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Oxford University Study finds connection between Social Conflict and Social Inequality in CEE

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A new report finds citizens in less equal societies expect free markets to generate social conflict. Oxford University's Prof. Stephen Whitefield and Dr. Matthew Loveless conclude that perceptions of social inequality are related to expectations that free markets and democracy will result in negative social interaction, that is social conflict. The results indicate that citizens in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) who consider themselves in less equal societies expect social conflict to be the result of free markets.

While the researchers find no relationship between income inequality and views of democracy, they do find that citizens in less equal societies view markets as the source of social conflict. In their analysis, perceptions of social inequality have the strongest influence on expectations of market-based social conflict, and these perceptions are stronger than normative views of the market. When considering views on democracy, perceptions of social inequality do not shape citizen attitudes, but social inequality plays a large role in shaping perceptions about the market. In addition, citizens who prefer anti-democratic leadership generally do not believe in the principles of democracy, but in comparison, those who prefer government intervention in the market tend to be same people who see excessive social inequality in their society.

The results for the report came from mass public surveys conducted in the new member states of the European Union in 2007.

EUREQUAL was the acronym for 'Social Inequality and Why it Matters for the Economic and Democratic Development of Europe and its Citizens: Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective'. The fundamental aim of the EUREQUAL project was to create and disseminate knowledge that will facilitate the achievement of greater social equality between individuals, social cohesiveness in societies, democratic and market development, and the broader integration of Europe. EUREQUAL was funded by the EU Commission's 6th Framework Programme and was based at the University of Oxford, under the direction of Professors Stephen Whitefield and Geoffrey Evans and involvement from a consortium of 11 European universities and research institutes.

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If you would like more information on this topic, please contact Prof. Stephen Whitefield. You may find additional information at <http://eurequal.politics.ox.ac.uk/>.