

**THE ABANDONED WORKER  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND THE ATTRACTION  
OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM**

**EUROPEAN SYNTHESIS REPORT ON QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The main objective of the SIREN project is to contribute to the understanding of the political reverberations of recent socio-economic changes by means of an empirical, comparative study. This research report represents the main results of the qualitative phase of the project and depicts the synthesis analysis of the country findings in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Switzerland.

Focusing on subjective perceptions of and individual reactions to changes in working life and analysing potential interrelationships with politics, in particular the appeal of right-wing populism and extremism, the qualitative findings are of crucial importance. They enable an *understanding* of how people are affected by socio-economic change and whether this makes them susceptible to right-wing populist and extremist ideologies, insights that have so far been missing by and large.

Right-wing populism and extremism comprise a wide variety of ideologies, movements and parties with marked differences according to national political traditions. Nevertheless, there is a common core that includes, among other things, a restrictive notion of citizenship, demands for a culturally homogeneous community and the view that society's benefits should be restricted to those who have made a substantial contribution to society. Right-wing extremism and right-wing populism therefore are not distinct phenomena; rather, the difference is one of degree. In the research a common definition of core ideological elements was used for the analysis of people's "receptiveness" to right-wing extremist attitudes.

Between them, the eight SIREN teams conducted a total of 313 and analysed 279 qualitative interviews on the basis of common interview guidelines. The samples in all countries encompassed different socio-economic situations (advancement, threat of decline and precariousness) and different political orientations, i.e. both people "receptive" to and "non-receptive" to right-wing populism and extremism. The interpretation and analysis was conducted on the basis of common procedures and resulted in interview reports and country reports. This European synthesis report is based on the eight country reports (project Deliverable 2) and on 96 English summaries of selected individual cases.

### ***Views on work***

During the last decade working life in all countries under investigation has decisively changed due to technological change, internationalisation, privatisation, intensified competition and more flexible labour markets. The most important ways in which people have experienced recent changes are redundancies and early retirement schemes, transfers to other organisational units and jobs, changes in work organisation, new styles of management, new demands on knowledge and skills, increased workloads, higher job and employment insecurity and problems of access to standard employment relationships and long-term security of employment. Individuals often react with

feelings of injustice and heightened subjective insecurity. They pointed out their performance orientation, their contributions to the company or to the economy, and their subordination to societal norms which have gone unrecognised or unrewarded. They suffer from breaches of implicit contracts, which result in a denial of the income, recognition and status they had expected in return. Others, those who can be said to have benefited from socio-economic change, often give a more positive account but also mention the high personal costs of success.

Reactions to increased insecurity are highly varied. People in very precarious employment situations have simply given up thinking about the future. They seem to have resigned themselves to the impossibility of making any plans and being forced to passively adapt to anything that happens to them. The inability to plan the future not only relates to work and employment but also to consumption and private life. There is a great fear of social isolation. At the other extreme are successful highly qualified and younger people who are confident that their education, their competencies and social relations will allow them to actively adapt to the ever-changing requirements of working life. What is noteworthy though is that these people do not seem to have a master plan for their careers either.

Overall, what emerges from the interpretation of the subjective accounts of changes in work in all eight countries is that for a large number of the respondents the attraction of work or, related to less privileged positions, the acceptability or bearableness of work has declined or even disappeared. It seems that some of the changes in working life are threatening the basic balance between what the employees put into work, in terms of efforts and sacrifices, and the employers' and society's provision of social security and social recognition in return. This leads to a feeling of injustice, which is experienced very emotionally as an injury and offence. This "mode of attachment" to work can be affected by different conditions for different groups of employees.

### ***Views on politics***

The analysis of political orientations showed that "out-group rejection" and "in-group favouritism" are the central issues within different patterns of affinity for right-wing populist and extremist ideologies. Furthermore, individuals with right-wing populist or extremist attitudes call for an authoritarian state, prefer authoritarian solutions and go as far as to admitting that they either vote for or are members of right-of-centre political parties. Since our interviewees expressed their sympathies with right-wing populist or extremist ideologies according to their particular social status, educational background, age, gender and personal experiences, there is more than just one approach to the extreme right. The archetypes that are presented and illustrated with individual cases in the report show a wide range of patterns of interpretation and coping:

1. Members of the middle class with right-wing conservative and nationalist mentality
2. Threat to middle-class status and identity, insecurity through modernisation; nostalgia and threat to cultural identity

3. Worker identity and pragmatic change from Social Democracy to right-wing populism
4. The community of decent and hard-working people and the devaluation of subordination
5. Precariously employed and unemployed women workers, struggle for survival, double disadvantage and preferential treatment of foreigners
6. Plea for a better welfare state, protection of the national majority
7. Unemployment and (early) retirement, questioning self-esteem and self-consciousness
8. The predominance of the feeling that the mixture of cultures and the dynamics of globalisation threaten the national and cultural identity as well as the work ethic and destroy the essential social units
9. The impact of family political values (anti-Communism and anti-Semitism) on the political orientation of employees in a country in transition

Even though our research focuses on the drawing power of the extreme right we have to bear in mind that this particular form of political conversion is just one among a wide range of different patterns of interpretation and coping. The empirical data also provide information about the conversion from one position or camp to political abstention, illustrate political conversions which tend toward “voice”, or provide examples for conversions from one position to another. Negative experiences in the world of work, which led some to endorse right-wing populist messages, strengthened the social-democratic, conservative or liberal convictions of others.

### ***The interaction between socio-economic change and right-wing populism and extremism***

The qualitative interviews were aimed at leading to an understanding of subjective perceptions of socio-economic change and of points of attraction of right-wing populism. The integration of the findings on people’s views on changes in work and on their views on politics gave rise to conclusions on how experiences in the world of work may be transformed into potentials of political subjectivity. What can be inferred from our sample of more than 300 in-depth interviews is that socio-economic change is in fact an important factor for explaining the rise of right-wing populism in various European countries. Only rarely in the interpretation of interviews focusing on how people are affected by socio-economic change was this not a decisive contribution to the understanding of the attraction of populism. In the report, we nevertheless described also other issues, such as, for example, discontent with mainstream political parties or family socialisation.

In the literature, the interrelation between changes in working life and support for right-wing populism and extremism is theorised in different ways (see Flecker 2002). Focusing on the problem of increasing complexity and intensified contradictions of social life, populist messages and, in particular, scapegoat theories and authoritarian views can help individuals to create a subjective sense of consistency in their

comprehension of social reality. In a world where traditional institutions no longer provide any orientation, views and concepts based on ethnicity, anti-elite sentiments or in-group/out-group distinctions may fill the gap. A related theoretical argument points out the damage to social and personal identity caused in periods of accelerated socio-economic change. In addressing imaginary ethnic or national communities, right-wing populism serves the need to compensate for lost certainties and offers opportunities for identification that may help to stabilise the self. Interestingly, our research does not strongly support these assumptions on right-wing populism's function of providing orientation and supporting identity. Of course, these interrelations can be said to play a certain role, but they are not the only and not even the prevailing one. Within the main patterns that emerged, other theoretical considerations seemed to be more helpful for the understanding of people's receptiveness to extreme-right ideologies.

More indications were found for theoretical views stressing that the individuals affected by far-reaching socio-economic change need to reconsider their position in the social world. Being faced with social decline or under threat of social exclusion, paying too high a price for success or for simply keeping up the standard of living, or not being able, despite hard work and painful subordination, to reach the position one aspired to may trigger strong feelings of frustration and injustice. It is exactly these potentials of political subjectivity that are targeted by populists arguing that the decent and hard-working ordinary people do not get what they deserve or that they are betrayed and exploited by both the elite and the outcasts who do not contribute their fair share. This consideration, which takes what Bourdieu called "positional suffering" as a starting point, is strongly supported by two main patterns that emerged from the interpretation of interviews in all countries under investigation.

One such pattern involves intensive feelings of injustice stemming from frustrations of legitimate expectations relating to various aspects of work, employment, social status or standard of living. Company restructuring, redundancies, early retirement, new management styles or intensified competition on the labour and housing markets devalue qualifications, acquired experience, previous hard work and sacrifices and bring to nothing the expected rewards for the subordination to the demands of a pitiless world of work. The experiences differ widely and may range from layoff out of the blue or involuntary early retirement to lack of recognition of professional experiences and contributions. Such frustrations are often expressed as feelings of injustice: people refer to other social groups that do not subordinate themselves to the hardships of work to the same extent and who are taken much better care of or who are able to arrange things for themselves illegally. These are, on the one hand, managers and politicians with high incomes, "golden handshakes" and generous pensions and, on the other hand, people living on welfare instead of working or refugees supported by the state. Of course, these patterns of meaning are strongly influenced by hegemonic ideologies and public debates on distributive justice and its violations. But quite often, against the background of people's experiences, these forms of subjective reactions were highly understandable. The core theme is that the decent and hard working and therefore morally superior people are being betrayed and that they have to realise that it was stupid to stay honest

and loyal and to subordinate themselves to the exacting demands of an increasingly cruel world of work. This means that political messages and ideologies of right-wing populism that address the double demarcation of “the people” from the elites on the top and from the outcasts at the bottom of society quite easily find a resonance.

A second clear pattern in the mental processing of changes in working life has at its core the fear of *déclassement*, the insecurities and the feelings of powerlessness that are associated with industrial decline, precarious employment or the devaluation of skills and qualifications. The experience of being a plaything of economic developments or anonymous powers can be clearly linked with right-wing populists’ presentation of the population as passive victims of overpowering opponents. The same goes for people’s nostalgic accounts of the good old (working) times and populists’ glorification of traditional communities. In some cases, authoritarian reactions to insecurity and powerlessness could be observed, while others made clear that a lack of political representation contributes to the feeling of not being protected as workers. People attracted to the extreme right seem to be convinced that they can only count on themselves. Since social-democratic parties have shown less and less interest in the workers’ world, the public recognition of the problems of social decline and precariousness seems to have become one of the competitive advantages of populist parties. The feeling of powerlessness not only relates to the individual level but also to collective entities such as the region, the working class or the nation. If people express their individual concerns in terms of the state of the country, the influence of the neoliberal ideology of competitive nationalism becomes obvious.

Differences between countries result from different aspects of socio-economic change being experienced at the time of the research, but also from the different agendas of the various right-wing populist or extremist parties. Regarding the competition on the labour market but also in other fields such as housing, the consequences of reunification and the immigration of ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe played a major role in Germany, while in France it is the population and, in particular, the youth with a north-African background or in Austria refugees from the Balkans that dominate the debates. In Hungary it is people’s struggle with the consequences of transition combined with anti-Communist legacies and people’s experience of parliamentary democracy as a “puppet theatre”, whereas in Switzerland economic difficulties coincide with damage to the image of Switzerland and the vanishing of traditional Swiss particularities. While in Denmark and Belgium the deterioration of welfare provision was strongly linked with the issue of immigration, the main point in Italy seems to be the combination of high levels of insecurity and a deep distrust and disenchantment with politics. These differences in the ways in which right-wing extremists and populists take advantage of discontent are in fact variations of a common theme.

Where does this leave us in relation to the popular and rather simplistic views on “modernisation losers” being seduced by populists? The answer to this question that was actually one of the starting points of our research is not straightforward. As will be shown at length in this report, adverse experiences in the process of socio-economic change and negative subjective evaluations of such changes are actually crucial to

understanding the appeal of right-wing populist political messages and propositions. Leaving aside the terminological problem of calling recent changes “modernisation”, one problem is that thereby the “winners” are left out of the picture, another is to define the group of so-called losers. Our findings show that simply using socio-economic characteristics such as “semi-skilled workers”, as is often done in election research, does not seem to be very helpful. Different societal categories are faced with problems of social reproduction: small entrepreneurs, sections of the middle class, fractions of the working class, etc. In addition, people whose objective situation has not deteriorated, or has even improved, may find it necessary to re-position themselves in social space in relation to others or may find that there is a high price to pay for some aspects of their involvement in working life, or social life in general. What the debate on modernisation losers also glosses over is the fact that it is not the losers in the increasingly fierce competition who are the problem, but the competition itself, in which subordination to authority, compliance with societal norms and willingness to work hard and make sacrifices is no protection against *déclassement* or precariousness.

What also contrasts with conventional wisdom on the issue is the finding that people express their problems or frustrations mostly in collective terms, talking about themselves as “the ordinary people” or “the workers”. This clearly reflects the consciousness of the collective position in the social world. In a distorted way, namely in the double demarcation against the elite and the underclass, this position is addressed by right-wing populism. What is more, many of the frustrations, anxieties and feelings of injustice clearly relate to workers’ interest in social recognition and societal integration. In all, our findings support the thesis of right-wing populism as a child of the neoliberal revolution and the absence of a convincing political left. And this is not captured at all by talk about frustrated modernisation losers.

## INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the SIREN project is to contribute to the understanding of the political reverberations of recent socio-economic changes by means of an empirical, comparative study. This research report represents the main results of the qualitative phase of the project and depicts the synthesis analysis of the country findings in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Switzerland.

Focusing on subjective perceptions of and individual reactions to changes in working life and analysing potential interrelationships with politics, in particular the appeal of right-wing populism and extremism, the qualitative findings are of crucial importance for a number of reasons:

- Qualitative and interdisciplinary research and insights that enable an *understanding* of how people are affected by socio-economic change and whether this makes them susceptible to right-wing populist and extremist ideologies have so far been missing by and large. We think that qualitative research as well as the applied interdisciplinary approach of bringing together the sociology of work, social psychology and political science is necessary to do justice to and grasp the complexity of our research topic.
- In the SIREN project an additional challenge and exciting aspect is the circumstance that the interdisciplinary qualitative quest for new insights in socio-economic change and right-wing populism and extremism is carried out at European level: analysing the respective country results against the background of other countries enables comparative and contrasting perspectives that ensure a better understanding of country phenomena. However, some of our results suggest that – irrespective of differing political systems, historical contexts and socio-economic country backgrounds – quite similar forms of interpretation, reactions and coping or resistance strategies were to be found with regard to increasing levels of insecurity and perceived social injustice in all European countries.
- The qualitative investigation intentionally included a methodological approach of changing perspectives and trying to understand socio-economic change and politics from the viewpoint of affected people and political subjects. This approach is in itself a political project as views and voices are being brought into the limelight that are underrepresented in public discourse. In public discourse shaped by the elites, disadvantaged groups on the labour market end up looking like incapable or unwilling victims of modernisation while the voters of right-wing populist parties appear as irrational fools deceived by charismatic leaders. From our results it can be deduced that it is also such pejorative perceptions of workers and voters that promote the success of right-wing populism and extremism.

The popular assumption of “modernisation losers” being drawn towards right-wing populism arises exactly from the elitist discourses and perceptions of workers and voters mentioned above (which are also put forward by numerous researchers). We were sceptical about this hypothesis of just the “losers” being drawn towards right-wing

populism, and we also wanted to deal with the “modernisation winners”. The foundation for this scepticism was twofold: first, we assumed that subjective perceptions and interpretations are decisive for understanding individual reactions, because these depend on whether people feel threatened or inspired by socio-economic changes; what is more, objective socio-economic positions do not necessarily correlate with subjective perceptions of these positions. This means that objective “winners” might perceive themselves as threatened by decline or having to fight hard to stay on the “winning” track. Second, we were interested in empirically following the theoretical hypothesis that the increasingly influential regime of neoliberalism inspires a new form of right-wing extremist ideology with competitive nationalism and social Darwinism as its core elements. Should this hypothesis be valid, not only people in precarious or declining socio-economic positions but exactly those in advancement situations might be susceptible to right-wing extremist ideologies. Therefore we selected three groups of interviewees representing different socio-economic situations: “advancement”, “(threat of) decline”, and “precariousness”, the definition of which will be given in the first chapter of this report.

We attempted to look at changes in working life from the vantage point of those affected and tried to understand the relative advantages and disadvantages involved. This meant taking account of the world view of our interlocutors, their images of society and of their position within society, their aspirations and hopes related to work, employment and standard of living and related to concomitant social status and social integration. Analysing subjective perceptions of socio-economic change also meant analysing how experiences in working life interfere with people’s constructions of identity. This was aimed to result, first, in a description of the actual meaning of current changes in work and employment for those concerned and, second, in a representation of its consequences for people’s “political subjectivity”, which, in turn, should make it possible to understand the appeal of right-wing populism and extremism.

Defining right-wing populism and extremism is difficult at a European level since the concepts and terminologies more or less established in the eight countries under investigation are heavily influenced by the political country phenomena. Studies conducted by Lipset, Heitmeyer, Betz, Holzer, Jaschke, etc. have conclusively categorised nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism and “*Führertum*” (“leadership”) as elements of *right-wing extremism* (Gärtner 2000:151). Despite the confusion enveloping this term, there is a consensual view concerning this movement’s core ideologies: Right-wing extremist ideology propagates a belief in the superiority of one race or culture over others (in this case that of the European race/culture). The term race is employed in this discussion as a social construction, not a biological one. Essential to this theory is the notion of racial superiority based on a distorted interpretation of Darwin’s “Theory of Evolution”, explicitly expressed and summarised in the idea of “survival of the fittest”. Right-wing extremist ideology proclaims a state of emergency for the “nation”: its very existence and ideals are under siege. The nation must therefore protect itself against all alien elements. Absolute priority and protection should be given to the nation’s own interests and a belligerent stance dominates political interactions with other nations and their governments. The essence of this doctrine is best



summarised in the phrase “One’s own people first”. This political mindset is at the core of right extremist/populist parties’ debate on immigration.

According to Holzer (1993), right-wing extremist ideologies are comprised of the following elements: the idea of the *Volk* [people/nation, or ethnic community] as a living organism with a hierarchical-patriarchal order; ethnocentrism and racism and a nationalist view of history; authoritarianism and anti-pluralism; the construction of enemy images and the projection of problems onto scapegoats. This definition makes it possible to differentiate between two essential dimensions of right-wing extremism: right-wing extremism in the form of parties, organisations, activist groups, the media, etc. on the one hand and sociological right-wing extremism as expressed in attitudes, mentalities, patterns of thought and behaviour, as well as electoral behaviour on the other, with “the far greater area of sociological right-wing extremism forming the reservoir drawn upon by political right-wing extremism” (Neugebauer 1998:2).

The expressions radical populism, neo-populism or *right-wing populism* are frequently used synonymously. The etymological definition of populism states that the term is applicable to any person, especially a politician or political leader, who claims to represent the interests, views and tastes of the common people, particularly as distinct from those of the rich or powerful (Webster’s Dictionary). However, Michael Kazin, author of “Populist Persuasion”, offers a more in-depth description of this concept. He describes populism as a steadfast yet inconsistent style of political rhetoric deeply rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He assesses populism as a movement which can swing to the left or the right, demonstrate tolerance or intolerance: “It can promote civil discourse and political participation or promote scapegoating, demagoguery and conspiricism.” (Kazin 2000:10).

*Right-wing* populism can be defined as identity politics in contrast to interest-group politics invoking common interests “of a category that in any case no longer have a common interest, but to whom a common identity is attached as the basis for policy and political representation” (Steinert 1999:6). Enemy images are particularly useful for populist agitation as they attract attention, passions and common upsurge in feelings as well as creating a closing of ranks (ibid.).

While populist strategies are characterised by not being restricted by a clear set of ideas or by the need to ground political propositions in an ideological framework, the right-wing populist parties in Europe nevertheless have a distinct ideological platform. This includes, among other things, a restrictive notion of citizenship, demands for a culturally homogeneous community, and the view that society’s benefits should be restricted to those who have made a substantial contribution to society (Hainsworth 2000, Betz 2002). What follows from this is that right-wing extremism and right-wing populism are not distinct phenomena; rather, the difference is one of degree.

“By appearing to be populist, right-wing extremism alters perhaps its demeanour, but not its essence. Therefore that which is defined as right-wing populism is not a new phenomenon or trend which contrasts or competes with right-wing extremism as such.” (Butterwegge 1996:28)

For this reason and for the purpose of analytical clarity and differentiation we took the core dimensions of right-wing extremism as criteria when assessing the degree of “receptiveness” of interviewees to right-wing extremism *and* populism. As will be

described in more detail in the first chapter of this report these dimensions are out-group-rejection, in-group favouritism, authoritarianism and rejection of institutions of representative democracy.

Between them the eight SIREN teams conducted a total of 313 and analysed 279 qualitative interviews. This report is based on the eight country reports (project Deliverable 2)<sup>1</sup> and on 96 summaries of selected individual interviews. In the first chapter we will present the methodology used in the research, then, in Chapter 2, briefly describe the main changes in working life in the countries under investigation as a basis for the description of subjective perceptions and evaluations of these changes which are presented in Chapter 3. The relations between perceptions of socio-economic change and political orientations will be presented in Chapter 4 on the basis of illustrative cases and summarised in more general terms in Chapter 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Balazs, Gabrielle/Faguer, Jean-Pierre/Rimbert, Pierre, Widespread competition, “déclassement” and political conversions. Interim country report on qualitative findings – France, Noisy le Grand 2002.  
De Weerd, Yves/Descheemaeker, Frederik/De Witte, Hans, Increased work pressure: a relevant but insufficient explanation. Interim country report on qualitative findings (Flanders), Leuven 2002.  
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Grinderslev, Edvin/Thoft, Eva, Xenophobic populism in Denmark – the Welfare State under pressure. Interim country report on qualitative findings – Denmark, Copenhagen 2002.  
Hentges, Gudrun/Meyer, Malte, Right-Wing Extremist attitudes in Germany – Consequences of competitive nationalism and neoliberalism. Interim country report on qualitative findings (Germany), Köln 2002.  
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Plomb, Fabrice/Poglia Mileti, Francesca/Tondolo, Riccardo/Schultheis, Franz, Elementary forms of right wing populism: Facing socio-economic changes in today's Switzerland. Interim country report on qualitative findings – Switzerland, Neuchâtel 2002.  
Tóth, András/Grajczár, István, Socio-economic changes and attraction to right wing extremism in Hungary: Perceptualisation of Present frustrations through the lens of the Past. Interim country report on qualitative findings – Hungary, Budapest 2002.

## 1. **METHODICAL ASPECTS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

The aim of the following research is to analyse subjective perceptions of and individual coping with socio-economic changes, particularly in the workplace. It is intended to clarify whether reactions to the upheavals in this area contribute to the growing support for right-wing populist politics. 313 in-depth interviews were carried out with people who had been either negatively or positively affected by socio-economic change in terms of income, status or job security. 279 of them were selected for the analysis.

An adequate methodology had to avoid two main biases: on one hand, the “biographical illusion”, which raises psychological properties of an individual up to general and collective explanations, and on the other hand “economism”, which emphasises objective factors of economic decline but neglects resources of social reconversion (cultural or social factors).

A focus of the survey were economic areas in which job opportunities and working conditions have changed greatly over recent decades. Almost all countries under observation have witnessed a growing influence of right-wing populist politics over the last decade. In Austria for example, the right-wing populist FPÖ formed a coalition with the conservative ÖVP at the beginning of 2000. While the interviews were being conducted, France passed through two national elections with stunning successes for the FN leader Le Pen in the presidential election of 21st April and 5th May 2002 and the general elections of the 9th and 16th June, 2002.

**Table 1: Number of the interviews carried out in each country/total number of interviews**

Country	Total number of interviewees	Selected interviewees	Men	Women
Austria	32	32	20	12
Belgium	42	42	36	6
Denmark	36	31	18	13
France	40	32	20	12
Germany	52	52	42	10
Hungary	42	32	21	11
Italy	37	26	13	13
Switzerland	32	32	23	9
	313	279	193	86

The interviews were tape-recorded. An average interview lasted an hour and a half; a few lasted beyond two-and-a-half hours. The transcriptions of the interviews in a

generally reader-friendly manner allowed us a detailed account of the content. While all interviews were at least briefly summarised, altogether 96 detailed and in-depth interview analyses with extensive quotations have been provided by the eight research teams. Quotations were selected on the basis of whether they could be understood as confirmations or refutations of our hypotheses and correlations.

## **1.1. Selection principles of the interviewees and description of the sample**

### **1.1.1. Socio-economic change**

*Three categories* of affectedness were constructed:

- **Advancement:** people working as self-employed or employees who have experienced an improvement of their occupational situation, of their income and their current or future chances on the labour market. What counts here is not high income or security *per se* but the professional advancement made possible by socio-economic change in the chosen sectors.
- **(Threat of) decline:** people who are (still) in (long-term) employment but who are affected by worsening conditions (e.g. wages, working conditions, type of work, flexibility/mobility demands, etc.) and/or increasing insecurity, such as company restructuring.
- **(Increasing) precariousness:** people working freelance (e.g. on a contract-for-work basis or as freelance employees) and who are unable to earn a secure long-term income on this basis; people in short-term employment with a high level of insecurity, people in early retirement and unemployment.

The construction of these three categories was based on objective situations or positions in the world of work (e.g. employment conditions, wages or known changes in the conditions in a previously nationalised company) and not on the subjective assessments of the interviewees regarding decline, precariousness or advancement.

### **1.1.2. Political attitudes of the interviewees/affinity to right-wing extremism**

The following dimensions, recorded with a corresponding “instrument” aimed at understandable categorisation, were used to define the “high receptiveness” category:

- *Out-group rejection* (e.g. xenophobia or rejection of minorities)
- *In-group favouritism* (e.g. nationalism)
- *Right-wing authoritarianism* (e.g. authoritarian attitudes)
- *Anti-system feelings* (e.g. being disillusioned with politics plus rejection of democratic structures)

This tool allowed us on the one hand to address the particularities of each country and on the other hand to compare their common features. The aim of the overall sample was

a well-balanced distribution of the interviews over the categories of “*low*” and “*high receptiveness for right-wing populism*”.

The characteristic of “receptiveness” was the most difficult to establish in the selection of interviewees, as it could only be verified in the course of the interview analysis. This meant that in seeking interview partners, the research teams concentrated on those for whom a high receptivity to right-wing populism could be presupposed (on the basis of the opinions of intermediaries). If this was not confirmed in the course of the interview or in the assessment, then the person fell into the group of low or non-receptiveness.

Finally, the political orientation of interviewees turned out to be distributed as follows:

**Table 2: Number of interviewees according to political orientation**

Country/N. int.	Receptive	In-between	Non-receptive
Austria/32	17		15
Belgium/42	16		26
Denmark/31	15		16
France/32	11	9	12
Germany/52	19		33
Hungary/32	18	6	8
Italy/26	11		15
Switzerland/32	19		13
Total	120	19	140

### ***Selection of economic sectors***

The first sectors chosen by all European partners were public sectors that had been privatised. This public ownership constituted the condition of a comparison between the different national qualitative surveys, in spite of the weight of national specificities. We also selected sectors that had undergone major changes in terms of industrial dynamic (decline or advancement). The choice of telecommunications facilitated the study of liberalisation policies: great waves of mergers involving public companies, restructuring, lay-offs and widespread competition.

Finally, the sectors chosen for this study have, as a rule, been subject to rapid change during the last ten to fifteen years. The issue of this *rapidity* was of crucial importance. It is in fact the one condition allowing the observation of the assumed link between socio-economic change and the attractiveness of ideas of parties of the extreme right. While it is difficult to perceive long-term tendencies of change, it is indeed possible to describe the manner of individual reaction to increasingly rapid changes of their professional life.

Before examining the subjective perceptions we first analysed the objective changes in the company and/or working and employment conditions of the interviewees (i.e. downsizing, privatisation, shift from open-ended to temporary contracts, etc.). Our field work was guided by the logic of the environment. It focused on working milieus in the sectors where stability had been questioned due to restructuring, changes in management, computerisation or transformation of working technologies.

**Table 3: Selected sectors by country**

Country/N. int.	IT	Telecom/ Post Office	Public transport	Health & Education	Services Retail, service to persons and companies	Industry Engineering, steel, auto industry, textiles, construction
Austria/32	X	X			X	X
Belgium/42		X	X			X
Denmark/31	X	X	X	X		X
France/32	X				X	X
Germany/52	X	X	X			X
Hungary/32	X	X	X	X	X	X
Italy/26	X	X			X	X
Switzerland/32	X	X			X	X

### ***Variation according to age, gender and region***

A variation has been achieved according to the following socio-demographic criteria: social origin, age, education level, gender, and region. Women are quite underrepresented. First, there are fewer women receptive to right wing extremism. Second, women felt obviously far less encouraged to respond to political questions.

Research teams in Hungary, France, Austria and Switzerland selected sectors linked with specific regions in order to illustrate the variance of local effects. Grenoble and Moselle in France, for example, are two frontier-areas: on the one hand, a multinational high-tech corporation, which developed within an industrial zone in the middle of a large university town near the Swiss border, and on the other hand three former steel-producing valleys in Alsace, which had been torn apart by industrial restructuring.

### **1.2. How did we get into contact with the interviewees?**

According to the principles of research stated above, we contacted the interview partners mainly through privileged informants, who at the same time enabled us to understand the impact of change on each working milieu and led us directly to the persons most affected by the changes. They improved our method of selecting from the

working milieus that interested us and thus enabled us to base this study not on a mere collection of unrelated interviews but on milieus in which the people encountered share certain common conditions.

The study was presented to the interviewees as a survey on “changes in occupational life, personal experiences and the role of politics”. We did not introduce the research as focusing on right wing extremism, but, as indeed it also does, on socio-economic change and views on society.

### ***Search and selection strategies:***

- Trade unions officials, shop stewards and works councils  
Trade union contacts (representatives of various political fractions): shop stewards who were informed about the subject of the study functioned as intermediaries. Nearly all participating teams relied on this method. Some trade union activists provided us with a list of names and office telephone numbers from different levels of the company.
- Human resources  
In addition to trade union sources, research teams in Italy, Belgium and France asked company human resource managers to make contact with interviewees.
- Common acquaintances  
Some participants were contacted through the broader circle of acquaintances (e.g. friends or job colleagues of acquaintances previously unknown to the researchers), who were asked whether they knew people working in various socio-economic conditions (i.e. advancement, decline and/or precariousness) who would be willing to give us an interview. This was especially helpful for the access to interview partners working as freelancers. After first contacts had been established, we proceeded to recruit participants through the snowball technique: interviewees were asked to introduce us to a person in their same working conditions, without mentioning their political orientation.
- Monographic perspective and specific working milieus (Switzerland (Neuchâtel), France (Lorraine and Grenoble), Hungary, Austria)  
Some teams chose working milieus in changing industrial sectors traditionally rooted in special regions. These milieus of work are strongly tied to social milieus. The advantage of the monographic perspective lies in the possibility of relating individual careers to collective history and conversely seeing this history as simultaneously experienced by all. The large amount of information gathered pertaining to the environment of an enterprise or an industrial sector makes it possible to put individual accounts into focus and to tie macro-economic transformations to the ones experienced on a personal level.
- Other means  
Polling institutes specialising in voter surveys in Denmark (people contacted on the telephone in connection with a survey were asked if they could consider taking part

in an interview concerning their experiences of social and economic change and whether such experiences had any effect on their political standpoint); through market institute surveys (Germany) and through other surveys. The Danish team proceeded through a welfare-state study being carried out at their laboratory. The purpose of that project was to explore possible connections between people's values, perceptions of and political attitudes to the welfare state. A quarter of the people in the sample interviewed in connection with this study were found suitable as they fulfilled the fundamental condition that they had worked in the past decade and hence experienced socio-economic changes. Other methods of the recruitment process also included: candidates for local elections (Germany), newspaper advertisements (Germany), private internet websites with both work-related and right-wing populist content (Germany), work foundations and training schemes searching for former course participants (Austria), rural municipalities (Austria).

### **1.3. Difficulties, biases, achievements**

The main difficulty is encapsulated in the SIREN hypothesis: if there were a link between socio-economic change and right-wing populism and extremism, how could population groups that have been hardest hit by socio-economic change be interviewed? How can an academic researcher establish a relationship of trust with the most anomic and/or dominated persons?

As a result, SIREN teams encountered difficulties such as:

- getting in contact with interviewees receptive to right-wing populism and extremism. Right-wing-extremism attraction as selection criterion tends to ward off the most self-censored individuals, or to favour the most militant.
- getting into contact with lower-level employees, temporary workers, precarious employees, the unemployed. Temporary workers are hard to get hold of and very hard to motivate for an interview outside working hours.

These problems explain the unbalanced aspect of some countries' samples, especially with regard to gender, age, and unemployment variables. Being aware of these biases and of their inevitability, we tried to control their effects rather than claiming they do not exist. SIREN partners avoided the positivist illusion of a representative sample, and paid special attention to potential biases related to the mediation and arrangement process of the interviews. The problems and lessons of the selection of interviewees that the various teams might have encountered were discussed in depth.

Getting into contact and building a relationship with the interviewees was a specific task in its own right. Contact with interviewees was aided by prior knowledge of the areas. Regular visits allowed us to build up a relationship of confidence with the providers of information, the purpose of which proved to be positive in neutralising the suspicions that are almost systematically aroused by the curious questioning of a "stranger".



## 1.4. Structure of the interview guidelines

As a methodological instrument we chose the qualitative “problem-centred guided interview”. Moreover, we referred to principles of interviewing that Pierre Bourdieu described in his chapter on “Understanding” in *La misère du monde* (1993). The internationally standardised guidelines included the following subject areas: employment history, subjective perceptions, affectedness by and interpretation of socio-economic change, and political attitudes and orientation. This instrument requires an indicative and not coercive use: each research team had translated it into the national context and proceeded according to its usual research methods. Moreover, the structure and the process of each interview was determined by the situation of the interviewee rather than by the specifications of the interview guidelines.

*The guidelines’ main topics:*

### 1. Socio-economic change

- The occupational situation of the interviewee
- Company, size of the company, subcontractor or core company, private or public, position within the company, status, seniority, income
- Working conditions, working hours, flexibility, work rhythm, workload/strain
- Relationship with superiors, with colleagues, with customers (humiliations, verbal violence, work hazards, isolation ...)
- Economic and social transformations in the 1980s and 1990s; point of view on changes, “crisis”
- Experience of unemployment, experience of non-standard employment (precarious, temporal/agency work, public work schemes)
- Changes of living and working conditions – insecurity, precariousness, relative decline
- Consequences of stress, health effects
- Effects on those close to you, on your neighbours, on the neighbourhood
- National and international dimensions
- Multinational companies, mergers and acquisitions, foreign investment, relocation of jobs, competition from abroad, European Union and the changes, the euro, etc.
- The particular effects of economic internationalisation on the business sector

### 2. Perception of the occupational group:

- Perception of the interviewee’s position within the occupational group (feelings of distrust, of stigmatisation, of being ignored, marginalised as a person)
- The perception of threats at work
- Problems of self-classification: the non-classifiables, neither workers nor bourgeois

### **3. The relations to politics (history of political opinions or activities)**

- Political opinions
- Relations to politics
- Distrust, indifference, or, on the contrary, political activities, trade unionism. The political capital (position in politics: grassroots activist, leader, expert, editor, security guard) will be examined in detail as well as the biographical framework explaining the contact with political activists
- “Alternative” politics: associations, charities, NGOs
- Experiences of politics in private life: conflicts with neighbours, family conflicts, conflicts at work, in public transport, aggression
- Perception of changes in politics/political view of the social world

### **4. Biography, history of education, social history**

- Age, gender, nationality
- Parents’ professions or occupations
- Family situation, occupation of the husband, wife, children
- Marginalisation or integration of the family
- Social mobility (rise or decline), geographic mobility, family immigration
- Illnesses, accidents, social misfortunes (early death of parents, prison, psychiatric hospital)
- Upbringing: authoritarian, liberal, no supervision
- Education, studies: private (religious) or public, curricula, diploma, subject: science/technical or humanities, difficulties at school, experience of school failure, changing schools
- Other status ambiguities: autodidact, degradation of position

#### **1.5. *Methods of interpreting the interviews***

The analysis of the interviews was performed in two steps. The first was a discourse analysis which resulted in writing a biographical account. Further we described the interview conditions. As a second step using a comparative analysis of the interviews, we tried to extricate different types of experiences on the basis of the relations between individual careers and particular structural contexts. A profound analysis of discourse made it possible to perceive schemes and individual world views resulting from the position occupied in social space. Comparative analysis therefore enabled us to relocate the cluster of individual stories in “classes of conditions of existence”.

Interpretation of political opinions and issues of right-wing populism and extremism could not succeed without paying close attention to “everything that overflows”, emotions, side-slip talks released in digressions and anecdotes, which express the “repressed”.

Thematic displacement has been especially highlighted (for example: from “insecurity” or “unemployment” to “immigration”).

In part, the interviewees themselves provided explicit information on how their political views have changed regarding preference for parties, questions of the welfare state or with regard to security policy. In part, it remained up to our interpretation to provide a connection between the perception and view of socio-economic change and statements on politics. In all cases, the aim of the interpretation was to understand the political orientation, in particular statements on policies towards foreigners and refugees, on representative democracy, preferences for parties and politicians, on trade unions and shop stewards, etc., through consideration of social and family origins, employment history, current life circumstances and the changes experienced in the world of work. Here it was important only to take up the most plausible connections with experiences in the world of work and, conversely, to leave all other reasons for particular political orientation, such as the influence of the mass media and social environment or experience with politics itself, as open as possible.

Finally, the interpretation had to be performed according to the following hypothesis: individual displacement resulting from changes experienced at work compels social agents to re-evaluate their position in social space in relation to others, therefore to re-evaluate their interests and values, and, consequently, their political standpoints.



## **2. FLEXIBLE REORGANISATION OF COMPANY AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Since our research project deals to a significant extent with working people's perceptions of socio-economic change, it appears reasonable to provide some background information on at least some of the most important objective transformations. Though it is certainly always difficult and almost impossible to summarise and balance scientific findings on an entity as large as Europe and on a subject as specialised and fragmented as sociology of work, these problems are at least slightly moderated by strong converging trends that affect and shape an increasingly integrated European economy. Common economic, financial and monetary policies at the European level are themselves only the most obvious expressions of such transnational development of markets, production chains and management strategies. However specific national paths of welfare-state regulated capitalism might have been in the past, the crisis of this post-war growth model helped to release very similar forces in the different countries, companies and workplaces. This is also why we emphasised on the one hand the study of formerly state-owned public services such as post, telecoms and railways and on the other hand the study of sectors closely related to information technology. As will be outlined later, sectoral economic developments sometimes displayed striking parallels and had a highly comparable impact on the respective workplaces. Very similar contradictions and tendencies greatly help in comparing subjective perceptions of and individual reactions to large-scale restructuring. Though privatised public infrastructures and businesses competing against each other on the markets for information technology might in some respects be the best examples for underlying changes of the economy as a whole, sectoral developments in the steel, the automobile and service industries, which were investigated only by some teams, confirmed our basic assumption that general European trends are increasingly prevailing over national peculiarities, at least at the level of objective changes. In order not to exaggerate this dominance too much, we also try to keep particular conditions in specific regions, companies and branches in mind by adding some colourful examples.

Some very important trends in socio-economic change since the mid-1980s have already been concisely discussed in the first European Synthesis Report on the literature reviews for the SIREN project (Poglia Miletì et al. 2002). Referring to research projects and results of the sociological debate across Europe, the respective chapter of that report first described the effects of internationalised productive and distributive structures on the composition of the European economy. Heightened international competition in the course of liberalisation efforts in the EU and related sectoral shifts have tended to benefit services, while industrial manufacturing experienced a period of often severe downsizing. According to OECD findings, average employment in the European service

sector has grown in relative as well as in absolute terms in the course of the last 25 years, from 47.9% to 66.4% of total employment (OECD 2000).

Secondly, together with the massive privatisation of public services everywhere in Europe, this decline affected size and nature of employment structures. High rates of unemployment not only remained a major problem for welfare policies of labour market regulation but tended to support neoliberalism's quest for a further reduction in universal social security standards. While specific social strata in all countries definitely profited from enhanced competition on the labour market as well as from various tax reforms, increases in flexibility and non-standard employment disadvantaged significantly larger parts of working Europe. Women, unskilled workers and immigrants are affected particularly severely. Downward mobility for at least some sections of the working population ends up in more or less complete informalisation and growing precariousness of work. Such forms of employment are characterised by marginal, low or discontinuous employment income, unstable employment and insufficient social security. Though increases in insecurity and inequality are not only shaped by national peculiarities of the welfare systems but also make themselves felt on qualitatively different levels, they are highly important outcomes of socio-economic change in Europe since the late 1980s. Despite differences in original transfer levels and different times of implementation, changes in social security systems of all countries have been characterised by two major developments: 1) tighter access regulations and a reduction of transfer levels, especially in the area of (early) retirement; 2) policies focusing on "activation", especially in the areas of unemployment insurance and social assistance (European Commission 2001:74ff).

Assuming the above-mentioned generalisation of socio-economic trends, the purpose of this chapter is a more detailed description of company and workplace reorganisation in the course of overall changes. Preconditions and forms of restructured industrial and labour relations must be understood to enable the reader to gain a better assessment of how working people subjectively perceive exactly these transformations. Beginning with a rather brief overview of the economic and political pressures to reorganise labour relations at company level, some of the most important aspects of a post-Fordist factory and office regimes in different sectors of the European economy will be highlighted. A third subchapter focuses on the ways individual workplaces and working conditions have been transformed from above as well as from below. Though convergent developments of industrial and labour relations are often striking in a cross-country survey, regional as well as sectoral peculiarities always have to be born in mind.

## **2.2. *Economic and political preconditions***

### **2.2.1. *Forces of neo-liberalism***

There has been considerable debate on whether neoliberalism as a political movement to overcome welfarist and trade unionist restrictions of capital sovereignty was the cause

or rather the outcome of the socio-economic changes in western Europe that have taken place since the mid-1970s (Schui/Blankenburg 2002). Those who argue that the anti-Keynesian revival of classical free-market economics was merely an ideological expression of increasingly open world markets, remarkable technological progress and unemployment-driven competition of workers adhere to a more economist point of view, while those who focus on the genuine forces of the neoliberals to intentionally remodel advanced capitalist societies certainly have a stronger belief in the relative autonomy of the political sphere. In any case, the crisis of the post-war model of economic growth has become ever more obvious since the mid-1970s. While growth rates, productivity and company profits diminished significantly, unemployment and inflation figures reached levels unprecedented in the *trentes glorieuses*. Donald Sassoon described it as a monument of human folly that neoliberal propositions to solve economic problems still exerted such a hegemonic rule in public discourses of the 1990s:

“By 1995, oil was cheaper than anyone could have wished during the previous twenty years; trade unions were a spent force throughout Europe; eighteen million unemployed kept the labour market loose and flexible beyond the hopes entertained by many conservatives in the 1970s; interest rates were at their lowest in years; strikes were rare, and virtually confined to the defence of jobs in the public sector, rather than to pushing wages up. And still, inexplicably, the advanced countries faced a future characterised by mass unemployment and low growth.” (Sassoon 1996:456)

But these objective failures of neoliberal policies, however, did almost nothing to discredit their ideological justification. On the contrary, politicians, academics and self-proclaimed experts have absolutely no problem in discovering ever new external and unnatural “rigidities” that allegedly restrict free market forces.

### **2.2.2. Science and technology's revolutionary impact on the production process**

Technological progress in the course of the micro-electronic revolution had effects on all sectors of the economy which can hardly be underestimated. The extended use of robots and computers in the production processes allowed a much more flexible reaction to changing market conditions and consumer demands. Digitalised logistics of transport and communication became increasingly important for rationalising chains of production and distribution. Technical progress of this type allowed a separation of working time on the one hand and times of machine utilisation on the other. Oriented towards a more flexible use of different sorts of capital this regime of flexibilised production opens new ways for enhancing productivity.

The production process itself was transformed twofold by scientific progress and technological innovation. On the one hand the invention and spread of robots and computers made existing machines more productive or even tended to substitute labour in the immediate production processes. On the other hand, the interplay between different productive factors also reached a qualitatively new stage. Micro-electronic innovations in particular accelerated the speed and heightened the precision of logical

operations and thus in some respects transcended natural limits of individualised brainwork. But far from making human beings wholly superfluous to the production process, reorganisation enabled qualified workers to control much more operations at the same time than before and enhanced the overall effectiveness of labour power. Combining the improvements in individual workplaces' productivity levels means achieving a qualitatively new type of technology. Far from being just a linear extension of existing trends, this new type thus makes the relationship of research, development, production and distribution as a whole more highly integrated than ever before. With planning functions less strictly separated from executive ones, intellectual work becomes more directly integrated into the immediate production process. The essence of brainwork shifts from formal logic operations to tasks that require a more creative and open-minded reasoning. It is highly important for capital accumulation to combine much more sophisticated means of production with much more demanding qualifications for its workers. Complexity of technical systems requires employees who are able to think in an abstract and at the same time holistic way. A feeling for teamwork, responsibility and autonomous decision-making are very welcome. This is why school and university systems are constantly being asked to guarantee heightened levels of general education. The new type of technology demands more specified qualification profiles as well as the ability to adapt to constantly changing challenges. Lifelong learning thus became the byword of capital's educational offensives. Concentrated on specific layers of the working and the middle classes, this educational revolution however tends to neglect and exclude the unemployed and the lower strata of the working class. Since the companies definitely prefer to determine new job descriptions themselves, they seldom have any interest in sharing their views on the introduction of new technology with employees, their representatives or the unions. Capital investment needs to exert a very strong influence not only on the direction of potentially profitable research branches but also on school and university curricula.

It is nonetheless important to remember that processes of up-skilling for one section of the working population often goes together with the maintenance and spread of neo-Taylorist work organisation in the service as well as in the industrial sector (Dörre 2002). Often the way new information and communication technology is implemented does not aim to enhance the role of labour but on the contrary follows the Taylorist logic of concentration of knowledge on the immediate production process. Workers' skills and experiential knowledge is subject to codification and digitalisation. While in some areas of complex production and service provision workers' experiential knowledge is being reproduced at a higher technological level and labour processes remain highly dependent on skilled labour, in other areas new technology mainly means automating and routinising work. This can be illustrated not only by the example of the much debated call centres but also with reference to manufacturing, e.g. the automobile industry, where management experimented with new forms of work organisation in the 1990s. Nowadays the high levels of flexibility of the production and assembly process are not being achieved by capitalising on the ingenuity and self-organising capacities of workers' in semi-autonomous teams and "productions-islands". Rather, complex ICT systems are used for realising on-demand manufacturing of a wide variety of cars on a



conveyer belt rendering work highly repetitive, monotonous and short-cycled (DeJonkheere et al. 2002). Consequently, under conditions of mass unemployment, deskilling and inhumane working conditions, which in the scientific and public debate appeared to belong to the past, seem to be becoming increasingly widespread again.

### **2.2.3. Concentration of capital and restructuring**

The internationalisation of competition, productive overcapacity, as well as weak public and private demand in an era of generally decreased growth rates – in short, the relatively difficult economic situation of the 1990s – forced companies to reduce their costs by almost any means. In order to pay for necessary investments in very expensive technological innovations, big corporations first of all tried to save costs in their workforce. Workers became even further replaced by machines, robots and computers and staffing levels were more closely adjusted to changing capacity utilisation. Owing to massive lay-offs almost everywhere in Europe, employment levels in the industrial sector decreased significantly. Instead of continuing the 1980s trend to form large, sector-crossing conglomerate corporations, more and more firms began to outsource company parts that did not belong to their core business (Bischoff 2000:114f). More and more sectors followed the example of the garment, shoe and toy industries in forming global commodity chains (Gereffi/Korzeniewicz 1994). Supported by new information technology and communication infrastructures relocations in the service sector and in administrative and creative business functions resulted in splitting up the value-added chain but also in new forms of spatial concentration of work (UNCTAD 2002:11, Flecker/Kirschenhofer 2002). At the same time companies were also on the lookout for opportunities to buy up competitors and to merge not only productive capacities but also to save costs for expensive bureaucracies and allegedly superfluous hierarchy levels (UNCTAD 2000:17f). While the 100 largest multinational corporations have a combined turnover of 25% of the world domestic product and are involved in no less than 70% of the global trade, they employ only 12.5 million workers, which is equivalent of 0.5% of the global workforce (Revelli 1999:70). Capital concentration at the top had mixed effects for small and medium-sized firms. Some of them became even more subordinated to the needs of big corporations. Extremely fierce and globalised competition between different suppliers and dependence on just a few huge customers at the end of the respective commodity chain forced numerous firms to give up business or to lay off workers. Other small and medium-sized firms, however, profited from newly developed markets and made very flexible use of niche production and service gaps. At the end of the 1990s the IT industry was one of the most prominent examples of this counter-trend to capital concentration.

### **2.2.4. Privatisation of public services**

Pressures to privatise public utilities and services have steadily increased in many European countries since the late 1970s. Proponents of privatisation first focused on public shares in profit-oriented companies and argued that public ownership tended to

weaken overall allocation efficiency by unfairly disadvantaging private competitors. An end to hidden subsidies and informal bailing-out guarantees would therefore encourage private investment to the overall benefit of customers and taxpayers. This “privatisation of state capital” has so far made the biggest progress in many European countries. Public companies in ultimately competitive key sectors such as banking, insurance, and basic commodities have already been sold to a very large extent. Among the countries with large properties in nationalised industries, France began to privatise earlier than Italy and Austria. Though the economies of Denmark, Switzerland, Belgium and West Germany were less mixed, these countries also sold many of their shares to private investors from the 1980s onwards (Pedersini 1999). State-owned industries in Eastern Germany and Hungary that survived the transformation to capitalism followed soon after 1989 (Tóth/Grajczjár 2003:10ff).

But however comprehensive the privatisation of state capital has been, it only marked the onset of another wave of de-nationalisation, which set public-owned infrastructures in the transport, communication and basic utility sectors under severe pressures. This is what Zeuner called the “privatisation of public tasks”.<sup>2</sup> The creation of completely new markets for private investment in formerly monopolist public domains was once again regarded as a means of enhancing efficiency, reducing public deficits and improving services. The quest for profitable capital investment spheres, lower fares and more specialised supplies was definitely decisive in the case of the telecommunications sector. Planning for greater integration of European markets, the European Communities themselves reacted to pressures like these with a number of Green Paper liberalisation proposals urging member states to open not only their telecommunications, but also their postal service and public transport sectors to deregulated competition and private investment. Market liberalisation began at the end of the 1980s with the FRG and France being among the first member states to gradually transform state-owned telecommunications monopolists into free-market enterprises. Anti-monopoly deregulation was generally followed by the renewal of corporate governance in favour of a more profit-oriented management and an ultimate “material” privatisation at the stock exchange. With Telecom Italia, Deutsche Telekom, Teledanmark, France Telecom, Swisscom and Telekom Austria being among the youngest private players all formerly state-owned monopolies in the telecommunications sector were at least partly privatised in the second half of the 1990s. Privatisation is not yet so advanced in the case of other public infrastructures such as railways and postal services. While Deutsche Post AG has already been privatised to a considerable extent, postal services in France, Italy, Austria and Switzerland are still awaiting full privatisation. Apart from British Rail, which is outside our sample, no major European railway company has been materially privatised yet. However, this does not mean that changes have not occurred. Railway companies remained state-owned but have generally been forced to operate in a much more profit- and efficiency-oriented manner. Governments and business lobbies hoped to reach this

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<sup>2</sup> Compare for terminological clarification: Zeuner, Bodo (1998): Das Politische wird immer privater. Zu neoliberaler Privatisierung und linker Hilflosigkeit; in: Heinrich, Michael/Messner, Dirk (1998), Globalisierung und Perspektiven linker Politik, Münster, pp. 284-300.

aim by strictly separating the management of company budgets from other public administrations and by encouraging stronger competition between different companies. In the course of these measures, also promoted by the EU, the European rail transport markets have become significantly more integrated (Pedersini/Trentini 2000). Connexx for example, a subsidiary of the French corporate giant Vivendi, is already the second biggest railway company in Germany.

While telecommunications, postal services and railways have thus far been the most prominent examples of privatisation, tendencies to privatise health care, education and the pension systems are no less relevant and will make themselves felt in the near future. It even appears possible that core functions of state sovereignty such as the police or the prison system will be partly transferred to private interests (“privatisation of the state”). In addition to the respective historic typology developed by Zeuner, Wahl has made it clear, moreover, that there is a definite pattern to each of these privatisation processes (Wahl 2002). Deregulation of specific markets is frequently followed by a transformation of the service’s legal form from public to private. This step was itself only a preparation for the ultimate and complete selling of public shares on the stock exchange.

Taken together, privatisation measures in different European countries were of sometimes particular importance in the 1990s. Apart from Germany, where gains compared to the GDP were extraordinarily low (below 0.125% of the annual GDP), and Switzerland and Belgium (0.4% and 0.5% respectively) also with relatively modest gains, all the other countries in our sample profited significantly from selling public assets. Proceeds in Denmark (namely due to the privatisation of TeleDanmark), Austria, France, Italy and Hungary equalled between 0.75% and more than 1.00% of the respective annual GDP in the 1990s (Schneider/Dreer 1999:36). Other national peculiarities should likewise not be neglected. While Hungary privatised very rapidly in three stages in the 1990s, France has not yet completed its early privatisation drive of the mid-1980s and is so far still holding back from selling its postal and rail transportation infrastructures to private capital. While privatisation has thus often brought short-term financial relief for public households, negative side effects cannot be overlooked. Profit-orientation forced managers to lay off large numbers of workers, while the economy as a whole often has not been able to generate that many jobs in compensation.

### **2.3. *Re-organisation at company level***

The Fordist growth model depended heavily on the development of domestic markets and entered a period of severe crisis when tendencies of objective saturation became increasingly visible. Instead of further relying on simple economies of scale companies were now obliged to search for new possibilities of combining productivity and profit-orientation under conditions of globalisation, but still generally stagnant markets. A more flexible reaction to changes on the market, to the shortening of innovation cycles and to the possibilities offered by new technologies became necessary.

### **2.3.1. *De-centralisation, commodification and the emergence of company networks***

Due to the very sharp reduction of transaction costs in the course of the micro-electronic revolution companies were no longer forced to provide such large-scale and highly integrated productive facilities which symbolised Fordist production. Labour-intensive production processes were not only outsourced but also often relocated into the Global South. As a result, large corporations today employ significantly fewer people than their counterparts 30 years ago. The power of a corporation is therefore no longer equal to the number of people employed in it but depends much more on the capacity to exert indirect control over de-localised productive networks of small- and medium-sized enterprises. Formal independence of formerly integrated departments of course does not necessarily mean that these new firms were in fact self-sufficient players on the market. Being forced to react to simulated market forces does not mean that profit-centres and similar institutions in fact have the resources to compete effectively. Separation from possible cross-subsidisation sources and remaining dependence on their main customer on the contrary often combines the disadvantages of self-employment with the disadvantages of wage dependence. Operating under heavy competitive pressures, these suppliers thus bear the full burden of buyers' markets.

Processes of decentralisation, networking or inner-company commodification are of strategic importance for the powerrelations at the workplace. They often contribute to an erosion of clear-cut company boundaries and tend to topple established hierarchies between different departments. While the definition of the exact workforce of one company turns out to be increasingly difficult, their representation is additionally complicated by equally fluid definitions of responsibilities on the side of management counterparts. Even in big companies, workers have become exposed to market forces much more directly and the companies' search for flexibility, e.g. by way of outsourcing, results in additional insecurity for them. Decentralisation also heightens the basic fragmentation of work and life experiences and makes coalition-building for workers much more difficult (Döhl et al. 2000:10).

### **2.3.2. *Flexibility of production***

Increased competitive pressures on the world markets forced companies not only to diversify their supplies and to enhance quality, these goals also had to be realised in the context of significantly shorter production cycles, smaller output numbers and reduced time horizons for product delivery. While large industrial storage capacities and regular opening hours in the service sector were once important instruments to regulate the supplies for standardised mass-production and service markets, customers of all kinds nowadays demand, and companies aim to achieve a competitive edge by offering much higher levels of flexibility. Companies react to pressures like these by lowering the break-even point of profitable production to levels even beyond the imagination of economies of scale. Production technologies are no longer extremely limited to the manufacturing of one single commodity but can easily be switched to usage of various kinds (Revelli 1999:48). To bridge the gap between production and distribution and to

satisfy diversified consumer interests *just-in-time*, companies in the industrial as well as in the service sector are relying on a more and more flexible workforce. To lower the risk of corporate hire-and-fire policies employees have to make sure that they are able to fulfil a wide range of duties under conditions of highly irregular working environments and time schedules. A company that is forced to flexibilise its production by means like these itself generates new pressures on other companies to do the same and thus helps to accelerate the race-to-the-bottom-like deterioration of working conditions at the expense of workers. This is why there are often no alternatives to involuntary part-time work and short-term contracts.

#### **2.4. Flexible employment**

Large-scale restructuring has placed the standard employment relationship of the Fordist age under severe pressure (Bosch et al. 2001). Though there has been very much debate about the extent of this industrial norm, long-term contracts, highly regular full-time schedules, relatively tight social security networks and (of course limited) bonds of seniority between a company and its most loyal employees have definitely been much more widespread in the post-war era than in earlier periods of capitalism. Even though the uncertainties and changing fortunes of the market have not disappeared with the introduction and dissemination of relatively secure and regulated employment perspectives, these achievements were at least good for moderating the most extreme risks of wage dependence. At the same time women still had to bear the exclusive responsibility for childcare and household reproduction. The highly wage-centred, national and latently patriarchal biases thus tended to disadvantage and marginalise groups that depended on the generally white, male and middle-aged breadwinner. The long-term erosion of this certainly contradictory employment relationship, however, allowed new problems to emerge without really solving the more traditional ones. Together with the risks of unemployment the significant spread of part-time work, short-term contracts and more irregular working time schedules contributed to a heightened fluctuation on the labour market throughout Europe (Castel 2000:336ff). Though this flexibility might be welcomed by employees who want to combine their private with their professional interests, individual needs often become subordinated to company interests and objective labour market cycles. Instead of improving social security and strengthening the autonomy of people formerly subordinated to breadwinner paternalism, rates of higher participation in a much more flexible labour market tend to individualise the dependence on the more anonymous forces of the market (Purcell 2000). In addition to the overall insecurity of employment perspectives, flexibility also deepens the gap between highly qualified employees on the one hand and low- or semi-skilled workers on the other.

Owing to the interest of many companies in integrating at least some groups of employees, a subordination of complex social and creative capacities has often become more important than the elimination of superfluous minutes and seconds in the production process (which was the principle goal of Taylorism). Instead of remaining

constant or rising only on a linear scale, performance pressures for these groups of workers themselves change very rapidly and profoundly. Capital imperatives thus tend to shape the psycho-physical constitution as well as social characters and creative potentials. Instead of determining the functionality of individual employees only with reference to the mere results of their work, they also have to accept a more general assessment of soft skills and so-called social capacities. Motivation, loyalty, political activities and the maintenance of mental and physical fitness are of significant importance. Commanding the means to control employees means exerting new forms of dominance and power. It is important to note that new management strategies have not replaced older ones but developed in the context of traditional workplace discipline and suppression of individual needs. Forms of intrinsic motivation to trust in one's own creative capacities are thus supported by the very traditional pressures to escape unemployment, social insecurity and fear of the future (Thompson/Warhurst 1998, Döhl et al. 2000:12ff).

For many years, management officials have therefore been emphasising the increased relevance of individual workers' creative potentials in the production process. What they obviously prefer are individuals who don't have anything in common with the drilled gorillas of the Fordist age. The capacity to work cooperatively in a team, to decide more or less autonomously about the actual best interest of the company and to foresee problems and complications would allow management to concentrate on its core activities and to save costs on possibly superfluous overseers and lieutenants. Proclamations like these led not only industrial relations scholars but also many trade unionists to hope that a new age of humanised working conditions on the shop-floor was beginning. In fact, efforts to humanise work have at least in some countries long been at the top of trade union agendas. Social democratic influence in Scandinavia for example ensured significantly higher participation levels at work. Moreover, companies in other countries have indeed also experimented with new forms of employee involvement. Research shows that about a quarter of all companies in Europe have introduced team work concepts in one way or another (Benders et al. 2000). But what gives at least some higher qualified workers the real decision-making capacities about the performance of their work also has negative sideeffects. "Limitless work" became the problem of the day, when companies introduced so-called trust-based work time and trust-based projects. The traditional distinction between work and leisure vanished when workplaces, opening hours and work descriptions became much more fluid and at least in some respects "virtual" (Döhl et al. 2000). Internalising corporate imperatives left many employees with the impression that they had given up their private lives in the interests of profit production. The group of those who earned a lot of money but had almost no time left for organising their own reproduction created a huge demand for personal services. Compared to the highflying optimism of team-work enthusiasts, numerous newly created workplaces in the lower parts of the industrial as well as the service sector are nevertheless still characterised by highly repetitive, boring and often alienating tasks for mainly semi- or low-skilled workers. Research even shows that experiments with new forms of work organisation in manufacturing were abandoned when high levels of unemployment meant that labour markets again made it possible to

recruit enough workers for repetitive and strenuous work and when options to relocate work internationally multiplied the pool of labour companies could tap (Springer 1998:36).

#### **2.4.1. Rationalisation**

High-tech means of production not only allow for more flexible modes of labour organisation, together with the division of the workforce into core and periphery, they are also well suited to adjusting inner-company labour supply closely to demand cycles on the market. By such means, occasional spare-time during working hours, which had previously made it at least sometimes possible to find some time to relax, has been radically diminished. Working permanently under the highest pressures possible is a cause of significant stress. New and much more sophisticated instruments to measure a workers' performance tend to replace old-fashioned instruments such as the time clock. Surveys on working conditions actually show that time pressures and stress levels are increasing in all EU member states (European Foundation 2000).

Since employees are systematically interested in discovering the misuse and waste of resources, team-work in so-called quality circles can be regarded as a very efficient organisation to enhance productivity and to save costs by all means necessary. The destruction of jobs on the basis of the workers' own proposals is the declared aim of this management strategy. Rationalisation of work in private companies also includes efforts to flexibilise working times. From this perspective, sector-wide agreements and regulations that compromise with union interests only interfere with employers' abilities to react just in time to unforeseeable changes on the market. This is why general rules on working hours for all were to be replaced by much more differentiated and individualised contracts that empower the companies to determine these very important employment conditions. More efficient use of fixed equipments and machines, flexibility on the market, the extension of shift work and the transformation of the weekend into regular working days are the ultimate aims of this working-hours policy of employers' organisations. Companies often hope to win over employees to their interests by pointing out gains of individual sovereignty over hours of work. Apart from the fact that individual interests in more flexible working hours are often the result of miserable social infrastructures for raising children, individual sovereignty in most of the cases is severely restricted by overall company interests in adjusting workforce supplies to market cycles.

#### **2.4.2. Weakening of workers' representation and trade union influence**

Tectonic shifts in social power relations as well as the flexible reorganisation of companies and workplaces are challenging the representation of workers' interests in more than one respect. Works councils, trade unions and shop stewards are confronted with pressures from above and from below. In an era of fierce competition (last but not least on the labour market) employers and managers on the one hand find it less reasonable to follow policies in the broad range of social compromise than in the past

decades. What used to be a means of avoiding class struggle and guaranteeing social peace during the system confrontation of the Cold War, is more and more attacked as an expensive burden for corporate competitiveness. Trade unions, moreover, are also having to struggle with diminishing support from below. While the workforce with full-time and unlimited contracts continues to shrink in many countries (significant proportions of trade union members today are retired or jobless), part-timers and casual labour with relatively weak bonds to their workplace are much more difficult to organise. In addition to this insecurity, individualisation of workplace environments has also left remarkable traces in the public consciousness. De-standardised wages, workingtimes and working conditions make it more difficult to generate common interests of all workers. It seems as if this multi-tier fragmentation of the working class was at the same time a condition for and a result of the weakening of workers' interest representation. Though different currents in the trade union movement are still discussing the adequate answers to challenges like these, an influential tendency is fighting for a corporatist modernisation of the endangered social compact. The idea of this strategy, which inspired numerous bi- or tripartite agreements at different levels (between employers, unions and occasionally the state) and in various countries, is to trade off employment guarantees by the companies against social benefits, wage elements and workplace descriptions of the workers (Hassel 1999). Concession bargaining and active participation in management policies to strengthen the competitiveness of corporations and whole countries is intended to help to re-embark on a path of new growth and employment. Whatever the ultimate outcome of this co-management strategy, some contradictions have already become visible. While they do not hesitate to accept workers' concessions, corporations and their organisations in particular do not initially seem to feel really obliged to keep their employment guarantees and promises. Secondly, union members are not getting the impression that their union engagement really pays off. On the contrary, instead of defending the achievements of the past, the especially de-centralised workers' representation in one single company by means like these even seems to be co-managing the further fragmentation of the working class. In struggles like these, many co-management inspired unions and works councils tend to focus more and more exclusively on the shrinking core workforces of the industrial and public service sectors while neglecting employees with insufficiently secure employment perspectives and welfare benefits (Bieling/Deppe 1999).

These tendencies are highly pertinent to our research, because the increased dynamics of change in work, higher levels of insecurity and partly deteriorating working conditions seem to be accompanied by a weakening of interest-group representation. The question is whether this is contributing to frustrations and feelings of powerlessness on the part of workers who then become the target of the new political entrepreneurs.



## 3. VIEWS ON WORK

### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, based on the interviews in the eight participating countries, we describe how people perceive changes in working life – in other words the subjective perceptions of socio-economic change in Europe. Though the findings do show differences and therefore refer to existing national particularities, some perceptions are very widespread in all countries. This indicates that in some ways the people in Europe are facing similar changes and have similar perceptions of the changes. Due to specific constructions of the labour market or different political institutions, other perceptions are nonetheless more specific. We would like to discuss the views on socio-economic change in three different perspectives:

- Perceived changes in employment status and working conditions – Chapter 3.2
- Perception of one's personal security – Chapter 3.3
- Perception of injustice – Chapter 3.4

At the end of the chapter we describe regional issues – Chapter 3.5.

#### 3.1.1. *The basis of subjective perceptions and evaluations: world views, work ethics and identity*

In their interpretation of socio-economic change and, in particular, of changes in working life, people rely on subjective meaning structures. These include their image of society and the view of their own place in society, principles of justice, orientations towards work and wage labour, and the role of working life in their construction of identity. In the interpretation of the interviews we took these patterns of meaning as a starting point because they not only guide the perceptions of change but also allow for an understanding as to how people may link aspects of ideology or political messages to the changes they have experienced. It turned out that basic work ethics – which encompass the relation to work as a meaningful activity, the orientation to performance and achievement and the orientation to gainful work – are of crucial importance in this respect because they form the intersection of personal and social identity on the one hand and the integration into society on the other. This means that people are conscious of their social status as workers and draw important aspects from this both for their personal identity and their image of society. Work is a life-structuring value that gives life support, stability and meaning. A considerable part of self-esteem is formed through what one does at work.

To understand the reactions and perceptions of the interviewees – especially those affected by processes of increasing precariousness or the threat of decline – we will briefly describe some aspects of these meaning structures.

Work is central to their concept of life for nearly all of the interviewees, and many of the interviewees actually like working.

*“Having a job you enjoy and where you can do something useful when you get up in the morning and it brings in some money – the most important thing is a good job and a nice place to live.”* Mr Knudsen, bus and taxi driver, on sick leave, Denmark

Even those with monotonous work, unhealthy working conditions and low occupational status hardly show a merely instrumental work orientation; they try to wring sense even out of alienating work.

*“... but it interested me nevertheless, and otherwise I would not have stayed for 19 years. If you do not like it at all you do not stay. You chuck it in.”* Mr Obnig, skilled worker, Austria

The importance of work is also revealed in the fact that those people have worked almost every day in their lives.

*“... in the 46 years, six months off sick and that was an accident.”* Mr Örtner, retired from work in services, Austria

*“I spent all my youth in there ... and in the first years I threw myself heart and soul in there.”* Ms Daniela, employed in manufacturing industry, Italy

Work orientation includes the aim of working to high standards. The working conditions therefore are also judged from this perspective, i.e. whether they allow workers to deliver high quality work. The orientation is based on professional values but also on the aim of being able to take pride in one's work.

*“I like to do my job well, also to make efforts and sacrifices. Since I try to do my job well and to achieve a result, I devote all my efforts to it.”* Ms Sonia, unemployed, formerly in the manufacturing industry, Italy

Despite the fact that they sometimes do not think the demands from the management are fair – for example demanding overtime work without pay – they do the work anyway. Especially if they recognise that it will ruin the quality or the image of their workplace, if the work is not done. As a skilled worker, employed in maintenance of public transport says: *“The public transport should run”*.

Work is seen as crucial for the integration into society. Most people perceive it as the only opportunity to achieve social status and an acceptable standard of living. Work and performance become the main basis for value judgements and some people have difficulties in accepting a diverging lifestyle – for example people who do not work or represent cultures with allegedly lower performance standards.

Often people identify with the company and for them it is a disaster if the company is declining.

*“Seeing the company die little by little and knowing that it will die is like seeing a piece of yourself because you left in there in good and bad eight hours a day for 21 years of your life.”* Ms Fransa, unemployed, formerly in the manufacturing industry, Italy

There may be a difference between the way older people and young people look at work. Older employees often have more traditional work ethic: work is a duty and it is an important tool for self-fulfilment; without work you have less meaning and risk losing your identity. Younger people often want more freedom in relation to their work. They are more ready to accept looser bonds to the company and job changes. But at a particular moment they also want fixed status, because they start a family and need to settle down.

Principles of justice are closely related to these work ethics. In terms of criteria for distributional justice people partly stress the degree of subordination under work related norms, partly the contribution made by individuals. In general, meritocratic views seem to prevail in the perception of both what people deserve themselves and what they think others are entitled to, though this view seems to have some blind spots, e.g. relating to the upper classes with unearned income.

Paid labour has become ever more important for women over recent decades, but women are still the ones mostly responsible for the unpaid family work. This leads to contradictory demands – on the one hand from the labour market, and on the other hand from the family life. Women have to construct their life styles as specific relations between these two areas of life – work and the family. Job security and being able to reconcile job and children are essential criteria. Individual ability and readiness to work is a central factor of identity for the women interviewees too. What is more, for some, economic independence is a particularly high value. For mothers in paid employment the ability to successfully organise both spheres of life is of particular importance.

Overall, the following aspects of subjective meaning structures are the most important bases for interpreting changes in working life: the ability to reach or maintain a standard of living securing economic independence and integration into society; professional orientations and aspirations in terms of content and quality of work; basic work ethics including the perception as work as a duty and as backbone of identity; female concepts of life highly valuing a successful combination of the two life spheres; and principles of distributional justice defining the moral entitlements of oneself and others.

### **3.2. *Perceived changes in employment status and working conditions***

The changes in working life described above affected the interviewees in various ways. The perception of losing social status is widespread as is the view of being forced to lead a life they have not chosen by themselves. Some have changed their employment status from standard, long-term employment to working on fixed-term contracts, have taken early retirement or are simply unemployed. For others, the devaluation of their qualifications and sometimes their work related values are most remarkable. Some have had to give up employment altogether because they cannot live up to the demands of modern working life or because they are burned out and their health is ruined by work. Losing their job, having difficulties getting a job or coping with its demands is a threat to many people's identity. People may get the feeling they are worthless or not useful.

For us there are several ways that an employee can lose his or her status:

- From an active working employee in the labour market to a life outside the labour market. Some are forced into early retirement, others are dismissed because of health problems, company closures or production being moved to other locations.
- From working full time in open-ended contracts to a job on precarious conditions, for example fixed-term contracts, informal employment being moved from department to department or being currently unemployed.

Some people have always worked in very precarious forms of work, e.g. in fixed-term contracts, involuntary part time work or totally informal working conditions. In the research sample this is true mainly for some of the self-employed young people trying to get into the labour market and for women trying to combine motherhood and paid work.

In addition to decreasing employment security leading to a spread of precarious forms of employment, recent developments on the labour market have had a great impact on the way work is organised – and this again has a great influence on people's view on working life. In subjective terms the most important changes seem to be the following:

- Devaluation of qualifications and work-related values
- New forms of work organisation and neo-Taylorism
- Consequences of privatisation and rationalisation

In the following we will first describe the transitions of employment status and changes in social status and then focus on the different themes just mentioned.

### **From work to early retirement or unemployment: feeling shocked and humiliated**

Depending on circumstances, losing one's job through redundancy or early retirement may lead to feelings of shock, humiliation or insult. The point of view of those affected is crucial to an understanding of these subjective reactions. Many of our interviewees are hard-working people who have worked all their lives. They have been very loyal to the company and they had almost never taken sick leave. They were proud of working and tried to find sense in their work even if their work was heavy, monotonous and unhealthy. Some are confronted with such a situation out of the blue and feel like they have been thrown away like garbage.

*“We had 15 days to decide. I had nothing prepared for my retirement. I had no outside interests ... I was pleased to leave, it was the only rational solution, but all the same, to leave after 30 years under a redundancy programme, that nevertheless left a bitter taste.”* Ms Madelaine, IT executive, France

Others subject to forced early retirement on health grounds did not so much mind the idea of not working but objected the reduction of income that spoiled the plans they had for getting out of debt, for example.

Some actually show shock symptoms in reaction to being made redundant. A 57-year-old carpenter who had worked all his life for a small entrepreneur and who had rejected more lucrative jobs out of loyalty was suddenly dismissed when the son of the owner

took over the company. He described shock symptoms and numbness. He completely withdrew from local social life. Living in a small village, having had close social relations with the owner and his colleagues and having believed in honour and reciprocity, he not only lost a job and a big part of his social identity but also his faith in the social world.

People who are dependent on social welfare after dismissal or sickness often feel humiliated in contact with the authorities. Moreover, they recognise that social bureaucracies and administrations tend to give the impression that social rights were mere acts of patriarchal charity. To them employment office civil servants appear to be full of mistrust and parsimony and welfare agencies in general do not take citizens seriously.

It is not so much social shame resulting from ending up in a stigmatised social category that was expressed in the interviews. Rather, our interlocutors pointed out their performance orientation, their contributions to the company or to the economy, their subordination to societal norms which have not been recognised. They suffer from breaches of implicit contracts meaning a denial of the income, recognition and status they had expected in return.

### **Being expelled from the core workforce: suffering from losing one's occupational identity**

After many years in a secure job, some of our respondents experienced plant closures or mass redundancies. For some this meant being transferred from site to site. Those affected not only suffer from the gradual decline in terms of job security and working conditions, they also often feel humiliated by the way they were given the message about their future.

But despite losing status and despite worse working conditions, many continue to work. The argument seems to be that you just have to accept the changes. A French woman explains that she was transferred from department to department, from site to site as closures occurred. Finally she had to work 65 kilometres from home, but she continued working and tried to convince herself that this is the way it must be.

*"I am working, I am very well. But it is true that ... you are there ... you had a previous career to that of today, you did something else before. ... For example I was a personal assistant. I wanted to be a personal assistant. The guy who was an engineer, he should still be an engineer. Well it is over, that no longer exists. We must draw a line through it. You must say to yourself: Good, you are lucky, you are fine, you have got work, you have got your pay at the end of the month. It is great. But forget what you did before. Forget it."* Ms Melle, currently employed in a reprographics studio, France

### **The old and the new labour market periphery: out in the cold**

Not all our respondents have ever enjoyed employment security. This is partly because of the seasonal character of the sector they work in and, in consequence, of frequent changes of employer. People in hotel and catering occupations have always been

oriented towards opportunities on the labour market in contrast to employment in a particular company. However, as examples from Austria show, increasing competition from immigrant workers leads to the perception of much lower labour market security. Another group that has never been in a standard employment relationship are young people trying to enter the labour market or women trying to re-enter after a family break. Quite a few of our cases are from the IT and telecommunications sectors where unstable, non-standard employment seems to be widespread, but where it has been possible to earn quite high wages in some countries. When telecommunications was a booming market, companies recruited young, flexible and energetic employees. They wanted highly motivated employees and many young people entered this sector. Those interviewed were often people without children or other obligations. Some could afford a middle-class standard of living (except for Hungary) – at least for a while. But when the crisis started – for example in the call centres – working conditions changed because of rationalisation and stricter management control. Those affected say they felt as if they were mere objects of completely anonymous management decisions.

*“Then due to company requirements, they decided to close the international division in Milan ... and since they did not know where to place us, they sent us to the customer information service.”* Mr Michele, call-centre operator, Italy

In some countries it is difficult for young people to get started on the labour market. They initially have a very loose contact with the companies they work for. And in a globalised world with increasing competition and privatisation it is becoming even more difficult for these groups to secure a foothold in the labour market.

Even the new opportunities in the IT sector and in IT-enabled services can be experienced as a mixed blessing. On the one hand new job opportunities emerged and at the same time moving to newly emerging occupations made it possible to enhance one's social status. On the other hand some had to try very hard not to be dependent on freelance work but to find stable employment. This ambivalence is illustrated very well by the case of Ms Jelinek from Austria who underwent retraining from hairdresser to web designer, which greatly enhanced her prestige in the eyes of her social environment. But she suffers from the insecurity in her new occupation because it is only possible to get short-term contractual work (*“... I know more unemployed web designers than employed ones”*). It is interesting to see that the improvement of some aspects of working life, in the view of the worker, can be fully devalued by the difficulty in achieving a stable employment relationship.

Those who have temporary work feel that they are exploited and they are aware that the company is not investing in them while taking as much advantage of them as possible.

### **Devaluation of qualifications and work-related values**

People who feel threatened by recent changes in company organisation and in ways of working or by developments on the labour market often hold the view that their qualifications, their experiences and their work-related values are devalued and that those no longer count. As their experience has lost its value they cannot envisage a future where the work they did in their professional lives would still make sense. The

experiences they have gained over the years simply cannot be converted into economic and symbolic capital that would be of value on the labour market.

But the perception of devaluation not only applies to those, such as former steelworkers, whose occupational position has disappeared through plant closure and who cannot use their skills in other jobs. Many employees have to learn additional tasks – some of them who have difficulties with change generally consider it is too difficult to learn a number of different tasks at once, while others appreciate this broadening of the number of tasks. In addition, theoretical abilities are becoming increasingly necessary, to perform abstract thinking for example. For some, such demands are more than they feel they can handle.

*“The way things are now, everybody needs theoretical training. But it’s not necessary at all – there’s no place for ordinary people with other skills. In a few years it’ll be impossible for ordinary people like me. You have to be so intelligent, so intelligent. It’s not fair.”* Ms Jørgensen, unskilled worker in the printing industry, Denmark

In some sectors the implementation of computer systems has only recently changed the nature of work considerably. One of these is the retail sector. Here, the computer has successively removed employees from sales and customer contact to doing more administrative work on the computer. Computers were introduced making work easier (rolling inventory, automatic stock-keeping), but defects and less varied work mean that the workload is perceived as being heavier. In some companies employees have had to adapt to these changes overnight.

One of the interviewees says that she now has to order new clothes by computer, whereas before she went to the headquarters of the shopping chain to do her ordering in person. Besides this, her contact with the customers, which for her was the heart of the work, has now become minimal.

*“Anyway – sales now is not much more than self service ... it is getting difficult with the customer, there is less regard and less attention for the salesperson. Everyday selling is reduced to surveillance, folding things away and the cash register.”* Ms Marini, department manager in the retail sector, close to retirement, Switzerland

Many workers seem to struggle with the fact that their work orientation has become inappropriate. In order to increase productivity, the quality of work has been allowed to fall. One group express frustration that it is now only the quantity of their work that counts and not the quality, which deprives them of any pride in their work. As a result they have lost their identification with their jobs, and work has been reduced to not much more than simply earning a living.

*“When I make a car, an Opel, and my family or friends buy an Opel because they know me, because they know I work there, and something on the car breaks every five minutes, you feel so ashamed, you know. It is like they are attacking your work, you feel like a real loser.”* Ms Vogels, repairwoman, automobile industry, Belgium

But it is not just changing skill needs, changes in the content of work and the loss of opportunities for identification that contribute to the feeling of devaluation. People

complain about the lack of recognition and the down-grading of their position as workers. Being hard working involves less status than it did previously.

*“... the upper, the middle levels [of management] they have withdrawn a bit more and that has much, much worse. So it is basically changed. You get the feeling that they really do not want anything to do with those down below anymore.”*

Mr Mautner, semi-skilled worker in metal industry, Austria

To summarise, the perception of devaluation not only stems from the experience that one's skills are no longer needed due to structural change in the economy or due to technological and organisational change at the workplace. It also relates to developments in organisational cultures that imply an increase in social distance between workers and managers and the denial of recognition. In addition, demands on the content of work are frustrated by the limited opportunities to realise one's expectations and, in particular, one's standards of quality. Only a few of the respondents were able to compensate for this through activities such as health-and-safety representative, by political activities or by becoming self-employed.

### **New forms of work organisation and neo-Taylorism**

The accounts of changes in work made it clear that current management strategies and developments of work organisation are diverse and ambivalent. In many workplaces, work has not only become more stressful but, according to some interviewees, employees also have to shoulder more responsibility, which could lead to perceptions of higher status. For some, therefore, greater influence, more responsibility and greater autonomy also are all essentially to be welcomed.

*“I think there's more leeway to make decisions – as a middle manager – when you don't have those rigid guidelines. That was 20 years ago. If anybody told you to do something in a particular way, you did it. And you didn't bat an eyelid. You did what you'd been doing for years. There's more of a chance to experiment now – try new ways. ... It's brilliant!”* Mr Sørensen, motor mechanic, foreman, Denmark

But others are less satisfied with these kinds of changes. The introduction of self-organising teams, for example, has left some with the feeling that they have to follow a certain set of social rules, and that if they protest they might be putting their job on the line.

Some also think that this is only a way for management to get rid of responsibility. For a woman working in retailing, having “to manage alone” contributes to the breaking up of her line of work. She says:

*“Before it was the director giving us ... now it's us who have to think, it's us who have to organise. For instance, if I'd like to do a demonstration, I have to get moving in order to find someone, it's us who have to call the central office to complain, to take action ... it is a lot more ... we work a lot more like this ... if you care for my opinion, the central office discharges a lot on top of us ... And if there are any errors, it's always us who are held responsible.”* Ms Marini, department manager in the retail sector, close to retirement, Switzerland



She experiences the “autonomy” given to her by the new organisation of work mainly as a personal pressure (“*it’s tough*”) and as separating her from the customers she ought to meet: “*their wishes and dislikes, what is to be done and to be avoided, can’t really be seen anymore*”. The everyday tension between the two spaces (sale and office) contrast with what she always enjoyed doing (sale, customer contact). On getting more responsibility, those who are less confident often do not feel they have the resources (time and qualifications) to cope with these demands.

The development has taken another direction in parts of manufacturing, e.g. in the automobile industry in Belgium. Time studies are intended to achieve extreme efficiency in the activities of each blue-collar worker working on the line, which also has to be divided into packets of work in the most efficient way. According to the employees, the main effect of this all is to reduce their freedom of movement and even their general freedom in the workplace – workers are less able to determine their working time for themselves. Robots have taken the heavy jobs and lighter tasks have been outsourced to other companies, resulting in faster, more monotonous work.

Workers are kept at their places in the production line by sensors and if they move too far away from their place the production line stops and they cause problems for the whole line. Previously, they could increase the pace for a moment, allowing them to move backward in the line getting a little bit ahead. This gave them time for a quick drink, a puff on a cigarette, etc. Besides the loss of self-created breaks, the control systems that have restricted social contact had a negative effect on the atmosphere at work.

Some people who work in telecommunications also recognise that their work has become more monotonous and less autonomous. This especially concerns people who have been moved to a call centre in connection with company restructuring:

*“My job has become less autonomous, much more mechanistic, headphones, computer and absolutely alienating, depersonalising. Moreover there are always control and monitoring procedures. [...] It is not acceptable.”* Mr Michele, call-centre operator, Italy

These examples illustrate that the development of work organisation is far from uniform. In addition, some widespread tendencies such as the devolution of responsibility to lower levels of the hierarchy are experienced with ambivalence. While some reported that their work situation has come closer to their expectations and that work has become more satisfactory, others complain about additional workloads or more alienating conditions. Regardless of the degree of autonomy in work, the general perception is that workload, pressures and stress levels have increased. This means that many of those who still have a regular job and enjoy relatively secure employment nevertheless suffer from worsening working conditions.

### **Consequences of liberalisation, privatisation and rationalisation**

As already briefly described in Chapter 2, the public sectors in Europe have undergone profound changes. Privatisation has been on the agenda in the telecommunications, post

and transport sectors, for example. Employees have mainly been affected, directly or indirectly, by companies' attempts to reduce staffing levels through mass redundancies and early retirement measures as well as by the rationalisation and intensification of work. The introduction of new concepts of human resource management in organisations previously characterised by highly bureaucratic forms of control have led to ambivalent results. On the one hand employees seem to welcome the more relaxed and informal atmosphere. On the other hand they struggle with increased workloads and performance pressure.

Some groups of employees regard the changes as being rational, logical and necessary measures despite the fact that the work has become heavier. In the former state enterprises there seems to be a general consensus that something had to be done to bring them up to date. Sometimes the evaluation is even quite positive:

*"People have woken up. That's thanks to privatisation. Your work isn't just a place where you pop in and get a wage. There's got to be a meaning to it, and, when there is, people accept responsibility and put in more for the business."*  
Mr Nielsen, telecom worker, Denmark

But often, even those who in principle are not against privatisation sharply criticise the way restructuring is carried out. One recurrent issue is that those who take the decisions, mainly the top managers, are almost completely ignorant of the actual business and the situation in which their workers have to operate. The consequences of inappropriate decisions have to be borne by the ordinary employees, who sometimes are even blamed for the failures: *"You feel like their doormat, sometimes"*, as an Austrian post office employee puts it.

It is not only the current situation that counts but also the difference between the previous security both of employment and the actual job, and the periods of recurrent internal restructuring, the closing down or selling of units and the continuous threat of redundancy. In times of accelerated organisational change it becomes more likely that people will be affected by the abolition of positions ("delaying") and by the devaluation of their knowledge and experiences. In reaction to the ensuing frustration some of our respondents fiercely rejected the new style of management associated with the *"Americanisation mania"* (Mr Fricker, telecoms manager in early retirement, Switzerland).

In contrast, in the process of restructuring, preparing or following privatisation, some groups have gained influence and responsibility, in particular in the telecommunications and post sector. Others see only heavier and more stressful work, and sometimes less influence in planning their own work. Workers complain about higher demands contributing to an increase of turnover, the change from a service orientation to a marketing orientation supported by performance-related pay. This relates both to the demands of "customer orientation" (i.e. selling more and a wider variety of products or services) and to the possibility of delivering high-quality work. Ms Veitschnig, an Austrian post-office employee, for example, perceives the *"scrapping for customers"* that she is required to do as *"repulsive"* as it violates social norms of honesty and decency. People are also struggling with the fact that rationalisation means they are no

longer able to maintain quality standards in their work, as can be illustrated with an example taken from care for the elderly.

*“We have to start from scratch every time now – we used to be able to make our own plans before. It’s hard to find time for extra chores like washing tiles or getting rid of layers of grease in the kitchen even though it’s obvious it needs doing. You fly in and fly out like a white tornado because you have so many to get round.”* Ms Jakobsen, in-home care worker, Denmark

Others, as, for example, Mr Zimmer from the German post office, complain about the consequences of price competition on the market which lead not only to increasing demands by management and higher workloads but also to a reduction of resources for the workers to satisfy the needs of customers. One group of interviewees regard privatisation as pure exploitation. Workers in the same type of job have a heavier workload than before for less pay. In Denmark, for example, a bus driver’s job is now considered to be one of the ten most dangerous occupations. Since privatisation the drivers have had to keep to tighter schedules and take fewer breaks, which has led to higher levels of stress for many drivers and older drivers not being able to keep the pace.

Early retirement has often been used to reduce staffing levels in a “socially acceptable” way. Those of our respondents affected by such measures partly find it difficult to cope with the reduced income, in particular if early retirement causes problems maintaining the standard of living or in paying back loans and thereby seriously interferes with their life plans. For others there is a prevalent feeling of being excluded, socially isolated and deprived of meaningful activity. Their experiences may be associated with a more general feeling of insecurity in the contemporary economic and social world.

Analysing the subjective interpretations of employees affected by privatisation, it is striking to note that many of them find it hard to criticise privatisation as such, given conventional wisdom on that issue and the bad public image of state employees. While there is no longing for the past – at least there seems to be no legitimate expression for it – actual restructuring measures partly meet with strong opposition. This is due not only to the fact that people are negatively affected; they also perceive a lack of consistency and appropriateness of such measures in view of the real work situations attributed to incompetent managers. High workloads due to lack of personnel are a general concern. Some also report negative consequences of outsourcing, e.g. that people are doing the same job for much less pay because they now work for an outsourcing service provider.

### **Occupational advancement: change as challenge or moral decline**

Interviewees who, in recent years, have been able to get promotion or to raise their status and income partly due to new market or technological opportunities to some extent perceived socio-economic change as a challenge. This is mainly true of highly skilled self-employed people who are able to organise their work autonomously, who can set priorities for themselves and who have a feeling of being important. People who work in the IT sector, in particular, often think of the changes in a positive way. Especially with regard to internationalisation, they like the international atmosphere.

Competition processes, whether at local, national or international level are perceived as an attractive challenge.

*“It is necessary to keep the high level of adrenaline, that is the capacity to react quickly to changes. They happen continuously.”* Mr Andrea, IT entrepreneur, Italy

Being in an “advancement” situation implies continual change. Changes are linked to contextual factors, mainly to market flotation. Employees must be flexible in two ways: on the one hand they must have the capacity and ability to learn and develop new skills and use new instruments, on the other hand, employees must be willing to get rid of their old knowledge, which, as time goes by, is no longer useful.

*“You’ve just got to be that much ahead of developments and force yourself to keep up. Given the rate of change, knowledge is out of date after a couple of years, so it’s a process of continual further training. It’s a good thing really, because it keeps you on your toes and makes you feel responsible for your own progress. That’s how it is, if you want to stay in a job like mine.”* Mr Henriksen, IT operator, Denmark

This group tends to play down the costs of their success in terms of stress, long working hours and restricted non-work social contacts.

Another group, particularly those who stepped up the hierarchy ladder in a more traditional organisational context, was more often concerned with changes in company policies. For example, they felt that their qualifications and work-related values no longer count – especially in connection with the introduction of new management concepts. Some interviewees consider the new management concepts to be based only on pure market-economy mechanisms. For some, this new business culture is a threat to the former company culture and community, work relations and forms of co-operation. Some interviewees consider that these concepts primarily originate from the US.

*“This Americanisation mania, and we stand gaping and continue to copy everything that comes from the United States. It is driving me mad and then on the political level, that is what bothers me most – they want it at any price. It seems that they are always right, they are the chosen people, and that is what frightens me. Thus, politically I would like that we were able to live our lives in Switzerland, that we were able to work without necessarily and absolutely bending to all these new fashions and certificates.”* Mr Fricker, telecoms manager in early retirement, Switzerland

Similar points were made by other middle managers or professionals in other countries. In spite of their success they found it hard to adapt to the demands of new business cultures. In particular, they despise excessive marketing and selling techniques as these violate their norms of honesty.

### **3.3. Perception of insecurity: calculable risk or complete loss of control**

Insecurity emerges as one of the most important issues from the subjective accounts of the consequences of recent changes in working life. While in general this theme is highly relevant to most of the interviewees, the particular forms of insecurity addressed

and the meaning attached to them differ widely. These range from perceptions of profound ambiguity of a world that is hard to understand on the one hand to calculable risks of one's market position on the other. The way people cope with changes and increasing insecurity also varies and depends on several circumstances. One of them is the extent to which they are used to insecure labour market relations. Another element is the way the welfare society is organised.

The pace of change is also a factor. If successive changes take place too quickly, people put up resistance, complain and very often develop health problems, such as stomach problems and sleep disorders. People seem to have fewer problems with changes if they understand the whys and wherefores behind them. But often they feel powerless because the changes are introduced from above without explanation.

Some interviewees give sceptical accounts of the "sustainability" of their current positions and their imagined future: they are doubtful whether, in the long run, they will be able (and willing) to keep up with the enormous demands on flexibility, skills upgrading, achievement levels, etc. It is quite interesting that objective socio-economic positions often do not correlate with the subjective perceptions of these positions and their stability: we can conclude that different frames of interpretation, social and cultural capital (and the extent of trust in its value and usability), expectations (building on past experience) as well as strategies of coping with change impact on assessing increasing insecurities as challenge or threat. Some interviewees who were unsackable civil servants nevertheless felt very threatened by restructuring measures (in the post and telecoms sector), whereas "advancing" interviewees in objectively insecure and risky positions felt or showed themselves to be fairly confident about their jobs and futures.

### **Employment – economic situation**

The prevailing perception is that the perspective of a job for life has vanished. Employees no longer have the certainty of working in the same organisation or in the same department until retirement. In the past, people found it relatively easy to obtain a permanent contract and as a result they had job security for the rest of their career. That security was even greater if people were employed by the state. Now, permanent contracts are only granted very sparingly and then mainly for highly skilled jobs.

In many countries, large numbers of employees in the telecommunications sector have been civil servants. The remaining civil servants in most countries have the privilege of being unsackable, and are thus in a relatively secure position – their pensions and other benefits are paid by the state. But these positions are threatened by privatisation and this form of employment is gradually disappearing. Civil servants' conditions of work are also changing, sometimes for the worse: for some employees, being moved around to different departments in the company represents increasing insecurity.

*"Today I am here, but maybe next week maybe something changes ... both at the political level and at the company level. Certainties especially for us older workers are growing weaker and weaker and this is what we are afraid of. I feel my job is*

*threatened and since I feel threatened I am afraid because I don't know what I will end up doing.*" Mr Michele, call-centre operator, Italy

It is clear however that the gradual increase in insecurity among civil servants who have always enjoyed a protected status with virtually lifelong job security is a huge shock to them. It therefore seems that the greater the sense of security was and the longer it lasted, the more difficulty people have had in adjusting to the idea of insecurity. At the same time it hardly seems possible to address this problem because for quite some time public opinion has regarded this kind of job security as a privilege of some groups of workers which cannot and should not be continued.

In the private sector, company-closures, outsourcing, mergers and acquisitions are widespread and have had a huge impact on work organisation and staff levels. Seasonal work, flexible working and temporary work is increasing – employees feel exposed to the vicissitudes of the market, which leads to a feeling of powerlessness. The flexibility demanded is not rewarded. Companies' increased reliance on temporary work can be a signal that their economic situation is unsound and restructuring may be on the way. People have to move to other departments and shift their jobs more often or are forced to work at long distances from their homes and families.

*"Every day I worry about whether I will be fired. That pains me more than when I used to not know if I would be able to get certain things, but that I would at least be able to pay for groceries."* Mr Marzahl, purchasing agent in the construction industry, Germany

People are forced into early retirement or to move to other plants, sometimes without knowing what kind of work they will be doing. The people approaching 55 are under particular threat. In the various successive reorganisations they are an important target group of "downsizing" through early retirement schemes. When management plan lay-offs they often offer retirement to the elderly employees in the company, but many of them perceive this as forced retirement. The pace of work, the way of working, the atmosphere at work and the lack of control over their future career that await them if they do stay, puts them off. Early retirement becomes the safer choice.

Those affected feel that they are considered to be worthless, and although they feel they have plenty of vitality, they feel they are being treated like pensioners. The consequence is loss of income, but many of them still have children in education, which means the children's future is also affected.

Some older people have a residual resistance to computers and computerisation in general. This is because it gives them the feeling of not really being able to keep up any more, of losing control over what happens at work and that their experience acquired in the traditional way is no longer worth anything.

*"Since the arrival of the computer I sometimes feel just like a dinosaur, I can't keep up with all that any more, and I am certainly too old to start learning about it now. No, I have missed the train, that is just the way it is. You can not teach an old dog new tricks, can you?"* Mr Bollens, technician, Belgium

For this group the devaluation of their qualifications and values are a severe threat to their job security. People who have managed to come a long way in their careers

compared to their parents also recognise that their qualifications and experiences are not used to the full anymore. They see that companies prefer young people, for example in the way the company organises a social plan for employees over 50 when the company is restructured.

For most of these people – and especially for the semi-skilled workers – the aspects of security and calculability of life have major significance. Some are low down in the social order and at the same time they see that work offers them few chances for advancement. If you have a good job you are interested in safeguarding it. Industrial work and, in particular, jobs in nationalised steelworks have in two ways been synonym for security, stability and calculability in relation to workers' life planning and way of life. Stable employment is a precondition for obtaining credit, which is often the only way semi-skilled workers can finance larger purchases.

Some people recognise the growing difficulty in facing expenses, because the salaries are not keeping pace with prices. The disqualification of work and the fall in solvency contribute decisively to structuring the individual perceptions of socio-economic change. This, combined with more flexible work, also creates insecurity. A former director of services who was included in the social plan for people over 50 when the company made a series of restructuring said:

*"... Nothing is certain any more, you don't know where you will be working in six months and what your salary will be, nothing! You can't plan for the long term any more. I think that's really stupid. Nowadays, the young ones must have some courage, because nothing is certain, they are burned, it's great if they get a job, but they are expected to work around the clock, and then they're fired from one day to the next ..."* Mr Fricker, telecoms manager in early retirement, Switzerland

Those excluded from the labour market are concerned about how to make ends meet on the social security benefits they receive and they are afraid that changes in the system will have negative consequences for them.

Unemployment or atypical employment entails material insecurity. People who have had long-term contracts in jobs considered secure may have taken out loans or have other economic obligations. The fear of material decline is closely linked with fear of social isolation – the fear of not being able to keep up with the living standards of friends and acquaintances, of not being able to go on holidays or to go to restaurants together.

Some cannot face or have stopped thinking about their futures.

*"Five years from now? I am not able to see myself. ... I have stopped thinking about the future, of what will come. ... I think about it once in a while, but anyhow I don't see anything. I will wait for some phone calls from the work agencies. So five years from now, well there is the hope to find fixed employment, but I have no certainties and consequently, I cannot see beyond present time."* Ms Sonia, unemployed, formerly in the manufacturing industry, Italy

Some people explain that they find it impossible to find a job because they have neither the qualifications nor the good connections necessary. A young man from Hungary says:

*“You know in this country there is a segment of society which does not have connections, does not have any good education and is between 35 and 55 years old. If you are in this segment it is impossible to get a job which would fit in your education and expectations.”* Mr Kastély, multiple job-holder, Hungary

While some of the female interviewees have broken off their careers because of the birth of children, and sometimes they have taken a career break longer than the usual parental leave in order to bring them up. When the children have grown up and they want to return to the labour market they have difficulty finding a job.

While some have found jobs that safeguard their livelihoods again, many have had to make concessions. However the security they reached seems to be falling away at the moment. One reason is regional – crisis regions have high unemployment rates; a second reason is age – they are over 50. Thirdly their qualifications are inadequate: some have completed an apprenticeship, but in their further careers they were employed as semi-skilled or unskilled workers.

Other women start working again before their children have grown up, and for them it is important to have a job they can combine with having children. One woman has chosen to work in her husband’s company because this gives her more flexibility.

*“Because I always have it a bit in the back of my head, that I am working for him, because when there is anything wrong with the children, I pack up and drop everything and go. Which would not be so easy in another office or something.”*  
Ms Carusan, IT operator, Austria

Many other women, however, are not so lucky to find jobs like this.

### **Heavier workloads**

The workload has increased, and so has the stress. In general, people are experiencing increased pressure of work, which is usually described as an almost constant rise since the early 1990s. For some the work has not so much become physically heavier, but a constant increase in pace is demanded, for example in the industry. Other groups perceive both physically heavier work and more stress, for example people who care for the elderly. The concern about being able to keep the pace is widespread in the group of people who feel that work is becoming harder.

*“I’ve become more stressed over the past five years. We have to work so quickly that when I get home in the evening I’m so tired. I fall asleep around six o’clock and wake up after a couple of hours, get undressed and go back to sleep. It’s incomprehensible how some people manage to go to meetings in the evenings or do sports. Where they find the strength is beyond me.”* Mr Skov, unskilled worker, Denmark

Mergers and acquisitions have led to a deterioration of working conditions because employees feel forced to accept worse conditions in the hope that the company will not move the production to other countries. The consequence is an increase in stress, workload and the pressure of not staying at home when being ill. The threat of forced early retirement, dismissal or relocation also leads to the disintegration of solidarity between colleagues.



Until the mid-eighties a skilled worker could usually be sure of a good salary. Now, in the Hungarian sample, many feel compelled to do two jobs in order to maintain what they consider an acceptable standard of living. This of course leads to an immense workload. A skilled worker working in maintenance in public transport has a micro-enterprise in the telecommunications business as well. He says:

*“I am working like hell. Last week I worked two nights and one day shift, and I was working for four days setting up telephone centres. After finishing the night shift, I run home, take a shower and then I jump into the car to run after the business. This is very hard work. It is almost impossible to get along with it.”* Mr Berkes, multiple job-holder, Hungary

Besides the heavy workload, this also leads to a different approach to work, because the private business “side job” becomes the main concern. Opportunities to socialise with colleagues and to spend time with family are limited.

But having a private company on the side is a risky business and the feeling of security has disappeared.

*“Once you get accustomed to security, it is hard not to have it. ... I am afraid that it is impossible to continue this in the long run. This way of life won't lead anywhere.”* Mr Berkes, multiple job-holder, Hungary

### **Always been in an insecure position**

Insecurity is part of the everyday working life for a self-employed person, which some have learned to live with. Some have invested in further training to get a wider market to operate on. They find constructive ways to cope with insecurity.

*“Basically for me it's like this, that although I've obviously always got my worries, strangely enough I have no worries about survival, that my self-employed existence will be shipwrecked. As there was never a shortage of money at [my parents'] home. ... I never stored the feeling of existential insecurity in my memory. That's not part of me ... I know a lot of people who have that very strongly, but I don't have it at all. I also think that it's only as a result of that that I dared to do what I'm doing at the moment.”* Ms Äggenwieser, self-employed masseuse, Austria

The social background seems to be essential here. Despite this constructive approach to insecurity, there are still worries about the absence of social guarantees in the case of not being able to work, above all in relation to their children.

*“So there's no security at all. That is, if the child is ill, it will be tragic; to be sick yourself mustn't happen at all – there's absolutely no safety net.”* Ms Aumüller, self-employed masseuse, Austria

Others, who have never chosen this approach, feel insecure and in this group some have difficulties in thinking about the future.

*“You don't have a future. It is always like you have to drag yourself day after day ... you get exhausted by the end of the year, because you are tired and you cannot do anything.”* Ms Sonia, unemployed, formerly in the manufacturing industry, Italy

Receiving unemployment assistance or being on social security moreover means coming to terms with severe material restrictions. This is extremely hard for the women looking after their children. One woman says:

*“I hardly buy anything anymore, and if I do then only at Humana or second-hand stores.”* Ms Bergner, unemployed, Germany

In this group we also find people who do not have much faith in the future.

*“I have no hope anymore. The only thing I can hope for is that my children are able to keep their jobs, that the company decides to keep them. That is almost more important to me than my own job. Over time you just get used to it – your nerves become dull. I was so exhausted and so distressed, that I couldn’t sleep at night. I could only think about where I would get the money to pay something, and then another bill would come the next week. It caused an enormous stress.”* Ms Bergner, unemployed, Germany

In the Hungarian interview sample we find many people trying to start their own businesses after being fired, or if the job can not provide an acceptable living. However, they face a tough competition.

### **Individualistic strategies in the IT sector**

The crisis in the IT sector has led to closures, cut-backs and severe competition and the people who work in the sector are aware of these conditions. Employees are clear in their minds about the possibility that their jobs are uncertain in many ways. But many of them do not regard this risk as a concern but more as a stimulus.

*“[You feel] the zest for challenges, for an intellectual challenge in the use of technologies, and in having a mental freshness determined by a constant demand to be up-dated.”* Mr Andrea, IT entrepreneur, Italy

Some think it demands a special kind of person to work in this business.

*“And like I said you have to be a certain type of person with inner calmness in order to cope with such a situation.”* Mr Ulrich, IT specialist, Germany

The feeling of having the necessary capacities and expertise is a means of coping with uncertainty. It is up to the individual to be prepared enough and ready to face the job market in case of dismissal. The perception of having the knowledge and the skills necessary to keep themselves competitive on the market gives the interviewees the feeling that they are actively managing current changes and instability, rather than being passive victims.

This group also has to accept a high workload and continuous stress. Over-long working hours of up to 60-80 hours per week are considered normal by some. The high level of stress and pressure for performance are not ignored but this frequently does not affect the positive approach to work. For some, coping with stressful periods of work successfully actually becomes a satisfactory confirmation of their abilities, in the sense that they get a kick out of “taming hell”:

*“So of course that gives you a certain self-esteem, when you see that actually all hell has broken loose, actually everything’s crashing round your ears, and*

*nevertheless we still make ends meet, nevertheless it works.*” Mr Baumann, young businessman, broker of IT trainers, Austria

The employees and freelancers in the IT sector tend to solve problems of coping with stress, pressure and enormous workloads in an individualistic way: relying on yourself in a merciless and competitive world of work with its insecurities, risks and unpredictabilities. *“You are your best product”* as the Italian interviewee cited below says. This way appears to them to be the most reliable and safest strategy for survival and success:

*“You have to be prepared; I think that things happen, things change, this is the reason for which I believe that the role of the single is important. Having a culture, a culture of the processes involved, which allows you to be independent, reversible and adaptable.”* Mr Davide, employee in the computer industry, Italy

As successes are perceived to be dependent on the role and capacity of the individual, so failures are explained through the role and incapacity of the individual. Some interpret the heavy workload as a consequence of an individual weakness.

*“I think that the problem is really with my lack of self-organisation. I think that I have to learn to budget my time differently and to become more efficient. During my eight hours of work I just have to concentrate on the most important things and then I have to know when to quit and say okay I can finish this tomorrow.”* Mr Hansen, team leader, IT sector, Germany

The high level of stress and pressure threatening the health of the employees is not ignored, but for some it can hardly affect the general satisfaction. A woman who is an under-manager in a mobile-phone company describes the psychological and physical strains she suffers from time to time:

*“What you most wanted to do then; I don’t know – throw yourself crying into bed because everything all around you just couldn’t do anymore and I’m already getting disturbed sleep, eating disorders. ... But at the moment it is OK, it is bearable. ... If I don’t cope any more ... then I just have to take a couple of days holiday and unwind. But that is human. That is quite legitimate.”* Ms Tumschitz, team leader, telecommunications, Austria

Some suffer from their exhausting working conditions to an extent that they are unsure whether they can keep the pace when they get older:

*“It’s pretty awful. I don’t even know if I’m going to manage to hang on in this race till I’m forty. When I get back home in the evening, for instance, it’s practically impossible to stop ruminating over all of the things I’m involved in.”* Mr Svendsen, IT specialist, Denmark

The subject of getting older is of particular relevance in the IT sector, as top performance is required, which only younger people are in a condition to provide, and this cannot be maintained in the long term or not up to pensionable age. Younger interviewees admit that they are not sure whether they are able to keep up the “race” for decades. Some of the older ones have had to recognise that this “race” can only be lost in the long term. Thus, for example Mr Daxhofer, a 54-year-old engineer in an IT concern believes himself positioned in an “elephants’ graveyard”, from which he is waiting for semi-retirement.

*“Until a year ago I still had personnel under me and everything, but apparently younger people do that now, and certainly with much more élan, you’ve got to admit that.”*

*“And we are struggling with the fact that, like any other normal company, we also have older workers, who are maybe not as capable to bear maximum loads of work. Or not as mobile and eager to travel, like we were in younger years. I myself am not curious about, for example, going to the US for six months. Or curious maybe yes, but I could probably not be able to perform well enough. ... Experience is not helping very much in that. I cannot imagine working until four in the morning for a week. I cannot and I do not want to imagine doing that.”*  
Mr Daxhofer, employee of an IT company, Austria

People who are self-employed often prefer being their own boss – being able to develop projects independently and determine the content and hours of work themselves. The enormous pressure of work is accepted as part of the deal. For freelance workers in the IT service, a high income functions as a guarantee of security with which they can save themselves from some misfortune, as Mr Sonnböck believes:

*“My house burns down – my God, I’ll buy a new one. ... I’ve got a slipped disc; OK, an operation will cost me 100,000 Schillings. Can I afford that? Can I do it? And if I can’t – fwhoo!”* Mr Sonnböck, IT freelancer, Austria

In the Hungarian report we find a special type of insecurity related to the political system. In public and state-owned companies the top management changes after every election because a new government takes over and brings in a new concept of company strategy. The consequence is that middle management has to be careful of disclosing their political or professional opinion. This leads to a feeling of insecurity.

*“Every four years we have a completely new management. Every four years the company is reorganised and we employ a new strategic focus. Each new management brings in a new clientele group and they kick out employees to make room for their friends.”* Ms Tóth, marketing manager, Hungary

This means that building a continuous career depends on having the right connections and belonging to which ever happens to be the right party at the time – the party in power.

Our findings allow different ways of interpreting evaluations of increasing insecurity being deemed as a stimulating challenge: some interviewees possess sufficient social and cultural capital as well as knowledge and skills that are very much in demand by companies or clients – they are conscious of this capital and it provides them with self-confidence in their chances of survival and success in rapidly changing economies and on labour markets with increasing insecurities and risks.

However, because of their age, formal education or simply the unpredictability of the skills in demand or company strategies, even some of the winners might not objectively and realistically be equipped with the capital to remain on the advancing track in the long-term. Nevertheless, they are not prepared to adopt this perspective, and instead convey self-confident perceptions and assessments. Perhaps the realisation of the fact that in a world of increasing risks and insecurities the winners of today may become the

losers of the year after next would be disturbing and have negative impacts on how one tackles the challenging present.

*“Personally, I have to say I am not a businessman, I’m a technician. Technicians are always capable of finding a decent job. So I personally think I wouldn’t have any problems finding a new job. If it was as good as the job I have now, I don’t know, but I doubt that I would have serious problems, especially also because of my age.”* Mr Müller, civil servant in the middle grade, telecommunications, Germany

### **3.4. Perception of injustice: feeling betrayed and humiliated**

A certain degree of injustice can be tolerated as long as the subjection to the impositions of alienated labour has an exchange equivalent in social security and social recognition. If the one side breaks this bargain, e.g. through dismissal, it produces feelings of injustice, which consequently may be directed against people higher up – such as for example the management – but also against weaker people such as immigrants and people who most of their life have received social benefits.

Perceived injustice is experienced very emotionally as an injury and offence, as a feeling of not being noticed and recognised, as a feeling of being looked down on and punished despite the high level of work orientation.

Redundancy is particularly hard for people who have always seen themselves as hard workers, especially when at the same time they see chief executives receiving “golden handshakes”.

*“We worked our arses off, we bust our guts working for a little pay.”* Mr Sagnol, rolling-mill worker, France

*“The bosses are paid billions when they are dismissed. ... They pay themselves monstrous salaries and yet the government will not cough up 10 centimetres to increase our wages. ... It is there it is unjust ... in short, it is only the worker who has no money.”* Mr Bouler, retired railwayman, France

The group of employees who cannot work anymore because the job is too hard or it demands qualifications they do not possess express great feelings of injustice. Some have worked their whole life with great willingness to work, burn themselves out and now have to live with the health consequences. They cannot get a job and some have recognised that neither the employer nor the state will or can help them getting another job of a kind they can cope with – they see themselves as having been thrown away. This was the view held, for instance, by a woman who had contracted an allergy from cleaning detergents and could no longer work as a cleaner.

*“You’ve slaved for them for 21 years, and what do you get for it? Dumped. That’s how I felt. They had nothing to offer. I’d been looking after patients for 21 years even though I didn’t have proper training. I worked tons of evenings when they needed someone. Night shifts – I’ve been doing three shifts in a row for years when staff was short – because I lived in the vicinity, when somebody was ill or there was a blizzard I used to cross the fields to do a night shift. And I didn’t mind. But I was disappointed the day they dumped me.”* Ms Frederiksen, cleaner, Denmark

Women experience double injustice – as employees and as women. This is most clear for single mothers. They pay a high price for their independence and autonomy, enormous burdens, feelings of guilt about having too little time for the children, material limitations, to some extent giving up career perspectives.

One woman says:

*“I mean, by and large, women are looked on as being disabled.”* Ms Frank, semi-skilled worker, electrical industry, currently unemployed, Austria

She explains this with regard to unequal pay and the prohibition of night work. When the factory closed, she had to train the Hungarian women who were going to do her work in the new location and afterwards she discovered that the management allowed the Hungarians to deliver sloppy work.

It is a widespread perception that other “undeserving” groups are accorded greater recognition, and this allows feelings of injustice and resentments to arise. Some direct their anger against those who from their perspective have apparently been able to fix things to suit themselves, such as politicians, but also refugees. We will come back to this point when dealing with political reactions.

### **Who to blame – the management**

Among the respondents we encountered people who feel that those who make the decisions do not understand their working life and that the experiences gained by working for many years are not recognised.

*“During the years your experience grows, and it seems to me that is not recognised any more in the way it was before. That’s what I think is negative in this ... system. For I think that somebody who knows an enterprise well, who has been working there for ten or twenty years, has ... well, he has a pretty good experience and ... and knowledge of the whole, the whole business, yes. And, in my opinion, this isn’t recognised that much in questions of salary.”* Mr Imhof, IT specialist in the chemical industry, Switzerland

The question of limited choice or the pressure of work is not seen as negatively or is tolerated to a certain extent if the company provides a certain level of wealth and security and if the company as well as society recognises these burdens. But if the company breaks this long-term implicit contract by means of a stricter economisation of social relations and if there is an increasing disregard for the impositions and burdens associated with the working conditions, job security is called into question – feelings of offence and devaluation arise.

Management is often regarded as inefficient, bureaucratic or unable to take the important decisions. This is seen to lead to bad decisions or lack of decisions.

*“But the management – the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing. There was the boss, a deputy, another deputy and what are they sitting there for – when everything is going down the drain and nobody cares.”* Ms Frank, semi-skilled worker, electrical industry, currently unemployed, Austria

Such decisions often concern the closure of sites that have recently been, renovated or in other ways invested in or receive government subsidies.

*“We give them money to set up business in a region and afterwards they leave with the cash. And then it is over and done. But what purpose does that serve? The worker, he is paying himself to work. And then, if he earns a bit more than he anticipated, he pays tax. I do not know – for me that is illogical.”* Mr Bouler, retired railwayman, France

The same kind of ignorance also is perceived in the way managers or consultants inform employees about changes, which can give rise to strong feelings of insult.

*“The way they fired us was unbelievable ... they behaved the way patriarchs did 150 years ago.”* Mr Georgi, web designer, Germany

Another interviewee says:

*“The policies of this company and the fact that they make an announcement three days before Christmas that they will be closing, that is really. ... I don’t want to say this, but that really is the absolutely worst thing you can do to people. They are only interested in profits. Whether anyone or their families are drastically affected, they don’t care about that.”* Mr Sturm, foreman in the metal industry, Germany

When a German company acquired a Hungarian telecommunications company, the new management hired an American consultant to reorganise and rationalise, who decided to move the warehouse to the outskirts of the city. The local shop steward tried to prevent this.

*“I had negotiated with the American consultant. I told him that from this part of Budapest one needs to get up at three o’clock in the morning to get to the central warehouse. He replied that he did not understand why this was a problem. Why didn’t they jump in their cars and drive that 35 kilometres in 20 minutes. He did not even conceive that a lot of us didn’t have a car, and if one had a car, he could not spend 40.000 out of his income on gasoline. ... You could imagine what you could expect from those who are making the decisions somewhere in Germany or France.”* Mr Kastély, multiple job-holder, Hungary

Increasing competition, changes and dismissals lead to an overall feeling that money decides everything:

*“Unfortunately we are living in a world where there are no ethical requirements. The only thing you have to have is ability of self-management and marketing.”* Mr Kastély, multiple job-holder, Hungary

### **The politicians and unions**

One group blames the politicians for taking the wrong decisions (privatisation, closure of state-owned companies, cut-backs in public-sector jobs) or for not defending the local market. In the Hungarian IT sector, for example, it is the big companies who control the market, and the smaller ones cannot compete with them.

Many feelings of injustice stem from experiences made in the process of privatisation. Especially with regard to the privatisation of public bus and rail transport, people realise

that the same jobs they did before now are in the hands of a private company paying much lower wages. As one of our respondents puts it:

*“Of course they now receive much lower pay and their benefits, such as vacations, have been reduced. It’s got worse for every one, much worse.”* Mr Busowitz, civil servant in the lower grade, public transport, Germany

The role of the unions also seems to be declining. For some, the employers are perceived as inflexible and invincible, and because of their weakness the trade unions are no longer able to represent the direct material interests of their members.

Some feel that the union failed in the process of privatisation. A former bus driver says:

*“It’s the fault of that disgusting social democratic union – the General Workers’ Union. They couldn’t care less about people on the shop floor. They accept any deal, even if it means destroying us. They just want the agreement in place. Four or five years ago I was a member of the Transport Workers’ Union. They had one agreement while the General Workers’ Union have at least five and a half just in the bus transport sector in the Copenhagen area. It comes down to the company you’re working for.”* Ms Jeppesen, former bus driver, in early retirement, Denmark

Outsourcing the transport sector in Denmark meant that the original collective agreement between the employers and the Transport Workers’ Union was transferred to the General Workers’ Union.

Others see the causes in the internationalisation of the economy. They recognise an increased profit-maximisation strategy of the big international concerns, which drives them to use the cheapest locations – in that process social standards and wage level are undermined.

### **Competition between groups in society**

In the competition between different groups on the labour market, the most noticeable in the interviews are the struggle between older and younger and the struggle between immigrants and the original population.

Some see the immigrants as a threat in the competition for work because they are cheaper for employers to hire. In some countries this is because they work for wages well below the normal rate, sometimes illegally. In other countries it is because there is economic support for an employer to hire an immigrant – a means to encourage integration.

A woman who cannot find work in catering that pays a living wage says:

*“Above all the Czechs and Slovaks are very much in demand both in service and in the kitchens because they work for lower wages than Austrian workers or are often not registered.”* Ms Ülbrecht, waitress, Austria

People perceiving themselves as hard-working often feel injustice if they consider other groups in society are getting money more easily. Some think that society is squandering social benefits on job seekers and those with no other form of income paid to do nothing.



*“I know people who have been here for ten years and don’t speak German. I have met people who say it to my face: Why should I learn German? I drive a Mercedes, you walk. They’ve got a lot of money, you can’t imagine how much. They get money in order to integrate, they live here for a year without paying rent. They get money for their children. They get a furnished apartment. And they get loans from the bank which they will never pay back. I see Russians driving Mercedes cars and they say: Work? Who me? No way – stupid Germans work.”* Mr Marzahl, purchasing agent in the construction industry, Germany

Some explain their decline as being partly the result of institutionalised discrimination against older people. The group of older workers is particularly threatened by the new demands of theoretical thinking, having responsibility in the job and the constant demand to adapt to changes. The fact that semi-skilled workers can be replaced and thus are in a weak position affects older workers more than younger ones, who can still to a certain extent trust in their labour power. The young thus become serious competitors.

### **The “advancement” group**

In this group feelings of injustice are not as widespread as among interviewees belonging to the “(threat of) decline” and “precariousness” categories. Some of the interviewees in this group, however, also feel threatened by socio-economic change and the insecurities it entails. Their views on the injustices in the world of work and society are often similar to those of our other two groups.

The violation of the work ethic is considered to be an injustice. Such violations are socially-structurally located “above” (in politicians, trade unionists, managers, etc.) as well as “below” (e.g. in the long-term unemployed). For some, especially the freelancers and entrepreneurs, everything that violates the principle of free competition and disadvantages them represents an affront. Some older workers who have reached quite secure positions see the pension system and welfare society as being endangered and cannot accept that people who in their view are “freeloaders” on welfare society or “social-security scroungers” also get a pension. Although many interviewees in this group earn good wages or occupy desirable professional positions, some of them do not show the generosity towards disadvantaged or marginal groups in society that might be expected. We can assume two reasons for this approach to people who, in their view, are unwilling to function in accordance with to the achievement-principle.

First, also subjectively, socially and materially rewarding work can lead to heavy workloads, pressure, stress, overlong working hours, burn-out, etc. Thus there is a price to pay for advancement and it seems that for some people – not only those in precarious or declining job situations – the fact that other people who do not live according to the societal norm of the achievement principle and in their view still live well (even if at a modest level) represents a kind of insult to the price they pay for belonging to the “winners”.

*“Because I know people, or you know people, I don’t know them, who just live on social security and where you then just ask, OK, I’d like to live as well as that. And you know these examples specifically. Then you think, yes, those are the black sheep who exploit this system.”* Mr Sonnböck, IT freelancer, Austria

Mr Sonnböck, a young and high performing, self-employed individualist, feels at home in a social system based in performance and competition:

*“I think a class society is not so bad at all, if it is not extreme. What would the world be like if everyone was equal. Not everyone wants to earn a lot of money. ... I think a classless society would be rather boring.”* Mr Sonnböck, IT freelancer, Austria

This quote brings us to the second point: Freelancers, self-employed people, employees in aspiring or top positions as well as managers are most intensely occupied with functioning according to norms of achievement and competition and excelling at the rules of the capitalist game. These norms shape perceptions that can lead to neoliberal, merciless attitudes of a social Darwinist nature. Injustice then means that the free play of market forces is prohibited, which leads to the “unjust” protection of the lazy. Equal opportunities or social justice is something “boring” and the superfluosity of the project to reduce class difference is justified as being against the will of people, who do not want to be equal.

Occasionally, it is argued that socio-economic change is an evolutionary historic dynamic that is in itself neutral:

*“No more people who all do the same thing in a massive manner, with the same roles. Now tasks and skills are diversified, now productivity is much increased, and this means that industry absorbs a diminished number of workers who have more and more different roles, but it does not absorb anymore the working masses. This is the general tendency. ... It’s not a positive or negative evolution; it’s an evolution.”* Mr Andrea, IT entrepreneur, Italy

On an ideological level, these examples highlight the proximity of neoliberal attitudes (shown by some of the interviewees we categorised as in “advancement”) to right-wing extremist thinking: no blunt racist or nationalist opinions or reactionary talk of some sort of *Volksgemeinschaft* are being articulated; instead, we are dealing with right-wing extremist thinking in respectable new clothes, socially accepted and originating in the middle strata of society.

In the perceptions of our interviewees, there are also people “up there” who do not adhere to the work ethic: the perception of management, politicians or trade unionists not knowing what’s going on “down here” where the actual work is being carried out and therefore making nonsense decisions is also to be found in this group. A woman who could be classified to the milieu of aspiring white-collar workers, perceives herself to be “down” and belonging to the “little” or “ordinary people”. She thinks that orderly conditions as well as the safeguarding of values such as decency and reliability are under threat, among other things, from changes in the company.

*“All talk so clever – they have forgotten what working down here is like.”*  
Ms Veitschnig, post-office counter worker, civil servant status, Austria

Those who have to bear the consequences of the decisions of incompetent and aloof managers are those at the bottom:

*“So you’re actually almost a doormat. Often it’s not our fault at all.”* Ms Veitschnig, post-office counter worker, civil servant status, Austria

Some see the break up, i.e. the restructuring of the company that accompanied liberalisation and the increasing pressure on employees to sell more or lower the quality, in a negative light. Social norms such as honesty and decency are being violated. Some argue that globalisation has increased competition and management prioritises economic results. It is the money that counts. Others stress the responsibility of management:

*“And just think about how many of them are fathers with a wife and children and how many of them are single mothers. Of course I understand that they want to earn money. The people who run the company want to make a profit, but they also have a social responsibility.”* Mr Hofer, head of data processing of a private telephone carrier, Germany

### 3.5. **Regions in decline**

In the French and Austrian parts of the project, people from regions dominated by a single industry were interviewed concerning economic, social and cultural issues. In these areas, people have become unemployed as their local area is falling into decay. For these people the consequences of this development are not only their own loss of status but also the loss of status of the whole area.

*“I lived through the boom years of the steel industry and then the decline – It’s become a dormitory town here – there’s nothing.”* Mr Kahn, retired steel worker, France

The French region is housing more and more immigrants. Two very different groups co-exist in a depressed geographical environment: workers and former workers – primarily from the steel industry – and the youth of north African origin. This spatial proximity personifies the threat of *déclassement*. For the group of retired workers, their private property embodies the whole extent of their investments. And they perceive the “youth” of the adjacent district where the immigrants live as representing both a threat to property and the reputation of the town.

People’s orientation on and anchoring in a region means that their mobility on the labour market is very limited, and the job loss resulting from the poor regional labour market situation is for many an existential threat – especially for workers over 45. This leads to defensive attitudes.

*“Demands are something you can forget now.”* Mr Pammer, metalworker, Austria

Some symbolic manifestations force this decline back into consciousness. The fate of buildings, for example, many become very symbolic. The “Casino”, for example, is a group of prestige buildings in the middle of an Austrian industrial town, belonging to the local steel works. A symbol of the heyday of the nationalised industry in the region and in particular the works in town. The decline of the “Casino” becomes a symbol for the decline of the region. For a long time it stood empty and then refugees were accommodated there.

*“This all plays a role. It is, and perhaps for us in there, that this didn’t, is certain, that the Casino had a lot to do with it. ... In any case of course it made an impression, the Casino was a smart building, and now its decrepit. Whether that*

*was them [the refugees] I don't know at all, that happened in the course of time. Of course, among the people themselves in [H.], that leaves an impression."*  
Mr Lindemann, metalworker, Austria

The decline of both the nationalised industry and the region reflects the general devaluation of their social position as industrial workers, which inevitably entails effects on their personal and social identities.

### **3.6. Summary**

In the following we will summarise the most important findings concerning the interviewees' perception of changes in working life. These changes and the related experiences are highly relevant because, to start with, work and employment are central to people's lives both in terms of securing material existence and in relation to social integration and personal identity. Though our sample encompasses wide variety of occupational groups, age groups, education levels, social milieus, etc. it can be generalised that work is highly valued, that it is life-structuring and provides support, stability and meaning. A considerable element of self-esteem is formed through what one does at work. When the interviewees face changes in working life, the work identity is affected and for part of the interview sample it seems that their identity is under enormous threat.

The most important ways in which people have experienced recent changes in working life are redundancies and early retirement schemes, transfers to other organisational units and jobs, changes in work organisation, new styles of management, new demands on knowledge and skills, increased workloads, higher job and employment insecurity and problems of access to standard employment relationships and long-term security of employment.

Dismissals and forced retirement are, on the one hand, a threat to one's standard of living and, on the other, lead to a perception of losing status. People feel worthless, betrayed and humiliated – especially if they have been faithful to the employer and to the work for the whole of their working lives. In the case of job loss it is not so much social shame resulting from ending up in a stigmatised social category that was expressed in the interviews. Rather, our interlocutors pointed out their performance orientation, their contributions to the company or to the economy and their subordination to societal norms, which have gone unrecognised or unrewarded. They suffer from breaches of implicit contracts, which result in a denial of the income, recognition and status they had expected in return.

A widespread concern among those who are still employed but affected by restructuring is the devaluation of qualifications and work-related values. Either employees under new circumstances cannot use the experiences they have accumulated and the skills they have appropriated, or new managers no longer recognise these individual assets. New rules of the game often mean that it is no longer possible to produce the standard of quality they used to, and workers perceive that the quality they had always found

important does not count anymore. This violates people's pride in their work and leads to the feeling that one's skills are no longer needed.

The feeling of insecurity is widespread and a very important issue to more or less all our respondents, though some do not openly acknowledge it as such. The most meaningful forms of perceived insecurity are:

- job insecurity in the sense of doubts regarding the long-term perspectives of a particular job within a company, e.g. because of imminent restructuring;
- employment insecurity, meaning fear of losing current employment in impending redundancies, problems of coping with demands for performance, health worries or concerns about the economic viability of the company;
- income insecurity and perceived threats to the standard of living or material subsistence due to unemployment, early retirement or precarious employment;
- skill reproduction insecurity due to computerisation, increasing demands for theoretical knowledge, restructuring, decline of the industry or the occupation.

Workers approaching or over the age of 50 realise that losing their job would mean long-term unemployment because they see no opportunities for themselves on the labour market. At the same time, older employees in particular recognise that they are the ones who will have to leave in case of closures or redundancies accompanying privatisation and restructuring.

Reactions to increased insecurity are highly varied. People in very precarious employment situations have simply given up thinking about the future. They seem to have resigned themselves to the impossibility of making any plans and being forced to passively adapt to anything that happens to them. The inability to plan the future not only relates to work and employment but also to consumption and private life. There is a great fear of social isolation. At the other extreme are successful, highly qualified and younger people who are confident that their education, their competencies and social relations will allow them to adapt actively to the ever-changing requirements of working life. What is noteworthy though is that these do not seem to have a master plan for their careers either.

There is a widespread feeling of living in an ever-changing world which is hard to understand. If changes are introduced from above without explanation – and in many cases this is the case – the feeling of insecurity is even greater.

Insecurity partly stems from changed forms of employment. The amount of temporary work is increasing, and those in such work often feel exploited. They are aware that the company is not investing in them while at the same time it is extracting as much from them as it can. But the way of coping with this situation varies. People who had previously enjoyed very secure conditions of employment suffer from being expelled from the core workforce. At the other end of the spectrum we find people (self-employed, people in IT and telecommunications) who have more or less chosen a non-standard employment status, and they often have a different approach to their conditions. They are more likely to see changes as a challenge, and they have to find

ways of profiting from the changes. Among these, some express a kind of social Darwinism. They suggest it is up to the individual to be sufficiently prepared and ready to face the job market in case of dismissal. Success is dependent on the role and capacity of the individual.

New ways of organising work are constantly being introduced in working life. We can find two trends in the interviews. One gives the employees more influence and responsibility. The other trend is increased management control and Taylorised work. Some interviewees suggest that the acquisition of greater influence and acceptance of responsibility in work is developing and satisfying. Others perceive it as a form of personal pressure. The reaction will often depend on the way the changes are introduced and how much the employees are informed and have had opportunity to participate in and discuss the changes. Another element is whether they do in fact have any influence. Sometimes the employee has to manage the work tasks without having sufficient resources or training. In general, more management control is perceived as a reduction of freedom.

The interviewees have experienced an increased pressure of work – usually described as an almost constant rise since the early 1990s. Interviewees say that they are afraid they can not keep up with the pace – older employees in particular express this feeling but we also find it among younger people. This not only contributes to a negative evaluation of current working conditions but also enhances the feeling of insecurity.

Overall, what emerges from the interpretation of the subjective accounts of changes in work in all eight countries is that for a large number of the respondents the attraction of work or, related to less privileged positions, the acceptability or bearableness of work has declined or even disappeared. It seems that some of the changes in working life are threatening the basic balance between what the employees put into work, in terms of efforts and sacrifices, and the employers' and society's provision of social security and social recognition in return. This leads to a feeling of injustice, which is experienced very emotionally as an injury and offence. This "mode of attachment" to work can be affected by different conditions for different groups of employees.

The causes of adverse changes and of injustice can be attributed to managers, politicians and trade unions. The view that "those who decide do not understand the working life and experiences for the ordinary people" is widespread, as is the impression that those who make the decisions do not care about people on the shop floor. Because of this, people see decisions in their workplace as being unfair or bad for the company or workplace. Workers' representatives and trade unions do not seem to be able to protect workers from the negative consequences of restructuring. Sometimes they are perceived as belonging to those "up there" who make the decisions and are able to safeguard their privileged positions.

The perception of globalisation is more diffuse. Often interviewees say that today money is all that counts and social norms of honesty and decency are violated. Some view the developments as being part of the implementation of new management concepts based only on pure-market economy mechanisms. Some see the management concepts as originating US and feel they are ruining the national company culture and quality.

## 4. VIEWS ON POLITICS. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND ORIENTATIONS

### 4.1. *The Rise of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism in the European debate*

*Introduction: The hidden persuasion of the working class?*

While a high percentage of those who voted for the French Front National (FN) in the 1980s consisted of the self-employed, shop keepers, trades and crafts people, small and medium-sized businesses, and entrepreneurs,<sup>3</sup> a change in this trend set in during the 1990s. In the mid-1990s, thirty per cent of all manual workers (male and female) voted for the FN. Two years later, votes for the FN from this group declined again by a quarter, and so did the percentage of votes in the first round of the French presidential elections on 21 April 2002, when approximately every one manual worker in four (26 %) voted for Le Pen, according to polling data<sup>4</sup> (see Plasser/Ulram/Sommer 2002). Simultaneously, close to 30% of tradespeople, shopkeepers and company executives voted in favour of the extreme right. However, this result has not led the media to pay particular attention to this “patrono-lepénisme” (Collovald 2002).

Austrian blue-collar workers are willing to vote for right-wing populist parties to a greater degree than their French counterparts. In the 1995 Austrian parliamentary elections, over 30 per cent of all manual workers voted for the Freedom Party (FPÖ). However in 1999, the working-class vote for the FPÖ rose to 50 per cent. This shift within the social base of supporters of the extreme right gave rise not only to political debates on the changing rule and growing influence of the extreme right among the labour force, but also provided a basis for a wide range of research projects focusing on electoral behaviour, declining confidence in the trade unions and the traditional left and, last but not least, on the decline of the social milieu which had functioned as a barrier against authoritarian seduction. It appears that the events of 11 September 2001 reaffirmed long-standing resentments against immigrants and further immigration.

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<sup>3</sup> At the national elections that were held in 1988, 27 per cent of the small shopkeepers, craftsmen and self-employed voted for the Front National and 19 per cent of workers voted for the extreme right (Perrineau 2001:194).

<sup>4</sup> In France, the results from the exit polls have to be interpreted very carefully: these surveys do not take into account the high percentage of people who refuse to answer (nearly 40%). It cannot be extrapolated that “X% of all labourers vote for Y”, because polling methods are unable to test opinions of non-voters and those not on the electoral list (Garrigou 2001).

### *11 September 2001 as a turning point in the debate?*

The attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 not only led to war against Afghanistan and changed the American foreign policy paradigm, it also influenced domestic policy debates in the US as well as in the western European states. Issues such as immigration and asylum policies became associated with terrorism, criminality and questions of internal security. The terrorist attacks provoked debates in national parliaments, caused national governments and parliaments to rescind or relax legal protection of data privacy and led to more stringent measures concerning the civil rights of foreigners, immigration law and provisions regarding asylum. These political debates also influenced the political attitudes and opinions within the population. Here the reporting by the media played a decisive role:

“The mass media have an influence on people’s attitudes as well as our common knowledge, but not always in the expected and desired ways. ... The way the mass media represent, focus and give voice to different actors and incidents in society could have the unintentional result of strengthening a racist discourse instead of fighting against it. Mass media reporting is especially sensitive when it comes to ethnic, cultural and religious relations in our society.” (EUMC 2002a:3)

The “Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001”, presented by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC 2002b), and based on reports from a range of countries, concludes as follows:

“Throughout many parts of the EU in the post-September 11 period, a rise in ethnic xenophobia was identifiable. This type of xenophobia was distinctly separate from the xenophobia that exists within both Islamophobia and indeed the anti-asylum seeker sentiment. ... Through a greater perceived threat of the enemy within, and an increased sense of fear and vulnerability both globally and locally, this type of xenophobia resulted in many countries experiencing a dramatic increase in the type of prejudices and hatreds that were already pre-existent. ... The impact of New York therefore seemed to have a direct impact on the way that an increased sense of hostility and lack of tolerance was exerted against pre-existent, usually historically perceived foes. In much the same way as the underlying explanations relating to asylum seekers, it provided a catalyst of fear that, to some degree, offered a newly acceptable justification.” (EUMC 2002b:40)

Most of the country records which were provided by the National Focal Points (NFP) indicate a considerable rise in the activities of the far-right and neo-Nazi groups. Even though ideologies, programmatic points of view and rhetoric of the different parties and organisations of the extreme right were similar, the reports did not assert a collaborative or pan-European co-operation of the European far-right. The above-mentioned summary report by the EUMC highlights one pervasive common feature of the European extreme right: the idea that Christianity in Europe was under threat and was about to be replaced by Islam. The underlying ideology of this scenario propagated by right-wing extremists is the assumption that Christianity is at the core of the European identity. Thus Islam



was considered to be a threat to European identity. Ideologies of this type have not been disseminated only by the organisations and the media of the extreme right but also by a well known prime minister: “*We must be aware of the superiority of our civilisation, a system that has guaranteed well-being, respect for human rights and – in contrast with Islamic countries – respect for religious and political rights.*” (Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, quoted by BBC news, 27 September 2001) Silvio Berlusconi’s statement that the West guaranteed respect for human rights and religion whereas this kind of respect did not exist in the Islamic world exemplifies that the perception of superiority of western civilisation is widespread – not only in the population but also in the political elite.

Even though the EUMC records a rise in activity and a wider voice of the far-right and neo-Nazis, the authors do not conclude from these observations that “popular opinion ... was significantly affected by the far-right. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the distance between the acceptability of the mainstream and the previous unacceptability of the more extreme, far-right is coming closer together.” (EUMC 2002b:43.) According to the authors of the report, the messages of the far-right may have found a “more consensual and sympathetic ear in the wider mainstream” (EUMC 2002b:43). Illustrating their thesis, the EUMC refers to the Italian and Danish example:

Even though Berlusconi defended himself against a storm of criticism – arguing that his remarks were poorly translated and quoted out of context – this assessment had a decisive impact, not only in Italy but also on an international level. Thus, the statement of the Italian prime minister became a source of justification for a Swedish neo-Nazi group. In the case of Italy, the report cites a smooth transition between the resentments directed against asylum seekers and Muslims following 11 September 2001 and links both of these issues to Italy’s existing ethnic xenophobic attitudes: Islam as “the old enemy”.

Within the period from 11 September 2001 to May 2002 (the publication date of the summary report on Islamophobia), Denmark and France were the only EU countries to have national elections. Preceding the 20 November 2001 elections to the *Folketing* in Denmark, an election campaign based on anti-terrorism displayed obvious as well as subliminal racist elements which were directed mostly against refugees with an Arab or Muslim background. According to the report, many Danish mainstream political parties had attempted to gain political advantage by using inflammatory language and openly mobilising racist stereotypes.

Within a few weeks, from 11 September 2001 to the elections on 20 November 2001, more racist crimes took place in Denmark than in all of 2000. Six years after its establishment, the Danish People’s Party (DPP) emerged in the elections as the third strongest party. The newly established minority government of right-wing-liberal prime minister Fogh Rasmussen depends on the representatives of the DPP. As early as 17 January 2002, the minister in charge of refugees, immigration and integration, Bertel Haarder (Venstre), announced that legislation had been drafted that would gravely worsen the status of the refugees and immigrants.

However, it is not only the events of 11 September that have led to an increase in racism (particularly against foreigners assumed to have an Islamic background). The Israeli-Palestine conflict, the critical situation in the Middle East and the threat of war against Iraq, resulted in the growth of anti-Semitism in various European states. Several extreme-right newspapers and journals blamed the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001 on the Jews. In France in particular, attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions increased.

In addition to the rise of racism outlined above, targeting primarily immigrants with an (assumed) Islamic background, we can state that anti-Semitic undercurrents have increasingly impacted on the political culture within the last several years – particularly in Germany and Hungary. Also in Germany the campaign in the run-up to the elections held 22 September 2002 was strongly influenced by racist ideologies and had an anti-Semitic bias. There is much evidence to conclude that “anti-Semitism became an issue for the first time in a post-war German election campaign” (Anti-Semitism Worldwide 2001/2, Salzborn/Schwietring 2003). Jürgen Möllemann, chairman of the liberal parliamentary party in the *Landtag* (federal state assembly) of North-Rhine Westphalia contributed – together with his party – to the acceptance of anti-Semitism as a legitimate attitude in public opinion. In doing so he only needed to refer to well known anti-Semitic stereotypes and to establish them in the public discourse. The debate began initially with the utterances of the defector Jamal Karsli, the former member of the Green parliamentary fraction in North-Rhine Westphalia who joined the liberal fraction and who claimed, in an interview given to the right-wing extremist journal *Junge Freiheit*, to know of the existence of a “Zionist lobby” possessing the biggest share of the media power in the whole world and able to “cut down to size even the most important personality” (*Junge Freiheit*, 5 May 2002). Asked in an interview referring to the views of Karsli – the new member of the liberal fraction in parliament – Möllemann stated: “I am afraid that no one but Mr Sharon and, in Germany, Mr Friedman with this intolerant and spiteful behaviour, could have recruited more members for the anti-Semites, who unfortunately exist in Germany” (Fried/Frigelj 2002). He thus blamed Michel Friedman, vice-president of the *Central Consistory of Jews*, for the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany. According to this widespread anti-Semitic ascription, the Jews are considered to be responsible for prejudices and persecution directed against themselves. In the run-up to the general election, Möllemann again provoked the revival of this debate by publishing a pamphlet mailed to every household in North-Rhine Westphalia. Again Friedman and Sharon were attacked. This time, the FDP leadership was angered and dissociated itself from the chairman of the North-Rhine Westphalia fraction in *Landtag*. At the national elections the FDP received 7.4 percent of the votes, well below the expected 18 per cent. But in North-Rhine Westphalia the liberals received 9.3 percent of all votes including second-preference votes – 2 percent more than the party had gained at the previous national elections. The “new anti-Semitism-debate” outlined here is just one example illustrating that the lines between racist, anti-Semitic and moderate right rhetoric have become increasingly blurred. Or, to put it another way, the issues of the right have become the issues of the centre (Butterwegge et al. 2002).

The EUMC 2001 report “Attitudes Towards Minority Groups In The European Union” (EUMC 2001) provides empirical data on the different dimensions of attitudes towards minorities, including: “blaming minorities”, “policies improving social coexistence”, “restrictive acceptance of immigrants”, “disturbance”, “multicultural optimism”, “conditional repatriation”, and “cultural assimilation”. In the period from 1997 to 2000 the attitudes of the EU citizens towards minority groups changed in contradictory ways:

- “On the one hand, many EU citizens favour policies designed to improve the coexistence of majorities and minorities. ...
- On the other hand, a majority of Europeans have voiced concern over minorities because they fear minorities are threatening social peace and welfare; this percentage increased over the period 1997-2000.” (EUMC 2001:11)

The authors of the report explain the latter tendency by the fact that people were worried about “unemployment, a loss of social welfare and a drop in educational standards” (EUMC 2001:11) – a thesis that was thoroughly investigated in our qualitative research.

The concluding “typology of people according to their attitudes towards minority groups” was constructed on the basis of the above-mentioned dimensions and it differentiates between four groups: the *actively tolerant* (21% of the total EU population), the *intolerant* (14% of the total EU population), the *ambivalent* (25% of the total EU population) and the *passively tolerant* (39% of the total EU population). The group considered as *actively tolerant* not only feels undisturbed by people from different minority groups, but it also agrees that minority groups enrich society; the *actively tolerant* deny a need for assimilation. People classified as *intolerant* hold strong negative attitudes towards minority groups; they tend to feel disturbed by ethnic minorities. Those classified as *ambivalent* do not think that minorities contribute positively to society and they share a desire for their assimilation, but – on the other hand – people in this *ambivalent* category do not feel disturbed by ethnic minorities. The group classified as *passively tolerant* have positive attitudes towards minorities, even though they do not support policies in favour of minorities. The *passively tolerant* do not feel disturbed by ethnic minorities, are convinced that they can enrich society and do not call for assimilation. Referring to the impact of the socio-economic status, the report concludes: “The percentage of tolerant and intolerant people differs systematically by socio-economic group. ... Socio-economic status has a much weaker effect on passively tolerant and ambivalent people, and its effect is not that systematic” (EUMC 2001:24).

Compared to socio-demographic factors such as gender, age groups, education, political attitudes or affiliation with minority or majority groups, the impact of socio-economic status on the attitudes towards minority groups is claimed but not proven or documented. Thus, the analysis of the Eurobarometer 2000 survey does not provide the empirical data to render the interaction of socio-economic criteria and political attitudes more precise.

Compared to other surveys on racism and xenophobia, our qualitative research not only collected data on attitudes toward minority groups but also focused on the impact of the socio-economic status of the interviewees and on their perception of socio-economic changes. In accordance with our special research interest and our particular focus, we will present the wide range of different political views in this chapter. Since the main focus of our research project is on the appeal of right-wing extremism, in this chapter we will describe, exemplify and analyse primarily various patterns of interpretation and coping strategies of interviewees who are attracted by right-wing extremism. The presentation of selected examples, considered to be archetypes, from our sample is based on the in-depth analysis of the individual interviews and cases documented in the individual interview reports which were provided by the researchers from each national team.

The question “Why them and not the others?” leads us to a discussion of the obvious phenomenon that negative experiences in the world of work do not necessarily lead to right-wing attitudes, but can, under certain conditions, also strengthen the ties either to the left and trade union movement or to the traditional conservative camp. This subchapter contrasts the interpretations and coping strategies that lead to an affinity towards the extreme right, against factors which might serve as barriers against the extreme right’s alluring appeal. Instead of the systematic approach used in the preceding subchapter, we concentrate on a discussion of the various factors that create such barriers.

Since the findings from eight different countries contributed to the qualitative research of this synthesis report, we have to bear in mind not only the national particularities and local peculiarities, but also the political debates, the particular press coverage and crucial events, e.g. national elections, dominating national politics in the year 2002. In the succeeding subchapter “General Country Backgrounds” we want to outline the most important characteristic features of the national and local debates that took place in the interview period.

## **4.2. General country backgrounds**

To ensure that the qualitative research findings are interpreted appropriately, it is necessary to outline the political debates and crucial events that took place in the various countries during the interview period. In most of the countries the interview period started in the spring of 2002 and lasted until late summer (September 2002). Only in France and Denmark were some of the interviews already conducted prior to 11 September 2001. During the interview period some of our national teams were confronted with election campaigns, as in Germany and Hungary, or with internal party differences in the extreme right camp, as in Austria. The Austrians saw a major crisis of the governing coalition, which led to a call for new national elections. Italy, Switzerland and Denmark debated highly controversial domestic policy issues related to the future of the welfare state.

*Austria:* The situation in Austria can be outlined as follows: In the 1999 general elections the FPÖ gained 26.9 percent of the votes and became the second largest party. Joining the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in a governing coalition, the FPÖ came into power at the beginning of 2000. Stressing the personal responsibility of the individual and the call for a more disciplined handling of the welfare state, the programmatic principles of the FPÖ are basically neo-liberal. These fixed programmatic goals notwithstanding, the FPÖ presents itself as a force fighting against the allegedly "privileged elites" and for the interests of the hard-working and industrious Austrians, in this way addressing the "ordinary people". Inside the governing coalition the FPÖ followed a neo-liberal course by raising taxes and national insurance contributions. The conflict between the neo-liberal programmatic principles and the neo-liberal bias of the economic and social policy of the governing coalition on the one hand and the reference to the interests of the Austrian workers and the ordinary "man in the street" on the other, was the ultimate cause leading to the crisis in the governing coalition. The federal chancellor's call for new elections was an outcome of the resignation of three FPÖ cabinet members and the head of the parliamentary faction. The internal party differences between Jörg Haider and the parliamentary faction and the crisis in the governing coalition, which took place in early September 2002, influenced the interviews conducted by the Austrian team after the crisis had become public. Most of the respondents considered to be receptive to right-wing extremism who were interviewed before the crisis within the party and the governing coalition expressed their sympathies for the FPÖ and supported its good work in the governing coalition. However, after the crisis had become public the researchers could hardly find any interviewees who expressed support for the politics of the FPÖ. The drastic change of the political situation in Austria is reflected in the interviews and anticipates the landslide defeat the FPÖ suffered in the general election on 24 November 2001 (from 26.9 % in 1999 to just 10 % in 2002).

*Belgium.* Since the last parliamentary elections (13 June 1999), a coalition of socialist, liberal and green parties, headed by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, has governed Belgium. With 15 parliamentary seats, the extreme right-wing Vlaams Blok (VB) is part of the opposition. In the local elections of 8 October 2000, which were seen as a test for the new national governing coalition, the government parties achieved favourable results compared to the 1994 local elections. In these elections the VB ran the largest slate of candidates ever, this time giving almost 80 per cent of the Flemish people the opportunity to vote for a VB candidate. This resulted in noticeable gains (e.g., 33 % in Antwerp and 26 % in Mechelen) making it the largest party in some constituencies. In spite of its election successes, the VB remains in opposition in each city, because all democratic parties have so far rejected any coalition with the extreme right – based on an agreement from the 1990s known as the *cordon sanitaire*. In contrast to other countries (i.e., Austria, France, Germany and Hungary), neither parliamentary nor presidential elections took place, so the interviews were not affected by an emotional election campaign.

Whereas the attacks of 11 September 2001 did not play a crucial role in the interviewees' interpretation of the social world, another political measure was mentioned quite often: the elimination of the radio-television licence fee in Flanders. Prior to this amendment every owner of a radio or television set had to pay the annual fee of approximately 150 euros. However, shortly after a Flemish minister cancelled this, a number of local taxes (in villages and cities) were raised. Although the Flemish government was not responsible for the tax increases, the public assumed that it was. Thus, people complain that they feel cheated, because they feel that what had been given to them by the government with one hand was taken away again with the other.

*Denmark:* As outlined above, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 provoked an abrupt rise of racist crimes and an election campaign strongly influenced by subliminal racist elements – both directed against immigrants with an alleged Islamic background. But the political debates on the EU enlargement also had an impact on the topics highlighted and questions raised by the interviewees. Worth mentioning in the Danish case is that the interview period started right after the new right-leaning government supported by the Danish Peoples' Party had come to power. One example showing the Danish People's Party's influence on the politics of the newly established minority government of right-wing-liberal prime minister Fogh Rasmussen was a draft finance bill. This proposed changes that would cut waiting lists, provide assistance to the vulnerable, and restrict the influx of immigrants and refugees.

*France:* Two national elections fell into the interview period, the presidential elections of 21 April and 5 May 2002, and the general elections of 9 and 16 June 2002. On 21 April, the extreme-right candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, gathered more than 17 per cent of the votes and qualified for the second round. He was finally defeated by the right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac, who received 82 percent of the votes. The public debates – both in politics and in the media – in the run-up to the elections focused primarily on insecurity, particularly highlighting issues related to crime and delinquency. The interviews conducted in the IT sector in Grenoble (December 2001 to September 2002) were overshadowed by the merger between Hewlett Packard and Compaq. With regard to changes in employment and growing insecurity, the crucial outcome of this merger was the announcement of far-reaching staff reductions (amounting to 25 per cent) threatening the employees in the Grenoble IT sector.

*Germany:* The racist bias of the political discourse on immigration and asylum policy and the anti-Semitic undercurrents in the liberal FDP's election campaign influenced not only the public debate in general but also the topics discussed in the interviews. As far as economic and employment policy is concerned, the following outline should contribute to a deeper insight into the debates of 2002. The interviews conducted in Germany took place against the background of the campaign in the run-up to the elections held on 22 September 2002. Chancellor Schröder and his "new centre" coalition of Social Democrats and Greens had to struggle hard to remain in office. Partly due to the worldwide recession, the German economy was performing very poorly. Instead of reducing unemployment significantly to 3.5 million, as Mr Schröder had promised in 1998, the rate did not fall. On the contrary: In the run-up to the

elections, 2002 official statistics indicated that the number of unemployed had increased to four million. In an attempt to restore confidence in the governing coalition's capacity to solve economic problems, it presented the "Hartz-Paper", a report of the proceedings of a commission headed by Peter Hartz, the former trade union-affiliated Volkswagen-manager from Lower-Saxony. Trying to obscure past failures and evoke new hopes, the governing coalition used such means to exploit widespread resentments against the unemployed and the allegedly inefficient social bureaucracies. Even though social-democratic employment policy did not contribute to a decrease in unemployment rates or to the improvement of economic conditions, the electorate had to be encouraged to vote for the Social Democrats again.

*Hungary:* Not one of the three previously elected government coalitions was confirmed by parliamentary elections after the political changes in Hungary in 1989/90. As the Hungarian parliamentary elections approached, it was first predicted that the national-conservative government coalition (FIDESZ/MDF) of prime minister Victor Orbán had a good chance of re-election. In the run-up to the 2002 elections, the extreme right-wing MIÉP, which had entered parliament with 5.47 per cent of the votes in the 1998 elections, determined the political climate in Hungary with its nationalistic, racist and anti-Semitic remarks. The propaganda was not only directed at alleged internal enemies, such as the assumed Jewish influence of the press, foreign investors, Sinti and Roma as well as the settlement of Russian Jews in Hungary. Its openly nationalistic and anti-Semitic ideology and propaganda also expressed anti-Americanism, criticism of globalisation, as well as criticism of the plans of NATO and the EU (scepticism concerning impending Hungarian EU membership). The relations between the government coalition FIDESZ/MDF and the MIÉP increased due to mutual goodwill during the legislative period and as the elections approached. The government coalition remained silent not only in view of the anti-Semitic remarks by István Csurkas and his party colleagues, but it also defended the extreme right against its critics – possibly with a view towards a coalition with the MIÉP after the parliamentary elections. The MIÉP, which considered itself the "opposition in the opposition", functioned as a silent procurer of a majority for the FIDESZ.

Overt and covert Jew-baiting was also present in various social spheres of influence. It was even found in an ecclesiastical circular which, concerning the 2002 elections, contained the following prayer: "Save our nation from the egoistical and only self-aggrandizing ultra-liberal ideology and provide us with leaders who are devoted to you and depend on your assistance." Liberal leftwing critics of these anti-Semitic diatribes were insulted with such terms as "leftwing Bolsheviks", "cosmopolitans", "bogus Hungarians", "spiritually alien", which are considered synonyms for "Jewish" and are openly denounced as traitors in the Hungarian media (Marsovszky 2002).

The emotionally charged election campaign can be considered the most violent ever. In spite of the prognoses of the pollsters, who had predicted a victory of the government coalition, FIDESZ/MDF narrowly lost (41.07%) while the socialist or rather the social democratic MSZP (42.05%) and the leftwing liberal SZDSZ (5.57%) were the unexpected winners. Although the number of MIÉP voters had barely diminished in

absolute numbers, the extreme right lost as a result of increased voter participation, and with 4.37 per cent fell under the five-per cent barrier for representation in parliament. The independent Péter Medgyessy, minister of finance 1987-89, and deputy prime minister of Hungary 1988-90, was elected prime minister at the constitutional session of the new parliament on 15 May 2002 (see Weigelt 2002).

After the elections the right-wing revived rumours and threatened the Hungarian population with the return of Communism. But the most important verbal weapon of the extreme right was the claim that the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition had committed election fraud. They demanded an unwarranted recount of the votes. Some radical right-wing groups organised demonstrations in Hungary's big cities and of course primarily in Budapest. Some of these demonstrations were illegal and suppressed by the police – evoking memories of the Communists' terror of the fifties. Victories in local and regional elections were the only hope remaining to the right-wing but the left-wing coalition inflicted an overwhelming defeat on them.

*Italy:* The Italian general elections held in May 2001 and won by Silvio Berlusconi again put the all-European phenomenon of the rise of right-wing extremism at the top of the agenda. The governing “Casa delle Libertà” coalition includes mainly the Forza Italia (FI), Alleanza Nazionale (AN) and Lega Nord (LN), but also the Democratic Christian Centre and the United Christian Democrats. The charismatic leaders of the three far right parties, Silvio Berlusconi (FI), Gianfranco Fini (AN) and Umberto Bossi (LN), work closely together in the governing coalition. The political debates during the interview period focused on the following topics: The governing coalition proposed new labour legislation aimed at restricting the protection from dismissal codified in Article 18. The amendment, considered as one of the most far-reaching measures of the neo-liberal politics of Silvio Berlusconi, provoked vehement protest from the left, especially within the trade union movement. On 19 March 2002, Marco Biagi, professor of economics and political advisor to the government, was shot dead in Bologna, and the “Red Brigades” were blamed for the murder. Ultimately, this led the minister of the interior, Claudio Scajola, member of Forza Italia, to offer his resignation. For the first time in twenty years, workers went on an eight-hour general strike in protest at the proposed new labour laws, especially the amendment to article 18 of the labour legislation codifying the protection from dismissal. The second amendment that should be mentioned in this context is the reform of immigration legislation passed by the lower house of parliament in June 2002 and by the upper house in September 2002. The restrictions in the immigration legislation were criticised by the opposition parties as racist and unfair and provoked great public debate. According to the “Bossi-Fini law”, non-EU foreigners (or immigrants from “third countries”) will only be allowed to immigrate into Italy if they have arranged their work contracts before entering the country. The duration of the residence permit granted is based on the period of the employment contract. Furthermore, the amendment to the immigration law complicates family reunions, since only children under 18 years are allowed to join their parents living in Italy. It also requires foreigners to be finger-printed for identification.



*Switzerland:* The success of Swiss populism and right-wing extremism is tied narrowly to the success of the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) or Union Démocratique du Centre (UDC). The SVP has been a member of the federal government since 1929, but had not radically opposed the government's policies before 1989. By raising public discourse on four topics, the party succeeded in gaining ideological ground from the left. These issues are the relationship with the EU, immigration, crime and drug abuse, and perceived abuse of the welfare system. The SVP legitimised these issues and contributed to a shift of the conservative parties to the right. It became prominent when a charismatic leader (Blocher) advocated these issues by introducing populist methods and extensive market-orientation.

#### **4.3. *Acceptance of right-wing extremism and populism: various interpretation and coping patterns***

“Out-group rejection” and “in-group favouritism” are the central topics observed in interviews of individuals who exhibit a strong affinity for right-wing populist and extremist ideologies. Furthermore, individuals with right-wing populist or extremist attitudes call for an authoritarian state, prefer authoritarian solutions and go as far as admitting that they either vote for or are members of right-of-centre political parties.

Here it became obvious that there is more than one approach to extreme right ideologies. Individuals who were interviewed expressed their sympathies for right-wing populist ideologies according to their social status, educational background, age and gender. The following demonstrates the various subjective interpretations of socio-economic change that can be extrapolated from the available interview material. It should be noted that the differences occur not in isolation from each other but become closely linked in a variety of ways within the interviews themselves. The overview presented here will analyse and illustrate the central methods of argumentation and reasoning. Each of the nine extrapolated interpretation and coping patterns leading to an affinity for right-wing extremism will be briefly characterised and introduced, with reference to the debates in the literature. However, the main goal and contribution of this chapter is the concentration on the individual cases and presentation of the archetypes.

##### **4.3.1. *Members of the middle class with right-wing conservative and nationalist mentality***

During the mid-thirties, the economist, David Saposs stated:

“Fascism ... [is] the extreme expression of middle-classism or populism. ... The basic ideology of the middle class is populism. ... Their ideal was an independent small property-owning class consisting of merchants, mechanics, and farmers. This element ... now designated as middle class, sponsored a system of private property, profit, and competition on an entirely different basis from that conceived by capitalism.” (Saposs, cited from Lipset 1960:134)

Members of the middle class opposed both capitalism and “big business”. A quarter of a century later, Seymour Martin Lipset referred in his book *The Political Man* (Lipset 1960) to this thesis, which had already been presented in the mid-1930s, and extended it as follows: Each social class could choose a democratic or extreme form of expression: “The extremist movements of the left, right, and centre ... are based primarily on the working, upper, and middle classes, respectively” (Lipset 1960:132). Right-wing extremism recruits its followers from the same social class which supports the liberal parties. Lipset argues that socio-economic crises caused the former followers of liberal parties to turn to right-wing extremist parties. The NSDAP owed its election successes primarily to the old middle classes which, due to the processes of modernisation, were threatened by decline and loss of class status. Several examples of the thesis presented by Lipset are evident in our empirical material. Here we differentiate

- between members of the middle class with a right-wing conservative and nationalistic mentality,<sup>5</sup> and
- those members of the middle class who, due to socio-economic changes, developed fears of social decline and the loss of their “cultural identity”.<sup>6</sup>

One interviewee, Mr Zellhofer (a technical manager in a construction company, Austria) comes from a poor, small farming background. His early membership in a nationalist student duelling fraternity (*Burschenschaft*), which he had joined as a student, had a decisive impact on his political socialisation and contributed to the formation of his right-wing conservative and nationalist ideological character. After passing his *Matura* [A-levels] at a technical college he became a technical manager and *Prokurist* [person with general power of attorney] for a construction company with 100 employees, and advanced socially.

Initially, he voted for the conservative ÖVP, which was in power in his province. But finally his experience with conflicts between social policy and financial interests led to increasing frustration and provoked his protest against the abuses created by the ÖVP’s political meddling in business. He turned towards the extreme right after failing in his efforts to establish a new “Bürgerliste” (citizens’ list) in opposition to the monopolist influence of the ÖVP and its involvement in the local economy. The FPÖ offered him an appropriate infrastructure and support for his political activities, and he considered this party as the only one combating corruption and the abuse of power. Along with ideological compatibility, the FPÖ was the party that, he felt, best represented his professional interests.

He sees socio-economic change as a challenge and has so far been very successful in dealing with it. As a manager, Mr Zellhofer feels he is obliged to act in a socially responsible way: moral responsibility and mutual obligation determine his professional

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<sup>5</sup> Mr Zellhofer, technical manager in a construction company, Austria; Mr Xelzmann, owner of a construction company and a restaurant, Austria; Mr Davide, employee in the computer industry, Italy.

<sup>6</sup> Ms Tumschitz, team leader, telecommunications, Austria; Ms Veitschnig, post-office counter worker, civil servant status, Austria; Mr Bertram, labour office employee, Germany.

behaviour, which is why he is critical of neo-liberalism “*because social peace is only achievable with reasonably full employment*”. His attitude is paternalistic and caring toward his staff, and the needs of the “ordinary people” are of major concern to him. Based on these values there is, likewise, a close relationship to the FPÖ, which sees itself as the representative of the “ordinary people.” Here it is interesting that the FPÖ’s successful, but contradictory, programme, which had long achieved a balance between being a capital-oriented economically liberal party while at the same time representing the workers, appeals to him. As an employer he appreciates that better conditions for free competition will be created. Because of his social values, he supports the FPÖ’s consideration for the “ordinary people”.

A further example of the affinity toward right-wing populist or extreme ideologies within the middle class can be found in the Italian sample. Mr Davide (employee in the computer industry, Italy) aged 34 and single, has been working in the computer field since 1988 and has advanced professionally in recent years. Nevertheless, the price for his career and the accompanying raises in salary created have increasing insecurity (limited contracts) and moves. At the time of the interview he was living 200 km from his place of work. However, he generally regards the processes of internationalisation in the computer field and his professional challenges positively.

Mr Davide’s political views are contradictory. Although he claims that he belongs to the left, many of his positions imply that he likes the charismatic leaders of the extreme right. The politician he feels close to is Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the post-fascist party Alleanza Nazionale (AN). He likes Fini because of his personality, his coherence and some of his political ideas, such as meritocracy, the value given to family and the interpretation of immigration. According to his political assessment, Benito Mussolini achieved many important goals for Italy, such as the welfare state, the eight-hour working day and the improvement of drainage of the southern area near Rome. For these reasons the political system under Benito Mussolini is considered by the interviewee as a “good government”.

In his view, Italy now needs a strong leadership, possibly based on socialism. Even though he claimed to be open towards immigration, he stated that immigrants had many demands which Italians should not satisfy: e.g. the construction of mosques and the elimination of the crucifixes in schools or public buildings. Immigrants should adapt their life to the habits and customs of the nations they move to and not attempt to change their receiving country according to their needs, habits, cultural and religious identity.

We cannot ascribe his right-wing affinities to his subjective perception of insecurity, since the interviewee feels completely at ease or, at least appears to, in a very precarious and competitive job market. His philosophy of life relies on meritocracy; those who are prepared, who trust themselves, and who make great efforts in order to be on the crest of the wave, will surely be successful. This is the interviewee’s explanation of his rising career. His reference to himself in this category seems to suffice. He sees the individual as the most important element for survival in an ever-changing socio-economic environment.

We can describe his right-wing membership as the result of personal interests. Meritocracy, strong leadership, strict measures against crime, prohibition of immigration are all the right-wing elements which, possibly, result from personal growth over time and are not due to recent changes which he has experienced in his work domain. Whereas the political views of Mr Zellhofer and Mr Davide are characterised by a high affinity for the FPÖ or, respectively, for charismatic political leaders of Italian fascism, their political assessments cannot be linked directly to their perception of the consequences of socio-economic changes.

In the following interview, we will present a modified variety. People who can be subsumed under this category have in common that they talk openly about their threatened middle-class status and identity.

**4.3.2. Threat to middle-class status and identity, insecurity through modernisation, nostalgia and threat to cultural identity: “So I’m an Austrian body and soul ...” (Ms Tumschitz)**

A sense of insecurity based on increasing modernisation, the subjective feeling of threats to one’s cultural identity and the sentimental turning to nostalgia can be found in many interviews we conducted with members of the middle class. Those questioned have in common that they see themselves exposed to the danger of social decline, although they still enjoy a relatively secure social status. This methodology will be illustrated by an example from Austria.<sup>7</sup>

Ms Tumschitz (age 31, team leader, telecommunications, Austria) has been working at a mobile-phone company for four years: one year as a call-centre agent and one year as a back-office worker. Thus, when she became “a supervisor” two years ago, she entered management. She has always been fully employed. Ms Tumschitz regards her present position and employment as secure – she has no worries about restructuring or staff cuts, because she believes that within her company there will always be work and a job for her. However, these optimistic future prospects do not seem to be completely realistic. Although she has not reached the status of a civil servant, the only job opportunities she sees for herself are within the formerly state-owned post-office group.

*“They [the ÖVP/FPÖ government] have certainly done a lot of good. What I credit them with is the zero budget deficit, so hats off to them for managing that, certainly at the taxpayer’s expense, but it had to be that way.”*

On the other hand she criticises the fact that the FPÖ “*all of a sudden drags everything that the SPÖ had previously built up through the mud. They certainly did a lot wrong, but nevertheless they did a lot of good for the Austrian welfare state. And the fact that they now actually want to use all their power to destroy that, that makes me angry.*”

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<sup>7</sup> Ms Tumschitz, team leader, telecommunications, Austria; Ms Veitschnig, post-office counter worker, civil-servant status, Austria; Mr Bertram, labour office employee, Germany; Ms C. employee in a reprographic workshop, steel industry, France.

According to her political view all four parties should have the same rights and rule together. If politics were to function according to her model, people would have more confidence in politics again.

*“None of these parties says exactly what people really want. Every party always only talks about a bit of what people want, and I would put the whole thing into one; that would be easier. But OK, that’s only the naive thoughts of a nobody, someone who doesn’t belong to them.”*

Thus she is against competition in democracy and desires a harmonious, co-operative all-party government. This position results from the assumption that one party or one person can neither recognise nor represent all the interests of the people. Inherent in this harmonious vision is the idea that the interests of all social groups would be compatible given the corresponding goodwill on the part of the co-operating parties.

She sees the introduction of the euro as a partial loss of identity: *“So, I’m an Austrian body and soul and so [my] patriotism is perhaps a bit higher. And I think with the euro we’ve lost a part of our identity. If they now take our neutrality away, we’ve actually lost almost everything.”* The loss of identity is not only associated with the introduction of the euro but also to increasing indebtedness which, in turn, is associated with the decline of the middle class. She also has a negative attitude towards the EU, which seems to her to be a Brussels-based dictatorship with the airs and graces of a world power similar to that of Americans and Russians. The Austrian identity is based on the pillars of the Schilling, neutrality and the welfare state, and is thus under serious threat. Because the Austrian identity and patriotism may be important in providing meaning for her personal identity, the subject of drawing boundaries concerning the EU and foreigners as well as in the separation of work and private life is also a central one.

She believes one ought to look very carefully at the foreigners who wish to immigrate into Austria. While those who are willing to work or whose families have been living in Austria for a long time should not be denied access, one should be particularly wary with regard to political refugees:

*“This xenophobia in Austria and that we’re simply overflowing, and that we have no structures on that score. Yes, we’ve just let everything in, haven’t we?”*

She admits that some occupational categories would have to be filled by foreigners, since these jobs, such as cleaning or construction work, are not deemed good enough for Austrians. She demands that Austrians change their attitudes, which might then eliminate the need to fill these categories of the labour market with foreigners. In the passages on the foreigner question she increasingly qualifies her earlier concession that foreigners who are willing to work should indeed be allowed into the Austrian labour market. She differentiates between work-oriented and welfare-state scrounging foreigners:

*“That’s actually the overwhelming part, who do want to do something, who do want to make a contribution. What I condemn are just these welfare-state scroungers who just come and then the family come after them”.*

Her personal dedication to work means that she demands similar efforts and sacrifices from everyone else in society! Despite identifying with the “red” camp, which is her

parents' and her own political home, she feels drawn to the politics of the FPÖ, which stands up for the increasingly endangered Austrian identity and uncompromisingly appeals for "bolting the door" because of the country being "taken over" by foreigners.

**4.3.3. Worker identity and pragmatic change from Social Democracy to right-wing populism:  
"Normally the socialists are the ones for the people" (Ms Marini)**

The arguments and methods of reasoning presented above were gathered from interviews we conducted with members of the middle class (self-employed and employed) who displayed authoritarian and racist attitudes. The following are the political views of female and male manual workers. During the 1980s and 1990s, there were major changes concerning the social base of the parties of the extreme right, particularly in France and Austria.

While earlier we touched primarily on the thought processes present in Austria, Germany and Italy, another variation paints a different picture. We found examples of the rejection of social democratic parties and a turn toward either right-wing populist or extreme parties in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland. Reports of the interviews emphasised either disappointment over the broken promises of social democratic governments or disillusionment with governments in which social democratic/socialist parties participated, as was also the case in France with the French Communist Party (PCF). The disappointment extends most often to the labour unions, which are no longer perceived as having the power to represent the interests of labour.

Based on the fact that the interviewees in question felt a strong identity as workers and were, according to their traditions, solidly anchored in the labour milieu, inasmuch as it still existed, the conservative parties were not an acceptable alternative. They are confronted by the following alternative: either they do not vote at all or they vote for a right-of-centre party that claims to have taken up the interests of the "little man".<sup>8</sup>

To start with, the example of Ms Jeppesen (Denmark), a former member of the Social Democratic Party, demonstrates the manner in which subjective perception and digestion of socio-economic changes can become transformed into sympathy for the Danish People's Party. Ms Jeppesen, aged 57, and mother of three children worked as a bus driver in public transport. After privatisation of the bus company where she was employed, her working conditions deteriorated greatly:

*"After privatisation you are not even allowed seven days of sickness; two or three times, then you are dismissed. After missing work twice, you are summoned to a real dressing-down and the managers expect you to call every other day to tell them how you are doing. They put pressure on people and people do feel under pressure, that hurts."*

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<sup>8</sup> Mr Imberger, postman, Austria; Ms Jeppesen, former bus driver in early retirement, Denmark; Ms Jørgensen, unskilled worker in the printing industry, Denmark; Mr Skov, unskilled worker, Denmark; Mr Bouler, retired railway man, France; Ms Bouler, cleaner, France; Mr Kahn, retired steelworker, France; Mr Lothmann, craftsman, chemical industry, Germany; Ms Marini, department manager in the retail sector, Switzerland.

After having been a member of the Social Democratic Party, she decided to switch to the Danish People's Party, because she did not think that the Social Democratic trade union movement was the kind of organisation which would fight to negotiate pay and working conditions. *"The trade unions should be more effective, but they do not fight anymore ... We must be more direct like in the old days."* She thinks that in the past the trade unions helped the "man on the shop floor". For instance, if he lost his job they would help him back on his feet again. Today she thinks the union "sucks up" to management. She considers privatisation unjust because it creates bad working conditions and reduces privileges for the oldest workers. She believes that her working conditions have deteriorated due to privatisation. After being assaulted five times, she suffered severe psychological problems, causing her to fear leaving her home and resulting in early retirement after two years.

She describes society as thoroughly corrupt, a corruption started by the trade unions and the Social Democratic Party leadership, aimed at oppressing the common working class man. *"It is just like Soviet Russia, where the government and the trade unions controlled everything, even the people in the top posts."* Ordinary workers can no longer fight for their rights and working conditions. It is no longer possible, as it was in the good old days, when the good shop steward was a Communist and able to address management on behalf of the workers. The change is due to the fact that the trade union movement now sides more with management than with the workers. *"Some shop stewards do not represent people on the shop floor, but management. They can be bought these days. ... They become full time shop stewards and get good Christmas presents."*

According to her assessment, the social democratic movement was now primarily staffed by academics fighting for their own careers:

*"In our union (transport workers) you get elected democratically at a general assembly. You do not get appointed like in SID. They had better have workers in the leading positions." Her switch to the Danish People's Party enabled her to fight for the "common man" like she had always done.*

According to her, privatisation and immigration are the two processes that have contributed most to the changes in the structure of society. Citing one example: The government passed legislation providing 100,000 crowns in subsidies to help new bus drivers enter the labour market. In Ms Jeppesen's assessment, this legislation was passed to please "the bosses". This means that new people start driving buses *"they are immigrants – all of them"*; the change also means that there are hardly any old-timers left. Management is free to do as it pleases after the trade unions have ceased being fighting organisations.

She criticises the activists in the social democratic trade union movement for having turned into *apparatchiks*, accepting any deterioration in working conditions to gain power:

*"It is all down to that disgusting social democratic trade union movement – the SID. They do not care shit about the workers on the shop floor. They accept any kind of collective agreement no matter how bad it is."*

Her ideas about the trade union movement caused her to leave the SDP. According to her political convictions, trade union movements should be fighting organisations and ought not be bought by management. She does not have any neo-liberal ideas concerning the national economy, on the contrary she is a supporter of the welfare state that had been built up by the Social Democrats, who are now betraying what they once built. She joined the DPP in 1996 when the Social Democratic Party broke its promises of retaining early retirement pay and workfare.

The second example presented here is the interview with Ms Marini (department manager in the retail sector, Switzerland). At the time of the interview, Simone Marini was 62 years old and would soon be drawing her pension. Ms Marini has always worked for the same company, although she had changed branches several times during the last 30 years. Having started as a trainee in the ready-to-wear department, she had been promoted to sales assistant and finally department manager of the ready-to-wear department in the shop, which opened over ten years ago in a small city (less than 40,000 inhabitants) which once used to be in the centre of the Swiss watch-making industry. She has climbed the ladder because she was familiar with “the complete system” of the company, and she didn’t need to follow any “courses” to be promoted for she had “*anciennety*” or job seniority.

Whereas she had previously “*followed a party*”, she says that nowadays the parties “*all resemble each other*”. Nothing in contemporary politics seems clear to her: “*one doesn’t know any more ...*”. This impression of the lack of accessibility of today’s politics derives mainly from her former attachment to the socialist party which now fails to propose clearly identifiable ideas or give her any clues in the maze of propositions in which she is no longer able to perceive any differences:

*“I have always sided with the socialists but you have to admit that they have lost tremendously because they don’t move any more or so I have been told. ... I really do not know, I think it is like this but maybe I am wrong, I am not overly ... fond of ... politics but I really think that the socialist party has lost much and in many places, ah, in many countries ... this might as well be a decline because they don’t ... they do nothing at all ... for the people, normally the socialists are the ones for the people ... it is the same with the unions ... in the face of the employers they do not move ... it is them who make the law, one shouldn’t dream here.”*

By this “*they don’t move*” she is referring to the unions, which didn’t oppose longer opening hours of the shop where she works. As the socialist party is not identifiable any more as the one protecting her interests at work, it tends to be mixed up with the rest of the political parties.

When questioned about the *Union Démocratique du Centre* (UDC) or the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP) and Christoph Blocher’s extremist views she generally rejects everything this party represents but at the same time keeps coming back to its ideas concerning immigration:

*“No, I absolutely disagree with them ... no, because there is a decline, ah, in everything ... it is to be done ... it is to be surveyed ... it is true that concerning immigration one has to be on his guard and to observe, that is no game, there are too many, but on the other hand one cannot ... regarding their ideas ... that is*



*Blocher isn't it? ... with the means he has got and all he has done, this hasn't been all too correct, ah ...*

The impression of “*too many*” is derived from the most recent waves of immigration she herself recounts: the “Kosovars”, the “Turks”, “those like that”. These she identifies, in the shop or by what her “customers” tell her is going on in town, as the ones playing havoc with the rules of community life:

*“... the lady who sees them taking a walk because they don't work, they do nothing, they frequent the coffee shops ... they are looking for trouble, we have got I don't know how many more of them at Ch. than we have ever had before ... additionally, one doesn't know how they came here ... ah, there must be illegals as well ... and by the way that is nothing to play with ...”*

She afterwards brings up the topic of foreigners quite often, as if to justify herself: “*I am not against foreigners ... that wouldn't go well with an Italian husband*” and to tell her experience of being a foreigner in Sweden and the difficulties she had encountered there.

The positions she takes are clearly oriented toward a rejection of others when pertaining to subjects close to her everyday experience (international commuters, foreigners). Otherwise, decidedly political topics like Europe, political parties, etc. can lead her to take positions contradicting the preceding ones as if they existed for her in a more abstract sphere of activities.

**4.3.4. The community of decent and hard-working people and the devaluation of subordination: “They come here, they get plenty of money, they can buy a house and everything. You really do start to hate them.” (Mr Kammer)**

The work ethic and the expectation that everyone should abide by this principle are at the centre of the interviews that serve as examples here. The interviewees firmly identify with their status, see themselves as part of the hard-working community and disassociate themselves vehemently from so called “*Sozialschmarotzer*” or social parasites. A thorough analysis of the interview material reveals that the “community of decent and hard-working people” has something in common, namely the deterioration of working conditions during the last years. Those who have not yet been affected by the processes of rationalisation and massive reduction of personnel and are still employed reveal that they suffer under increased workloads, stress, consolidation of work and an enormously high level of anxiety. Often they are threatened by the Damocles sword of dismissal, which induces them to submit to those conditions, to agree quietly, not to rebel or take to collective measures in defence. Some of the interviewees report health problems (digestive and heart troubles and sleep disturbances) which they attribute to the deteriorating working conditions. The suffering under the worsening working conditions – which often is mentioned only casually – makes itself heard in other ways: those who apparently succeed in withdrawing from this imperative, especially foreign welfare recipients, the unemployed and, at the moment, even early retirees, are resented by working people who, having internalised the “protestant work ethic”, suffer under the condition of their lives and work and feel

angered by these alternative concepts. They demand that others should abide by the law of paid employment according to the motto: Those who do not work, do not need to eat.<sup>9</sup>

Mr Wannen, aged 52, is a metalworker from the Flemish part of Belgium. Six months previously he had been promoted to “acting planning officer” and he enjoys full-time permanent employment. During our interview, Mr Wannen stated that he has nothing against people from ethnic minorities who work and pay their taxes. According to him, however, the majority of the ethnic minorities are shamelessly taking advantage and taking the money away from the poorer sections of the Belgian population.

He ties his disapproval of any form of immigration not only to the demand that foreigners should attempt to work in their native countries but also calls for a policy of population control, such as sterilisation or birth control:

*“So why do they come here? I don’t know – ... I think if you are not too idle to work – then I don’t think it’s such a bad life ... in India or wherever – of course they are all skin and bones, it’s pitiful really ... but wouldn’t it be better for them – the pill or sterilise the men? They have enough time for it – making babies – enough time to work.”*

The same negative attitude towards people from ethnic minorities also applies to “criminals” and “idlers”. He emphasises, a number of times, that people get far too much and don’t have to do anything for it. For this reason he is angry with “criminals who have a good life in prison”, “people from ethnic minorities”, etc.

He also says that within a few years he will face the choice of moving or learning Arabic. At certain moments he seeks to express his own racist attitude in a more subtle way. A few times he emphasises the fact that he does not think all the people from ethnic minorities would have to leave. The most important thing seems to be that people from ethnic minorities should work and pay taxes just like he does. If that were the case, he would not consider that anyone would have to go back.

Mr Wannen differentiates between those foreigners who were beneficial for the Belgian majority in the past, because they performed the dirty jobs for which Belgians were not available, and those foreigners who, supposedly, “eat Belgians alive” because they receive welfare support from the government:

*“... the Italians for the dirty work ... but now the Moroccans come, the Turks, the Chinese, Japanese ... they don’t come here to do the dirty work, but to eat us alive – they come here, they go to the OCMW; they get child benefit, they get everything.”*

Mr Wannen sketches bleak scenarios of the future because he is convinced that Islam is on the move and Muslims, due to their high birth rate, threaten the existence of Europeans.

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<sup>9</sup> Mr Klammer, semi-skilled worker in the metal industry, Austria; Mr Wannen, metalworker, Belgium; Mr Sørensen, motor mechanic, foreman, Denmark; Mr Jean, unemployed security guard, France; Mr Kahn, retired steelworker, France; Mr Kammer, lower-grade civil servant, Deutsche Post AG, Germany; Mr Müller, civil servant, telecommunications, Germany.

*“Allah – or whatever they call him – is on the advance – Islam – they breed like rabbits – they get too much for doing nothing; I’m sorry – I am a racist – when you see it; there are too many of them here.”*

In his discourse, he combines immigration with conquest, colonialism, murder and crime. This scenario of impending menace reverses a perpetrator-victim-perspective:

*“Islam is coming to drive us out – they are coming to conquer us here ... there are already enough murders happening – they are coming to kill us off – we have to make room – Islam is coming to kill us off. ... I am not a soothsayer – it’s just my opinion – I said to my wife: within a year or two we will have to put a gun by our window – the Moroccans will come and break into our house. ... I don’t feel like a Belgian in my own Belgium any more ... in the Aldi [supermarket chain] ... they are advancing and spreading out.”*

As an ordinary uneducated citizen who has to work hard for his money, he places himself at the bottom of the social scale. Mr Wannan attaches considerable value to work and to meritorious principles in general: working – as he himself has always done – is a basic requirement. People from ethnic minorities can stay here, as long as they pay taxes and work. One important fact is that he has always imposed this value upon himself. Thus he says that– even though he had the opportunity – he has never requested any extra days of sick leave.

The interviewee expresses his disappointment with the government, which in his opinion facilitates abuse by giving too much money to people who have not earned it. Confidentially, he confesses that he votes for Vlaams Blok: *“I never tell anyone – not anyone – but I will tell you – after all it’s confidential – but it’s over my head.”*

The second representative of this pattern of interpretation leading to right-wing extremism is the interviewee Mr Kammer (civil servant in the lower grade, Deutsche Post AG, Germany), who was born in 1969, stems from a working class family and grew up in a staunchly conservative town of a German border state. After secondary school (Hauptschule), he began an apprenticeship leading into a “simple” civil service career in the German Federal Postal Service (Deutsche Bundespost) in 1985 and completed his A-level exams (*Mittlere Reife*) afterwards. He began his professional career as a parcel delivery man and works today in the complaints management department.

If asked directly, Mr Kammer feels relatively satisfied with his place in society. Of course, he is not wealthy but he is relatively free from inhibiting economic restrictions. Although Mr Kammer is relatively well-established in purely economic terms, and does not have to worry about the security of his job, he does complain about certain injustices in the German “system”. First of all, according to him, the wages that most hard-working people earn do not guarantee them a livelihood and, second, foreigners and immigrants have been given the same rights to welfare benefits as German citizens. This opened too many loopholes for people who live at the expense of others.

Mr Kammer has three different attitudes toward the world of work. He has deep disdain for people who do not enjoy their work and who are indifferent toward their own job. Complaining about stress, workload, or inadequate compensation does not in his view

result from objective problems but almost indicates a personal character deficiency, although there is indeed some indication that Mr Kammer sees no alternative to being content with the status quo. He would even consider it legitimate to lay off disgruntled and grumpy employees because he assumes that they are also inefficient workers. *“When I do my job, which makes me angry day after day, I think that I do not belong there.”* Compared to these, employees who like their jobs tend to do far better, which represents the second attitude. Positive attitudes contribute to the company’s success and guarantee high standards of quality.

But according to Mr Kammer’s observations, this kind of engagement in the individual jobs often corresponds with a complete indifference to the fate of the company as a whole. Instead of favouring this similarly counter-productive stance, he is in favour of employees who not only identify with their specific job but also with the general success of the corporation. Similar to intrinsically motivated loyalists and guardians, they would not only pay attention to any kind of problems in their own field but would also look out for possibilities of improvement anywhere else.

Mr Kammer has quite a long and apparently inconsistent record of political activity. Still a member of the conservative party CDU, he even sat in the city council of his hometown when he was younger. In his opinion these activities went well together with his early commitment to the post office trade union, Deutsche Post Gewerkschaft (DPG):

The following quote illustrates how he combines the defence of work with the rejection of supposedly lazy foreigners who are unemployed and whom he considers to be lazy social parasites:

*“It’s hard to understand why there are people here in Germany who don’t work. Either they aren’t allowed to or they can’t or whatever. But they may get quite a bit of money anyway. Sometimes we bring them a package every single day. They have a nice car in front of their house. They always eat well. They are always well-dressed ... is that right, that we just pay their way through life while we have 4 million people who are unemployed? Is it right that they come here in the first place?”*

For Mr Kammer welfare abuses like these are directly linked to “the system” in general.

*“They come here, they get plenty of money, they can buy a house and everything. You really do start to hate them. Then you ask the question – is that right? Is the system right in doing this? There are people who hang out in cafes all day long and spend their time gossiping ... and then there are those people who work hard for a few hundred Euros per month. That’s the question. That’s what I think about it and I don’t think that that has to do with your political orientation. Those are just things that come to mind.”*

Mr Kammer’s professional advancement, in the course of privatisation and corporate restructuring, did much to heighten his identification not only with his work but with the company in general. As his material compensation did not rise correspondingly to the growing workload and stress, recognition from his superiors seems to be Mr Kammer’s most important incentive. To do them a favour, he always watches out for possibilities to enhance labour productivity and to get rid of unproductive processes and employees.

More than a simple reaction to the threat of eventually losing his job, Mr Kammer's assiduity as a civil servant with a basically secure career expresses his belief that a strong work ethic is critical to corporate competitiveness.

The rigidity of his aversions to "*lazy foreigners*", "*social scroungers*" and others (indicating itself the deep contradictions of corporate identity) even transforms into the generalised criticism that the political establishment would systematically distribute privileges at the expense of hard-working Germans. As Mr Kammer's authoritarianism and nationalism are based on such performance-oriented work ethic ("Those who don't work shall not eat!"), even his seemingly anti-systemic protest conforms with dominant social values and can eventually be utilised to strengthen exactly the type of capitalist sovereignty that promoted aggressions like Mr Kammer's in the first place.

**4.3.5. *Precariously employed and unemployed women workers, struggle for survival, double disadvantage and preferential treatment of foreigners: "But at some point your body just won't function anymore" (Ms Renger)***

In highly industrialised societies two differently organised areas of life confront each other. We could also interpret them as being different spheres of influence in society which are subject to different governing principles. Women have the task of reconciling these currently conflicting structural principles and logic in the realm of production and reproduction. The social integration of women takes place in both work in the family and reproductive capacity as well as in work in the market place. Women have to do justice to such demands in different areas and combine reproductive and productive tasks and thus become subject to a "dual societal role", according to Regina Becker-Schmidt (1987). These two social realms are not judged equally, instead market-generated work is considered "work" while family responsibilities are considered private matters. Since family related work is usually primarily carried out by women, the consequences influence integration into the paid work force. Women are over-represented at the lower levels of the employment hierarchy, so one may speak of a gender-specific segmented labour market.

During the numerous interviews, it became obvious that the experiences of women could not be reduced to the realm of employment, because, along with reports of their occupational experiences, the female interviewees include their daily life experiences against the background of their "dual societal role". The necessary split between occupation and family became the subject of discussion along with questions of educational and school policies as well as conflicts in neighbourhoods. Some of the female interviewees criticised the presumed overly liberal immigration and asylum policies of the various governments. They were also aware of the threat posed by (female and male) foreigners in the competition for employment and the social security net. A particular variation of the extreme right attitude of women is expressed by their

observation that (female and male) foreigners from Islamic societies pose a threat to western emancipation.<sup>10</sup>

The account of Ms Renger (unskilled worker, unemployed, Germany) illustrates the female approach to right-wing extremism outlined above. Ms Renger was born in 1960 into a working-class family and grew up in the western part of Berlin. She attended secondary school and started an apprenticeship as a florist. She had to quit her training at the age of 17, when she became pregnant. Before the accidental death, in 1988, of her long-time companion and de-facto father of her son, she took a part time job at the town hall of her district.

After her partner's death she worked as a lavatory attendant at the Kurfürstendamm, the most popular shopping street in West Berlin. In her job at the "Ku'damm", which has represented the wealth of the western capitalist world since the fall of the Berlin wall, she witnessed the delight, the amazement and the emotions of the former GDR citizens experiencing the "golden western world" for the first time. Living as a single mother and coping with one single income made life difficult. Finally, to earn a better wage, she decided to take a job as a machine operator, working shifts in the steel industry. Due to the fact that she never overcame the sudden death of her partner, she had a nervous breakdown some years later and was forced to quit her job. For one year she was employed in a job creation scheme, where she had to tear apart pieces of equipment. At the time of the interview she was acting as a caretaker for the building where she and her son live. This arrangement (cleaning the stairs, mowing the lawn in summer and shovelling snow in winter, etc.) allows her to pay a very small amount instead of paying the whole rent. She and her son live on her unemployment benefit and on his monthly "income" (EUR 92) which he receives for his apprenticeship as a carpenter. All in all, she and her son must manage to cope with EUR 200 – 250 a month.

Ms Renger's experiences in the labour market are the experiences of a female employee without particular training, being employed at the lowest rung of the social ladder. Motivated by the higher wage paid at the steel company, as compared to the low income of a lavatory attendant, and encouraged by the fact that her son had started school, she decided to start working as a machine operator:

*"Mike went to school and then I started working at G. I began working for four hours a day and after half a year they decided to hire me permanently. It wasn't bad, but unfortunately that is when I had the nervous breakdown. That's when it became clear, I always thought, that if I try my best that I would make it, it was expected of me. But at some point your body just won't function anymore. [...]The working hours were better, although it was shifts. That is what broke my neck. That is what caused my physical and mental stress, such stories. I thought, I would somehow manage. I'll say very honestly that I was interested in making money. The*

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<sup>10</sup> Ms Carusan, IT operator, Austria; Ms Eibner, formerly semi-skilled worker in the electronics sector, unemployed, Austria; Ms Jelinek, a multimedia designer in the IT sector, Austria; Ms Ülbrecht, waitress, Austria; Ms Tongelaars, worker in the automobile industry, Belgium; Ms Jeppesen, former bus driver in early retirement, Denmark; Ms Renger, unskilled worker, unemployed, Germany; Ms Berger, unemployed, Germany; Ms Sonia, unemployed, formerly in the manufacturing industry, Italy.

*funeral wasn't cheap. But I just couldn't manage: my job, my son, the shifts. And then at some point my son said to me: Mama, I'm afraid I may lose you as well."*

This interviewee, who used to vote for the Social Democratic Party at the age of 18 and still criticises her father for not having lost his confidence in the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), has a strong feeling of justice and expresses, in the interview, the gap between the politicians on the one hand and the ordinary citizen on the other, regardless of whether they are German or foreigners.

Ms Renger's vision of the future is extremely pessimistic. She is absolutely convinced that the decline of Germany, which started with the unification process, will continue at least for the next decade:

*"Basically things are just going to keep getting worse, that's what I think. I'm just afraid that at some point it'll all be over ... but I'm sure that things will keep getting worse. It's been getting worse for at least two years now ... but I think that it will continue this way for the next 10 or 15 years."*

Ms Renger insists on the necessity of a differentiation. She claims not to condemn the individual persons but the system: *"But I do criticise our system for saying: hey everyone, just come over here and live as you please. And they expect it to work, but it doesn't. I just don't know what will happen to our country."* But her call for differentiation between the individual and the political responsibility degenerates into a diatribe against some ethnic groups. *"I have nothing against foreigners, but I'm sorry, there is something wrong with Russians and Poles; something went wrong with them. I grew up with Turks, Italians, and people from Yugoslavia and I have a Sicilian in the family. I am certainly no racist. But there is something wrong."*

Being confronted with foreigners whom she cannot identify as such at first sight seems to create feelings of uncertainty and threat. Furthermore, the way immigrants from Poland and Russia manage to cope with their situation (for example with panic-buying) reminds her of the strategy chosen by her parents and other members of her family after they had left the GDR and tried to rebuild a new life in West Berlin. In a certain sense she recognises strategies of survival in the habit of these foreigners, admiring and despising them at the same time.

Our simple question as to whether she had followed the recent anti-Semitism debate in Germany, led to a long monologue, attacking the Jews for complaining constantly about what the Germans had done to them: *"I'm of the opinion that when those Jews would just stop complaining and whining about what we Germans did to them, then somehow that would end too"*. Even though she points out that she was not a follower of Hitler, she mentions that one could not ignore that he had done some things well: *"When I hear that there was no unemployment, and I don't know, that women could walk the streets at night"*.

Ms Renger's attitude towards Jews is in line with the widespread anti-Semitic discourse. Jews are considered as a social group (she does not mention the term "race") who were used to being extremely rich in the past and still are expecting a certain amount of wealth now.

*“Those Jews aren’t poor. They are doing quite well actually ... they’ve always had money. That’s the way the Jews always were and that’s the way they always will be. I don’t have anything against Jews, but I don’t feel like paying anymore. I don’t see why I should hide my feelings, even when someone says to me: you and your concentration camps. Because to tell you the truth, Jews have always had a nose for where profits can be made. And that’s the reason why they’ll probably survive (laughs).”*

The topics she is mostly interested in are related to education and professional training, the common currency, social welfare and retirement. She is convinced that these political areas have changed dramatically since the early 1990s and that the processes of transformation of the GDR and the former Soviet system were the cause of the decline. Since her racist discourse focuses primarily on the immigrants from eastern Europe, she emphasises the interplay between the collapse of the eastern European state system, the process of globalisation and the new waves of immigration.

The fact of being a mother seems to be decisive in being attracted by right-wing extremism, since most of the negative examples cited by Ms Renger are related to her son’s experiences at school or to other young people from Poland, Russia or Turkey. One of the technical terms introduced in the German debate by Birgit Rommelspacher (1995), is “female care orientation”, and this could be considered as one of the primary sources of her sympathy for right-wing extremist ideologies.

Another example that should be presented in this context is the case of 40-year old Ms Eibner (formerly semi-skilled worker in the electronics sector, unemployed, Austria), who grew up with her six brothers and sisters in a large family in a rural area in Austria. Her father, a master joiner, was a rigid authoritarian (*“it was just extremely strict in our house, wasn’t it?”*). Although he wanted her to become a teacher she refused. As a child and later as an adolescent she not only learned to resist pressure but also to rely on herself and to fight her way through life. After finishing secondary school she attended a commercial college for one year and a vocational school for catering from which she graduated. In addition, she passed a chamber of commerce examination for shorthand, typing and dictation, although she never succeeded in finding a job as a secretary.

Until her mid 30s, her life was strongly influenced by the different seasons in tourism: After having worked in catering during the high season, she held relatively insecure low-paid jobs for a long time. She travelled, sometimes hitch-hiking, to Italy and to other countries in the off season. During this period of her life she did well because she neither earned much money, nor did she *need* much money. She stated that she lived for the day and did not make any great plans for the future. As a result she was also “free” from certain constraints of the system.

The decisive turning point in her life was marked by her decision to “settle down”, to take out a loan to buy her parents’ house, and to take care of her sick mother. As a precondition to be able to pay off her debts, she started working in the electronics industry as a semi-skilled worker. In retrospect, she observed that she enjoyed the regular working hours and punctual wages she could rely on in the industrial sector, compared to the unreliable working conditions in catering. Her shift from catering to



industry was accompanied by a change from an adventurous (unstable) to a monotonous (stable) life.

As a semi-skilled worker in a “women’s factory” she experienced various mergers and acquisitions. Initially, the factory was owned by a company with headquarters located in Vienna; later the company was taken over by an American group with its headquarters in Florida and finally it merged with an Irish company. Currently, the multinational corporation represents itself as “one of the leading suppliers of power conversion products and communications sub-systems to the communications industry”.

In retrospect, she sees the merger of the company with an American group as the beginning of the negative trend in her working life: “*but since they merged, since then it’s then ... been downhill all the way*”. She perceived the accelerating dynamics of globalisation of the economy as the beginning of the end. Initially, working hours were reduced to 30 per week. In January 2001 the company opened a manufacturing facility in Hungary and the production was successively relocated from the Austrian to the Hungarian industrial plant and then even further east to China, where the company maintains another plant (and from there partly back to the Austrian site again). Finally, all production was moved to Hungary and the plant where she used to be employed was closed. She considers this development as a targeted strategy of the American group, relocating production to low-wage countries, aiming at reducing personnel costs while disregarding the quality of work.

The year 2001 was marked by waves of dismissals. When Ms Eibner was laid off at the beginning of 2002, she was personally affected by the cost-reduction strategies. Her intensive search for a job has thus far remained unsuccessful. However, she has not yet given up and trusts in her own strength to keep her head above water. For example, she goes as far as bartering eggs and fruit for meat. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in a commercial truck and bulldozer operating course to increase her qualifications.

We found that her political attitude included a high affinity for ideologies of the extreme right. We present the crucial findings of the in-depth interview analysis with regard to her political attitudes as follows: Ms Eibner is politically interested, follows politics mainly through television, and also watches political affairs programmes such as *Betrifft* and even *Hohes Haus* [TV coverage of parliament] when she has the time. She is, however, disillusioned as a result of her personal experiences and expects nothing from politics or politicians – one can only rely on oneself, “*because no one else is going to help you*”.

She also emphasises the failure of municipal politics. She feels left in the lurch because the closure of the factory was simply accepted without any involvement of the mayor. Her interpretation is that politicians’ initiatives are driven by electoral considerations. Allegedly, for the social democratic municipality the companies with a work force of male metalworkers, their core voters, are much more interesting. Being active in politics herself is out of the question, because in politics one cannot remain honest, but is forced

to lie and act against one's own convictions. *“Well, there you have to lie, there's no other way”.*

Strongly influenced by her personal experiences with the strategies of relocation and reduced labour costs, she is convinced that immigrants serve to depress wages on the labour market. But she complains even more about the alleged preferential treatment of refugees in Austria. Even though she expresses empathy in regard to the fate of the refugees from former Yugoslavia, she criticises Austria for spoiling refugees. She believes that refugees are better off than poor Austrians. She insinuates that the refugees know their way around the welfare system better and exploit the loopholes much better than needy Austrians.

The supposed privileges, granted to the refugees, are compared in her account to her own precarious situation:

*“When I think, all the refugees have come up from Yugoslavia, no question they are poor people. But they were all given some allowance; they were given everything. You sometimes heard for example that when they got a flat up here, that they got furnishing and no medical costs, no travel costs, so we all have, all them, we gave them everything. And when I think, I have to buy my potatoes and cook my potato soup at home. And they, I see they all buy ready-cooked packets, then of course I start thinking. Then I think, how can they afford that. They've got a fast car, they have a flat, they ah ... buy ready-cooked meals just to warm up in the microwave, when they would have time to cook. And you go to work and you work and you just get by with the bare necessities, I mean ...”*

Ms Eibner strongly opposes not only Austrian membership in the EU, threatening the loss of Austrian (and also her?) independence, but also the forthcoming eastern expansion of the European Union, arguing that the imminent membership of east European countries will lead to an influx of a cheap labour force and result in lower wages.

Raising the topic of the EU sanctions against the Austrian government – due to the FPÖ's participation in the Austrian government – she is particularly angry about the subservience of Austrian politicians to Brussels and compares the Austrian submissiveness with that of the shop steward of her company, who, according to her, did not fight against relocation and the closure of the Austrian plant:

*“And what about our politicians? They all knuckle under, like our shop steward in the company. That's exactly how I see it. [laughs] They all knuckle under, the Austrians to Brussels, that's how it was in the company. The new shop steward in the company always knuckled under to the others, so that he had peace and quiet.”*

Even though Ms Eibner currently is on the dole, she considers the Austrian welfare state as excessively generous. Her criticism is mainly directed against down-and-outs and people who do nothing all day but live well at the expense of the working population: *“I mean, they all live magnificently without working”.* Work definitely plays a major role in her self-esteem and value system. Her statement that she considered work in the factory as restful and relaxing reveals that her everyday life is full of work and constraints. *“And for me that was a relaxation. For me, where I have far more stress at home than when, than I had there in the company”.* Ms Eibner has, to a large extent,

internalised the work ethic and lives accordingly. Her description of the course of the day, in which every minute is filled with work, running her own household as well as her mother's, is indicative of this.

*“Earlier I had always additionally, those were the things I did, what I did on top of my working hours, on top of [running] two households ... and on top of rebuilding the house. So, holidays, Saturday, Sunday or whatever, didn't exist ... always working full time.”*

She suggests reducing the period for which unemployment benefits are granted to three months to combat the perceived misuse of the welfare state and to ensure that recipients are forced to start looking for work immediately, and thus have no opportunity to enjoy life at the expense of those who are working. Her own experience that it is extremely difficult to find work as a female, semi-skilled worker in a rural area, even if one looks for it as determinedly as she does, has no influence on her rigid rejection of the welfare state. On the contrary, because she was forced to find employment immediately, she is angry that others receive welfare benefits. It is interesting that she actually enjoyed regular periods of unemployment while she still worked in the highly seasonal tourist industry. However, with her new life style she must submit to the discipline of work schedules.

Being part of and integrated in the dominant society (in the form of recognition and participation), however, demands acceptance of concepts and values, such as readiness to work, work ethic, discipline and order. This in turn limits one's own desires, which would contradict such concepts as *joie de vivre*, idleness, fun and pleasure (Stamer 2000:74). Strangers who are not or are only partially subject to these constraints highlight what one has repressed in oneself. Such people live “well” without paying the price. This is also true for marginal groups within society such as down-and-outs and the long-term unemployed, who are considered social “parasites”.

Ms Eibner's rejection of foreign refugees and down-and-outs is fed by the perceived injustice in comparison to her own situation. Whereas she must make great sacrifices and deny her own needs in order to pay back the loan for her parents' house and to some extent to survive, foreigners are disproportionately “spoiled” by not having to make any effort. Those without her personal experiences (i.e. drudgery, efforts and constraints) and who do not comply with the work ethic are to be rejected. Perhaps a hatred of those who drop out without experiencing severe punishment is manifesting itself here.

**4.3.6. *Plea for a better welfare state, protection of the national majority: “You just can't treat [the elderly] the way you sometimes hear about.” (Mr Sørensen)***

Over recent decades the social welfare safety nets established by the western European states experienced massive changes. The future of the social welfare state and social safety became the subject of discussion for all the interviewees of the countries we examined, without exception. Younger employees in particular put great emphasis on the question of whether or not their pensions were still safe. The discussion of the inter-

generational treaty was linked to feelings of injustice and insecurity in view of one's own perspective of the future.

The Austrian and German researchers in particular encountered many interviewees who felt threatened by the dismantling of the welfare system. These assessments took on a special role in the Danish example. The Danish interviewees criticised the fact that the older generation, which had created the Danish welfare society, were now forced to suffer as it was being dismantled. Here the interviewees express their own dismay but also exhibited concern for the senior citizens. The criticism of the erosion of social security systems is associated with an ideology of exclusion: in times of scarce resources it would have to guarantee that immigrants did not benefit at the expense of the majority population of the welfare state. Such a dispute over distribution is illustrated in the following example.<sup>11</sup>

Ms Madsen is in her mid-20s and works in a home for the old and mentally ill. She left school before entering high school, studied one year in the US and attended a business school for several years. Four years ago she began to work as an untrained nursing assistant in the home for the elderly. After a year of training in nursing she returned to her job but in a different section.

Her most serious worry is caused by cutbacks in the social safety system, especially in care for the elderly. In Ms Madsen's opinion, Social Democratic politicians responsible for the cutbacks have no understanding of the conditions under which the elderly are cared for. She holds the decision makers, at local level and in the government, responsible for the difficulties.

Furthermore, she is troubled that she is unable to carry out her duties properly and to her own satisfaction because of inadequate financing, personnel and equipment. She complains not only about the heavy workload and stress but primarily about the fact that, under the given conditions, she is not able to provide her patients with the treatment they need. These people need a calm environment and become aggressive when it does not exist.

She says it was particularly busy at work in the summer because of the staff holidays. During the summer they had many supply workers, but many of them did not want to stay and they had to find new ones. She also complains about the increasing paperwork. The interviewee seems not to be frightened for her own position – except for the consequences of stress. She is more concerned about the conditions affecting the old people in society.

In spite of her criticism of the politically wrong changes, she leaves no doubt that she enjoys her work. *“You do not choose this job because of the money. I enjoy sitting together with the old people and make them happy, smiling and content – but it is not often you are allowed to do that.”*

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<sup>11</sup> Ms Madsen, eldercare, Denmark; Mr Sørensen, motor mechanic, foreman, Denmark; Mr Jean, unemployed security guard, France.

Although, like the other interviewees, she denies that she might be a racist, she admits during the interview that she doesn't like immigrants who cause trouble. In the workplace, she has worked with immigrants who participated in work training. She says: *“Well, I'm not a racist in any shape or form, but I do not like people who make a fuss – I do not. I just do not like it. I have nothing against them – they can work here if they want, we have had some coming out with us in work training with headscarves on – that is OK. Those who want to work – that is fine”*. As long as they work it is all right but in a certain part of town, they hang around in the streets. She always chooses another route so that she does not have to walk past them.

Her political orientation led her toward the Danish People's Party, which provides her with a party that talks a lot about the problems in care for the elderly and against the criminality of immigrants. Ms Madsen's decision to vote for the party was the result of a combination of political attitudes: she worries about the future of the Danish social welfare society, with particular concern about care for the public and the elderly, she experiences immigrants as a threat and, finally, she mistrusts established parties and labour unions.

With regard to her employment, she does not seem to experience any *déclassement*. She enjoys her job but suffers from uneasiness that, due to inadequate time and cuts in the budget, she cannot devote herself to her job the way she would prefer.

The interview we conducted with 49-year old Mr Sørensen, a member of the Danish People's Party, took a similar direction. He is a motor mechanic and foreman in a factory owned by an American company, where he has been working full time for more than 10 years.

He is aware that the management could decide to close the factory and relocate the production. But because the factory is profitable he does not seem to be much concerned with this threat. He describes the development in work organisation as positive and he sees it more as a challenge than a threat. He says that now he enjoys more freedom and is permitted to experiment in his work.

The positive response to the new work organisation becomes evident in the following statement:

*“I think there's more leeway to make decisions – as a middle manager – when you don't have those rigid guidelines. That was 20 years ago. If anybody told you to do something in a particular way, you did it. And you didn't bat an eyelid. You did what you'd been doing for years. There's more of a chance to experiment now – try new ways. ... It's brilliant!”*

He expresses dismay concerning society's treatment of its senior citizens. Although those who are currently in work have to thank the older generation for the creation of the Danish welfare state, society does not care for senior citizens adequately.

Mr Sørensen states that, in his opinion, the politicians have failed in the area of immigration policy and the welfare state. Former governments had ignored those issues but things have improved with the new government.

*“I feel that as far as immigration policy is concerned – that it’s being addressed – that we’re doing something about it – it can’t be good for anybody just letting more and more people into the country. We have to have a plan of action. ... There’s room for lots of people, but if it’s going to work, people have to be given a chance to make it work.”*

In recent years it has been too easy for foreigners to immigrate into Denmark and then receive support in Denmark, he believes. The foreigners demanded too much, because “we” had let them get used to it. He neither opposes immigration nor immigrants as such. However, in his opinion immigration and asylum policies, if they are too liberal, impede integration, which, in turn, leads to conflicts: *“When you start talking about Muslims and mosques. When they come to Denmark they demand a mosque, because they think that is the way to do it in Denmark. When you speak out loud you get [things].”*

If there was a connection between the immediate changes in his place of work and his right-wing populist attitudes, it was only very marginal. Rather, as in the previous example, Mr Sørensen was concerned with the social security systems, particularly the care of the older population, and this may be the issue leading him towards the Danish People’s Party. Danish People’s Party sympathisers praise it for being the first party to address the problems of the older generation in Denmark as well as immigration and problems related to it:

*“You just can’t treat [the elderly] the way you sometimes hear about. Some places they turn their nappies over and that sort of thing, because the council wants to save money. And at the same time they’re letting all these immigrants into the country and giving them new bikes and what not – I just think it’s wrong. It shouldn’t be like that.”*

#### **4.3.7. Unemployment and (early) retirement, questioning self-esteem and self-confidence:**

***“I cannot bear such injustice.” (Mr Ypenreit)***

People who are greatly affected by unemployment not only suffer from diminishing income and a reduction in living standards, but also run the risk of developing ailments related to psychological stress. The psychologist Thomas Kieselbach speaks of the condition of “psycho-social” stress brought on by unemployment. The unemployed suffer from “moments of financial insecurity, problems of social integration, self-confidence and disorientation in time”, aspects which form the basis for a stable and healthy identity. Long-term unemployment is often accompanied by difficulties in coping with daily life as well as social stigmatisation. The use of socially unacceptable methods to combat unemployment is often attributed to the inability of the person caught in this dilemma, rather than to the system that created this situation (see Kieselbach 1996:187f).

In each country we encountered phenomena associated with psycho-social stress, among civil servants, white collar employees and manual workers affected by early retirement. In the course of privatisations, which have increased rapidly since the beginning of the 1990s, employees at former state enterprises were the first to be retired

early (with a medical recommendation) and their pensions were taken over by the state. Similarly, in the declining industries (mining and steel) corporate management, in concert with the works council, developed “social plans”. One avenue to reduce personnel was the early retirement of employees. While some of the early retirees are happy with this decision and enjoy early retirement, others indicated that they did not retire voluntarily. This new situation (retirement as early as in the mid-forties) not only causes financial difficulties but also enormous emotional stress, problems discussed only with hesitation.<sup>12</sup>

Mr Ypenreit (Austria), age 58, is a former cabinetmaker and now on disability benefits. In his early 50s, and after having been employed in the same firm for 36 years, he was regarded as superfluous to the job by the new owner of the small enterprise. According to him, the transfer of the company’s ownership from father to son and, as a consequence, the confrontation with the new head of the company, marked a turning point in his working life. In his view the new owner represents both a new generation of employers and a new management strategy, which he perceived as ruthless with regard to employees and implicitly inhumane.

His resulting unemployment caused him great distress which he still has not overcome. Naturally, retirement involved some losses for Mr Ypenreit, since a pension of 77 per cent of a low wage is not very much. However, his wife is working, so they can manage and he says “*you adapt to it*”: “*That was actually the least shock of the whole thing*”. The material effect is only a problem for him in relation to the feeling of having been treated unjustly, without being given clear reasons for being laid off. He had remained at the company although in his view he earned less in relation to what he could have made at other companies. This attitude, however, was not recognised or rewarded. On the contrary, he was laid off.

After losing his job, Mr Ypenreit withdrew into the family and became very isolated, although he used to be socially integrated before. He no longer goes to the pub. He neither has contact with his former colleagues nor with his former employer, the senior employer. He explains that he avoids the senior employer because he “*cannot bear such injustice*”. Mr Ypenreit had identified both with his work and with the company to a great extent. For him, his job security had been an established fact. His becoming superfluous – especially for inexplicable reasons – hit him hard. He felt he had been dropped. All his previous efforts and achievements no longer counted for anything. To him this is unjust: “*What you have achieved is never put down on the bill*”.

Becoming unnecessary and laid off, apparently resulted in “shock symptoms” in Mr Ypenreit. He appears to have gone numb. He says that for months he did not know what was happening. He withdrew completely from the social life of the village. The impression of a serious crisis emerges from the interview. The impression is that his

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<sup>12</sup> Mr Ypenreit, former cabinet maker, on disability benefits, Austria; Mr Bouler, retired railwayman, France; Ms Berger, unemployed, Germany; Mr Böttcher, formerly occupied in the construction industry, unemployed, Germany; Mr Oster, post office employee, lower-grade civil servant, in early retirement, Germany.

world view and his values – such as justice, decency and trust in people – his occupational identity and also his role as a man broke down, the latter because in the future his wife would take over the role of breadwinner. This impression further emerges, not least against the background of his speechlessness, that Mr Ypenreit has still only partly overcome this “shock”.

He sees little opportunity for the individual to exercise political influence. For this reason he does not concern himself with the pension reform: *“I haven’t concerned myself with that, because what can an ordinary person do against it? I don’t think about it, because that will be decided elsewhere.”* For him, the only possibility of having any influence is by voting in elections. But here, too, he describes the effect of the social pressure in the small village. Previously, he explains, those who did not go to the polls were called up at home and asked when they were coming or if they had forgotten the election.

Subjectively he has the feeling that he does not belong to any particular political camp but votes by choosing the most convincing personality and at the moment these are, above all, Grasser and Riess-Passer (FPÖ), and Strasser and Schüssel (ÖVP). He was hoping for a continuation of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition and argues that the SPÖ would do it worse. For Mr Ypenreit, being an independent voter means switching between the ÖVP and the FPÖ.

The second example to illustrate this thought pattern is present in an interview from France: Mr. Bouler, a retired railway worker, was born in 1942 in Alsace during the German occupation. He started work at the age of fifteen and made his career in the national railway company, in a section linked to the steel industry, under very questionable conditions of safety and a comparatively low wage. Now he receives a small pension:

*“I’ve got just about the guaranteed minimum wage [SMIC]. If you don’t have that, you can’t live. If you calculate everything that needs to be taken out each month, you know, you don’t do silly things with that. That allows you to buy a TV on credit. And then, that’s all.”*

On the one hand, sixty-one-year-old Mr Bouler criticises social injustice, low wages, income inequality, insufficient access to care and the inequality of access to legal aid, on the other hand he associates this discourse with a denunciation of foreigners, in particular of the North African youth, whom he holds responsible for all the problems:

*“It’s an unequal contest. Money goes to money. I only say good, well: it’s true that the youth of today, they’ve no longer got work, it’s unfortunate. That’s what’s killing the whole country, that is. And the fixed term thing, the contracts thing. ... So a guy who works for six months, he is not guaranteed to have his job six months’ later ... if you put yourself in these people’s shoes, you understand them sometimes, when they do stupid things. But, at the end of the day, if there were fewer immigrants, there would be a bit ... make the French work a bit more. That might be better too. But then, all the same, we’re being invaded at the moment by the Romanians, the Kosovars, in short all that. They’re only interested in that: they’re only interested in the dough. You come to France, you’ve got money for nothing. That’s it.”*



This excerpt exposes the logical connection between the two discourses, one focused on social issues and the other “racist”, structured around the competition between two segments of class in the precarious labour market, as well as the fear of possible loss of status by the group comprised of children of established workers. On the one hand, the passage from one to the other is affected by the changing economic order – “the unequal contest” – which undermines social struggles, and on the other hand, by the appropriation of political discourse which suggests prohibiting immigrants’ access to the national employment market (“national preference”). Here as elsewhere, the principle of division between “nationals” and “immigrants” conceals the objective division between segments of the same class. This substitution of an ethnic question for a social one, reintroduced in the 1980s by the extreme right and taken up by the whole of the media-conscious political field, creates and exacerbates a problem, but draws a part of its effectiveness from what it proposes as a solution.

More utilitarian than a mere “protest”, Mr Bouler regards voting for Le Pen as the most effective means of serving his interests; but in an indirect manner, since in his view politics does not offer a single candidate capable of satisfying the aspirations and needs of “the worker”.

**4.3.8. *The predominance of the feeling that the mixture of cultures and the dynamics of globalisation threaten the national and cultural identity, the work ethic and destroy the essential social units: “I can live without a computer.” (Mr Koller)***

The interviews not only focus on such topics as justice/injustice and security/insecurity but also on the loss of the (supposed) national or cultural identity. The respective references vary: in some cases the national collective is in the centre, in other cases it is in the region, the city or even the particular neighbourhood. Several interviewees have experienced immigration as a threat: they claim that they do not recognise “their street”, “their village”, “their town”, “their region” anymore, that they can not orient themselves; in short, they complain about the loss of their cultural identity. Significant environments such as family, school, colleagues and neighbourhood, which functioned for a long time as emotional support, are now subject to serious changes and lose the emotionally stabilising function they once had.<sup>13</sup>

We can illustrate this thesis with the following two examples from Italy and Switzerland. Mr Mirko (part-time employee in a book store, Italy), is a 27-year-old employee with a high school diploma, who went to university for two years. He has

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<sup>13</sup> Mr Jensen, industrial worker, Denmark; Ms Jørgensen, unskilled worker in the printing industry, Denmark; Mr Michele, call-centre operator, Italy; Mr Mirko, part-time employee in a book store, Italy; Ms Curie, salesperson, retailing, Switzerland; Mr Bollinger, department manager, in early retirement, Switzerland; Mr Rust, technical manager in a micro-electronic company, Switzerland; Mr Imhof, IT specialist in the chemical industry, Switzerland; Mr Fricker, telecoms manager in early retirement, Switzerland; Ms Marini; department manager in the retail sector, Switzerland; Mr Charmillot, unskilled worker in the chemical industry, Switzerland; Mr Koller, unskilled worker in the chemical industry, Switzerland.

varied working experiences: at a betting agent's for horse races, in a sports shop, as a switchboard operator and as an office worker. Currently, he is working for a book store in C. with different tasks, including work in the front office, shipping and distribution. He has a short-term, part-time contract for three months and will soon be hired in a company near his city as warehouseman, initially with a short term contract but with a chance of more stable employment. In summary, he has been working for six years but with some breaks.

As a consequence of his various temporary jobs, he has often experienced periods of unemployment and faced financial problems while looking for a job, which was not always easy to find. His past jobs had some drawbacks because of the shift work, which he didn't entirely like. During his job at the betting agent's, he had to work late nights and during the summer, in his job at the sports shop, he had to do frequent weekend work.

He does not describe the changes he has experienced as stressful or difficult because he has always found a positive work environment and always got along well with his colleagues. He feels positive about his new job in a smaller business and a work environment in which he can express himself:

*"I prefer to work in a small place, with a few people, instead of working in a company with a hundred people where in the end you are just a number. I think that if you are just [one] in four, everybody has to do ... everybody has more responsibilities ... a person, this way, counts a little bit more."*

Changing employment has not been a source of stress for him. The interviewee appears to be an optimistic person, not adverse to change nor overly worried about his job future. This may be due to his youth and his family's support since he lives with his parents. *"I hope to be satisfied, fulfilled, with a good wage, I hope so ... well, this is what every person in the world hopes, [I hope to have] an open-ended contract, in an industry that satisfies me personally first, and then also economically."* He thinks that the only threat to his future job will depend on himself; since he relies on his skills and knowledge, his reasoning is based on the concept of meritocracy.

Immigration is a real problem for the interviewee. However, his opinions on the issue reflect latent prejudice. He expresses prejudicial and negative attitudes towards foreigners in a socially acceptable way, which we can consider as examples of modern racism. He understands the reasons that lead immigrants to come to Italy but, in his opinion, immigrants should also go to other countries. He is under the impression that Italy is the only country they are headed for. He denies his racism, but nevertheless it becomes evident right away; his words are very significant:

*"I'm not racist, but I don't agree with the idea that many people come here; I can understand those miserable [i.e. poor] people, but each time I see those ships overloaded with people ... Well, of course you shouldn't sink them, for God's sake, but why do they come only to Italy? ... Can't they also go to another country? Maybe because we're the only one who let them in. There are many other countries close to Albania, they can go somewhere else."*

He makes a clear distinction between two different groups of immigrants: the group of those who are willing to work, whom he claims to accept, and the remainder consisting of criminals and thieves, who come to Italy with bad intentions. It is interesting to notice that his statements are focused primarily on this second group. His solution to the problem is to increase aid given by governments to poor countries in order to limit the flow of immigration.

He does not feel represented by any political party, and he explains that he feels that there are no important differences among parties: *“Whether the right or the left is in government things will always be the same ... everybody now criticises Berlusconi because he does this and that, and because he robs here and there, and when the left was governing things weren’t different.”*

Gianfranco Fini (the leader of Alleanza Nazionale) is the politician he feels closest to, mainly because he is inspired by his personality and by his political style, rather than because he agrees with his party programme. In his opinion, Fini is an honest and coherent politician, and these two qualities are very important to him.

He describes himself as belonging to the right, *“not the Berlusconi right, a little more extreme”*; however, he says during the interview that he is *“not satisfied by the way things have gone so far”*, not explaining in detail what he means with this statement. He told us that he was deeply convinced about the ideas initially supported by the Lega Nord, but he states:

*“He totally disappointed me, and he lost many votes, because you can’t be once on this side and the following moment on the other side ... the League has gone too much to the limits, with this nonsense about secession, that was really nonsense.”*

Like many other interviewees, he feels disenchanted and with no expectations about politics:

*“You always hope for something more ... the hope is that, everybody hopes this, but you know that it will never happen. Everybody wants ... they all say that they [i.e. politicians] want a better Italy, that all things work out right, that jobs improve, and that this other problem is solved, but anyhow you know that things will be always the same.”*

His original support for the Lega Nord can be explained in terms of regional identity which the party heavily emphasised at the beginning. His shift towards a more extreme right, evidenced by support for Alleanza Nazionale, derives from a disillusion with Bossi, who completely missed the goals that the interviewee expected. His support for Fini is described in terms of fascination with the political man, rather than for the Alleanza Nazionale’s programme.

The second illustration of the above thesis derives from our Swiss example. Mr Koller is a commuter and an unskilled worker in the Basle chemical industry, who was 56 when we conducted the interview. He lives in a village in Alsace, about 40 kilometres from Basle, and has been working in Switzerland for more than 30 years. In 1971 he joined one of the big multinational enterprises of the Basle chemical industry, where for eleven years he worked in paint production before leaving because of health (spinal and

pulmonary) problems. The enterprise provided him with a job, which he now has held for 21 years, consisting of different services for the technicians in one of the enterprises a research departments. Mr Koller is responsible for postal services, raw materials, refuse disposal, etc., as well as for minor repair work.

Even though he regards the possibility of intervention to change the actual development of society as illusory, he nevertheless has a clear idea of what is happening today. He thinks that Switzerland and Europe are threatened by a process he defines as “Americanisation”. The change in work is – according to the interviewee – also part of this Americanisation. Mr Koller fears that European workers run the risk of being transformed into “day labourers” as has happened in the United States. He also remembers that during the first crisis in the chemical industry, which he experienced at the beginning of the 1970s (he had just entered the industry), his employer appealed to an American society for help in researching solutions to get through the crisis. Some “*gentlemen with white collars from New York*” then arrived at the factory and measured the necessary time to complete the tasks, the duration of the breaks, the time taken to go to the lavatory, etc. He thus associates Americanisation also with pressure on the workers, which he personally cannot tolerate. In a more general way, he reproaches the Americans for their arrogance and their intent to impose their system not only in the production sector but everywhere. Mr Koller also refers to food as an example. “*We don’t need those people*”, he says. “*We have lived before them*” and without them (the “we” here describes the inhabitants of the Old Continent). It should be noted that even on this more general level of criticism of “*things that go bad*”, the discourse of the interview partner is concerned with the opposition of cultures and people of different nationalities.

Immigration is the issue he considers to be the main political problem today and the root of all evil. In the same breath, Mr Koller says that there is nothing to be done “*because we already have too many*”: “*five million Turks in Germany, five million Arabs in France, without speaking of the others ...*” He relates the story of when he and his wife went to central Basle – once! – and emphasises that he was shocked at the presence “*of everyone except the Swiss*” in the squares and streets. “*Are we really in Switzerland?*” he had asked his wife. He obviously includes himself among those who have the right to come and work here, just as he already had done with regard to the Americans. The main reason for his violent criticism of the European Union is related to the fact that frontiers have been opened and the Union is therefore in his opinion responsible for the immigration flow. He ignores the fact that the EU has opened frontiers within the Union and, at the same time, has hermetically closed its external borders.

What, in Mr Koller’s opinion, are the problems arising from immigration? On the one hand, he denounces the fact that tax payers have to pay for the upkeep of immigrants who have an easy life on welfare (more than the locals). Mr Koller stresses that he is not responsible for the difficulties foreigners encounter in their own countries and that it would be better if they were to stay there. He is convinced that “*the rise in crime*” directly and exclusively results from “the opening of the frontiers”. He denounces those people who come here, who “*don’t adapt themselves, kill and steal*”.

The affinity between Mr Koller's points of view and the discourse of the "new muscular right" is clearly evident. Mr Koller is a man of "*the old generation*" who feels that times have changed. Without pleasure, he adapts to these changes as little as necessary. He regrets the disappearance of the old times, when life, even if it seemed harder, was in his opinion more correct and humane. His categorical rejection of the computer ("*I can live without a computer*") symbolises this attitude towards the present evolution of society: there's nothing you can change and you have to adapt as far as necessary, but no more. He thinks he has arrived at the end of the tunnel and is looking forward to a life after work.

#### **4.3.9. *The impact of family political values (anti-Communism and anti-Semitism) on the political orientation of employees in a country in transition***

In Hungary, a country which has undergone an intense economic, political and social transition since the early 1990s, we noticed that in addition to immediately recognisable economic changes (e.g. in the workplace or within the social security systems), family traditions are enormously important in determining political attitudes. This thesis is illustrated in the following example.

Ms Tóth was born in 1966 in a city in central Hungary. Her family was protestant and highly religious. In high school, which she finished in 1990, she studied music and trained as a conductor. For six years she was employed as a university lecturer at the Protestant University. During her maternity leave she studied psychology and after finishing her studies, she was employed as a psychologist at one of the major telecommunications companies. She was appointed head of the marketing department of this state-owned company in the telecommunications sector.

The fate of this company practically depends on election results. Every new government brings a new concept of company strategy and deploys a new top management:

*"Every four years we have a completely new management. Every four years the company is reorganised and we employ a new strategic focus. Each new management brings in a new clientele group and they kick out employees to make room for their friends".*

No wonder that, according to Ms Tóth, the major factor in building a career at the company is to have the right connections to whichever party is in power:

*"Party connections, absolutely, connections (are condition of success). Good work and success are not at all related. ... Having a career within the company depends on connections."*

She is not at all afraid of leaving the company, and has a good chance of getting a similar or even better-paid job. Moreover, she was contemplating leaving the business sector and setting up a psychological consulting business.

Her grandparents belonged to the local elite of the pre-war society. The wider family suffered repression during the terror of the Stalinist period in the fifties and these sufferings were a constant topic at home. Nevertheless, her parents had not been directly

affected by physical repression and were able to preserve some of their middle-class status during the socialist regime. Her father was a vet, her mother a music teacher. Nonetheless, her mother was discriminated against in the school for being overtly religious. She never received a reward or any kind of acknowledgement for her work. This discrimination was a constant issue at home: *“My parents were not afraid to tell me the truth. They knew that I would not tell that [to] anybody in school”*. Her family provided her with a highly religious and nationalistic education. The fate of Hungarians living in Romania or in Trans-Carpathia, then belonging to the Soviet Union, was also a constant topic. Her younger brother emigrated to Germany in the late eighties. At high school she also felt discrimination because of her political opinions and she felt that she was not able to get scholarships because she had no connections to party bosses.

In her view, the MSZP is the party of political careerists who continually change their political position according to their own interests. Although she does not like the MSZP, she thinks the SZDSZ is the prime agent of globalisation forces in Hungary. Even though the MSZP is less inclined to serve the interests of financial elites than the SZDSZ, it is greatly influenced by the SZDSZ: *“They [the SZDSZ] are much more dangerous than the MSZP, because they are strategically preparing the road towards full-fledged globalisation.”* In her opinion, globalisation is a process that is promoted by a small, notably Jewish, circle of financial investors. She believes the SZDSZ is the party of these Jewish interests.

The MIÉP, she says, is the party of angry people, who themselves or whose families suffered a great deal during the communist terror. Consequently, it is a party influenced by anger and emotions. However, in her opinion, politics dictated by anger is not a good thing. She personally shares some of the issues raised by MIÉP, but says:

*“They are a bit crude, and Csurka is a narcissistic personality. You can see this in the organisational culture of the MIÉP. It was established 12 years ago, and you haven’t seen a new face since then (in the party leadership). All coming from the same angry older generation.”*

She has always voted for the mainstream moderate right-wing party: for the MDF in 1990 and in 1994 and FIDESZ in 1998 and 2002. Her husband holds similar political views, though he is, to a certain extent, even more right-wing. He voted for the MDF in 1990 and 1994, MIÉP in 1998 and FIDESZ in 2002.

Family experiences during the communist regime, the religious environment and her ties to the protestant church put her fairly straightforwardly into the right-wing camp. Moreover, she clearly agrees with some of the major issues raised by the MIÉP. Nonetheless, she has remained faithful to mainstream right-wing parties in her voting behaviour, partly because her family did fairly well during the last regime and were able to maintain some of the status of the pre-war period. She clearly differentiated herself from the angry people supporting the MIÉP. She is not content with the nature of democratic transition, but she does not see the MSZP as the major problem. Nonetheless, she never would vote for the MSZP. For her, the really dangerous process in modern history is globalisation – a process that destroys local communities, traditions

and national cultures. Her negative perception of globalisation intertwines with the belief that globalisation is moved forward by a small circle of the Jewish financial elite.

Her workplace experiences, developing marketing psychology and observing marketing strategies of other firms, reinforce her belief that consumer society is promoted by deceptive marketing campaigns that serve the profit interests of companies. Her increasing dislike of her current position is partly connected to this resentment towards the excesses of consumer society.

#### **4.4. Rejection of right-wing populism and extremism: various interpretation and coping patterns**

*Negative experiences in the world of work strengthen social democratic or conservative political positions*

The question of the attraction towards the extreme right constitutes just one aspect of the more general question of the effect of political socio-economic changes described in Chapters 2 and 3. Analysis of the interviews leads us to concentrate first on biographical paths marked by radical conversions of their perception of politics, their ideology and sometimes their votes. One can illustrate various excellent examples of “conversion” within the European sample: political conversions tending towards “defection” from one position (e.g. from the social-democratic view) to abstention; political conversions tending toward “voice” (Hirshman 1972), from one position to another (from the “revolutionary left” to social-democracy; from left-wing to extreme-right, from right-wing or centrist views to the extreme right, from commitment to political parties to commitment to social vocational associations; from an apolitical attitude to trade unionism, etc.). The subject of the enquiry naturally leads us to pay particular attention to conversions to the extreme right.

The use of a balanced sample between interviewees “receptive to right-wing extremism” and “non-receptive” interviewees should not lead us to lose sight of the fact that the majority of citizen in every country involved in the SIREN project do not vote for extreme-right parties. Right-wing extremist attraction is a minority phenomenon. In addition to the political conversions discussed above, it is necessary to consider other types of interviewees: retired workers involved in charitable works or in local politics, young workers involved in trade unionism, early retired managers organising cultural activities, or employees dedicating their spare time to family life. Some people are satisfied with their working situation, although often with a sense of resignation, and emphasise the positive aspects of work. In our sample, the young self-employed “beneficiaries” of technological and economic development were not disturbed by the disadvantages of working life, such as excessive overtime hours. Mr Sonnböck, for example, an Austrian IT freelancer and software programmer, who displays an economically liberal world view bordering on social Darwinism, has no liking for right-wing populist ideology or politics. He sees himself as one of the social elite and strong enough to look after himself. His opinion of right-wing populism is that it appeals more

to mediocre and dependent employees than to those who are self-sufficient.

Others, on the contrary, have suffered loss of status as a result of restructuring and have found themselves, in certain markets, competing against members of a socially inferior group. Nevertheless, they have not been attracted to right-wing extremism. Why them and not the others? What resources have these individuals brought into play to affect their redeployment and to extract themselves from “untenable” positions?<sup>14</sup>

A certain number of jobs within sectors in decline, such as the steel industry, were immediately eliminated. Unlike the skills of technicians, engineers or administrative personnel, the practical skills of a rolling-mill worker or steel-maker cannot be adapted. In this homogeneous social milieu, one ignores the social and economic skills that, statistically, tend to be underdeveloped among the workers interviewed. But one observes that individuals with political and cultural skills can be retrained. Political skills frequently acquired by trade unionists during trade union struggles or acquired by their children in the form of family experience (specific socialisation, knowledge of the workers’ movements, militant practices, social classification) are difficult to reproduce in a locally depressed environment with weakened trade union structures. But nevertheless, self-assurance and a local reputation for leadership, knowledge linked to the organisation of demonstrations, negotiating skills acquired during negotiations with employers’ representatives or through contact with journalists, political astuteness needed for the organisation of general assemblies – but also knowledge, specifically economic or managerial, associated with trade union responsibilities – all constitute skills equally suited to managerial posts and which therefore are convertible.

It should also be noted that “activist capital” or skilled leadership is ineffective on the national or local political scene as long as it lacks the variety of cultural resources

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<sup>14</sup> Other factors are barriers to right-wing extremism and populism: Political socialisation in the family plays a decisive role in shaping one’s basic political attitudes. Acceptance/non-acceptance of the regime, religious/non-religious and nationalistic/non-nationalistic education by the family seem to determine whether the interviewee voted for the liberal-left or the right-wing-nationalistic party bloc. Status inconsistency can be observed, as evidenced by both a simultaneous decline and advancement, and by precariousness and opportunity, at both the macro-economic and personal level. Thus people as well as the economy are in transition. Some people do not experience frustration, or if it exists they can cope with it. Those who are not attracted to right-wing populism and extremism (RWE) exhibited a kind of “acceptance of real life challenges”, i.e. “What can you do?”, and hope that the democratic process will somehow be able to correct the economic and political conditions. People in agreement with changes in the movement are less receptive to RWE. The changes are integrated in views on society based on other ideologies or reasoning. The more people live in and can refer to diverse cultural environments (immigration history in the family, frequency of encounters with other social environments or “milieus”, etc.), the less likely they are to be receptive to ideas of RWE. Where we observe people as being less receptive, we conclude that most of them rely on different cultural and social resources to cope with socio-economic changes. This is because they are members of social groups and networks with different cultural influences and they have available to them a wider range of experiences, discourses and arguments that can reconcile changes without reliance on RWE arguments. For example, they are more familiar with other cultures and ways of life and thus do not feel as threatened by cultural differences of immigrants. They can relate to other identities than to that of the workplace and do not need to rely upon a sense of national identity for their self image and sense of place in society. Their ability to identify with multiple and differentiated groups within society eliminates the necessity for exclusive group identification.



necessary for class acceptance. The “working class voice”, the proletarian ethos or the simple action of articulating workers’ interests is unwelcome in the political universe dominated by the educated classes. Although made easier for today’s generation through the improvement in education, the adjustment to political propriety is not easy for the employees who entered a factory at the age of 14, nor for today’s employees leaving the education system at the age of 16.

The career path of Ms Gerard, a hotel employee in France, demonstrates how convertible resources, when utilised, can increase the likelihood of “upward” redeployment and, under certain conditions, induce political positions rigorously opposed to those of the extreme right. This interview provides an answer to the question: Why do some resist the extreme right and not others when in an equally precarious economic situation? The daughter of a miner of Italian origin, 40-years-old, Ms Gerard is married to a blue-collar worker. Over the past four years she has moved from temporary jobs on to fixed-term contracts with a subsidiary of a multinational firm in the hotel and catering trade in Luxembourg, where she is employed in a low income and low status position as a waitress. She lives in a former steel city where the delinquency rate is high, drug trafficking abounds, noise nuisance is frequent, as are dustbin fires and joyriding. On several occasions, Ms Gerard has been the victim of this environment.

Ms Gerard has two peculiar kinds of skill. First of all, she continued her studies up to the baccalaureate (A-levels) and at the age of 22 embarked upon further studies at university. She obtained a degree in law. Secondly, Ms Gerard has significant “political capital”. Her father, a miner and former CGT trade unionist and socialist sympathiser, is still anchored in the left. With memories of the important miners’ strikes and workers’ mobilisation, Ms Gerard has adopted the structure of paternalistic political views.

At first sight, Ms Gerard is in one of those “untenable” positions that result from the precariousness of loss of status: her educational qualifications are not in keeping with her job as a waitress, and the proximity of her living conditions to those of the children of poor immigrant families places her in a situation of social insecurity. But she has been able to utilise her university degree, which represents “educational capital” at a higher level than average in the group, and her “activist capital” in a specific market where both of these resources are valuable and synergic: the market of vocational social associations. Ms Gerard is, in fact, engaged in a multitude of collective activities, which provide her with a stable position, as well as a certain local reputation.

Ms Gerard is interested in national politics and followed the debates attentively during the presidential elections. The subjects she is interested in are linked to her associative commitments. Sensitive to the security measures taken by the government, she nevertheless denounces the expulsion of immigrants, who are at the same time her neighbours, her colleagues and her “clients”. All the same, Ms Gerard speaks of the conditions in her district only in systematically optimistic and positive terms. These views are, in part, brought about by her position in the municipal association structure: biased towards institutions designed to improve the lifestyle of the inhabitants, she strives to emphasise the results of her actions. As a result, Ms Gerard’s political views

fall into the category covered by social vocational associations: progressivism, pragmatism, effectiveness, tolerance and anti-racism.

Socio-economic change can also lead to a strengthening of patterns of interpretation and political orientation that can be classified as belonging to the social democratic, conservative or liberal political camps.

A turn to social democratic principles or attempts to improve upon such principles results from increasing insecurity and inequality, and requires a more equitable distribution of social wealth and state measures to control the power of the market. The causes of disadvantageous changes in the world of work are a result of the strategies of large corporations and globalisation. The perception that socio-economic change is leading to a shift in power relationships in favour of large enterprises and resulting in increasing insecurity is clear to those who see the primary aim of politics as safeguarding living standards and opportunity – which they understand in terms of employment, health and pensions. The growing economic insecurity, and in particular the threat to jobs, may have strengthened or reactivated social-democratic values.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in Mr Neumann's view, a currently unemployed worker from a crisis region of Austria, social standards and wage levels are being undermined by international corporations in search of the cheapest location.

*“The big companies want to make billions in profits. For them it's only profit that counts now, not the ordinary man who's doing the work.”*

Mr Neumann, who considers himself socially to be a “small worker”, would like a society that makes a modest but secure living standard possible for everyone:

*“... that at least everyone has a job – I mean, just as well as it goes, that everything's in order in the schools, education, and that everyone has got welfare cover. That the money isn't distributed unequally, that would be an important point, that one person doesn't have very much and the other nothing at all. Let's say, as if you can call it the social middle class, you don't have to have too much, but it should be enough to live on.”*

In recent years Mr Neumann, who comes from a poor family background and has therefore had to struggle all his life to maintain a modest living standard, has noticed that employment security in general and social security in particular are being called into question. This, however, has not made him angry with refugees or “welfare-state scroungers” or parasites, as was the case with some others we interviewed in the region. Even though he was self-employed for a number of years, he views the world from the perspective of the worker. Contrary to his previous voting behaviour, which was influenced by his father-in-law, an ÖVP local councillor, he turned to those who, in his view, represented the interests of the workers, namely the SPÖ. The fact that his politicisation took this direction, although he *“in principle doesn't think much of politics”*, initially resulted from his rejection of Haider's destructive political style. A

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<sup>15</sup> Mr Neumann, semi-skilled worker, electrical industry, currently unemployed, Austria; Mr Hortusek, health and safety representative, Austria; Mr Quentin, worker, steel industry, France; Ms Darmont, marketing engineer, IT sector, France.

further explanation could lie in the fact that his precarious life situation does not appear to encroach on his identity. Even under existential insecurity, he sees the possibility of controlling his own life:

*“I have always watched out that things go forward. Actually I’ve never worried. I’ve always thought of something, and it’s the same now. And if things just get a bit tight, I’ll have to live with it.”*

Although Mr Neumann sees workers’ dependence on the economic powers much more clearly than others, he does not allow feelings of powerlessness to arise.

In the Austrian sample, Mr Hortusek is the most outspoken critic of neo-liberalism and the socio-economic change over the last ten years. His own experiences of unemployment, or that he has occasionally been categorised as too old at 30, have further strengthened him in his political involvement in and commitment to the weaker sections of society. Thus in the company he attempts to maintain the values of solidarity, human rights and the protection of life against rampant “social Darwinism”, in which he sees parallels to right-wing extremism. He is very interested in contemporary history and, because of his firm and thoughtful opposition to right-wing populism, is in no way receptive to its message. He also criticises the SPÖ, in which he is “*a very distant*” member, because the party neither adequately addresses such issues as unemployment and poverty nor is the organisation free of racism and xenophobia.

In the conservative camp as well, there are examples of the fact that demoralisation and offences in working life do not necessarily cause increased receptivity to right-wing populism.<sup>16</sup> For example, Ms Reutner (IT support officer, Austria) encountered extremely negative experiences after re-entering employment following a long maternity break. After eight years in a company where she had felt at home, she was sacked unexpectedly. Through a personnel agency she obtained a job where she became a victim of harassment. After becoming unemployed, she had great difficulty obtaining funding from the Austrian labour market service for further training. Ultimately, information-technology training enabled her to find a position in a renowned service-industry company, in which she feels very much at home. For Ms Reutner, respect for the dignity of every human being is very important, and she criticises the FPÖ for fomenting xenophobia. Her father owned a construction company for which her mother also worked. Politically she tends towards the ÖVP. What differentiates her from other interview partners is her material security through her husband, a bank clerk, as a result of which employment for her is, at least economically, not absolutely necessary.

Even though it appears that there is a lack of legitimate forms of expression for problems in the work place, bad working conditions do not *per se* lead to particular political responses.

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<sup>16</sup> Ms Reutner, IT support officer, Austria; Mr Emont, retired executive supervisor, IT sector, France; Mr Laudru, computer executive, IT sector, France.

#### 4.5. Summary

This chapter has emphasised four main issues:

- The rise of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism in the European debate;
- the general political background of the countries under investigation;
- the acceptance of right-wing extremism and populism; and
- the diverse patterns of interpretation and coping strategies leading to rejection of right-wing extremism and populism.

The success of right-wing populist and extremist parties in the national elections in European member states as well as in “third countries” (e.g. Switzerland and Hungary) led the EU to initiate research projects investigating the rise of right-wing extremism and racism in Europe. The newsworthy enquiries highlight either the attitudes towards minority groups in the European Union, racism and cultural diversity in the mass media, or *Islamophobia* in the EU after 11 September 2001. Although these enquiries and publications provide useful information on the rise of racism and xenophobia in the area of society and politics, they share a “missing link”. Until now, the European research projects have not investigated the link between socio-economic change and the appeal of the extreme right. Thus the description and analysis of the upsurge of racist and right-wing ideologies has not been systematically linked to the dynamics of globalisation and especially to the changes in the world of work. The starting point for the researchers of the SIREN team is the question: In what way and to what extent do the individual experiences in the working world contribute to interpretations and coping strategies that turn out to be compatible with the core ideology of the extreme right?

For a proper interpretation of the research findings, a second section provides crucial information on political events and debates in the various countries under investigation. These eight paragraphs highlight the political campaigns in the run-up to the national elections, as well as the election results, in Austria, France, Germany and Hungary during the period of the interviews. The subchapter focusing on the political background of the individual countries sketches public and political debates insofar as the researchers of the national teams considered them relevant to the course of the interviews and the assessments of the interviewees. To provide a deeper insight into the diverse political cultures, we have attempted to characterise the extreme-right-wing and populist parties and their relationship to the moderate right. Despite the heterogeneous political traditions and cultures in the eight countries under investigation, the issue of immigration and asylum policy – dramatically overshadowed by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 – played a crucial role in the media and political debates during 2002.

The core of the chapter on “Views on politics” focuses on the acceptance of right-wing extremism and populism, and on various interpretation and coping strategies. “Out-group rejection” and “in-group favouritism” are the central issues observed in interviews with people who exhibit a strong affinity for right-wing populist and

extremist ideologies. Furthermore, individuals with right-wing populist or extremist attitudes call for an authoritarian state, prefer authoritarian solutions and go as far as admitting that they either vote for or are members of right-of-centre political parties.

Since our interviewees expressed their sympathies with right-wing populist or extremist ideologies according to their particular social status, educational background, age, gender and personal experiences, there is more than just one approach to the extreme right. We demonstrate the various consequences of socio-economic change which can be extrapolated from the available interview material. The main goal and contribution of this chapter is the concentration on the individual cases and presentation of archetypes.

Whereas most of the extrapolated interpretations and coping strategies could be found in most of the countries under investigation, we cannot deny national particularities. The Danish researchers faced the phenomenon that the demand for a better welfare state was often voiced in conjunction with a racist discourse and led to sympathies for the Danish People's Party. The Hungarian researchers emphasised the significant impact of the political values of the family on the shaping of political attitudes and socialisation of the interviewees. The presentation of the nine archetypes thus reflects common trends in all the European countries studied as well as some special features we faced in particular countries.

It should be noted that differences do not occur in isolation but are closely linked in a variety of ways within the interviews themselves. On the basis of numerous in-depth interview analysis reports provided by each of the eight country teams, we extrapolated central methods of argumentation and reasoning, leading us to different interpretation patterns and coping strategies. The overview presented in chapter four highlights nine different archetypal personalities or factors likely to be attracted by the ideologies of right-wing populism or extremism:

1. Members of the middle class with right-wing conservative and nationalist mentality
2. Threat to middle-class status and identity, insecurity through modernisation; nostalgia and threat to cultural identity
3. Worker identity and pragmatic change from Social Democracy to right-wing populism
4. The community of decent and hard-working people and the devaluation of subordination
5. Precariously employed and unemployed women workers, struggle for survival, double disadvantage and preferential treatment of foreigners
6. Plea for a better welfare state, protection of the national majority
7. Unemployment and (early) retirement, questioning self-esteem and self-consciousness
8. The predominance of the feeling that the mixture of cultures and the dynamics of globalisation threaten the national and cultural identity as well as the work ethic and destroy the essential social units

## 9. The impact of family political values (anti-Communism and anti-Semitism) on the political orientation of employees in a country in transition

Accentuating the “Rejection of right-wing extremism, populism: various interpretation and coping patterns”, the last subchapter raises the question “why them and not the others?” Although our research focuses on the appeal of the extreme right, we have to bear in mind that this particular political conversion is just one among a wide range of different interpretations and coping strategies. The empirical data provide information about the conversion from one position or camp to political abstention, illustrate political conversions which tend towards “voice”, or provide examples of conversions from one position to another.

The initial argument is that many of our interviewees have had negative experiences in the world of work but only some of them have interpreted their experiences in connection with ideologies of the extreme right. Raising the question “why them and not the others?” we sketch different forms of conversion leading to a strengthening of patterns of interpretation and political orientation that can be classified as belonging either to the social democratic, conservative or liberal political camps.

Referring to selected examples taken from the Austrian and French sample, we exemplify the impact of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) on the manner in which the interviewees interpret the social world and their political affiliations. Whether and to what extent the interviewees have “activist”, “political”, “cultural” or “educational capital” at their disposal influences their interpretation and analysis of the social world and their ability to cope with negative experiences in the world of work.

The increase in economic and social insecurity may have strengthened or reactivated social-democratic values. In the conservative camp we found interviewees whose accounts exemplify the thesis that demoralisation and offences in working life do not necessarily lead to an affinity for ideologies of the extreme right. In general we can conclude that bad working conditions neither lead *per se* to ideologies of the extreme right nor to particular political responses in general.

## **5. IMPROVING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND EXTREMISM**

In all the countries surveyed, the interpretation of the interviews revealed interesting interrelations between people's experiences at work or on the labour market and their views on politics. To some extent it was even possible to account for recent changes in political orientation and party preferences with reference to such experiences. Chapter 4 has already presented the wide variety of political orientations using exemplary cases as illustrations. In this chapter we would like to pull the threads together and summarise the main impact that changes in working life have had on receptiveness to right-wing populist or extremist ideologies, messages or politicians. In a second part we will then focus on reasons for the appeal of right-wing populism and extremism other than those related to the world of work. Although this was not at the core of our research, we have also analysed indications of such alternative explanations in order to avoid to over-emphasis of the role of socio-economic change and, in particular, changes in work and employment.

### **5.1. *How do changes in working life impact on political orientations? What elements of socio-economic change make people receptive to right-wing populism?***

In analysing political reactions to experiences of socio-economic change, opinions, voting behaviour or party affiliation are not our main concern. We are interested in political orientations in a much wider sense: These include images of society and normative or moral ideas of social order, concepts of justice and feelings of injustice relating to social life, aspirations for happiness, the need for recognition and cultural identity, etc., which constitute "potentials of political subjectivity" (Dubiel 1994). Material and symbolic consequences of socio-economic change may result in a release of potentials of political subjectivity if, in a "populist moment" in history, "collective experiences of injury, fear of losing one's status and thwarted hopes for happiness of some groups of the population are dropped, as it were, from established discourse and become 'floating potentials', at odds with the traditional spectrum of political orientation" (Dubiel 1994:203f). Consequently, the interpretation of subjective perceptions of changes in working life should help us to understand why particular ideological elements, political messages or styles of politics of right-wing populism and extremism may become attractive to particular groups of people.

The empirical research started from the hypotheses that people interpret increasing insecurity and other adverse changes in working life in different ways and that political reactions vary depending on social milieu, gender, biography, age, social status, geographical and cultural context, etc. We therefore neither assumed that there was a mechanistic relation between socio-economic change and political views, nor did we

presuppose that socio-economic change was the main reason for the rise of right-wing populism and extremism. There was also agreement that there are several theoretical reasons for why changes in working life may increase the receptivity to right-wing populism. It is one of the strengths of the rich empirical material this report is based on that it reflects not only a variety of European societies and political systems but also different research traditions and theoretical backgrounds of the SIREN teams in the various countries. This makes it possible to explore a range of theoretical interrelations between socio-economic change and right-wing populism and extremism and to engage in sociological, socio-psychological and psychological reasoning. At the same time, it makes it necessary to exercise caution when it comes to the comparative analysis of the material. Therefore, our main concern in this concluding chapter is not to describe how these interrelations differ between the eight European countries under investigation. Rather, we aim to synthesise the findings from qualitative research in all these countries to provide the debate with an empirical base that has so far been lacking.

#### **5.1.1. *Injured sense of justice and appeals to the “decent and hard-working people”***

There are a number of interviews in all the countries under investigation that showed clear connections between the conditions and changes in the world of work and the receptiveness to right-wing populism.

One such connection can be located in experiences that injured people’s sense of justice and in their experience or fear that, in spite of hard work and sacrifices, they are not able to maintain or attain the standard of living and social status they have previously enjoyed or which they aspire to. These interlocutors see themselves as not being rewarded for their subordination – in some cases even being punished. The feelings of disappointment and anger are directed against those who, in their eyes, have a “good life” without subjecting themselves to the impositions and risks of an increasingly pitiless world of work. These are the politicians on high and secure incomes, the refugees who are “looked after by the state” and the long-term unemployed, who allegedly do not want to work at all. A related aspect is growing competition or unfair competition on the labour market or in a particular field of economic activity. Understandably, illegal employment of (clandestine) immigrants in the tourist industry, for example, is a bone of contention for unemployed waiters. But in the construction industry, too, illegal employment and wage dumping have given rise to conflicts between local workers and immigrants from central and eastern Europe. In Germany, competition between Eastern and Western Germans following German reunification is also mentioned, as is competition from ethnic Germans who have immigrated from other countries.

As described in Chapter 3 of this report, the experiences people have suffered in the world of work are varied. They range from privatisation of companies and early retirement to the loss of jobs through plant closure, relocation or the threat to employment due to a crisis in the industry. This may lead to a frustration of expectations and hopes due to the loss of income and status, but it may also imply that people slowly



realise the decreasing and the insecurity of rewards in terms of living standards and societal integration for hard work and subordination. Among the group of people in socio-economic situations that we classified as being under “threat of decline” or “precarious”, there is a predominating impression of being patronised and betrayed: *“I feel betrayed, you know. Betrayed and patronised”* (Mr Oster, post office employee in early retirement, Germany) *“I worked properly and I feel I’ve been punished for it”* (Ms Frank, semi-skilled worker, electrical industry, currently unemployed, Austria); *“we’re too decent, too bloody stupid, too honest”* (Mr Bouler, retired railwayman, France). The experience of not being honoured for having put up with the hardships of work *“without moaning”* leads to profound frustrations.

Often this feeling is accompanied by the perception that asylum seekers and the “work-shy” are systematically favoured. These other groups seem to attract aggression for obviously escaping the exacting demands of work – and *“still live well”*. The emotions involved often cannot be understood without reference to the pains of work, the physical and psychological strains that people have to accept, while living in a rather precarious situation (Flecker et al. 2002). The immediate working conditions therefore seem to be crucial for the understanding of individual patterns of interpretations: First, in a situation of a breach of an implicit contract or, in other terms, the termination of reciprocity, feelings of injustice can be expected to be the stronger the higher one estimates one’s contribution or costs, e.g. in terms of sacrifices or physical and psychological damage. Second, the pains of work need to be repressed and may thereby lead to aggression against others, mainly those who are perceived as being able to avoid such pains illegitimately. In some cases the problem is not the worsening of working conditions as such but rather the unchanged hardships of industrial work under conditions of increased employment insecurity and rising costs of living.

The story of Mr Klammer, a semi-skilled blue-collar worker in a metal factory in Austria, provides a good illustration: The emotional-aggressive feeling of injustice is concentrated and heated as if through a magnifying glass in the example of his friend, who allegedly uses every trick possible to manoeuvre himself through the controls of the labour-market society.

*“Those are exactly the things, because you’re directly affected by it. He comes in, I come home from the shift. He comes home from [swimming in] the gravel pit, sweating. Great! Got so hot, sat down there, drank a beer, pretty women. You come home filthy, sweating from grafting. [The friend says:] ‘No ... I don’t need to go to the retraining course, and not that, and I’d never do that, because it doesn’t suit me’... Then you just think, what am I going to work for? He doesn’t live badly. I say he hasn’t got any debts, and he’s got a flat and manages to buy his ten or twelve beers every day and as long as he can buy that with social security he’s getting too much. No wonder he doesn’t go to work any more.”* Mr Klammer, semi-skilled worker in the metal industry, Austria

In the world of white-collar workers the threat of decline is sometimes less visible. As in the case of Mr Imhof, a Swiss IT specialist in the chemical industry, it may be confined to the perception that a new management does not recognise professional experience, engagement and achievement. The ensuing damage to the concept of social

justice, the perception of foreign managers and consultants as intrusion and threat makes it difficult to adapt. This is hard for a highly conformist person, and may lead to even stronger demands for adaptation and assimilation of others, which are emotionally articulated when discussing the issue of immigration.

It was not only those who experienced adverse consequences of changes in working life who showed an aversion to weaker groups in society. Such a reaction can also be found among those who had been able to improve their position but still suffered an increased workload, unlimited working hours or high demands on flexibility. Mr Müller, for example, a relatively well-paid telecom-worker with civil-servant status in Germany who suffers from stress at work, projects his aversion onto all those who do not sacrifice and torture themselves in a similar way for the benefit of the company and the national economy. His call for forced labour for the unemployed – *“They should get a shovel in their hand and have to shovel a cubic meter every day”* – and his plea for the brutal destruction of municipal structures he suspects of being corrupt indicate that although his political affiliation is centre-left he is nevertheless susceptible to right-wing extremist strategies to resolve problems in society. Other examples show that perceived insecurity of the viability of the company may strengthen such authoritarian views and lead some to despise colleagues who do not perform well enough. This exclusionist pattern of meaning can easily be transferred to the level of the nation state whose economic viability, according to the ideology of “competitive nationalism”, is under threat.

In Hungary, the economic transition undermined living standards and increased insecurity for many. Even those who successfully maintained or improved their material situation usually had to achieve this with incredible effort. This includes, for example, generating additional income by taking a second or third job or, as in the case of Mr Iró, by setting up and running a major enterprise in addition to full-time employment. Interestingly, the point of reference for comparison is often not the parents but the grandparents and the economic situation between the two world wars. Interviews in Hungary suggest that the (threat of) decline in living standards and precariousness can reinforce or even mobilise the prejudices that might have been acquired during family socialisation. This may in fact lead to voting for an extreme right party. There is no denying that anti-Communism has a great influence, as it is transformed into a scepticism against the political elite and may thereby lead to an affinity to the extreme right.

Often, the experiences related to working conditions also nurture the feeling that “those up there” who take the decisions do not know anything about the actual conditions of work.

*“There are people sitting at the top, and they don’t have a clue about what’s going on in the factories and the community. They’re just busy making as much money as possible. ... You know, those directors, bosses and people high up in society. They think they can just press a few buttons, and the changes will come of themselves – but they don’t.”* Ms Jørgensen, unskilled worker in the printing industry, Denmark

Contrasting the “people” to the elite was also frequent in one group of Swiss interviews. Identification with the middle classes, the milieu where “*people are gaining their livelihood correctly without being able to afford whatsoever*” (Mr Bollinger, department manager, in early retirement, Switzerland), is the common basis of these, individual stories. “We” is used frequently when referring to the domination from above (“*they think we are idiots*”), in particular from “politics” and from “the ones who take the decisions”. The “people” accordingly constitute a moral category: the ones who are working hard to get out and who are subject to the “irresponsibility” of the economic and political elite. This expression is also used when talking about a sentiment thought to be shared by everyone, namely feeling one’s household budget being minimised by the charges, the pressure or the incomprehension of governmental bureaucracy (taxes, health insurance, indirect taxation, family allowance, etc.). The “people” (called “workers” by some) are thus an industrious and silent majority suffering from pressure from “above”. This vision of the social world is evidently held by interview partners whose careers consist mainly of daily personal investments in maintaining their standard of living. Personal history or the “family career” (De Gaulejac 1999) should thus be considered an important source of the understanding of perceptions of socio-economic change.

Some of the women we interviewed clearly expressed their feelings of injustice in relation to the double disadvantage they suffer as (blue-collar) workers and as women: they add to the equation their experiences of discrimination, problems at work and in employment stemming from patriarchal family relations, and the virtual impossibility of reconciling paid labour with motherhood. Not being able to maintain economic independence from a life partner in spite of hard work and far-reaching sacrifices is what hurts some of them most. Others, after having given up their own career-related hopes and dreams, are more concerned about the fate of their children. What makes some of the reproduction-oriented women attracted to right-wing populist views is, on the one hand, a lack of childcare facilities, school quality or access to vocational training and, on the other, the recognition of their motherly self-image, which is denied to them by the centre-left middle class.

From a sociological perspective we can conclude that socio-economic change forces people to reconsider and re-evaluate their position in the social world. They may find themselves in an “untenable position” if, for example, their current status and income no longer reflects their qualifications or their cultural capital. It may lead to a situation in which material and symbolic rewards are no longer perceived as offsetting efforts and sacrifices. This may be caused by changes in work, such as increasing work load, lack of recognition or precarious employment. But it may also stem from a threat to living standards because of the increased cost of living. Both may impact on the way people make sense of their working life, on how satisfied they are in general or how they are able to come to terms with physically and psychologically damaging working conditions. This perceived balance or the “mode of attachment” to work seems, in many cases, to be at the core of the relation between socio-economic change and political reactions.

For some, low income and long working hours, which again are sometimes a strategy to compensate for lower income, result in a retreat from social life, which they simply cannot afford any longer. As they interpret it, social life no longer works and life outside restricted social contacts becomes something strange or foreign. This alienation from society may lead people to see foreigners as symbols of a social life that has become foreign to them, and, consequently, can be seen as basis of xenophobic resentments. The phrase “*soon we will be the foreigners*” used by Ms Marini, Ms Veitschnig and others should therefore not be misunderstood as simply expressing a perceived threat to cultural identity by immigration. Rather, it seems to express alienation channelled by the dominant discourse on problems of society. What this points to is nothing less than the endangered integration of sections of the working class into society.

### **5.1.2. Insecurity, fear of declassing and feelings of powerlessness**

As already presented in Chapter 3 of this report, many of our interlocutors face increased and further growing insecurity of employment and income. It is a particularly pressing problem for those who lack the cultural capital and the psychological disposition to be able to perceive insecurity as a challenge or at least think that they will cope one way or the other. The experience that it is impossible to make plans for a few months ahead means that one has lost control over one’s life.

At a general level, there is already a clear connection between such insecurity and loss of control and right-wing populism that addresses the population as a passive victim of overpowering opponents, often without going into clearly defined interests (Dubiel 1994, Steinert 1999). There is also a connection with “competitive nationalism” as people frequently express feelings of powerlessness relating not only to their own socio-economic situation but also to the state of the country or society as a whole: “*We are finished economically and we are completely powerless. Germany has lost its standing in the world*” (Mr Marzahl, purchasing agent in the construction industry, Germany). Another general relationship can be seen in the fact that, in their stories, people who feel threatened by the immediate future seem to focus on the past. This quite often leads to nostalgic accounts contrasting the good old times with the unpleasant present and the frightening future. This corresponds to the backward oriented utopian political messages of right-wing populism glorifying traditional communities.

At a more specific level, the interpretation of the interviews showed different reactions to feelings of insecurity and powerlessness. Some are clearly authoritarian, others exclusionist, and many reveal a perceived lack of political representation. These reactions can be illustrated with the following examples.

The case of Mr Vanhaard, a Belgian railway worker, is a good example of an *authoritarian* reaction. When his wife lost her job through the bankruptcy of the national airline she worked for, he suddenly realised that working in a state enterprise does not guarantee employment security. The perceived insecurity leads him to criticise

not only government policy, but also his colleagues. He is very harsh towards people who cannot cope with the changed pace of work.

*“People work much too slowly, then you can see two of them working there on a job that could be done by one ... they adapt to the pace of work – yes it’s nice, isn’t it – but if they don’t adapt – well, sorry – that is an indication that they can’t cope with the work.”* Mr Vanhaard, railway worker, Belgium

Analyses of this interview showed that Mr Vanhaard reacted to the threat in an authoritarian way, by harshly condemning the “slackers”, people who, in his eyes, do not work hard enough and therefore jeopardise the viability of the company and, hence, his own job and pension scheme and therefore his own future.

Turning to political authoritarianism, the interviews revealed that in a state of general insecurity, attention and hope can be directed at all those who still appear as players, that is, as capable of action and having an effect.

Mr Pammer, an Austrian social-democratic blue-collar worker and later a minor salaried employee, was always aware of the fundamental dependence on corporate decisions, but now has the growing feeling of being a plaything at the mercy of a volatile economic situation which he sees as an emerging threat to his survival. Following the partial relocation of the plant, management wanted him to transfer to Hungary, which he was able to resist on health grounds. Even though a job was found for him in the company, it is highly insecure. And it is clear to him that at the age of 45 he will not find another job in the region should he lose this one. For him, this experience calls into question not only the trade union but also the parties, as these are not in the position to protect him from the loss of his job. Alongside the acute threat to his own job, the creeping decline of the region, to which he is emotionally very strongly attached, injures Mr Pammer’s identity. He therefore sees the safeguarding and creation of jobs as the most important socio-economic aim. Players who in his opinion have the actual power to swim against the tide of relocation of production to central and eastern Europe and to create jobs in Austria, and politicians who appear as “strong men” therefore appear to him fundamentally as shining figures.

Feelings of insecurity and powerlessness in the face of developments in the company, the labour market or in the global economy are aggravated by the perception that *political representatives* no longer provide any protection. Workers’ representatives appear to be incapable of action and are seen to have “surrendered” to the employers or “swim along” with them. This relates to the general level of asymmetric power relations between the increasingly mobile capital on the one hand and trade unions that keep losing membership on the other, which forces labour to make concessions. But it also relates to immediate support of individual workers in the case of trouble. At this level the picture is mixed: While some respondents made a clear difference between workers’ representatives in the company and on the shop floor on the one hand, and politicians on the other, others also report a lack of support by their union when they had a dispute with the employer.

Ms Frederiksen illustrates such a case. She was made redundant after years of hard work because she suffered from a serious allergy which made it impossible for her to do

her cleaning job. She was helped by a dermatologist and after many years of toing and froing she was finally awarded industrial compensation. About her trade union she says:

*“I don’t think the union can take credit for that, because they didn’t lift a finger to help me – they did nothing to help me find another job. I was not offered other work. That was wrong, I feel, because they could easily have got up and said – she has slaved for so-and-so many years, so we feel she deserves an easier job.”*  
Ms Frederiksen, former cleaner, Denmark

She has considered (but she didn’t) giving her vote to Pia Kærsgård the leader of the Danish People’s Party, of whom she says:

*“I like listening to her when she speaks. She doesn’t use all big words or give election promises. If she had her way I’m quite sure in spite of everything that many things would be better for people on the shop floor.”* Ms Frederiksen, former cleaner, Denmark

Here again, the public acknowledgement of one’s problems and the political interest in the workers’ world appears to be one of the populists’ strong points. In this way the interviews revealed a crisis of representation which seems to exist in industrial relations but which is strongest in the field of party politics (see Part 5.2.2. below).

Our analysis of the interrelation between insecurity, powerlessness and political orientations revealed yet another, seemingly contradictory connection that can be termed “conformist rebellion” (Hentges/Meyer 2002:55). Racism is – at least for some of our interviewees – a strategy to articulate their protest against social injustice in an officially accepted and authorised way. Even if they were exposed to leftist class struggle or social equality slogans (which, as everybody knows, they are not), it appears to be quite improbable that these would be accepted without difficulty. After all, the danger of further marginalisation and isolation would be far greater than if they were to advocate semi-official propaganda. In calling for an extremely authoritarian reintegration of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, some extreme right-wing German respondents idealise mechanisms that have turned out to be very effective in subordinating their own economic and emotional needs to the will of powerful agencies and institutions. What in terms of class relations can be seen as conformist, appears in the perception of most interviewees as a rebellion against pressures for political correctness. As far as problems stemming from immigration are concerned, many voiced the feeling that they are “not allowed to say anything”. It is understandable that the consequent uneasiness makes xenophobic utterances by right-wing populists appear so “refreshing”. It is therefore a rebellion in the double sense of protesting against injustice and of violating political correctness, and it is conformist as it is in line with the partly concealed views of the economically and politically powerful.

Overall, the interviews indicated high levels of perceived job insecurity, which was sometimes expressed openly, sometimes hidden behind wishful thinking of job stability and only given away indirectly in side-remarks such as “*in two years time – if I am still here*”. Job security is perceived as being threatened mainly by plant closures or relocations, by fierce competition between companies, which may result in bankruptcy, and by company restructuring and rationalisation. But it is also related to high and

increasing workloads and demands for flexibility and mobility, which make workers doubtful whether they will be able to cope or to reconcile work and family obligations in the long run (see Chapter 3 of this report). Our interpretations showed that people who turned out to be receptive to extreme right ideologies or messages tended to attribute the causes of negative affects individually and to express the conviction that in coping one can only count on oneself. Psychologically, such strong individualistic and meritocratic beliefs can be explained with reference to dissonance reduction processes: if the salience of their category of identification is low, even people in poor socio-economic conditions may justify and support the system that is at the origin of their disadvantaged position (Jost et al. 2003). Furthermore, this result is consistent with research showing that internal attributions (for example of poverty) are typical of conservative people (Heaven 1994, Zucker/Weiner 1993). Receptiveness to right-wing populist or extremist views was not only found in individualistic psychological coping strategies – which, on the one hand, enhance work ethics and achievement orientation and, on the other, increase the fear of failure and the perceived risk. It was also present in individuals whose social strategies, in contrast, focus on membership and stress the reliance on the individual's reference group. Defensive psychological reactions, including nationalism and anti-immigrant feelings, are likely in the case of individual strategies, but also with social psychological strategies if the reference group is assumed to be dissolved (Martinelli/Milesi/Catellani 2002:46).

Similar to problems in the world of work, which are barely recognised in public, insecurity is also not taken up by public discourse in a way that represents the concerns of ordinary people. A good example of this is the enlargement of the European Union, which is presented in a rather positive way by mainstream politics in many member states. Having experienced plant relocation to Hungary and other central and eastern European countries and new competition from immigrants on the labour market after 1989, interviewees in Austria expressed concern over the consequences of full membership of these countries. While Mr Daxhofer, who enjoys a secure position in the IT industry, talks about the “*queasy feeling*” he has on the subject, an unemployed female worker in a declining old industrial region speaks of “*panic-stricken fear*”. As the immediate concerns and legitimate interests of workers in this context are not addressed by other parties it is easy to understand how right-wing populists may take advantage of such potentials of political subjectivity.

### **5.1.3. The violation of values, anomic conditions**

It is often argued that not only increasing employment insecurity or changing working conditions but also more general aspects of socio-economic change directly or indirectly impact on people's political orientations. Loss of security also stems from the process of “individualisation” in which traditional societal institutions, such as the family or the occupational group, lose their former security and protective function (Beck 1986). According to Beck, the dissolution of social milieus leaves an ideological void and thereby creates the preconditions in which allegedly natural categories such as race, gender and age gain importance and become more ideology-laden. This does not mean

that the erosion of traditional milieus in itself leads to of right-wing extremist orientations. Rather, patterns of interpretation of the social world that were previously provided by social milieus are absent, and therefore there are fewer alternatives to patterns of orientation that resort to “natural categories”.

It is maintained, for example, that individualisation may lead to social isolation, insecurity of action and to feelings of powerlessness – anomic conditions that can be targeted by right-wing extremist ideology (Heitmeyer 1992). In addition, the complexity of contemporary society, its contradictions and existential insecurities lead to a lack of orientation. Extreme-right ideological elements, such as anti-out-group positions or authoritarianism, may help individuals to create a subjective sense of consistency (Zoll 1984). The same goes for the erosion of norms and values that leaves people with outdated normative orientation and tensions between their values and their actions. The ensuing uneasiness may be addressed with nostalgic accounts of the past and demands for the reestablishment of vanishing traditions and communities. It is also argued that the very dissolution of traditional social milieus and the recourse to allegedly natural categories like race, gender and age form the prerequisites for a resurgence of right-wing extremism (Heitmeyer 2002).

We addressed these hypotheses in our research because consequences of individualisation, the violation of values or forms of anomy were touched on in the interpretation of interviews on life plans, working biographies, insecurity and views of the social world. A general finding from our research sample is that the more concrete interrelations between socio-economic change and receptiveness to right-wing populism or extremism already discussed in this chapter seem to be much more salient than general tendencies such as the loss of orientation, values or social ties. Anomy theory therefore only provides additional explanations, relating in particular, to rural regions or particular social groups where the erosion of traditional communities, characterised by specific relations of reciprocity and social identities, is but a more recent phenomenon.

The following exemplary cases illustrate conditions in which the more immediate connections between changes in working life and receptiveness to right-wing populism and extremism described so far in this chapter did not seem to provide a full understanding and, consequently, the wider context of societal change had to be taken into account. 38-year-old Ms Veitschnig with civil service status, who has been employed at the Austrian post office since leaving commercial college and has recently risen in the hierarchy, addresses the problem of high workload: “*Then you come home ... I say, like a squeezed out rag, I often say.*” (Ms Veitschnig, post-office counter worker, civil servant status, Austria) In this perspective a nostalgic look back at the “good times” in the nest one could work more slowly and had more time for work and the customers is noticeable. But Ms Veitschnig presents as equally important a second aspect of change which she also sees in a negative light: the “break-up”, i.e. the restructuring of the company which accompanied liberalisation and the increasing pressure on employees to sell, to raise turnover. She sees the “*scrapping for customers*” in which the social norms of honesty and decency are violated as “*repulsive*”. Strong feelings about the loss of values and community ties were also found with other



interviewees from the same rural farming region near the Austrian border to a central European neighbour country. They see the current economic and political changes as a menace and to some extent they feel their cultural identity as threatened. Foreigners represent an issue to which this threat can attach itself.

Ms Kántor from Hungary, who holds a university degree in psychology and is head of the marketing department of a Hungarian telecommunication company, holds similar views. Her workplace experiences, developing marketing psychology and observing marketing strategies of other firms, are reinforcing her belief that consumer society is promoted by deceitful marketing campaigns that only serve the companies' profit interests. Her increasing dislike of her current position is partly connected to this resentment towards excesses of consumer society. For her, the real dangerous process in modern history is globalisation. Globalisation is a process that destroys local communities, traditions and national cultures. Her negative perception of globalisation intertwines with the belief that globalisation is moved forward by a small circle of the Jewish financial elite. She clearly shares some of the major themes raised by the MIÉP but does not vote for this right-wing extremist party because she clearly differentiated herself from the "angry" people supporting the MIÉP.

Another example is Michel Rust of Switzerland, who is just starting his career in research and development in a transnational company. Although he in fact distinguishes himself from the milieu of small regional enterprises (workers, precision mechanics, etc., the ordinary people of the technical domain) he partly shares their values. Delivering high quality work is highly valued and can lead to uneasiness when conditions do not make it possible to live up to such values. This element of his value system influences the way he draws boundaries, e.g. when it comes to the "mixture and flow of migrants" emanating "different mentalities" and mutilating Swiss principles of work. What is particular interesting in this, and similar, accounts is the definition of a "milieu of morality" which the interview partners oppose the population categories (managers, immigrants) they hold responsible for the detrimental changes in society.

The Italian interviews with people in different socio-economic situations also highlight this relationship: interlocutors who could be classified as being receptive to right-wing extremism or populism perceive contemporary society as changing quickly, in a way that could be dangerous, also because some basic values seem to be forgotten. They see a more rigid and strict respect of rules as a means of coping with the rapid changes present-day society is undergoing. For example, harsher sanctions should be applied against people who break the rules, like people who do not care about public property, or who commit crimes. *"If you rob, you must be punished"*, says Mr Davide. Mr Mirko thinks that a possible solution for criminality is to give more power to the police and to establish punishments proportional to the offence. In contrast, people who respect the law and do their duty should be rewarded and protected. Some interviewees trust superior, often "ideal" authorities, who should enact these culture-driven rules both by applying strict sanctions and by giving fair compensation. In fact, trusted ideal authorities are seldom politicians, who are perceived to be absolutely distant from ordinary people and interested in their power only. There is in any case the perception

that some authority should make the rules and traditional subverted values should be respected:

*“Some values ... they should be automatically respected. It should not be necessary to impose them. Unfortunately, this is not the case. So what do you think to do? Let it be like this or try to make it change?”* Mr Fabio, telecommunications employee, Italy

It is argued that the family should be the basis of our society, and this contrasts with the feeling that it has lost its role. For example, it is more difficult to find large families than it used to be, because young families now have only one or two children. The values implicit in the family, such as simplicity, have also lost their hold. Ms Sonia from Italy, for example, states that people are nowadays interested in earning high wages and being able to afford affluent way of life. The effects of such a change in value system are evaluated negatively:

*“If we analyse how people are living ...we don’t live well, people aren’t living well, because of the quality of life, but mainly because of the falling apart of families, of ... the extended family of past times doesn’t exist anymore. In my opinion, it’s a disaster, we can all see, these things, the father who kills the son ... there have always been things like these, but right now, they are a symptom of uneasiness.”* Mr Marco, entrepreneur Internet services, Italy

Some time ago, it was argued, human relationships were more genuine, there was more trust in one another, while today people are more suspicious and wary of strangers. Most interviewees agree that we lived better some time ago than in the present. This is not related to material well-being (which has improved), but rather to the current lack of human values in individuals.

These illustrations from the qualitative interviews in different countries are intended to show the prevalence in some of our interviews of an uneasiness with the loss of values and of closely integrated communities. This means that in addition to feelings of injustice, fear of declassing or feelings of insecurity clearly related to the world of work, we also found examples of political subjectivity, which can be addressed more generally by the backward looking utopias of unspoiled communities – or the law and order and anti-immigration policies of right-wing populism and extremism. But some qualifications need to be added here: First, in contrast to theories focusing on this level of interrelationship, our findings suggest that it is only of secondary importance; we can assume that the attraction of political messages, styles of politics or ideologies of right-wing populism and extremism can more often be accounted for with reference to the more concrete reasons described in the previous parts of this chapter. Second, it is not always the ideological elements of racism, xenophobia, authoritarianism and nationalism providing orientation, opportunities for identification or support to damaged social identities that make right-wing populists or extremists attractive. If people adopt the principles of neo-liberalism combined with “competitive nationalism”, support for right-wing populism and extremism can also be driven by economic considerations: Globalisation as a challenge to the national economy leads to a call for a strong authoritarian government improving the conditions for competitiveness at international level. Another non-ideological reason for political support for right-wing populists or

extremists can be found in the perceived lack of democracy – whether it is experiences of nepotism and corruption or the feeling of not being able to participate, of not being represented in the political game. This means that, while right-wing populists are rightly presented as a threat to representative democracy, the reasons for their success can partly be found in undemocratic conditions of contemporary European societies at local, regional and national levels, but also at the level of the European Union. It is this and other aspects we turn too now when, in the following, we discuss reasons for right-wing populism and extremism other than socio-economic change.

## **5.2. Additional or alternative reasons for explaining right-wing populism and extremism**

The starting point and focus of our analysis was the way socio-economic change has affected people's lives. In most cases, this formed a central element of our interviews that facilitated an understanding of the receptiveness to right-wing populism and extremism. However, the interpretation also yielded a range of other contexts, circumstances and influences that proved indispensable for the understanding of this receptiveness. Ultimately, for some interviews we came to the conclusion that, despite massive positive and/or negative impacts of socio-economic change, these issues could only be accorded a peripheral role in the turn towards right-wing extremist or populist affinities or party preference. In some cases interviewees explained their support for right-wing populist or extremist movements with “explicit” reasons outside working life and socio-economic change. Recurring examples of such reasons were personal traumatic experiences with migrants (e.g. mugging or burglary, sexual harassment, etc.) and overall dissatisfaction with the political system. Since different patterns of interpretation of the far-reaching changes within society are not invented by the interviewees themselves, we also have to take into account the ideological systems and societal contexts that contribute to a particular interpretation of the world and society. Because of the society- and country-specific formation and features of these ideological systems, we will make several digressions to selected countries to highlight some aspects or their country-specific moulding.

The individual dimensions or reasons given below might as such and by themselves not be sufficient to produce an affinity towards right-wing extremism and populism. Together with social macro-structures such as the political system and the media, family socialisation, milieu and the respective amounts of social, material and educational capital are of equally critical importance. In times of massive socio-economic and/or political change, the interrelation of these factors can become decisive for people turning to right-wing populist or extremist ideologies. At the individual level, the subjective interpretations of socio-economic change and of the consequences for one's life determine the means and strategies of tackling change and crises. The Italian research team for example looked at their interviewees' coping strategies and found connections between these strategies and the appeal of right-wing extremism or populism: the higher the *perceived* threat produced by increasing socio-economic

uncertainty and insecurity, the greater was the likelihood of the adoption of defensive positions such as racist or nationalist attitudes (Martinelli/Milesi/Catellani 2002:46). These perceptions are influenced by the interpretative matrix (shaped by norms and values of one's socio-cultural milieu and family upbringing, including political socialisation) for making sense of changes in working life and the world in general as well as for dealing with the increasing insecurities people are facing. And these norms and values are also influenced by societal discourses on more public levels (political elites, mass media, etc).

Following this first outline of the interplay of various dimensions necessary to understand the rise of right-wing populism and extremism, we will now present the most important reasons apart from and beyond socio-economic change, which we discovered in the qualitative interviews and which seem to support the attraction of far right attitudes.

### **5.2.1. *Real and symbolic threats related to the turbulences of immigration***

Some interviewees talked about personal negative experiences with immigrants, such as mugging, burglary and damage to personal property. They said that these experiences led them to anti-immigrant views. However, we also encountered cases in which experiences like these did not lead to such views. Therefore it can be assumed that traumatic or negative experiences might be “triggers” for latent xenophobic attitudes. These attitudes can be fuelled by existential feelings of insecurity in terms of one's place in society. Feelings of existential insecurity or threat can have objective backgrounds like (threat of) unemployment and/or material and social decline. However, we also found anti-immigrant attitudes as expressions of very subjective conditions where material threats or risks were absent: in these cases, the painful realisation of disintegrating social fabric, increasing individualisation, and a societal climate of profit-orientation and egotism led to a nostalgic longing for the past with a homogeneous cultural community. In cases like these, the presence of immigrants is interpreted as a threat to cultural and social identity. Criminality by immigrants is considered as a proof for the legitimacy of anti-immigrant attitudes and for the reality of this threat. It is crucial to point out the responsibility of public discourse and mass media in preparing such an interpretative racist matrix. Personal experience or observations of daily life with immigrants become confirmations of a “truth” that is manufactured by mass media and that comes down to the identification of “foreigners”, criminals and social security scroungers exploiting the “hard-working national population”.

Some interviewees felt disturbed by strange odours, noisy behaviour and other allegedly strange customs. They appeared to be irritated by the mere physical presence of “foreigners” and demanded either their removal or cultural assimilation. Referring to educational issues, some interviewees with children were very concerned about decreasing educational standards and quality because greater ratios of children from an immigrant background went to their children's schools. On the symbolic level, the

perception of neighbourhoods or schools being “invaded” by immigrants and hence downgraded (in terms of social status) can be linked to feelings of *déclassement*. Although many interviewees refer to second-hand experience or media reports, some are personally affected by the presence of migrants in their surroundings. Although in many cases anti-immigration views are the results of problem displacement or scapegoating, there is no question that immigration does actually cause problems. Understandably, people want these problems to be addressed. Quite a few of our interviewees complained that they are not allowed to speak openly about their concerns or problems with migrants. This fuels anger with politicians and elites, who preach the merits of tolerance, flexibility and cultural globalisation. Due to their well-off positions they can afford some kind of liberal generosity and thus tend to pathologise the “localists”, who compete with the lower strata of society (e.g. immigrants) for jobs and housing (Zilian 1998).

### **5.2.2. Crisis of democracy and political representation**

Dissatisfaction with politics was a phenomenon frequently encountered in interviews from all eight countries and of all political orientations: personal negative experiences with politics as well as the observation of politics via the mass media contribute to the wide-spread picture of politics as a corrupt game benefiting only power-hungry materialists.

Politics is only a crowd puller if one can, for example, offer “TV duels” at election time and maximise the entertainment factor (Ullram 2001). Besides, news reports frequently focus on scandals and mismanagement of political elites and top civil servants, which again ensures viewers’ attention. The media coverage of financial scandals, in comparison to that of the decrease in workers’ purchasing power, fuels a suspicion of collusion and general corruption in a political world indifferent to the fate of the “small people”. All this contributes to frustration with politics, which some perceive as a “Punch and Judy show”.

Additionally, an increase in the personalisation of politics is mainly due to the reception of politics via television. This form of reception gives a strongly personality-related and personalised approach to politics (Butterwegge et al. 2002), which is communicated in many interviews. People often orient themselves less towards political positions or programmatic points than to the way, and by whom, some issues are expressed. Thus politicians’ sympathy, charisma and appearance become the decisive marketing qualities. It can be assumed from the interview material that the increasing personalisation of politics is a highly relevant factor for the success of populists. A quote from Austria, which highlights this personalisation tendency very nicely, comes from an 46-year-old woman who complains about the non-charismatic personality of the present Social Democratic party leader, Alfred Gusenbauer: “*Well, what he says might often be quite good but as one rejects him as a person one also rejects what he says*” (Ms Reutner, IT support officer, Austria).

Disappointment with politics in general and with social democracy in particular is also fostered by exactly these parties' orientation towards new and more affluent layers of the electorate. Among the respondents who had changed their party affiliation, some argued that it was actually the change of the policies of a party that caused the switch.

*"I switched to the Danish People's Party because they (the Social Democrats) changed their policies – I haven't. The Social Democrats have forgotten people on the factory floor."* Ms Jeppesen, former bus driver, on early retirement pension, Denmark

Disinterest in politics has been diagnosed by political scientists as a crisis of the legitimacy of representative democracy as well as of the established conservative and social-democratic parties. This diagnosis of de-politicising trends raises the question of how this disinterest has emerged. Our research provides important indications for what is often marginalised in the dominant discourse of political science: the disqualification of the traditional "game" of politics, in the eyes of many interviewees, rests notably on the disappearance of the workers' world from the political scene and the national media. Workers' apparent "disinterest" in politics comes back to politicians' "disinterest" in workers' problems (Balazs/Faguer/Rimbert 2002:31).

*"Then if you want to speak of politics today, who to vote for? There is not one amongst them who came forward and said 'we're going to review workers' pay and retirement pensions by such and such a percentage because it's years since they've had a rise'. Nobody spoke of that. Then tell me what's the point of voting today. It's not surprising that there was such a level of abstention."* Mr Bouler, retired railwayman, France

With many interview partners the impression arises that they see themselves only as the object and not the subject of politics. They have never had experience or success in political action and activity and conclude that one cannot do anything or change anything. As a result of this passivity, politics is seen as being "up there", while oneself is down below and powerless. These feelings of powerlessness are aggravated by political developments such as European integration, EU enlargement and globalisation. Politics is not only perceived on a national, but also on a European and international level. Many interviewees have a negative image of politicians, and politics is seen as a lying, dirty business – or, as one Austrian interview partner crudely puts it: *"Politics is a whore"* (Mr Pammer, metalworker, Austria).

People affected by company restructuring not only criticise management but also government decisions. In the interviews this may lead to the expression of disregard to politicians and the game of politics.

*"Oh, someone somewhere in Brussels, but don't ask me who was behind it; but it is usually at the highest level – or even at ministerial level. ... Politics is controlled by the people who have the money. So it's not politics any more, it has become economics – it's: how can I get rich, stay rich and get even richer – and I don't have to take the rest of the population into account because their job is to make sure that I get richer."* Mr Karels, worker, Belgium

Some interviewees who previously belonged to the social-democratic camp ascribe the decision to vote for or join a right-wing populist or extremist party to the established

major parties. They felt themselves let down and not satisfactorily represented by parties from the social-democratic camp (or their trade unions). Experiences range from observations of and conflicts with undemocratic structures in the established parties, the perception of an inability or unwillingness to promote changes in favour of workers, or ultimately to accusations against shop stewards and trade unions of having changed sides and playing the role of co-managers. In resistance to this, they turned to the only alternative they saw within the party spectrum, a right-wing populist party. Here we have to add that in some countries interviewees differentiated between local and national politics. In France, for instance, local politicians and politics were evaluated positively for their commitment and proximity to people whereas politics on a national level was perceived as very distant and cut off from their interests.

Several interviewees have found a new political home and feel better represented by right-wing populist parties. It seems that the public acknowledgement of one's problems and the political interest in the workers' world is one of the populists strong points. Others appear pragmatic and realistic on the question of right-wing parties being the better workers' party and the party of the "little people". An interesting example of this is a French interviewee, who believes Le Pen to be on the side of the bosses (i.e. not willing to represent him) and explains his voting for the Front National by the metaphor of buying a big dog in order to frighten a neighbour who might take advantage of you:

*"Listen: if you want to frighten a neighbour, you buy yourself a big dog. The neighbour doesn't come to give you shit. But if you do nothing and you let him do what he likes well he's going to take you for a bloody idiot. And well it's a vote like that. ... Ah well, Le Pen, he'll be right-wing, huh. He'll be for the bosses. But the left-wing is also on the side of the bosses, only it's less obvious."* Mr Bouler, retired railwayman, France

This quote also illustrates another finding: sometimes the vote for the extreme right is not primarily motivated by ideology or exclusivist strategies, but seen as the most effective means of serving the interests of blue-collar workers vis-à-vis the elites.

### **5.2.3. Traditions and reproduction of political culture**

Sympathies with, or voting for right-wing populist or extremist parties cannot necessarily be interpreted as an identification with these parties' political and ideological positions. Some interviewees are quite aware that voting for right-wing parties is their form of protest, but they do not trust those parties either. However, the fact that the racist and social-Darwinist ideologies of these parties are not recognised as such or at least do not interfere with sympathies or voting behaviour can be interpreted as disquieting testimony to societal and political culture: On the one hand we are faced with authoritarian and historical legacies like Fascism and National Socialism in some countries. On the other hand, in all eight countries we are encountering a political climate that – under the influence of neoliberal restructuring and thinking – is drifting towards far right-wing ideologies: apart from "trendsetters" like Christoph Blocher, Umberto Bossi, Jörg Haider, Pia Kaersgard, etc. the political elites of all established parties are at present architects or fellow travellers of this societal development. Last but

not least, we have to stress that voting for established parties or even being a member of an established party cannot be understood as a barrier against being receptive to right-wing populism or extremism: among the voters and members of the conservative, liberal or social-democratic camp we encountered numerous sympathisers with right-wing extremist ideologies.

Though a country's cultural and political traditions hardly explain the shifting fortunes of right-wing populism and extremism, some of them nonetheless provide a relatively autonomous breeding-ground for the shape and sustainability of respective political attitudes. Hence, historical continuities, particular political cultures, the resurgence of anti-Semitism in the 1990s, and the racism and anti-Semitism propagated by the political elite contribute to an ideological pattern which can be mobilised in times of crisis (Butterwegge et al. 2002). Of course, depending on highly specific historical developments, the strength of nationalism and racism varies from country to country. Nevertheless it functions basically as a line of demarcation between "us" and "them" in order to legitimate the distribution of social and material wealth and to strengthen (national or cultural) collective identities that were perceived as being endangered. In addition, in a few countries, for example in Belgium, nationalistic feelings or a perceived threat to Flemish culture were a marginal phenomenon in the discourse of interviewees attracted to right-wing populism or extremism. In the interviews it was very difficult to find positive descriptions and pictures of cultural and national virtues or merits that could be the foundation for this nationalism: this phenomenon can be called "nihilistic nationalism" (Hentges/Meyer 2002:65).

Racist and anti-Semitic ideologies are frequent allies of nationalist attitudes and appeared in our interviews in a variety of more or less disguised forms. Since openly and explicitly articulated anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic positions are most often not part of socially accepted behaviour, many interview partners initiated their anti-immigrant or anti-Semitic discourse with statements like "*I have nothing against foreigners but ...*", "*I am not a racist but ...*". To illustrate this kind of discourse we are giving a quote from an Italian interview (see also Chapter 4.1.8.):

*"I'm not racist, but I don't agree with the idea that many people come here; I can understand those miserable (i.e. poor), but each time I see those ships overloaded with people ... It's not that you should sink them, of course, for God's sake, but why do they come only to Italy?"* Mr Mirko, part-time employee in a book store, Italy

Instantly denied and cushioned by expressions of empathy, aggressive fantasies and ideas like sinking boats with immigrants crop up.

As mentioned above, the political elites do indeed often condemn anti-immigrant sentiments when they assume the form of voting for right-wing populist or extremist parties or racist riots such as arson attacks on refugee homes. However, these elites are also powerful stimulating forces of racism by promoting competitive nationalism for economic reasons or by jumping on the discursive tracks of right-wing populists in order to increase or secure their electorate. However, one should take into account that another facet interwoven into contemporary racism is economic utilitarianism. The bonds of nationality are not as strong as economic usefulness of "foreigners" and



nationals. Under conditions of competitive nationalism individual performance orientation and self-sacrifice have become much more important than the origin of the passport (Hentges/Meyer 2002:67).

In this context, the mass media – not only the “gutter press”, but partly also the “quality” papers – contribute to the fact that immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees are linked to drug traffic, prostitution, criminality and social security misuse (Butterwegge et al. 1999). They played a significant role in preparing the breeding ground for right-wing populism and extremism (ERCOMER 2001). This is also reflected by our research findings: even though some of the interviewees refer to their own (either real or imagined) experiences with criminal and violent immigrants, most of the interviewees quote and reproduce the press coverage of the primarily problematic effects of immigration. Finally, some newspaper stories become myths that are retold for years or transferred into second-hand experience. In the Danish results, for instance, some stories appeared to be very long-lived: Three of the Danish interviewees referred to reports published in the press many years ago. Two of them cited the story of refugee children who were given brand-new bicycles. Another told the story of residents of an old age nursing home whose nappies had not been changed, but turned over (Thoft/Grinderslev 2002:54).

#### **5.2.4. Family Socialisation and Authoritarianism**

In some cases we found that family and milieu backgrounds played an influential role in the attraction towards right-wing populism and extremism. However, coming from a family or social milieu strongly embedded in right-wing ideologies and/or authoritarianism does not of course necessarily mean that a foundation for “receptiveness” is laid down. We also interviewed people who were anxious to distance themselves from their right-wing and/or authoritarian upbringing and who showed themselves very committed to left-wing ideologies. Even if this repudiation is also a form of influence of upbringing and milieu, we should distinguish between different forms of influence in order to avoid deterministic interpretations. Apart from this it has to be recalled that the political “milieu” of the extreme right was not at the core of our research interest.

Some interviewees, nevertheless, were and are still quite firmly positioned within right-wing extremist ideologies, owing to their family upbringing and social milieu. In these cases, socio-economic change did not contribute to or bring forward a change of political position but rather confirmed existing attitudes.

Voting behaviour was often not informative with regard to political position and receptiveness towards right-wing populism or extremism. Several interviewees from social-democratic or Christian-conservative families, who still vote according to these traditions, turned out to be highly receptive to right-wing populist and extremist ideologies.

Our interview findings show that affectedness by socio-economic change and its assessment as a threat (the latter being also influenced by coping strategies acquired within one's family or social milieu) can produce an attraction towards right-wing populist or extremist ideologies (or parties). These positions, however, are not adopted out of the blue but are connected to corresponding latent frames of interpretation acquired within one's social milieu. Hence we can conclude that socio-economic and societal changes can reactivate latent patterns of meaning deeply rooted in society and its socialisation agencies, including the family.

Authoritarian attitudes transferred through this institution also support affinities with right-wing populist and extremist ideologies. Some interviewees expressed these attitudes by calling for less democracy or for tough measures against people breaking social norms. Others admire strong, charismatic leader figures from right-wing populist parties and put their trust in them. It is indeed necessary, for example with regard to the Italian findings, to distinguish between the longing for charismatic leaders (like Fini), as well as the assessment of these "leader" personalities, from their ideologies.

In general, stricter rules and more law and order were put forward as desirable in order to prevent society from breaking apart or sliding into moral decadence. Respect for traditional values and the vital importance of the family are stressed as anchoring means of ensuring social cohesion. Some interviewees look nostalgically into the past to illustrate a safe, secure and intact social community. On the basis of our interview material we can suggest that some of the interviewees experience the erosion of social milieus, individualisation tendencies and the socio-psychological consequences of rapid socio-economic change as a negative and far from liberating development. These people feel that their personal and social identity is fundamentally uprooted and threatened by the increasing insecurities (in all areas of life) and they often activate authoritarian patterns of interpretation acquired via socialisation in the family, milieu and society in general.

### **5.3. Summary**

The qualitative interviews were aimed to lead to an understanding of subjective perceptions of socio-economic change and of points of attraction of right-wing populism. In this chapter we have integrated the findings on people's views on changes in work and on their views on politics. This gave rise to conclusions on how experiences in the world of work may be transformed into potentials of political subjectivity. What can be inferred from our sample of more than 300 in-depth interviews is that socio-economic change is in fact an important factor for explaining the rise of right-wing populism in various European countries. Only rarely in the interpretation of interviews focusing on how people are affected by socio-economic change was this not a decisive contribution to the understanding of the attraction of populism. In this chapter we nevertheless described also other issues such as, for example, discontent with mainstream political parties or family socialisation.

In the literature, the interrelation between changes in working life and support for right-wing populism and extremism is theorised in different ways (see Flecker 2002). Focusing on the problem of increasing complexity and intensified contradictions of social life, populist messages and, in particular, scapegoat theories and authoritarian views can help individuals to create a subjective sense of consistency in their apprehension of social reality. In a world where traditional institutions no longer provide any orientation, views and concepts based on ethnicity, anti-elite sentiments or in-group/out-group distinctions may fill the gap. A related theoretical argument points out the damage to social and personal identity caused in periods of accelerated socio-economic change. In addressing imaginary ethnic or national communities, right-wing populism serves the need to compensate for lost certainties and offers opportunities for identification that may help to stabilise the self. Interestingly, our research does not strongly support these assumptions on right-wing populism's function of providing orientation and supporting identity. Of course, these interrelations can be said to play a certain role, but they are not the only and not even the prevailing ones. Within the main patterns that emerged, other theoretical considerations seemed to be more helpful for the understanding of people's receptiveness to extreme-right ideologies.

More indications were found for theoretical views stressing that the individuals affected by far-reaching socio-economic change need to reconsider their position in the social world. Being faced with social decline or the threat of social exclusion, paying too high a price for success or for simply keeping up the standard of living, or not being able, despite hard work and painful subordination, to reach a position one aspired to may trigger strong feelings of frustration and injustice. It is exactly these potentials of political subjectivity that are targeted by populists arguing that the decent and hard-working ordinary people do not get what they deserve or that they are betrayed and exploited by both the elite and the outcasts who do not contribute their fair share. This consideration, which takes what Bourdieu called "positional suffering" as a starting point, is strongly supported by two main patterns that emerged from the interpretation of interviews in all countries under investigation.

One such pattern involves intensive feelings of injustice stemming from frustrations of legitimate expectations relating to various aspects of work, employment, social status or standard of living. Company restructuring, redundancies, early retirement, new management styles or intensified competition on the labour and housing markets devalue qualifications, acquired experience, previous hard work and sacrifices and bring to nothing the expected rewards for the subordination to the demands of a pitiless world of work. The experiences differ widely and may range from layoffs out of the blue or involuntary early retirement to the lack of recognition of professional experiences and contributions. Such frustrations are often expressed as feelings of injustice: people refer to other social groups that do not subordinate themselves to the hardships of work to the same extent and who are taken much better care of or who are able to arrange things for themselves illegally. These are, on the one hand, managers and politicians with high incomes, "golden handshakes" and generous pensions and, on the other hand, people living on welfare instead of working or refugees supported by the state. Of course, these

patterns of meaning are strongly influenced by hegemonic ideologies and public debates on distributive justice and its violations. But quite often, against the background of people's experiences, these forms of subjective reactions were highly understandable. The core theme is that the "decent and hard working" and therefore morally superior people are being betrayed and that they have to realise that it was stupid to stay honest and loyal and to subordinate themselves to the exacting demands of an increasingly cruel world of work. This means that political messages and ideologies of right-wing populism that address the double demarcation of "the people" from the elites on the top and from the outcasts at the bottom of society quite easily find a resonance.

A second clear pattern in the mental processing of changes in working life has at its core the fear of *déclassement*, the insecurities and the feelings of powerlessness that are associated with industrial decline, precarious employment or the devaluation of skills and qualifications. The experience of being a plaything of economic developments or anonymous powers can be clearly linked with right-wing populists' addressing the population as a passive victim of overpowering opponents. The same goes for people's nostalgic accounts of the good old (working) times and populists' glorification of traditional communities. In some cases, authoritarian reactions to insecurity and powerlessness could be observed, while others made clear that a lack of political representation contributes to the feeling of not being protected as workers. People attracted to the extreme right seem to be convinced that they can only count on themselves. Since social-democratic parties have shown less and less interest in the workers' world, the public recognition of the problems of social decline and precariousness seems to have become one of the competitive advantages of populist parties. The feeling of powerlessness not only relates to the individual level but also to collective entities such as the region, the working class or the nation. If people express their individual concerns in terms of the state of the country, the influence of the neoliberal ideology of competitive nationalism becomes obvious.

Differences between countries result from different aspects of socio-economic change being experienced at the time of the research, but also from the different agendas of the various right-wing populist or extremist parties. Regarding the competition on the labour market but also in other fields such as housing, the consequences of the reunification and the immigration of ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe played a major role in Germany, while in France it is the population and, in particular, the youth with a north-African background or in Austria refugees from the Balkans that dominate the debates. In Hungary it is people's struggle with the consequences of transition combined with anti-Communist legacies and people's experience of parliamentary democracy as a "puppet theatre", whereas in Switzerland economic difficulties coincide with the damage to the image of Switzerland and the vanishing of traditional Swiss particularities. While in Denmark and Belgium the deterioration of welfare provision was strongly linked with the issue of immigration, the main point in Italy seems to be the combination of high levels of insecurity and a deep distrust and disenchantment with politics. These differences in the ways in which right-wing

extremists and populists take advantage of discontent are in fact variations of a common theme.

Where does this leave us in relation to the popular and rather simplistic views on “modernisation losers” being seduced by populists? The answer to this question that was actually one of the starting points of our research is not straightforward. As has been shown at length in this report, adverse experiences in the process of socio-economic change and negative subjective evaluations of such changes are actually crucial to understanding the appeal of right-wing populist political messages and propositions. Leaving aside the terminological problem of calling recent changes “modernisation”, one problem is that thereby the “winners” are left out of the picture, the other is to define the group of so-called losers. Our findings show that simply using socio-economic characteristics such as “semi-skilled workers”, as is often done in election research, does not seem to be very helpful. Different societal categories are faced with problems of social reproduction: small entrepreneurs, sections of the middle class, fractions of the working class, etc. In addition, people whose objective situation has not deteriorated, or has even improved, may find it necessary to re-position themselves in social space in relation to others or may find that there is a high price to pay for some aspects of their involvement in working life, or social life in general. What the debate on modernisation losers also glosses over is the fact that it is not the losers in the increasingly fierce competition who are the problem, but the competition itself, in which subordination to authority, compliance with societal norms and willingness to work hard and make sacrifices is no protection against *déclassement* or precariousness.

What also contrasts with conventional wisdom on the issue is the finding that people express their problems or frustrations mostly in collective terms, talking about themselves as “the ordinary people” or “the workers”. This clearly reflects the consciousness of the collective position in the social world. In a distorted way, namely in the double demarcation against the elite and the underclass, this position is addressed by right-wing populism. What is more, many of the frustrations, anxieties and feelings of injustice clearly relate to workers’ interest in social recognition and societal integration. In all, our findings support the thesis of right-wing populism as a child of the neoliberal revolution and the absence of a convincing political left. And this is not captured at all by talk about frustrated modernisation losers.



**ANNEX:****SUMMARIES OF COUNTRY REPORTS ON THE QUALITATIVE FINDINGS<sup>17</sup>*****Austria***

Austria can be described as an ideal research field for the analysis of socio-economic change and receptiveness to right-wing populism. Ultimately, the upheavals within Europe in the last decade and a half were probably only more deep-going in the central and eastern European transformation countries. In the mid-1980s, nationalised industries and banks, a large public sector and large, foreign-owned enterprises dominated the labour market and provided long-term, sometimes guaranteed employment. The penetration of neo-liberal convictions in politics in the 1980s coincided with a crisis in the nationalised industries' core companies. A policy of privatisation set in, which reached its high point in the mid-1990s. Austria's accession to the EU in 1995 marked a further milestone in the liberalisation of previously protected economic sectors and a sharpening of competition. The sharp rise in the unemployment rate was accompanied by the abandonment of the political aim of full employment and a gradual limitation of social security. The promises of security had given way to a rhetoric and policy of increasing insecurity.

The phase of upheaval came in the period of the grand coalition between the social democratic party, SPÖ, and the conservative party, ÖVP, which in 1986 had replaced the coalition between the SPÖ and the FPÖ when Jörg Haider took over the FPÖ leadership. It also coincided with a fall in the importance of the social partnership – that is, the concerted action by the government and employers', workers' and farmers' associations in almost all areas of policy. As a party that was tied neither to the government nor the social partnership, the now right-wing populist FPÖ was able to operate an energetic opposition policy and, from under 5% in the mid 1980s, increased its electorate massively at each election from 1986 onwards, when it already received 9% of the vote, until finally in autumn 1999 it achieved 27% and was brought into government by the ÖVP at the beginning of 2000.

*Socio-economic change: perceptions and views*

In all those interviewed, the subjective perceptions of and views on socio-economic change are characterised by a pronounced work ethic. The clear differences in

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<sup>17</sup> These summaries are taken over with some modifications from the individual national reports (deliverable 2) – for details see footnote 1.

perceptions and views can be traced back to different biographies, social backgrounds and characteristics of the region.

Naturally, socio-economic change itself has become noticeable to the interviewees in widely varying ways. Thus the subjective perceptions even within the group of “gainers” are extremely heterogeneous, since the views are mostly ambivalent and the darker side is sometimes emphasised, sometimes glossed over. Among the precariously employed on the other hand, it is noticeable that even if the material aspects of the changes, that is, income and working and employment conditions, are of immediate importance, the lack of recognition or the devaluation – as a worker, for example – acquires major significance in the assessment of the changes. The wider social distance between employees and middle management as well as the lost esteem for one’s work causes deep offence.

A common feature of the changes in the world of work that was surveyed is the fact that earlier promises of security are no longer kept and that conditions of work are becoming harder. Sacrifices and pressures are naturally more easily swallowed by those who have made their hobby into a career, who are in a pleasant working atmosphere, feel recognised and upgraded or hope for wealth and fame as the reward for their efforts. With all the others, issues came to the fore that had long been out of fashion in public and in politics: the alienation of labour and the high degree of hardship at work.

*View on politics: the relation between socio-economic change and right-wing populism*

In line with the defining feature of right-wing populism – that it does not represent a cohesive ideology and that its political programme is changeable or contradictory – the causes of the attractiveness of the FPÖ that were ascertained in the interpretations of the qualitative material were also correspondingly diverse. The connection with the effects of socio-economic change is clear, even if the results show that disadvantageous developments in the world of work by no means automatically lead to receptiveness to right-wing populism (cf. Vester et al. 2001).

We have drawn up a typology of “receptiveness” to illustrate the diversity of the aspects of right-wing populism that seem to make it attractive, and the multiple life situations and mentalities that make such attractiveness probable. Typical patterns, as the interpretation of our qualitative material shows, range from right-wing *Burschenschaft* [student duelling fraternity] mentalities in relation with the economically motivated desire to break the municipal monopoly of power of the ÖVP, to a combination of the fear of *déclassement* and the threat to cultural identity with nostalgic longings for lost communities. According to family background and political camp, which many cannot escape, and according to gender, the relationship between the experiences in the world of work and political reactions is highly varied. Thus the struggle for survival that women in precarious employment are engaged in, and the double discrimination they experience, makes it understandable why they see in comparison apparently generous provision for refugees as a provocation. It would be wrong to assume that the “Austria First” slogan, which is rightly considered to be proof of the ethnocentrism of right-wing



populism, appeals to many people primarily because they are latently racist. Our analysis shows that it is above all the absence of recognition of to some extent existential threats and the feeling of having been let down by politics that is the basis of its attraction. The fact that the perceived threat is quite relative and may consist in the fears of decline in social status by those who are materially well off, makes it understandable why receptiveness to right-wing populism is not just found in precarious life situations.

One connection, which has thus far hardly been referred to in the literature, seems to us to be of particular significance for the Austrian situation, namely the physical, psychological and social costs of subjection to the impositions and constraints of working life – that is, the pains of work faced with the continuously uncertain reward in the form of income, security and social integration. The fact that others who do not subject themselves to the pressure of work apparently also live well provokes aggression. It does not need much problem transference, which is obviously suggested by discussions about “welfare-state scroungers”, “economic immigrants” and “bogus asylum seekers”, to convert this aggression into political capital. In our view the situation is intensified by the fact that there seem to be hardly any legitimate forms of expression for the pains of work, let alone perspectives for ameliorating them. The receptiveness to the FPÖ in part explains itself just through the fact that they have made the problems of lack of reward for the “hardworking and decent people” into a public issue, and given social recognition to many people whom all of the others have failed.

If one bears in mind the continuing increasing insecurity in working life and the growing social inequality in relation to the powerlessness of politics to solve people’s main problems, it becomes apparent from our findings that right-wing populism will find a better rather than a worse basis in Austria in the future. The collapse of the FPÖ in the autumn 2002 general elections should not obscure this.

## **Belgium**

Flanders can be considered an interesting comparative case for the link between socio-economic change and receptiveness to right-wing extremism, both because of its political set up and its economic structure.

Belgium is not really an agricultural nation. Its economic emphasis lies more on industry, and, to a large extent due to the presence of the European Institutions in Brussels, even more on the service sector. It has a small but open economic structure, with a high level of imports and heavy reliance on exports. Because the economy is so heavily dependent on exports, it has always been important for Belgium to maintain a strong competitive position. This competitiveness of the Belgian economy is for the most part based on high worker productivity (something that has always had to make up for the lack of natural resources). This allows Belgium to be very competitive, even successfully competing with low-wage countries in some sectors. In times of economic adversity, this also implies that competitiveness will mostly be maintained through

increasing worker productivity, usually either through increased flexibility or, in the worst case, through lay-offs. Moreover, the Belgian economy is a free market economy with very little direct government intervention. There still are some state enterprises (such as Belgian Rail), but these are mostly active in public services. Because of European Union policy, however, these sectors too are being deregulated and opened up to economic competition. Geographically (with 57% of the GDP) Flanders is by far the most important economic region in Belgium.

Politically, for the last three-and-a-half years Belgium has had a government without Christian Democrats (CD&V) for the first time since 1958. This, combined with the green party (Agalev) participating in the government for the first time, makes the present government a “new” one. It is made up of liberals, socialists and greens, and is known as the “Purple-Green Government”. General elections due on May 18 will be the first electoral test for the new government, with its success or failure linked by the prime minister among others to the level of support for the Vlaams Blok. The Vlaams Blok, the only extreme right-wing party in Flanders, has enjoyed a steady electoral rise for about 20 years now. Nevertheless, it has never made it into any government, even at local level, because of the “*cordon sanitaire*” the other parties have (so far) maintained around it, agreeing on no account to form a coalition that includes the Vlaams Blok. However, mainly in a battle for right-wing voters, some parties have recently been putting pressure on this policy of isolating the extreme right. The outcome of the elections will determine both the direction of the Purple-Green alliance and the existence of the *cordon sanitaire*.

#### *No resistance to socio-economic changes*

The interview material clearly shows that 1) all those involved have to some extent been faced with major socio-economic changes during the past 10 years; and 2) that a large proportion of them still feel “threatened” today as a result. It therefore seems that in this connection we have not yet reached the end of an era, but the processes of socio-economic change and above all of deterioration are still progressing apace.

In general, the restructuring and reorganisation programmes the respondents have experienced are evaluated rather negatively. This is because the main consequences are increased work pressure – less physical, but more stressful – and a significant deterioration in the atmosphere at work. Together with the gradual increase in insecurity associated with these changes, this also seems to make an impression on people’s work orientation. Job satisfaction and commitment fall, work is increasingly seen only as a way of earning a living, rather than in terms of self-realisation.

On the basis of the interview material, a few important sectoral differences can be mentioned. The difference between state enterprises and private companies was particularly obvious. Employees from private companies seem to have been confronted more starkly with the negative consequences of socio-economic changes during the past ten years. It seems that for them the screw has been turned more tightly, while in state

enterprises the employees had more “in reserve”. People in private companies also had a much stronger feeling of being subject to “the dehumanising logic of capital.”

In state enterprises there seems to be more of an understanding that the changes are necessary in order to make the enterprise competitive within an open European and global market.

Assessments of the reorganisations among state employees are therefore generally more favourable, unless they see a threat to their status and, above all, their pensions. Feelings of injustice arise in these cases and fears for the future quickly emerge.

The respondents reported major changes in the content of work, terms of employment and working conditions. “Continuous” working makes their jobs psychologically more demanding. The computer has become a permanent feature, resulting in various reactions. Some people were able to live with it, after a brief period of adjustment, and consider it to be an improvement. Others are dismissive, considering that it leads to rigidity and reduces efficiency. They feel completely or partly excluded by it and often consider that it reduces them to mere numbers. In the automobile sector, in particular, highly standardised work is sometimes described in very negative terms.

In the private sector, increasing flexibility is demanded of employees in terms of working time. Fewer permanent contracts are being awarded, both in state enterprises and in private companies. It is above all the “permanent” employees who have problems with this, since they increasingly have to work with temporary employees and agency personnel who are often less experienced and less motivated. All things considered, this again causes changes in employees’ attitudes towards their work and their commitment to their professional life. Due to the link between age and the (possibility of) permanent contracts, these observations seem to be partly age-related.

To conclude on the subject of socio-economic stories, trade union activity seemed significantly to colour the story being presented.

#### *Socio-economic changes and political thinking*

One initial observation in the analyses of the respondents’ political ideas and the conceptual frameworks within which they are situated was the nature of reactions against immigrants. These were highly individual reactions, based on the perception of a personal threat. Flemish-minded or nationalistic feelings, or the threat to Flemish culture, were not mentioned much in the interviews, so in that respect we have to be cautious of making any comment. If this observation is correct, however, it is in any case consistent with two other observations derived from these stories. First, there is a strong general feeling of growing individualisation in society, and alongside it the observation that, in times of socio-economic threat, employees no longer act as colleagues but have become competitors against each other.

It was also found that often unconscious racist reflexes, which emerge in reaction to socio-economic threats, also seem to have a strong economic basis. We deduced this from the fact that people’s problems with immigrants, both economic and cultural, seem

in most cases to disappear suddenly when it comes to immigrants who live, work and pay tax “like everyone else”. It is at least equally clear that in times of socio-economic difficulty any form of exploitation of the system whatsoever is not tolerated at all.

When people’s experience is that life has become more expensive – and we did not really hear anyone contradicting this – and they also sense a direct and indirect socio-economic threat, they are clearly equally sensitive to fiscal policy. Their assessment of government policy therefore usually seems to be based on their wallets. There were repeated comments on the feeling that during the recent period one tax was supposedly abolished, only to be replaced by three different ones, with the bill ultimately no lower at the end of the day. Certainly, when employees notice that the flexibility required of them is punished rather than rewarded by a badly adjusted tax system, this has a negative effect on their confidence in politics.

We also observed that there is a clear difference in terms of the relationship between the world of work and politicians, between private companies and state enterprises. It seems that politicians more readily become a scapegoat for employees in state enterprises, due to “political share-ownership”. On the other hand, this indirect bond with the state coffers does, in some cases, create a feeling of greater security.

As an alternative, competing explanation for socio-economic changes accounting for increasing susceptibility to right-wing populism and extremism, mention should be made of the mass media and individualisation linked to a breakdown in the social fabric. The mass media ensure that crime and war from all over the world are highly visible, which often gives rise to feelings of insecurity, and immigrants can quickly be blamed for this when the Vlaams Blok conveniently suggests it. It was also found that the feeling of insecurity among the group of respondents was strongly linked to the place where they live: cities are felt to be much more unsafe. Finally, we observed that impressive personal experiences can also lead to radical changes in political orientation, quite apart from the economic situation in which a person finds himself.

## **Denmark**

Since 1983 the debate on immigration issues in Denmark has become increasingly polarised. In the lead-up to the last election, in November 2001, several Danish parties started to address the issues of immigration and integration. At that election, the Danish People’s Party won a sizeable share of the ballot, and has since supported the present government.

The terms *right-wing populism* or *extreme right* are not applicable to the People’s Party. Apart from its opposition to immigration and the multicultural society, their key issues are issues that originally were claimed by the Social Democrats – not least their policies on the elderly and vulnerable in society. We are therefore inclined to think that a term such as *xenophobic populism* fits the party and the developments in Denmark better.

At the macro level, the tendency over the past ten years has been towards a better economy and lower unemployment. But this cannot disguise the fact that several

elements of Danish society have not benefited much from the economic upswing. At the same time, workplaces are undergoing far-reaching changes in the form of privatisation and outsourcing of public sector organisations, investment cuts in certain areas of the public sector, takeovers, the sale of private sector businesses and, finally, comprehensive restructuring programmes.

#### *Interviewees' perception of change*

Changes in the workplace and society have affected all of our interviewees, but the effects and their significance have varied, as have the responses. Some have benefited from the changes, even though pressures at work have increased (“Advancement”). These interviewees tend to express a broader concern for the direction society is taking – i.e. globalisation, immigration and crime – but generally do not express any sense of being under threat themselves.

Other interviewees have been put in a more precarious position by the changes, with the threat of unemployment or infirmity (“Threat of Decline”). Reactions to changes often depend on how they happened and their effect on the individual’s position. Some see the changes as a challenge, others as a sign of increased pressures and unemployment. Some feel that the sense of solidarity has disappeared, either among work colleagues or in the local community, and some are concerned about globalisation, immigration and crime. Some are particularly worried about the future of the welfare state, pointing to cuts in spending on the elderly and waiting lists for hospital treatment. Others focus on the relationship between immigration, crime and costs, yet others on the lack of success of integration policies. Finally, there are those who express concern about the possible impact of globalisation.

A last group of interviewees consists of people outside the ordinary labour market (“Precariousness”). They have all been in contact with the social services in the attempt to obtain the benefits they are entitled to. There are varying perceptions among the group as to whether assistance and support were given in a satisfactory manner. Concern about the welfare state is widespread in this group, and several feel that it is not working. Others feel the system is fair. Crime and immigration are also referred to here as two areas where changes have been most apparent. Some focus on the high cost of immigration, others on the failure of integration measures. The consequences of globalisation are also a matter of concern for some.

#### *Socio-economic change and political orientation*

The dominant impression is that people who feel relatively secure are seldom exponents of xenophobic populism. They have good jobs, they equate change with challenge and potential benefits, and they are not dependent on the support of the welfare system. On the other hand, not all of our interviewees who feel threatened or are already marginalised express xenophobic-populist attitudes. The great majority of our interviewees say they are concerned about where society is heading, about immigration and integration issues, but they highlight different aspects.

Some of the accounts given by our interviewees support the thesis that changes in working conditions that have a marginalising effect will cause the development of a xenophobic-populist orientation. A contributory factor appears to be whether one feels protected and supported by social institutions in relation to the negative consequences of change. Those who express pronounced xenophobic-populist attitudes often say they feel let down by unions, workplace or other elements of the system.

The accounts of another group support the thesis that changes in society that are perceived as a threat affect political views in the direction of xenophobic populism.

The concerns of others for the economy of the welfare state are less distinctly worded. There is a general criticism of the failure to implement a successful integration policy, but it is criticism that is aimed at the government and decision-makers, not at immigrants as a group.

Finally, there are finally some interviewees who reject right-wing populist ideas out of hand. This group consists to a greater degree of people with more information on the nature of the changes, and whose views on trends in the welfare state are considerably more balanced. But some of the members of this group have been excluded from the labour market to a greater or lesser degree. The accounts of this group falsify in many respects the causal connections between the theses, in that they respond differently to the changes they have experienced.

#### *Other explanations*

There is a good deal of evidence that the way the press deals with welfare issues, including the impact of immigration, has an effect on the way many people perceive changes in society. The types of media people use may also have an effect. If people follow several different media – the broadsheets, the programmes of the national broadcasting corporation, etc. – it may give them a more sophisticated outlook on immigrants, immigration and integration, while confining oneself to local media sources and the tabloids may contribute to a more restricted view.

There is an apparent connection between values held and people's perception of changes in society. Having a job and supporting oneself are often considered key values. On the other hand, such values incite hostility towards people who receive state benefits – with the exception of the older generation who are credited with having built present-day Denmark.

#### **France**

In the face of rapid changes in the employment market, only a certain number of groups have adopted reconversion strategies, principally educational, social and economic. The biographical accounts recorded during the French elections make it possible for us to understand the different social groups' views of the world. A variety of explanatory factors reveal themselves from the interviews held among the employees of large high

technology companies, among workers and technical staff in the steel industry, as well as among the security staff or small business people in different regions.

The probabilities of restructuring world opinion towards the extreme right are currently and in part linked to the deterioration of the means of social reproduction of the three groups in decline: small employers (and, in a larger sense, the traditional lower middle class with “family-based” economic resources), the traditional upper middle class (principally Catholic, in managerial professions linked to the state and whose economic interests are dependent upon family resources), and, finally, a section of the working class (represented notably by the declining trades).

This deterioration has its roots in the changes in the form of competition which, over the past thirty years, have affected the three principal institutions of social development (and therefore the basis of restructuring strategies): family, school and the workplace. Numerous relegated individuals in these social groups have seen the specific types of capital they possess being devalued or cancelled out. To summarise the objective chances of success on a descending scale, the changes occurring devalue educational investment and professional qualifications, weaken positions that are already often not far short of hopeless, shatter social benefits linked to ascending career paths and exacerbate competition between sections of the working class. The result is an increase in socially “untenable” positions, at the same time through the difficulty of maintaining this status without demeaning oneself, and through the faint hope of coming out “on top”.

One might make the hypothesis that a prolonged period in this “porte-à-faux” (double-bind) position constitutes, in real terms, a possible condition for political attraction to certain ideas presented by the extreme right.

### *High Technology*

The perception of economic exploitation is linked to the temporal nature of the crisis, which not only affects the various sectors but cuts across a range of the personnel and sections of different classes affected at different times. Thus, the crisis in the IT industry and the “new technology industries” might have appeared all the more dramatic since it is more recent and touches a sector which appeared to be protected from the normal laws of economics. This apparent defiance of economic violence is reinforced by the cultural resources of the employees working in this sector, often more qualified than is required for their job, and by their commitment to the innovative and cultural value of the “products” they produce. The recent evolution of large-scale production in the IT sector aimed at the search for short-term profit and the renunciation of investment in “technological progress” (with its procession of redundancy plans, of suppression or at least, of devaluation of research and training programmes) runs counter to more than 60 years of “corporate culture”, in which the key words were creativity and autonomy.

All the same, the political “realisation” that restructuring and “social programmes” can today affect all employees, including those in the “high-tech industry”, does not necessarily implicate left-wing commitment and collective mobilisation to organise

resistance. It is re-translated in its ambivalence to the standpoints of the (extreme) right towards the left in relation to cultural resources, age and the objective chances of redeployment.

It is with regard to the threat of *déclassement* that the political stances adopted by the middle classes make sense and the reaction to this threat expresses itself in terms of discrimination/refinement compared to the political positions of the working class: also is it necessary to translate back topics such as the apolitical attitudes, anxiety in the face of uncertainty, a certain ambivalence with regard to the introduction of the 35-hour week and, in general terms, the adhesion to the corporate spirit, compared to the analysed threat of loss of status.

The attraction of the extreme right's political policies has little significance in the world of new technology, only due to the fact that the crisis in this sector is still a recent phenomenon, the biographical consequences of which are far from having produced all their effects. Nevertheless, employees whose professional and social futures appear to be the most at risk take account of certain aspects of these political standpoints. These are the oldest, the least qualified, often with careers relatively disproportionate to their cultural resources (and consequently sometimes in charge of younger, more competent and better qualified employees) but who have been forced to accept early retirement.

### *Declining Industries*

The French steel industry was broken up in early 1980s after political decisions linked to the local effects of the new international division of labour. The qualitative enquiry demonstrates that a significant number of "racist" comments expressed by interviewees constitute the ideological expression of struggles faced by different sections of class in a context of transformation of the workers' group: competitive struggle in different markets (work, education, housing, social benefits, etc.), exacerbated by long-term unemployment and wage settlement destruction; symbolic struggle destined to ward off the permanent threat of relegation to the group on the immediately lower rung of the social hierarchical ladder. These struggles can be specified in focusing upon the relations maintained between two sections of the working class: on the one hand, the older employees, early-retired and retired workers from the steel industry and, on the other, the last to arrive "on the bottom rung" of the workers' group (and the first to be hit by the economic recession) the north-African immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s and their children.

Over and above the most important struggles to gain access to the labour market and educational qualifications, these competitive antagonisms, never admitted as such, crop up on a daily basis in a multitude of environments: for customers in small businesses, for access to housing and against the devaluation of property investments and, finally, in competition for the allocation of municipal funds and social benefits. They contribute to the creation of conditions giving rise to the possibility of a commitment to certain themes postulated by the extreme right.



As observed during individual interviews, the “choice” of the extreme right does not cover political conviction, commitment or a programmatic committal any more than it results automatically from economic depression, unemployment or precariousness (the overwhelming majority of individuals confronted with these phenomena have not adopted an extreme-right position). Conversely, when individual and collective *déclassement* and a restriction in the chances of redeployment are added, attraction to the extreme right increases. Everything indicates that interest in the extreme right constitutes an expression of the struggle between those who have lost status, are dispossessed of political representation and symbolically repudiated as a group. Among certain individuals one observes that the vote for the extreme right obeys a “double demarcation” logic, which consists of keeping neighbouring groups at bay: the class sections immediately below on the social ladder, who simultaneously embody competition and the threat of relegation (for example, immigrant workers), and the upper-class sections, who personify an unattainable redeployment.

## **Germany**

According to the sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, the political class in Germany is currently facing two essential challenges. While social-democratic leaders have been forced to convince their structurally conservative supporters of the beneficial effects of a liberal welfare state reform, right-wing parties have had to win their culturally conservative camp for an equally liberal policy on immigration-related issues. Only the combination of these two efforts was sufficient to guarantee the necessary modernisation of German society. This remark summarises very briefly the general perception of the problem and the programmatic notions of the liberal wing of Germany’s political and economic elite when dealing with the issues analysed in our research project. Dahrendorf’s belief in the compatibility of both projects still seems to underestimate a number of serious problems, contradictions and unintended interactions, which turned out to be outstandingly important in the course of our research process. His question concerning the necessary struggle between political and economic liberalism on the one hand and several forms of “traditionalism” on the other thus has to be reformulated. Do modernised policies of traditionalist economic liberalism really promote political progress or do they perhaps profit from self-produced reactionary forces against democratic freedoms and social equality? Several of our results indicate a certain plausibility of the latter assumption.

As part of the neoliberal offensive to “modernise” and “reform” the German social system, the deregulation and privatisation of formerly state-owned infrastructures such as rail, telecoms and post produced very mixed results. Big business consumers of transport and communication services as well as rival competitors definitely benefited from price reductions, technological revolutions and the opening of new spheres for capital investment. But things already look different for private users. While supplies have diversified and often also cheapened as far as telecommunications is concerned, prices and services of the privatised railways, Deutsche Bahn AG (DBAG), and

Deutsche Post AG (DPAG) did not really improve and are now often worse than in the period of state ownership. Though the state itself sometimes received remarkable incomes from the sale on the stock exchange or by auctioning off mobile phone licences, large-scale subsidy has not come to an end. This is not only true for the chronically debt-ridden railway system, which has to compete against an even more highly subsidised road and air transport, but also for the once very promising Deutsche Telekom AG (DTAG), which is currently struggling with huge losses and even more enormous debts. Unlimited responsibility in times of economic crisis on the other hand does not mean that the Ministry of Finance has had an equally strong influence on respective business and management decisions. Closures of entire networks (customer service, post offices, railway stations and lines), which resemble the deterioration of public services in Britain, moreover indicate that the overall efficiency of basic infrastructures has not risen in the course of privatisation. Limited successes in any case were reached at the expense of employees and working conditions. Large-scale reductions of personnel not only harshly intensified daily work routines, but employees were also forced to accept much more inconvenient workplaces and working environments. Outsourcing and the respective introduction of multi-tier wage systems weakened the once comparatively influential trade unions and works councils. De-standardisation and flexibilisation of course did not just produce losers, it also allowed whole groups of employees to accelerate their professional careers in significant ways. But the experiences of these people can be compared with the fate of IT experts and web designers in the so-called New Economy. Certainly, wages and special incentives were relatively high and working conditions more relaxed in the boom period and helped to strengthen corporate identifications with the company. But when earnings and profits plummeted in the course of the big crash beginning in summer 2000, even highly qualified employees had to acknowledge the darker side of their relatively precarious success. Lay-offs, shrinking wages and stricter controls at the workplace did a lot to destroy illusions about the brave new world of neoliberal flexibility.

### *Perceptions of socio-economic change*

Most of the socially advanced interviewees complain about a deterioration of working conditions in the course of privatisation. They suffer from tremendous workloads, from compulsory flexibility, an increase of anonymity and report that responsibilities have been shifted downward while the resources to fulfil these duties diminished rapidly. But restructuring processes also brought with them better opportunities to organise work autonomously and greater influence on the workplace as a whole. Compared to socially advanced people, the situation is of course worse for employees who have experienced one or another form of social or occupational decline. The common denominator of their work orientations is the (often Fordist) past as point of reference. Criticisms of the process and consequences of globalisation, privatisation and industrial restructuring are very frequent. The power of management to relocate plants, to lay off employees and to blackmail workers and trade unions has sharply increased. Downward mobility also means that employees have to closely monitor their individual or family budgets. Even the civil servants in this group are afraid of not having sufficient pension levels. For all

of them, declining social security is the single most important problem in their employment history. Problems are even more grave for people out of work. Though all downwardly precarious interviewees had participated in numerous job training measures, none of them could see any job prospects. Due to their quite low standards of living, all downwardly precarious people know what it is like to live with severe material restrictions. Facing official indifference to precarious living conditions as well as being forced to participate in often absurd and all the more humiliating job-training measures serve the purpose of erasing any memories these people may have had of self-respect and individual autonomy. Respective feelings of insecurity and heteronomy are surely strongest in this layer of downwardly precarious interview partners but are, last but not least, also frequent in cases of upward precariousness. One of the most fundamental reasons for these almost ubiquitous feelings of insecurity is the extremely severe competition on the labour market in the course of persistent mass unemployment. While this competition invites strong trends towards social dumping on the supply side, on the other side unemployment is exerting equally heavy pressures on social security systems. Interviewees not only have an idea that times have thus become much harder for workers, but many of them also try to explain growing competition and declining employment security with reference to issues like “corporate greed”, “German unification” or more ominous “globalisation-related threats” and “social scrounging”.

*The relation between socio-economic change and right-wing populism/extremism*

As a result of the major national election campaign this summer it turned out to be relatively easy to address explicit political questions like these. Milieu-specific access to politics of course made it necessary to also pay attention to more implicit forms of political inclination. It comes as no surprise that political orientations in the three different status groups tend to be highly heterogeneous. Experiences of occupational advancement can be interpreted in a more left-leaning as well as in a more right-wing manner and the same is true for the categories of decline and precariousness. More remarkable than this heterogeneity of political sympathies are milieu-specific forms and patterns of involvement in political affairs. Inasmuch as highly active and interested employees need enough spare time and cultural capital for their political activities, our sample indicates that requirements like these exist predominantly in the category of advancement. People who suffer from decline or live under precarious conditions often do not have the chance to participate in shaping their own living conditions. This does not of course mean that they were not interested in politics. On the contrary, their immediate dismay forces them to search for explanations of various kinds. Though this would contradict first impressions, their political interests are in at least some respects stronger and more passionate than those of socially advanced spare-time politicians. Desperately in need of political solutions, downwardly mobile or precarious interview partners at the same time lack most of the means to improve their situation. Powerlessness and social status correspond negatively. Forms of political engagement also differ with respect to the current gender regime. Profiting from the current division of labour, established role models become problematic at a different level for men than they do for women. While the latter are forced to pursue their interests against

established prejudices actively, men are more in a position to react to real or potential threats to their privileges. Male criticism of women's emancipation seems to be a code for disapproval of more general social transformations. It is moreover striking that women who tend to sympathise with the far right seem to adhere to a more motherly self-image than others striving for self-realisation. Ideals of motherliness on the one hand and self-realisation on the other should not be neglected as determinants in the formation of women's political experiences.

Analysing the peculiarities of political sympathies for the extreme or populist right meant taking other things into account than mere socio-economic motivation. Historical traditions and the particular political culture of German society, racist and anti-Semitic currents in the political elite, the influence of the media and the impact of regional milieus should not be neglected in academic explanations of right-wing extremism and populism. The link, however, between socio-economic change and right-wing populism has to be explained otherwise. Neoliberal privatisation and deregulation offensives not only produced enormous social stress in numerous sectors and layers of German society, they were also justified with reference to heightened levels of national competitiveness. Many sympathisers of right-wing populist ideas took the call for more self-discipline, individual responsibility and renunciation of private needs literally and wonder why their personal sacrifices have not paid off as promised. Those who were incapable of leading the nation into a more prosperous future, who lived beyond their means or who were asking for more than they actually deserved, consequently had to be punished by some kind of populist revolt. Although many supporters of right-wing populist currents have the immediate protection of their own job or their current standard of living in mind, this type of protest is in any case much more than simply a perverted form of socialism. Far from criticising capitalist competition as such, what many of them call for is the abolition of unjust welfare benefits and political subsidies for weaker groups in society. But aims like these are ironically very much in line with political projects promoted by the otherwise denounced political class. As far as its origins, subjective motivations and objective political functions are concerned, right-wing populism can thus be characterised as a reactionary force within neoliberalism. Far from modernising the country, calls for deep cuts in social security standards not only contribute to a re-polarisation of society, but they are also in danger of benefiting the anti-democratic and anti-socialist right.

### ***Hungary***

The Hungarian situation is unique in the group of countries covered by the SIREN project. As opposed to the relatively peaceful and linear post-war development of western European countries, Hungary has had a very different history. The Communist regime starting in the late forties brought about terror, radical changes in every aspect of life and a break in historical trajectories and in the lives of millions of people. The defeat of the revolution in 1956, a partial liberalisation and rising living standards from the sixties onwards underlined the "historical reality" of the regime, but millions of

people never accepted it as legitimate. The economic crisis in the eighties highlighted the lack of legitimacy of the regime and prepared the way to a democratic transition. The last decade brought the return to democracy and to a market economy, which, after two decades of economic decay, erupted into a dramatic economic crisis. On the surface, the economic crisis of the early nineties is comparable to the great economic crisis of the period from 1929 to 1933. In reality, as our interviews show, while people experienced the rapid decay and collapse of the old model, millions of possibilities opened up to participate in and to adapt to the new conditions of an open and liberal market economy. Thus, we can observe the coexistence of decay and advancement, precariousness and new opportunities both at a macro-economic and at a personal level.

### *Perceptions of socio-economic change*

The interviews in the SIREN project are testimonies of the difficulties people encounter in a low-income society that has seen a major economic crisis and large-scale restructuring in the past decades. The interviews highlight very onerous employment careers and job conditions. Apart from a small segment of highfliers and very successful entrepreneurs, the normal coping strategy is pluri-employment. Namely, in addition to a full-time job people have to have a second part-time job in another workplace, run a micro-enterprise, or work in the informal economy. The least successful segment of our interviewees belongs to the group of the precariously employed. Characteristically, they have one source of income, or a low paid, insecure and, very likely, a non-satisfying job, or informal employment without any security.

Employment requirements seem to put an enormous burden on our interview partners, regardless of which segment of society they belong to. Long working hours, unpaid overtime, working on Saturdays and Sundays, inability to go on holidays is typical, regardless of employment status and income level.

Employment security has become a very murky category. The combined effect of political clientalism, volatile market conditions, lax labour legislation means that, apart from low-paid core jobs requiring special knowledge, jobs are not considered to be secure. This statement is true for almost all sectors of the economy, regardless of ownership or competitive position.

Company survival and the preservation of jobs has become an imperative for employees in the private sector, for the sake of which they are willing to accept informal practices, work extra hours without any overtime benefits, accept informal income packages or perform jobs not part of their job-description.

Low company capitalisation, with the exception of subsidiaries of very large multinational companies, results not only in low wages but also deteriorating working conditions, non-observation of basic safety rules and a lack of technological upgrading. Low capitalisation also shapes the market chances of those micro and small enterprises run by less successful “strugglers” who are trying to complement their low salaries by additional work. Their chances of successfully carving out a market niche that secures a fairly stable income are negligible. If their only source of income happens to be the

micro-enterprise, they are likely to be incapable of running these businesses successfully in the long run. Some companies are operating in market niches that have not yet been discovered by big multinational corporations. The price of being in an untapped market niche is that the profit margin is very low and the customer base very thin. In turn, companies that are in the same market niche as multinational companies are unable to compete on the same profit margin.

Long working hours, lack of free time, stress and difficulties are putting burden on working people, and cause the deterioration of the quality of life, human relations and family life.

Probably no other country in the SIREN project has experienced similar political, societal and economic shifts in the past decade, or even in the last fifty years. Likewise, in no other country in the SIREN project can a similar status inconsistency and the coexistence of deterioration, precariousness and advancement be observed. Indeed, this is the story that the interviews in the Hungarian sample tell. People, just as much as the economy, are in transition, experiencing inconsistency, decline, precariousness and even advancement at the same time. A similar inconsistency was observed in assessing their perception of advancement in terms of family trajectories. Most of the respondents enjoy a better material and societal position than their parents did. But compared to their grandparents, their advancement is questionable and many of them long for the material security and status of their grandparents.

#### *The relation between socio-economic change and right-wing extremism*

Probably owing to the stormy political and economic history of modern Hungary, there is no other country in the SIREN project where the past is so much part of the present. According to our experiences, the assessment of the political and economic situation is heavily influenced by the past, by the historical trajectory of the family, by the political socialisation within the family during the communist regime. And there is practically no one unaffected by the dramatic changes following the collapse of the socialist regime and the return to a liberal market economy.

In the Hungarian sample of qualitative interviews, the political socialisation in the family has played a decisive role in shaping basic political attitudes. Acceptance/non-acceptance of the regime, religious/non-religious and nationalistic/non-nationalistic education by the family seem to determine whether the given interviewee voted for the liberal-left or the right-wing-nationalistic party bloc. It was also found that one of the decisive factors influencing votes is whether the voter's family suffered directly from the Communist terror and injustices in the fifties. In our sample, those whose wider family, were subject to such injustice and repression, or experienced a break in the family trajectory are the most frustrated with the nature of transition. It seems that frustration rooted in the family history is one of the major factors in voting for an extremist party that promises the removal of those who are considered responsible for the unfortunate post-war history of Hungary. Hence they are likely to wish to see a

strong-handed charismatic leader, who would put the country in order and re-establish traditional values.

Such frustration alone might lead one to vote for a staunchly anti-Communist extreme-right party. In this sample, however, this seems not to be the case with any of the interviewees. Partly, this is caused by the fact that our interview partners had not been subject to reprisals of the fifties. For those who have not suffered any personal injuries, it is easier not to vote for an extreme right party, despite their frustration with the nature of transition and with the role the elite of the former regime played in the new democratic system. It is here that the second factor comes into play. Personal life history, career path and people's perception of their current social and employment status, too, have a very important influence on political beliefs and voting behaviour.

Interviews suggest that the (threat of) decline in living standards and precariousness is reinforcing or even mobilising the prejudices which might have been acquired during the family socialisation phase. Frustration and the consequent reinforcement and mobilisation of prejudices might lead people to vote for an extreme right party. In contrast, in the interview sample, none of the really successful people, who were benefiting from advancement and were not threatened by a decline in the quality of their lives or by precariousness, had voted for the MIÉP, even though they were attracted to right-wing extremism to a certain extent.

As a general rule, it seems that to vote for an extreme right party one has to have a dual frustration – one resulting from the family history and passed on through family socialisation, and the second from the individual career path, rooted in failure in the current rapidly changing economic environment.

In this dual frustration, frustrations suffered in every day life tend to reinforce and mobilise prejudices and beliefs acquired through family socialisation and might lead to attraction to right-wing extremism and populism and a vote for a right-wing party.

## ***Italy***

The long-established socio-political order based on the dominance of the Christian Democratic (DC) party during much of the post-war period broke down at the beginning of the nineties: the First Republic ended and the Second Republic began. A major role in the crisis of the First Republic was played by the “Mani pulite” (clean hands campaign), which discovered a system of corruption in political financing. Corruption and illegitimate financing charges caused profound crisis and loss of political credibility as well as of electoral consensus: from 1992 to 1997, Italy faced significant challenges since major political parties underwent drastic changes as voters demanded political and economic renewal.

The Christian Democratic Party was dissolved; the Italian People's Party and the Christian Democratic Centre emerged. Other major parties, such as the Socialists, saw support crash. A new liberal movement, Forza Italia, gained wide support among moderate voters. The Alleanza Nazionale broke from the neo-fascist Italian Social

Movement. A trend toward two large coalitions, one on the centre-left (Olive Tree alliance) and the other on the centre-right (Freedom Pole), emerged around 1995 and 1996. In 1994 Silvio Berlusconi and his Freedom Pole coalition won the elections. The Berlusconi government was forced to step down in January 1995 when one member of his coalition withdrew support. A series of centre-left coalitions dominated the Italian political scene between 1996 and 2001. National elections, held on May 13, 2001, returned Berlusconi to power at the head of the five-party centre-right “Freedom House” coalition, comprising the prime minister’s own party, Forza Italia, the Alleanza Nazionale, the Lega Nord, the Christian Democratic Centre, and the United Christian Democrats.

Since the beginning of the nineties, economic policy in Italy has focused primarily on reducing government budget deficits and holding down the national debt. Italian governments have adopted annual austerity budgets with cutbacks in spending, as well as new revenue-raising measures.

The nineties in Italy will be remembered as years of great economic change. Everything began with the European integration of capital and goods in the common market, and continued with the balancing of public accounts, with the progressive reduction of the presence of the state in productive activities and financial brokerage and with the progressive liberalisation and privatisation of public utility services, to end up with the implementation of European common currency. This process was mainly concentrated in two periods: 1992-93, when there was a financial and monetary crisis; and 1997-98, when Italy joined the monetary union.

The process of privatisation has contributed in a significant way to raising public finances, enlarging the size of the financial market, and re-launching badly functioning companies. Privatisation involved public ownership sectors such as major telephone and insurance companies, energy, chemicals, steel and metalworking companies, food, printing and publishing and some public utilities, both at the national and local level.

After the September 11<sup>th</sup> events, Italy, like the rest of the EU, saw its economy falter. At present, Italy is in the midst of a slow economic recovery and is gradually catching up with European standards.<sup>18</sup>

### *Perceptions of socio-economic change*

In the last decade Italy has been changing in many important respects: not only have Italians been required to change their traditional conceptions of a life-long job but they have also been required to change their political affiliations and to change their view of Italian society as a whole.

It is possible to trace some common features among all the interviews referring to socio-economic changes. A recurring element is the perception that there are no more jobs for life: Italy is moving towards a more and more flexible job market, which requires great

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<sup>18</sup> For further information please refer to Deliverable 1 and Deliverable 2.



efforts on the part of workers in order to cope with the challenges of competitive and precarious employment conditions. Increasing flexibility is explained as a necessary condition for Italian industries and societies in order to be able to face international demands for competitiveness. Overall, interviewees have accepted this new typology of work, but there are major differences among the three above reported categories.

People in the advancement category see flexibility as a stimulus and an opportunity for professional and personal growth. For these workers, flexibility is a must, in order to fulfil personal expectations in terms of career, to acquire new competencies and knowledge, and ultimately to survive in a competitive job market. Flexibility refers also to physical mobility, extended working hours, high levels of toleration of stress or pressures and mental capacities to adapt to a different and constantly changing working environment.

People in the decline category have undergone significant changes in their job domain, and have experienced a lowering in their overall employment condition. In most cases, changes have been imposed from the outside, by the top company management as a result of restructuring, privatisation, and/or of company cost-cutting policies. As a consequence, interviewees were forced to accept less professional tasks, relocation or job shifts, without any possibility of choosing an alternative solution. Levels of commitment or involvement in the job and/or company have decreased, while perceptions of injustice are likely to arise. Workers in precarious situations show the highest levels of perceived uncertainty. For these interviewees, the most disturbing element is the lack of any possibility of embarking on any projects, either personal or professional, in the long or short term. If workers in declining sectors find it difficult to think about their future in the next five years, temporary workers are unable to, or have stopped thinking about their futures at all. Workers show a generally ambivalent attitude towards temporary employment. On the one hand it is perceived as a safer and better option than irregular employment, or as a means for young unskilled workers to enter the job market. On the other, the overall evaluation is that temporary labour favours the employer but not the employee. For some interviewees, especially the ones who have not deliberately chosen temporary employment, such a precarious condition is perceived as extremely negative. Reactions to uncertainty also depend on the interviewees' living conditions: people who can count on the economic and psychological support of their families display effective coping strategies. In fact, almost all "precarious" interviewees are young, and do not have to rely solely on their own wage for a living.

#### *The relation between socio-economic change and right-wing populism/extremism*

The underlying hypothesis of this study is that high levels of perceived uncertainty and threat would drive people to adopt extreme-right and populist political orientations. These political orientations offer a well-defined worldview, enhance law and order values, stress the necessity of making a clear distinction in social categories. As such, they can provide people with the certainty they need to face the factual reality that, on the contrary, presents them with an ever-changing, fuzzy, and apparently messy world.

As to political issues, all the interviewees on one hand display a deep distrust and disenchantment towards the political world and its protagonists, and on the other regard politics as being distant from ordinary people's needs. Such a feeling is shared across the three socio-economic categories and both by right-wing and left-wing workers. It is difficult to trace a link between the three socio-economic categories and the opinions related towards politics and social issue. In any case, analysis shows that right-wing interviewees have an enhanced sensitivity towards threat and risks implied by current changes, while left-wing interviewees in contrast seem to be better equipped to face the changes without feeling threatened. Consistently, the former react defensively, while the latter do not. We highlighted various strategies people employ to cope with uncertainty. Individualistic strategies emphasise the role of the individual in managing uncertainty and changes within the job domain. Contingency strategies focus only on the present and avoid any consideration of the future. Social strategies emphasise group membership and have dual outcome: if people believe that their reference group will continue to exist in the future, even if under different conditions, they accept the change and will feel safe in the current changing context. If people believe that their reference group is likely to disappear in the future, however, they are likely to perceive the change as a threat and react defensively, i.e. they tend to anti-foreigner prejudice, nationalism, etc.

## **Switzerland**

The findings from the qualitative interviews are anchored in a socio-economic and political context depicting the conditions for the possibility of certain world views prevailing over others. Thus, the following question arises regarding Switzerland: how has a party like the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) been able to raise its profile and influence individual world views? The SVP introduces its favourite issues and, to a larger extent, its ways of dealing with them, by means of election campaigns as well as the regular plebiscites (initiatives and referendums). This always results in public debates mobilising the media but also in compelling other parties to comment upon the issues raised – and the solutions suggested – by SVP. That the populist parties of the extreme right succeed in getting certain issues onto the political agenda and even determining how they are approached, is neither new nor a specifically Swiss feature, but Swiss political institutions give a certain significance to this fact. Direct democracy and the frequent appeal to citizens on specific issues (like immigration), as if they were permanent “social problems”, influence collective representations in public space. They are, in this sense, “stocks of knowledge” structuring the cognitive superstructures through which people understand their environment. It is as if it is no longer possible to explain the recent changes in Switzerland without referring, one way or the other, to the issues of migration, drug abuse or other issues related to the propositions of the populist parties. Even if the arguments do not fit the parties' political positions, which is in fact mostly the case, there is frequent recourse to these indispensable elements of the explanation of society to describe and understand social change. The campaign issues

are gradually integrated into individual world views, being treated and modified in order to give sense to everyday experience.

Switzerland is experiencing a difficult economic situation leading to bankruptcies and massive lay-offs. The crisis is increasingly affecting domains and sectors that until now were thought to be secure (governmental sectors, major national enterprises, new technology, etc.). These economic units, reputed to rest on a strong economic basis and to represent economic success based on certain work ethics, have symbolised the good health of the country and its capacity to reach a state of stable affluence. The crash of the national aviation company, bad management of a cantonal bank and a large insurance company as well as the lay-offs by enterprises with a high “Swiss surplus”, for example, have heightened the feeling of insecurity individually experienced in daily life. The image of Switzerland (Swiss label, workmanship, economic stability) is crumbling, impairing confidence in the future and complicating the reproduction of a certain idea of Switzerland.

*Perceptions of socio-economic change & impact on political subjectivity?*

As an initial result of the analysis, we have been able to prove that individual displacement resulting from changes experienced at work compels individuals to re-evaluate their position in the social space in relation to others. This act of re-positioning is an occasion to project their systems of values, as well as their own concept of the rules (concerning morality and justice) of public life onto various issues. This act of re-positioning with regard to others will be called “political subjectivity”.

This result shows that the experience of change is also a result of the individual resources of interpretation of the social world. Additionally, these resources can be mobilised within the system of the new rules for different spheres of everyday life – work in particular – even as the individuals facing them remain the same. As they can no longer find points of reference in a changing world, individuals will create a moral milieu for themselves from which they exclude everything that is threatening.

Some people see themselves as being subject to the full force of the impact of the crisis while others experience it more indirectly, as we have seen pertaining to the deterioration of working conditions, the loss of financial solvency or the impossibility of finding meaning in one’s work. Some even seem to come out of it quite well, if the numerous scandals involving entrepreneurs or board members who have left firms with bonuses of up to tens of millions of francs while announcing massive lay-offs are to be believed. In a situation of rapid change, social asymmetry and differences in income and living conditions that have thus far been accepted as seemingly self-evident, come to signify utter social injustice. Similarly, everything deviating from the norm (marginal groups, immigrants, refugees) seems to highlight the destruction of Swiss society. The fact that numerous people implicated in the scandals are politicians of bourgeois parties (of the economic right) has revealed the connection between economy and politics. Seen from a strictly political point of view, this could be translated as the transfer of votes from the parties of the bourgeois right towards SVP, presenting itself as defending the

ordinary people even when paradoxically taking a liberal stand concerning economics. What seems to be more important (and durable) is the impact of this change on the political subjectivity of individuals and on their perception of the world – their world as shown by their careers, daily experiences, the principles held, and the categories of reference they apply in order to give sense to their life.

At the present stage of the research, it might be difficult to evaluate which of the types of vision of the social world is most likely to fall in with symbolic suggestions of the right-wing populist parties. In any case, it seems clear, even as evident affinities with this ideology have been stated for all three ideal-types, that the “populists”, in referring explicitly to the “people” or the “workers”, are the preferred target of the discourse of the populist right. They are also the ones who express the most violent feelings of being caught in between, as one interview partner does in a kind of caricature at the end of the interview: rising prices and stagnant wages, the people on “welfare” weighing down society, and the continual flow of immigrants. Resentment is most easily aroused among those who have had to “fight their way through” to achieve a standard of living adequate to minimal participation in the sphere of consumption and who during the last decade have seen the cycle of growth, which had held out the promise of future improvement in everyone’s situation, coming to an end. A closer look shows that, instead of encountering close copies of the ideology promoted mostly by SVP, we have largely seen and heard opinions which cannot be explained by traditional political categories (left or right). We have seen a “depoliticised radicalism”<sup>19</sup> (Paugam 2000:343) rather than straightforward allegiance to party ideologies. Depending on the issues approached, these forms of individual handiwork lead to anti-global opinions, the rejection of foreigners, or the support for ecological activities (the Greens) and result from the loss of conciseness of the legitimate political discourse with regard to the world the interview partners live in. Moreover, the individual reports we have analysed in the course of this study are an the expression of uneasiness regarding the changes experienced – an uneasiness expressed by everyone in the form of an interpretation of the social world that puts the contradictions of their lives into perspective.

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<sup>19</sup> We use this concept as explained by Dubet (2000:335): “Radicalism because of its appeal to principally not negotiable moral issues, depoliticised because it doesn’t recognise itself in any form of organised political activity.”

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