

Delocalisation in the EU: the Embraco case on Twitter

On **19 February 2018** the appliances manufacturer **Embraco**, a unit of the **US multinational Whirlpool**, confirmed its final decision [to shut down its Italian based factory](#) to move all production to Slovakia, laying off almost **500** staff near **Turin**. Embraco's situation has been critical for years now, and pushed Embraco to seek and obtain financial aid both from the regional and the national government to keep the factory from being shut down.

Embraco started moving part of the production to **Slovakia in October 2017**, and in **December** the executives declared the intention to close the Italian branch. In February, the **Italian Minister of Economic Development Carlo Calenda** tried to negotiate alternative solutions with the company to avoid the layoffs, but Embraco rejected all proposals and confirmed their intention to move.

This decision came at a particularly sensitive time in the electoral campaign and had a strong impact on public debate in Italy, on both traditional media and social networks. Issues such as firm delocalisation and wage competition between EU countries emerged as the core of the debate. Furthermore, **many commentators stressed out the link between these developments and the EU economic integration process on the one hand, and the principle of free movement on the other** (in this case, the movement of firms and companies across EU member states). Discussions about the role of the EU have been also triggered by the decision taken by Minister Calenda to discuss the Embraco situation with the EU Commissioner for **Competition Margrethe Vestager** in **Brussels** on **February 20**. Calenda asked the EU to monitor the case and make sure that any incentive policies from Slovakia to Whirlpool happened in respect of European law.

EuVisions collected all conversations about the Embraco case that took place in the Italian Twitter-sphere between February 10 to 25, for a total amount of **50,984 tweets sent by 14,251 users**.

Figure 1. Volume of tweets over time

As the graph shows, the debate on Twitter increased in volume starting from February 19, the day Calenda met the Embraco executives, and reached a peak on the next day, on the occasion of the meeting in Brussels between the Minister and Commissioner Vestager.

By means of natural language processing (**NLP**), we were able to sort tweets featuring negative attitudes or criticisms expressed in relation to the Embraco situation from the mere informative ones. Here we used a broad criterion that included in the former category all negative statements, comments and remarks, and all critiques expressed towards the actors involved. What resulted is a subset of **35,281 critical tweets**, that is the **70%** of our initial dataset.

Criticism towards the Government

Many critical tweets point out the responsibilities of the **Italian Government** in the closure of the factory. The failure to contain the country's economic crisis and the excessively high tax burden on firms would have pushed Embraco to move the production away from Italy. Also, the government is accused of being subject to the "**neoliberal logics**" and **globalization rules**, considered as the causes behind the delocalisation and the deterioration of **workers' rights**.

Minister Calenda is particularly called into question for having "failed again", after unsuccessfully dealing with similar cases involving the national flight company [Alitalia](#) and the steel company [Ilva](#). He's also accused of showing a commitment to the Embraco workers' cause only for electoral purposes. Besides Calenda, we found that former **Prime Minister Matteo Renzi** has been strongly criticised: in many conversations Renzi is mocked for a statement in **2015** where he boasted that he had solved Whirlpool's crisis and kept Embraco from laying off workers.

These critical tweets towards the government are sent by citizens as well as by opposition leaders such as **Luigi Di Maio (5 Stars Movement)**, **Giorgia Meloni (far-right Brothers of Italy)** and **Simone Di Stefano (extreme right Casapound)**.

Criticism towards the European Union

Many negative opinions were specifically addressed to the EU institutions and actors. By means of NLP, we built a second algorithm in order to separate these particular discussions from the set of overall critical tweets. As Figure 2 shows, we found that more one out of four critical tweets (**26.2%**) is not related to national politics but is actually addressed towards the European sphere.

By means of topic modelling we identified the most distinctive words and hashtags used in the subset of EU critical tweets, when compared to all other conversations. We plotted our results in Figure 3. As the wordcloud shows, **the negative discourse around the EU is particularly focused on the consequences of the economic integration**. This is clearly visible in terms such as *dumping*, *l'inganno dell'euro* ("euro's bluff"), *italexit* and so on. The "unfair wage competition" (*concorrenza sleale*) between member states, that would be the reason why Embraco decided to shift production to Slovakia, is seen in these tweets as a consequence of the economic integration pursued through "the neoliberal logics of markets" and "globalization". **The EU institutions would also be guilty of not protecting the workers social rights at Community level.**

Figure 3. Most distinctive words in the critical tweets towards the EU

The EU is also indirectly criticized by those tweets that attack the centre-left government for its pro-European stance. The idea is that the original decision of joining the EU has resulted in giving up national sovereignty to the EU institutions, and in depriving the Italian government of useful tools of monetary and **industrial policy** that could be used to actively tackle such crisis and avoid delocalisation. This is particularly true for criticism coming from the **League party** ("#4marzovotolega") and its leader ("#Salvini") who is a long-running critic of the **EU economic integration process**.

Also, the decision of Minister Calenda to discuss the Embraco case at the EU level was criticized by tweets that describe the EU as a political entity without respect for the Italian institutions and without any interest in solving similar matters. **According to this vision, the EU would be indeed the one promoting the delocalisation process** and the wage competition at the expense of the workers' social rights.

In this context of indirect critics to the EU, the **+Europa (More Europe)** party founded by the **former EU commissioner Emma Bonino** is widely criticised for its commitment to relaunch the project of the **United States of Europe**. Many tweets claim that a deeper European

integration would only increase the episodes of delocalisation. Many of these tweets criticizing the EU are sent by political figures and election candidates. Among the most influential (most retweeted) users of the subset we unsurprisingly find some well-known actors of the [“anti-euro” front](#) such as **Claudio Borghi (League)**, but also candidates from parties that do not explicitly (or clearly) share anti-EU stances, as **Nicola Morra (5 Star Movement)** and Leftist oriented politicians such as **Stefano Fassina (Free and Equal)**.

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