STSM SCOPE

The general framework of the carried research activities is closely related to the topics from the third working group of this Action, especially to "the citizen's engagement with populist political messages and the effect of these messages". More specifically, I focused on the citizens with clear political preferences, belonging to opposing political camps, the central-right and the central-left parts of the ideological spectrum. My special area of interest was **investigation of the effects of the populist political messages coming from prominent political leader on the supporting/opposing partisan camps within the electorate body**. For this purpose, we assessed the levels of trustworthiness towards a political figure renowned for populist politics, the former prime minister and longstanding spokesman of the state, Silvio Berlusconi. The trust exhibited toward the political persona of Berlusconi was measured directly with the self-assessment questionnaire and via implicit indicators, such as perceived similarity and single category implicit association test.

ACTIVITY REPORT

The explicit and implicit measures of trustworthiness of a prominent political figure, the former primer minister Silvio Berlusconi, were taken to gain deeper insight of the overall effect of his messages on the proactive audience i.e. supporting/opposing partisans. Such resolution was made since the research was carried out at Sapienza University of Rome and to this day, Berlusconi is still recognized as the most prominent Italian representative of a populist political leader.

The perceived similarity (PS) (Caprara et al., 2007) refers to the degree of resemblance between own and the psychological assessment of the leader and was extracted as a score-difference from the values assigned on self-leader's Big Five Tests (BIG5) (Digman, 1990). It is an implicit indicator associated with the assessment of trustworthiness in number of studies: sporadically it has been linked with synchronous motor interaction of random partners (Sacheli et al., 2012), while frequently with the image of political candidates as witnessed by voters with psychological evaluation (Caprara et al., 2007), the joint reflexive attention and stronger tendency for gaze-following behavior (Liuzza et al., 2011; Liuzza et al., 2013) as well as by neural fMRI investigations (Cazzato et al., 2015). The single category implicit association test (SC-IAT) (Karpinski & Steinman, 2006) is utilized through coupling of a single target object (an image of Berlusconi) with dual-meaning priming words carrying positive or negative evaluative dimension (such as "happiness" or "disaster", for example).

A coarse-grained analysis was also conducted during the STSM period and the preliminary results indicate towards a link between the implicit measures such as PS and SC-IAT and an explicitly declared trustworthiness of Berlusconi i.e. all three measures are positively associated constructs. In addition, we discovered cues for "socially undesirable" attitude where the strong implicit bias was coupled with weak explicit trust towards a former leader, which is explained in the light of his declining popularity and the period of testing (matching the period of Berlusconi's withdrawal from political scene).

LOGISTICS

The research conducted under the auspices of COST Action IS1308, was based upon three hierarchical pillars of organization:

- **Academic Coordination (with Assoc. Prof. Maria Grazia Gerbino)**
- Scientific Supervision and support (by Prof. Salvatore Maria Aglioti, Prof. Gian Vittorio Caprara)
- Research Collaboration with postdoctoral fellow Giuseppina Porciello, and fellow colleagues, lab members, doctoral and post-doctoral researchers.