis' offices were not accidental, rather the Agrofert owner clearly established his party according to technocratic governance since its birth.

Furthermore, in regards to the centralization of ANO, it is worth noticing that the majority of the party's fundings came from Babis' personal fortune, which, as discussed by Just and Charvat, is instrumental in the personalization and centralization of business-firm parties around their founder (Just and Charvat 2016, 87; Guasti 2020, 276). This technocratic features of Babis' politics became more evident as he was appointed Minister of Finance, a time in which, the ANO founder was very overt in his resolution to run the country as a business firm, going as far as marketing 'manage the government as a company', a motto which became closely associated with his persona (Kosar et al. 2019, 456; Bugaric and Kuhelj 2018, 24). In these regards, the political persona Babis constructed for himself is as important as the party itself.

Furthermore, one can observe the close link between ANO and Agrofert by discussing the handling of the bureaucratic side of the party. As of its creation, ANO's financial accounts were directly managed by Agrofert's financial director and ANO's local branches were often located in Agrofert's buildings (Hlousek and Kopecek 2019, 40). Previously this chapter has discussed

how Babis' nature as politician and as businessman are often partially overlapping, similarly, it is complicated to draw the line on where ANO ends and Agrofert begins, particularly in regards to their employees and members. As underlined by Stulik and Naxera, Babis' communication style closely matches his self-identification as an entrepreneur-turned-politician; the ANO leader often used his role as Minister of Finance and, later, prime minister to further his personal economic interests (Stulik and Naxera 2022, 40).

4.2.3 Is Andrej Babis a Technocratic Populist Leader?

Shortly after the registration of his party, Andrej Babis said 'I am not a politician and never will be ... I am a manager. There should be politicians in parliament and managers in government...' (Kopecek 2016, 725). Arguably, this sentence is ideal-fitting to the definition of Andrej Babis and ANO as technocratic populist actors within the arena of Czech politics. Following his election as, firstly Minister of Finance, and then Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Babis' time in office has confirmed his technocratic populist features.

Differently from the discussion regarding Berlusconi's technocratic populist tendencies, in the analysis of Andrej Babis' political career one contemporary event serves as the ideal example to discuss the technopopulist characteristics of the ANO founder: the Covid-19 pandemic, which started in 2020. In these regards, Babis' approach to the pandemic is a clear example of how his populist political communication merges with strongly technocratic features in the handling of the health crisis. In the initial phase of the pandemic in early March 2020 the Czech Republic was quick in implementing restrictive measures to control the spread of the virus. In these regards, as prime minister, Babis heavily relied on the expertise of technocrats in his decision making process (Hartikainen 2021, 5). Andrej Babis reiterated his technocratic message in discussing the containment of the pandemic – which was better in the Czech Republic than the European average – by stating 'My profession is businessman, crisis manager, actually Prime Minister of the Czech Republic...we have results, best in Covid'

(Bustikova and Babos 2020, 496). In this context it is evident that the ANO founder is aiming at exploiting the achievements of his government in the fight against the pandemic to legitimise his technocratic tendencies. Similarly, Babis' communication style during the pandemic can be clearly labelled as populist. Andrej Babis heavily portrayed himself as "one of the citizens" during the time of crisis, he always appeared in public wearing a face mask and related to the issues of the Czech citizens sympathizing with them in his frequent social media live streams and posts (Hartikainen 2021, 6). As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, the portrayal of himself as "a mere Czech citizen" is clearly linked to his populist tendencies.

Moreover, as previously discussed, the organization of ANO and its political aims clearly show how Andrej Babis can be identified with technocratic populist features. Concerning his party, Babis has framed his political propaganda around the idea of a non-ideological citizens' movement of practical doers (Hanley and Vachudova 2020, 281). In these regards, the lack of ideology and the appeal to the entire Czech population have been identified as populist features; while the presence of "practical doers" – or experts – can overtly be linked to technocratic ruling. Moreover, the technocratic populist nature of ANO is strengthened by its electoral tactics. Babis used his ownership of the media outlet MAFRA in order to push his electoral campaigns. While other actors in the political arena did not have the same influence on mainstream media as the ANO leader did, Babis' ownership of MAFRA allowed him to publish information favouring his own political campaign while simultaneously putting down his political competitors (Guasti 2020, 479; Hlousek and Kopecek 2019, 41). However, it could be argued that Babis' purchase of MAFRA was somewhat unsuccessful in regards to his political propaganda. Not only the public and his political opposition vehemently criticised the acquisition and its effects on free and democratic electoral propaganda in Czechia; also, multiple high-profile editors and journalists left the company following the ANO founder's acquisition (Waschkova and Metykova 2015, 12). Notwithstanding, Babis' acquisition and use

of MAFRA to further his political career is a clear technocratic populist element of his political career. The ANO leader used his business skills and expertise to maximise the potential of his populist message to the population of the Czech Republic, overtly combining his entrepreneurial skills with his populist persona.

Hlousek and Kopecek clearly summarise the technocratic populist features of Andrej Babiš and his party as ‘he branded older parties corrupt and incompetent, and perpetrators of state dysfunction. At the same time, Babiš offered a purely technocratic, managerial vision, in which the state would be managed in a competent manner’ (Hlousek and Kopecek 2022, 34). Similarly to the perspective provided by these scholars, this chapter has underlined the striking technocratic populist features of ANO. This chapter and the previous one have highlighted how technocratic populist features come to life in different modes across actors and countries. Reiterating this point, the following chapter delves in depth into the discussion of similarities and differences between Andrej Babiš and Silvio Berlusconi with respect to their technocratic populist traits.

5. Discussion and Comparison

The previous chapters of this research have discussed in depth the core elements of technocratic populism and how Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi fit within the theoretical framework established by the existing academic literature. Nonetheless, in these chapters, the technopopulist rhetoric of Berlusconi and Babis have mostly been discussed in regards to nationalistic tendencies; both actors heavily argued the benefits they would bring for the respective country's citizens. This chapter argues and provides evidence to the applicability of the parameters established in the Methodology chapter to the two technocratic populist actors focus of this dissertation. As highlighted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation the comparison between Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis has not been analysed in the existing literature and is the subject of a research gap. This chapter is structured according to the parameters of comparison previously outlined, discussing the parameters of comparison one by one in order to analyse how the two aforementioned contemporary political actors relate; firstly, to the concept of technocratic populism, and secondly, to one another. Therefore, this chapters seeks to identify commonalities and differences between these actors through the discussion of the case studies vis-à-vis the established methodology. In this regards, the focus of the present chapter is to establish to what extend Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi fit the definition of technocratic populist actors provided by the Theoretical Framework chapter of the research.

5.1 Opposition of Technocratic Populist Leaders to the Established

Elite

As explained by the existing literature on technocratic populism, the opposition of technocratic populist actors to the mainstream political elites is one of the central features of this political phenomenon. Therefore, it is the first parameter this research implements in the

understanding of Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi as technocratic populist political actors. As discussed in previous chapters, both actors debuted into the political arena in times during which the established political leaders – in the respective countries: the Czech Republic and Italy - were going through profound crises. In both instances, major political crises shook historical parties. In the aftermath of these unstable circumstances, both leaders have constructed electoral campaigns which centred around the opposition to the mainstream elites, deemed incompetent, biased, and most importantly, deeply corrupted. While it might be argued that the rejection of the legitimacy of mainstream political elites by Berlusconi and Babis could be understood as a product of historical circumstances, it is undeniable that it does define these actors as technocratic populist ones. While it is irrefutable that Babis' and Berlusconi's political careers would have been impossible without the fall of the establishment, one cannot argue that these instances alone can be credited for the emergence of technocratic populism. Indeed, both actors proved critical technopopulist features in their responses to these crises.

Multiple similarities can be observed between Babis and Berlusconi in their technocratic populist approach to their claims of “externality” as they firstly embarked on their political careers. Firstly, both actors exploited their identities as business man and inexperience in politics in their electoral runs. Remembering a quote by Andrej Babis following the foundation of ANO, the former prime minister said ‘I am not a politician and I will never be... I am a manager. The Czech Republic is a company with ten million shareholders. It is an indebted business with stupid management. On top of that, that management steals’ (Kopecek 2016, 725). As discussed in previous chapters and exhibited by the afore-stated direct quote, these actors stressed their identity as ordinary citizens. From the examples provided in previous chapter, it has become evident that both politicians adopted a rhetoric arguing the necessity for a change in actors in government, using populist narratives to delegitimise the established political elite and, in its place, legitimise their position as newcomers in elections. In these

regards, the discussion of both Berlusconi's and Babis' success in the political arena is closely connected to these actors' personal charismas. The previous chapters have demonstrated how both actors were able to rely on individual interpersonal skills and connections – such as charisma and informal networking – to present themselves as viable candidates to the respective electorates, resulting in extremely successful electoral campaigns.

Even though one might expect that the stress of “externality” would cease once these political actors took office as ministers, in both instances that was not the case. Rather, both Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis reinvented their interpretation of their opposition to the mainstream elite according to their new roles in government which put them in a central position within the mainstream elite. Therefore, both actors continued stressing their externality concerning the mainstream political arena, even though the two former prime ministers did so in different manners. Silvio Berlusconi – even during his time in office as prime minister – continued to portray himself as an entrepreneur. As mentioned in previous chapters, Berlusconi was already a known figure to the Italian public before running for office. Along these lines, Berlusconi used his business endeavours, particularly his television networks, to stress his identity as a “non-politician”. This narrative can be interpreted as a medium through which the Forza Italia leader attempted at maintaining an aura of approachability and difference from the former ruling elites and his political opposition. Regarding the claim to externality that Andrej Babis continued to portray after his election into office, the previous chapter has provided an overt example of this rhetoric: the former PMs use of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Babis' social media use is strongly tied with the PM's populist tendencies in handling the Covid-19 pandemic. In communicating with the Czech population while restrictions were in place, the ANO founder was very active on social media discussing both politics and popular culture. Arguably, this rhetoric was adopted to make the prime minister appear down-to-earth and relatable, following the narrative that established

him as an ordinary citizen. Moreover, even though social media is increasingly becoming a medium of communication adopted by political actors, Babis' use of this tool represented a novelty in the Czech context and was covertly used to reiterate the ANO founder's distance from the previous ruling elite of the country.

In conclusion, it is clear that both Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis were overtly antagonistic to the established elite as they debuted in the political arena; they heavily criticised mainstream political parties as corrupt, inefficient, and uncaring for the wellbeing of the population. Moreover, both actors attempted to maintain their externality in regard to traditional party politics as they sought to maintain the support of the population while in office. These elements considered, according to this first parameter of analysis, both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi can be clearly identified as technocratic populist political actors.

5.2 Straightforward and Unmediated Representation of the Citizens

The second parameter of comparison of this research refers to the rightful and unmediated claim of technocratic populist actors to the representation of the people. As discussed in previous chapters, this defining feature of technocratic populism is, arguably, the one that most evidently connects populism and technocracy. While the former argues for unmediated representation of the people as a whole, not weighted down by the overly bureaucratic institutions of mainstream political parties; the latter argues for the governance of experts who are not biased by the need for electoral support based on political ideologies. In these regards, the previous two chapters - discussing the political lives of Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis - have introduced multiple instances in which these actors claimed unmediated and truthful representation of the citizens of the respective countries. Particularly, the technocratic tendencies of these two leaders are evident in their underlining of their experiences as skilled businessmen. On this subject, Berlusconi and Babis are strikingly similar; in their electoral campaigns they both clearly stated that the respective national populations should trust them

as they would run the respective countries just as well as they did their business endeavours. These actors argue that the malfunctionings of democracy are to be blamed on the overly bureaucratic procedures of contemporary institutions. These claims must not be understood as covert, as Andrej Babis repeated the phrase “the state should be run as a firm” so often that it has now become so closely associated with the ANO leader that one could define it as his own private motto (Rut 2023, 125). With this sentence, Babis faults the institutions of modern democratic ruling for the lack of adequate political representation provided to the population, meaning that not only the institutions are faulty but so are the actors within them. Once more, populist rhetoric appealing to the emotional side of the electoral are at play are based on technocratic claims: the Czech electoral should vote for ANO because it is the only party able to efficiently run the state. Babis’ claim to run the state as a firm demonstrated the ANO’s leader opposition to the bureaucratic institutions of democracy. While Berlusconi similarly stressed his background as a savvy businessman, the most striking feature to his claim of truthful representation of the Italian citizens is another one.

Regarding Silvio Berlusconi, the Forza Italia leader took a partially different approach to the claim of being the only political actor able to efficiently represent the citizens of his country. As underlined in previous chapters, one of Berlusconi’s electoral techniques was the critique of the overly complex language used by mainstream politicians. While this example could be understood as a rejection of the established political elite, it is also, and arguably more relevantly, a critique to the complexity of contemporary democratic political processes. While this rhetoric style could also be understood as highlighting the self-identification of Berlusconi as an external candidate and his general opposition to the established elites, in discussing his technocratic populist features, this discourse more critically highlights the critique of democratic institutions and the distance between the general population and the ruling elite which Berlusconi faults traditional political parties with. By voicing this critique, Berlusconi

opposes himself to this narrative, suggesting that his more hands-on and clearly understandable approach to politics is the one that could rightfully represent the will of the Italian citizens.

In conclusion, it is clear that both Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis appealed to their backgrounds as businessmen to argue their capabilities to represent the people better than the established elite. In this regard, the approach of these two politicians differed. While Berlusconi took a more overt approach in condemning the lack of clarity in political discourses, Babis heavily criticised the inefficiency of democratic institutions. In this regard, it becomes clear that Berlusconi's approach to claiming rightful representation of the Italian citizens, while undermining mainstream political party, was particularly populist in character. The Forza Italia leader appealed to the rhetoric of portraying himself as an ordinary citizen who understood ordinary citizens' needs, which as above-discussed is a defining feature of populism. Differently, Andrej Babis leaned more towards the technocratic features of technocratic populism; the ANO founder criticised the mainstream elite as inefficient, claiming that he was the only actor in the political arena with the expertise to efficiently represent the people in government. Despite these differences, in regards to this second parameter of comparison both actors can clearly be identified as technocratic populists.

5.3 Critique of Technocratic Populist Leaders of Political Plurality

The third parameters of comparison analysed in this research discusses the understanding of technocratic populist leaders of the political arena and their views regarding coalition governments, hence those governments that are composed by more than one party. As highlighted by the existing academic literature on technocratic populism, this political phenomenon rejects plurality of representation in government. According to technocratic populist actors, because of their expertise and knowledge of the will of the people, they are the only actors that could represent the entire population in governance therefore rejecting the existence of different political ideologies among the population. More accurately, technocratic

populism believes in the clear existence of “right” and “wrong” decisions within politics; as highlighted in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this dissertation, the technocratic part of this political phenomenon views politics as a science. While superficially this parameter could be confused with the previous one, it is critical for the understanding of technocratic populism to differentiate them. While the previous parameter criticises the overly institutionalised and bureaucratic proceedings of democracy, the third one rejects the idea of political plurality. Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to argue that the second and third parameters of comparison are not connected to each other, the rejection of political plurality is also understandable as a critique of traditional political parties prioritizing votes over the good of the people. As discussed by the existing academic literature, according to technocratic populist point of view, political plurality allows for arguments within government which ultimately lead to the impossibility of the government to do the good of the people.

Regarding the two political actors analysed in this dissertation, neither one of them fits the ideal-type definition of technocratic populist leader in regards to the rejection of political plurality. Both Berlusconi and Babis have been prime ministers with the support of coalition governments. Particularly, Silvio Berlusconi has been the winning candidate as prime minister only of coalition governments (Fella and Ruzza 2013, 39). Similarly as mentioned in previous chapters, both during his time as Minister of Finance and as Prime Minister, Andrej Babis was a part of a coalition government with the Social Democrats. Regardless, one can argue that these coalitions were not ideal scenarios for the two political actors, they would have rather governed by themselves. Notwithstanding, it is common knowledge that any political party would avoid coalition governments if possible. However, in the instance of Silvio Berlusconi, his political career has become strictly associated with his role as leader of the centre-right political coalition in Italy. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the Forza Italia leader rejected the idea of political plurality in government. As mentioned above, Berlusconi served as the

prime minister leading the biggest coalition in the history of the Italian Republic, which included the Northern League, Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), a post-fascist party, and small right-wing Catholic parties (Parker and Natale 2002, 665). It is clear that Silvio Berlusconi did not reject the idea of political plurality, his party had never been in power without being part a coalition. Nonetheless, it is arguable – as it is for most political leaders - that Berlusconi’s acceptance of political plurality stemmed from necessity rather than political ideals.

In conclusion, even though the actions of these actors do not match the ideal-type definition of this parameter, their rhetoric matches it better. As demonstrated by the first parameter discussed in this chapter, both actors heavily criticised their political opponents on grounds of their incapability to lead a government. However, one cannot argue that this discourse is enough to ultimately label Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi as technocratic populist actors according to this parameter. In conclusion, neither Silvio Berlusconi nor Andrej Babis can be defined with certainty as technocratic populist political actors according to this third parameter.

5.4 Rejection of the Left-Right Political Spectrum

As discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this dissertation, technocratic populism defies the mainstream idea of the left-right political spectrum. In these regards, it is expected for technocratic populist actors to also place themselves outside of the established spectrum which is closely associated with traditional party politics. It can be argued that the rejection of the traditional left-right political spectrum can be associated with the rejection of traditional party politics and their elites, as discussed in the first parameter of comparison of this chapter. As previously mentioned in this dissertation, technocratic populism lacks a clear ideological stance; in particular, regarding the technocratic features of this political phenomenon, the left-right political spectrum can be understood as an obstacle to the unbiased governance of the experts. Nonetheless, in the instances of the two case studies this research

focuses on, as previously discussed, both Babis and Berlusconi had central roles in their respective governments as prime minister, therefore placing themselves at the very core of the dynamics of traditional politics.

In regards to this fourth parameter, Silvio Berlusconi cannot be defined as a technocratic populist actor rejecting the left-right political spectrum. As mentioned previously in this dissertation, during his almost three decade long political career, Silvio Berlusconi had solidified his role as the leader of centre-right political coalition in Italy. As previously mentioned he was more than once elected as prime minister by coalition governments composed of right-wing parties, such as the party that is currently most popular in Italy: Fratelli d'Italia - Brothers of Italy in the English language (Baldini et al. 2022, 390). Therefore, while it might be argued that Berlusconi's Forza Italia did not align within the political spectrum of the First Republic it is undisputably one of the main centre-right parties of the Second Republic. Arguably, Berlusconi's prominent role among centre-right parties played a significant role in Forza Italia's long-term political success. In regards to Andrej Babis and ANO's political ideology, placing the Czech leader on the right-left political spectrum is not as transparent as it is with his Italian counterpart. While the former Czech prime minister began his political career completely externally from the right-left political spectrum, however, as ANO was elected into government in 2013, the party started to mould itself to fit the political spectrum. Still nowadays ANO can be most comfortably defined as an entrepreneurial and business-firm party (Hajek 2017, 292). Notwithstanding, through looking at the parties with which ANO entered into coalitions – the Social Democrats - it is clear that Babis and his party can be defined as centre-left political actors.

In conclusion, with respect to this fourth parameter of comparison, at the beginning of their political career these actors could have been defined as external to the right-left political spectrum; at his debut in the political arena Andrej Babis certainly defied the spectrum and so

did Silvio Berlusconi to a lesser extent. However, as these two actors proceeded in their political lives, they both settled within the spectrum; Silvio Berlusconi became leader of the centre-right political coalition and Andrej Babis can be identified as a centre-leftist political actor. In regards to the latter, this conclusion can be ascertained by looking at the party with which Babis entered a coalition, the CSSD, which is a left-wing political party; supporting the same argument, ANO has not been in government with a party clearly identifiable as right-wing (Hajek 2017, 292). Concerning the identification of these actors as technocratic populist leaders according to this parameter, Silvio Berlusconi utterly defies it. While the connection of Andrej Babis to technocratic populism is stronger in this regard, it still does not fit the ideal-type of technocratic populist actor provided by the Theoretical Framework.

5.5 Understanding of the Population as a Homogeneous Mass

The last parameter of comparison of this research is concerned with the view that technocratic populist actors have of their electorate. Their understanding of “the people” as an homogeneous group is, arguably, one of the most obvious features of technocratic populist actors. As discussed in previous chapters, technocratic populist leaders, differing from traditional political parties, do not cater to any particular social group, meaning their electorate is rarely defined by political inclinations, ethnicity, gender, or social class. As discussed by the existing scholarly literature on the topic, technocratic populism argues for the existence of the general will of the citizens, therefore, different social groups do not have different political inclinations; what is best for the country does not vary according to individual identities. In this regard, this last parameter of comparison connects to the second one – straightforward representation of the people – and the third one – rejection of political plurality. It is obvious that the perceived connection to the people is the most striking feature of technocratic populism and defies the classification within one specific parameter.

In regards to the understanding of the population as an homogenous mass, this trait becomes evident in electoral campaigns – in these regards, both Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis provided multiple clear examples of their understanding of the population as a homogenous mass. As mentioned in previous chapters, both political actors appealed for votes through mainstream media; mainly, television appearances and social media. As mentioned in previous chapters, Berlusconi appealed to the entire Italian population on national television, promising the completion of a series of goals aimed at bettering the life of the Italian population. This example clearly demonstrates how Berlusconi viewed the citizens of Italy as having common political interests and goals. Andrej Babis made similar promises by sending pamphlets to all Czech households, therefore - similarly to Forza Italia – ANO can also be identified as a political party viewing the interests of the electorate as homogenous. Hence, in this regard both Babis and Berlusconi often referred to “the good of the people” adopting the idea that all citizens of the respective countries share the same political wishes. In doing so, both former prime ministers appealed to the citizens of their respective countries perceiving them as an homogeneous mass. Their electoral campaigns, as mentioned in the previous chapter, targeted the entire electoral disregarding the left-right political spectrum.

In conclusion, with respect to the fifth and last parameter of comparison, both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi fit the ideal-type of technocratic populist actors. Both actors, during their entire respective political careers, have always appealed to the entire populations of their respective countries as potential electors.

Summary of the Findings of Comparison

	Andrej Babis	Silvio Berlusconi
Opposition to the Mainstream Elite	- Established traditional political parties deemed	- Established traditional political parties deemed

	<p>inefficient and corrupt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taken advantage of political crisis. - Use of new means of communication – social media – to draw a divide between himself and the former established elite. 	<p>inefficient and corrupt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taken advantage of the crisis of the First Republic to denounce mainstream political parties.
Straightforward and Unmediated Representation of the Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “I will run the state as a firm”. - Critique of the bureaucratic processes of democracy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stressed the detachment of the First Republic from the Italian population.
Rejection of Political Plurality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both as Minister of Finance and Prime Minister, was part of coalition governments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Led the biggest political coalition in the history of the Italian Republic. - Secured the role of leader of the Italian centre-right coalition for decades.
Rejection of the Right-Left Political Spectrum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Debuted as a business-firm and entrepreneurial party. - ANO can be understood as a left-leaning political party – it entered into 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At its peak, Forza Italia was the main political party of the Italian centre-right political scene.

	coalition with the CSSD.	
Understanding of the Population as a Homogeneous Mass	- Electoral rhetoric aimed at appealing to the entire population.	- Electoral rhetoric aimed at appealing to the entire population.

In conclusion to the present chapter, the table above summarises the findings of the five parameters of comparison that have been analysed in this chapter; these parameters aimed at technocratic populist political actors. This chapter has highlighted how real-life scenarios differ from the ideal-type of technocratic populism presented by the existing academic literature. Regarding the present comparison, the above table summarises the findings of this chapter and clearly illustrates how Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi fit within the theoretical definition of technocratic populist actors. In these regards, it is apparent that with respect to the opposition to the mainstream elite both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi fit the ideal-type of technocratic populist actors, both taking advantage of political crises and expressing their distaste of traditional parties in the same manner: accusing them of corruption and inefficiency. With respect to the claims of rightful and unmediated representation of the people, both actors can be defined as technocratic populists, nonetheless, while Andrej Babis leaned towards technocratic features in his critique of the inefficient bureaucratic processes in the Czech Republic, Berlusconi had a more populist approach. The Forza Italia founder highlighted the disconnect between the mainstream political elite and ordinary citizens, underlining the distance in choice of lexicon between the two groups. Regarding the rejection of political plurality, neither Berlusconi nor Babis can be defined as technopopulist actors. As shown in the table above and highlighted by the discussion of the third parameter of comparison, both former prime ministers have only led coalition governments. Particularly, in the discussion of Silvio Berlusconi, he can be identified as totally opposite to a technocratic populist actor

according to this parameter, as he was the prime minister of the largest coalition of post-Second World War Italy. Similarly, regarding the rejection of political plurality, Silvio Berlusconi had the role of leader of the centre-right for the majority of his political career, therefore in this regard, his political career was antagonistic to that of an ideal-type technopopulist. Regarding ANO, positioning Andrej Babis' party on the right-left political spectrum is more blurred. While the party itself never adopted a clear ideological stance in these regards, the party entered into governmental coalitions only with the CSSD, an established left-wing party. Therefore, in regards to this fourth paragraph of comparison, Andrej Babis can only partially be identified as a technopopulist. Lastly, both Babis and Berlusconi understood the respective electorates as homogeneous masses, therefore fitting the ideal-type definition of technocratic populists according to the fifth parameter of comparison. In summary, the present chapter has highlighted the complexity of applying the theoretical definition of technocratic populism to real-life political actors. Even though neither Babis nor Berlusconi fit the ideal-type definition of technopopulist political leaders, both of them match the majority of the parameters identified as defining features of technocratic populist actors. As previously stated in this research, real-life examples are never a precise match to the definition provided by political theory, in light of this consideration, the discussion of Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi vis-à-vis technocratic populism has identified both of these actors as technocratic populists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has aimed at shedding some light on the phenomenon of technocratic populism in contemporary Europe through two case studies – Silvio Berlusconi and his political party, Forza Italia and Andrej Babis with his political party ANO. As explained in detail the introductory chapter of this dissertation, there is a clear research gap in academic publications that can be filled by the present research. Firstly, no scholarly publication has focused on the direct comparison between these two former prime ministers, even though multiple authors – in discussing political trends in contemporary Europe at large - have acknowledged the similarities between the two. Secondly, due to the novel focus of the academic community on technocratic populism, the theoretical understanding of this contemporary phenomenon has only been applied to a limited number of case studies, among which, the two case studies analysed in this dissertation are obviously not included. The identification and understanding of this research gap has led to the formulation of the research question focus of this dissertation: How can Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi be identified as technocratic populist actors? The following chapters of this research focused on providing a cohesive answer to this inquiry based on the discussion of the two selected case studies.

Subsequently, in the chapter titled Theoretical Framework, this dissertation discussed in depth the working definitions of technocratic populism proposed by the existing literature, in addition to providing critical definitions of populism and technocracy. As demonstrated by the analysis of the existing scholarly publications, both populism and technocracy can be defined by some core characteristics. In regards to defining populism, this phenomenon is characterised by the antagonism between “pure people” and “corrupted elite”, the latter of which denies the former its popular sovereignty. Therefore, populism argues for political representation that is based on the general will of the citizens, often portrayed by personalistic parties led by charismatic political actors. Regarding the definition of technocracy, the literature has

highlighted the core idea of understanding politics as a science. With respect to this understanding, technocratic actors are defined by their view of a tangible “good of the people” which can be realised by a government made up of educated and specialised individuals that are not selected through party membership, rather, they are recruited by technocratic leaders based on their skills.

As previously mentioned, differently from populism and technocracy, there is no universally accepted definition of technocratic populism, therefore, it is only through the analysis of the existing literature and the debates sparked within it that it was possible to reach a working definition of this political phenomenon. This research has concluded that, as of today, the most comprehensive definition of this phenomenon is that provided by Bickerton and Ancetti, who define technopopulism as the rightful representation of “the people” and the capability to competently mutate their will into policies; these authors highlight the basic elements of technocratic populism as the combination of claims to representation of the people as a whole and claims of expertise (Bickerton and Ancetti 2021, 23). This chapter then led to the identification of five parameters against which to compare political actors and serving as a tool to identify them as technocratic populist actors. These parameters were explained in detail in the Methodology section of the present research and are titled as follows: (i) the opposition to the established mainstream political elite, (ii) the claim to unmediated and straightforward political representation of the citizens, (iii) the rejection of political plurality, (iv) the rejection of the right-left political spectrum, and (v) the understanding of the population as homogeneous. Consequently, the following two chapters of this dissertation introduced the two case studies focus of the present research: Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babis. Firstly, these chapters provided an overview of these actors political lives and their parties. Then, both Berlusconi and Babis were presented through the lenses of populism, technocracy, and technocratic populism. Specifically, these chapters provided a great amount of instances in

which both actors have shown clear technocratic and populist features during their political careers. Concluding, these chapters provided the examples through which these actors were then compared to the established parameters defining technocratic populist leaders.

Lastly, the chapter titled Discussion and Comparison applied the previously explained methodology to the two case studies this dissertation focused on. In this chapter the five parameters outlined in the Methodology chapter were dissected vis-à-vis the two selected case studies. As evident in the analysis of the case studies, the parameters were not mutually exclusive and they became somewhat deformed once compared to real-life scenarios. Nonetheless, while Babis and Berlusconi might not be ideal-type technocratic populist actors, it would be erroneous to argue that the comparison among these two and that against the parameters is not critical to the understanding of technocratic populism in the context of contemporary Europe.

In regards to the first parameter of comparison – opposition to the mainstream elite -, both Berlusconi and Babis utilised political crises that their countries were undergoing to delegitimise mainstream political parties and condemn them as corrupt and inefficient. Moreover, as previously demonstrated, even while in office as prime ministers, both actors attempted at portraying a degree of externality to the mainstream elite. Therefore, both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi can be identified as technocratic populist leaders during both their electoral campaigns and their time in office.

Concerning the second parameter of comparison - straightforward and unmediated representation of the citizens – both Berlusconi and Babis appealed to their backgrounds as extremely successful businessmen to claim their capabilities in simplifying the complexity of democratic processes, which they faulted as one of the causes of inefficient political representation of the people. In discussing this parameter, one witnessed the first differences

between the two actors. Andrej Babis heavily criticised institutional proceedings as inefficient, notably arguing ‘I will run the state as a firm.’ Differently, Berlusconi denounced the non-understandability of politics by common citizens. Therefore, in regards to this second parameter, similarly to the previous one, the present research has identified both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi as technocratic populist political actors.

Regarding the rejection of political plurality – the third parameter - both ANO and Forza Italia have always been in government solely as parts of coalition governments; Berlusconi has even been the prime minister of the biggest political coalition in the history of the Italian Republic. While it might be argued these coalition governments were due to necessity, as discussed in the previous chapter, all coalition government are identifiable as non-ideal scenarios for political actors regardless of them being technopopulists or not. Therefore neither Berlusconi nor Babis can be identified as technocratic populists according to this parameter.

Concerning the rejection of the right-left political spectrum – fourth parameter - neither Andrej Babis nor Silvio Berlusconi fit the ideal-type technopopulist actor highlighted by the existing academic literature. As discussed in previous chapters, during his multi-decade long political career Silvio Berlusconi had become the leader of the political centre-right in Italy, and his party, Forza Italia, is still one of the most influential one in the Italian political arena. Regarding Andrej Babis, while he still maintained a level of externality with respect to the left-right political spectrum, currently, through its coalitions in government, ANO can be loosely identified as a left-wing party. In these regards, Berlusconi completely defied the definition of technopopulist according to this parameter. Andrej Babis appeared to fit the parameter better, but he is still far from the ideal-type technocratic populist actor in rapport to this parameter.

With respect to the fifth and last parameter of comparison of the present research – understanding of the population as an homogeneous mass – both Andrej Babis and Silvio

Berlusconi have appealed to the entire population of their respective countries during election campaigns. In doing so, these actors have confirmed their view of the population has having a general will, which is not mutated by any particular social category defining individuals – such as gender, ethnicity, and social class. Therefore, in regards to this last parameter of comparison, both Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi fit the ideal-type definition of technocratic populist political actor. Summarizing the individual discussions concerning these parameters of comparison, while neither Silvio Berlusconi nor Andrej Babis can be identified as ideal-type technopopulist actors, the label of technocratic populist fits both actors and their political parties.

In conclusion, this dissertation has discussed in depth the working definitions of technocratic populism, identifying five concise parameters that are to be interpreted as the core characteristics of contemporary technocratic populist actors. The testing of these parameters against Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi has proved both actors to adhere to the definition of technocratic populist actors.

Avenues of Further Research

As discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation, the aim of the research conducted in this dissertation is not that of providing an exhaustive and comprehensive explanation of technocratic populism in Europe. Regardless, the present research has highlighted important similarities between contemporary political actors who are definable by technocratic populist traits. Moreover, as previously discussed, this research has concluded that according to the established parameters, Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi can be identified as technocratic populist political actors. Nonetheless, the present research has also highlighted a great disparity between the ideal-type technocratic populist actors according to political theory and their real-life counterparts. Therefore, this dissertation opens avenues of further academic research in regards to technocratic populism in the context of contemporary Europe. As underlined

multiple times in previous chapters, technocratic populism must be understood as a relevant political phenomenon, playing an important role in the shaping of the European political arena.

In consequence it is possible to apply the present methodology and theoretical framework to further contemporary case studies. For instance, as mentioned in the introductory chapter of this piece, relevant authors in the field, such as Bickerton and Ancetti, have analysed technocratic populist actors in France, Spain, and Italy. Nonetheless, as highlighted by this research and the aforementioned scholars, there is a lack of comparison between European sub-regions – such as the present research discussing Southern and Central/Eastern Europe in relation to one another. Future research comparing different case studies across Europe would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of technocratic populism in contemporary Europe, providing precious insight also for the theoretical research about the topic that is still evolving and has not reached an universally accepted definition for this political phenomenon. Particularly, as technocratic populism is a recent political phenomenon, academic literature defining it within the field of political theory is still in evolution. Therefore, it is possible to keep the present methodology updated according to future research discussing technocratic populism.

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