

Solidarity in times of crisis - Socio-economic change and political orientations in Austria and Hungary

The recent economic crisis has severely affected citizens all over Europe, leading to high levels of insecurity and declining trust in public institutions. The populist radical-right successfully capitalises on people's anxieties by blaming scapegoats for society's problems and offering simple political answers. As recent European and national elections showed they are indeed becoming even more attractive to a significant part of the electorate. However, reactions to the consequences of the crisis and to experiences of deprivation do not necessarily lead to authoritarianism, nationalism and xenophobia. Many people voice democratic and universal-solidary protest against the worsening of living and working conditions and join progressive social movements, particularly in southern Europe. These opposing responses reflect a growing tension in Europe between nationalist and exclusivist concepts of solidarity, on the one hand, and inclusive and transnational ones on the other.

The proposed research project SOCRIS aims at investigating the impact of the intensified socio-economic change following the recent economic crisis on political orientations. It will build on the findings of a former European study conducted between 2001 and 2004 (SIREN, 5th framework programme) which showed how the transformation of working life added to the appeal of the extreme right in eight countries. As a follow-up study, SOCRIS will investigate the current situation and assess the impact of the crisis. It will go beyond the SIREN study as it will not only focus on people's affinity to right-wing populism and extremism but put more emphasis on democratic and inclusive political orientations and on the ongoing symbolic struggles over different forms of solidarity.

The project will focus on Austria and Hungary which were part of the original SIREN sample and provide the unique opportunity to investigate two countries both having a strong populist radical right, yet affected by the crisis very differently. Using methodological triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, SOCRIS will explore how individuals perceive and react to the consequences of the crisis. It will investigate how recent developments have fuelled attraction to the populist radical right and to right-wing extremism and where and why, on the other hand, democratic and inclusive orientations have been strengthened. The comparison over time and between the two countries will provide a deeper understanding of the complex processes of political subjectivity.