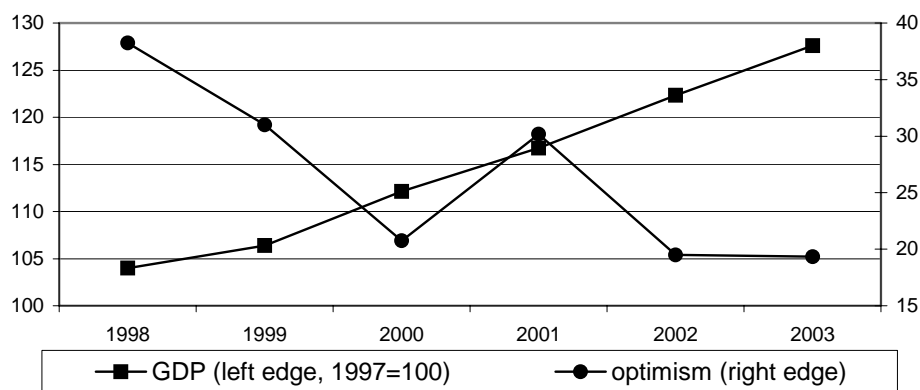


## OPTIMISTIC THEORY ABOUT THE PESSIMISM OF THE TRANSITION

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### *The problem*

In 2003, Bulgaria's GDP finally clawed its way back to pre-1989 levels on the back of six back-to-back years of growth in roughly 4.5% annual increments. Consumer spending figures reveal a pick-up in the financial fortunes of most Bulgarians<sup>1</sup>. The statisticians reported a fall in unemployment from 19% in April 2000 to 13.5% in December 2003. Domestic consumer lending doubled year-on-year in 2003. Sofia is in the run-up to its EU accession. Following the logic of the dominant mantra of the supranational financial institutions, all these stable positive trends should translate into increasing public support for the policy of economic growth as well as for the majorities, governments and reformers that pursue it. Surprisingly, Bulgarians' personal and collective outlook is becoming gloomier, voter disaffection is spreading and public support for the government's economic agenda is waning. We have termed the wide discrepancy between the macro-economic dimensions of the transition and their subjective perception by society the "paradox of the Bulgarian transition."



### GDP and optimism in Bulgaria, 1998-2003

Source: GDP data from the National Statistical Institute; optimism survey by BBSS Gallup International, yearly data represents median monthly data: percentage of positive responses to the question "Is Bulgaria changing for the better?"

<sup>1</sup> "Social stratification in Bulgaria" (1999-2004), Mediana Agency

Data collected by several polls reveals strong correlation between people's expectations and voter turnout and between expectations for the future and confidence in the political institutions. Each post-1989 election in Bulgaria has been decided by the anti-incumbency votes, a trend attributable to the permanently high levels of public pessimism.

	People with income in decline	Unchanged income status	People with income gains
<b>Vote at the 1990 general elections</b>			
Bulgarian Socialist Party	42%	21%	13%
Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)	23%	39%	35%
Movement for rights and freedoms	4%	5%	3%
<b>Vote at the 2001 general elections</b>			
NDSV	34%	32%	25%
United Democratic Forces	13%	20%	25%
BSP-led Coalition for Bulgaria	23%	13%	9%
<b>Vote at the 2001 presidential elections</b>			
Georgi Parvanov	51%	39%	29%
Petar Stoyanov	27%	37%	42%

As seen from the table above, the anti-incumbency sentiment, fuelled by the negative outlook of the voters, elects Bulgaria's governments. In terms of politics, the Bulgarian society is in a place where economic growth has no knock-on effect on political support while in terms of economics, Bulgarians' negative outlook chokes off investment and free enterprise. The markets have developed the ability to turn into reality the expectations of the entities involved in the commercial exchange. Therefore if we could answer the questions "Why the economic growth generates no optimism?" and "Who are the people that see no upside to the economic growth?", we would be able to formulate a platform for the expansion of the social base of reformist policy which is the *primary goal* of our report.

### ***The ghost of comparisons***

The comparisons with other societies and economies further underscore the "paradox of the Bulgarian transition". In the U.S., a blip in consumer confidence prefigures the onset of recession while bullish consumer sentiment promotes economic growth and the public profile of the government. In the EU and in Central and East European countries,

economic growth also underpins a positive outlook about the future. A comprehensive opinion survey conducted by Eurobarometer in October-November 2003 found that Bulgarians are the biggest malcontents among the 13 EU membership hopefuls, including Turkey. Bulgarians also have the most pessimistic view of the future and the least confidence in their domestic institutions.

Bulgaria sulks at the bottom of the Life Satisfaction table with only 31% of its citizens content with the life they lead. All other membership aspirants have greater segments of upbeat population: 40% in Romania, 85% in Slovenia, 83% in Malta, 82% in Cyprus, 69% in Turkey, 54% in Hungary and Slovenia. The average of content citizens for the EU is 79% while that for the 13 aspirants is 60%. Bulgarians are also the most critical of the changes that have happened in the past 5 years – 13% think the situation in the country has improved while 50% hold the opposite view. In contrast, 46% of Turkish respondents, who were in the midst of an economic crisis at the time of the poll, said they were better off than 5 years earlier. Bulgarians are second-to-last when it comes to the outlook for the next five years – only 35% expect things to get better, a reading that is closest to Slovenia where 33% share the same view. Confidence in the institutions – government, parliament, citizen organisations and parties, is another area where Bulgarians placed second-to-last. Only 14% have confidence in these institutions versus 56% of Cypriots, 44% of Maltese, 41% of Turks, 38% of Estonians and 32% of Hungarians. Poles are most distrustful of their institutions with only 15% having confidence in them.

### ***Why are we this way?***

Many an analyst has tried to interpret and rationalise the disconnect between growth and optimism on the backdrop of large-scale or modest comparisons. A study of previous analyses and of interpretations that have appeared in the media has defined three types of assertions that explain the “Bulgarian angle”: economic, media and stemming from national psychology.

The stripped-down version of the economic theory represents an income determinism that seeks and finds the roots of the pessimism exclusively in poverty and lowly incomes: “we are pessimists because we are poor.”

The incumbents search for the source of pessimism in a “media conspiracy”. They blame the media for “distorting” reality and failing to give coverage to the progress that has been achieved: “the public is pessimistic because it is being manipulated by the media”.

But everyone subscribes to the conclusions of popular psychology: “we are pessimists because we are Bulgarian.”

The current report goes beyond the search of a catch-all explanation for the “pessimism of the transition” and focuses on identifying the factors

that determine the pessimistic mode of the different social groups. We are not so much attempting to explain neither the sources nor the proliferation of social pessimism but to understand the dynamics of pessimism and thus work out a vision of a reformist agenda that will win public support.

### ***The approach***

The current report analyses the findings of a series of studies performed by different teams of sociologists as well as data from a comprehensive survey conducted for the purposes of the report in December 2003 and from 17 anthropological field studies held in late 2003. The theories that took shape during the team discussions have been tested against a range of research methods in three distinct phases. The process begins with an analysis of existing sociological, anthropological, regional and macro-economic studies, statistical data and economic and cultural chronicles with the goal of formulating working theories. Then these provisional theories are tested and fine-tuned in socio-anthropological studies conducted in 17 locations around the country - selected in terms of type of population centre, level and pace of development, and backed up with 200 exhaustive interviews. Finally, the conclusions from the second phase and the correlations that jumped out of prior sociological surveys are used as the baseline for a national representative sociological study and for the formulation of the final results.

### ***Definitions and Hypotheses***

The word “optimism” is present in the dictionary of Naiden Gerov in its absence. In the history of sociological study in Bulgaria, the word will always be associated strongly with Ivan Hadjiiski and his “Optimistic theory about the Bulgarian people”.

In the course of and for the purposes of the current paper, social optimism and pessimism are defined as the positive or, respectively, the negative expectations of the individual about his/her own future or the future of the community to which he/she belongs – family, population centre, region or state, as stated by the respondents in the poll’s answer sheet.

This definition of optimism does not exhaust the much more complex essence of this phenomenon as a socio-psychological reality but it nevertheless allows us to draw comparisons with other studies and with other countries around the world.

Several theories about the roots of social pessimism endemic to Bulgaria’s transition took shape during the search for an answer to the question “Why the economic growth generates no optimism?” The first theory traces the origin of this pessimistic streak to the pattern of historic development, to what Hadjiiski defines as “the unorthodox aspects of our societal development.” The second theory centres on the impact of the models of socialist modernisation and the concepts formulated during the socialist era. The third theory examines the traits of the democratic system. The

fourth theory explores the distortions of post-communist publicity and the characteristics of the media environment. The fifth hypothesis breaks down the dynamics of social inequality and the regress of social status during the transition years while the sixth hypothesis looks at the egalitarian and integrating function of pessimistic speak.

In the structure of the current report, the different hypotheses have lost their identity. Pessimism is viewed as fallout from the joint workings of a whole range of factors - that have varying degrees of gravity for each social segment and with varying degrees of impact at different times, and the upshot is determined by their interplay. It is impossible to isolate one or two factors on which to blame the **causes** for pessimism in Bulgaria. It is more useful to imagine a hierarchical aggregation of factors whose impact is enhanced or cushioned by various sets of circumstances.

The analytical task is made that much more difficult by the fact that the study contains two layers and, therefore, two rows of data: a) synchronic data which tries to rate the factors conditioning social pessimism in terms of their significance; and b) diachronic data which tries to timeline the process. In general, the search for a comprehensive explanation of pessimism as a phenomenon, which integrates so many individual and supra-individual traits is beyond the scope and resources of our type of study. Hence the focus on showcasing the dynamics of pessimism, the factors that have the greatest impact on pessimism, the configuration of factors peculiar to the different social groups and the trends each group is facing.

### ***Status pessimism***

*The hypothesis most frequently espoused by social theorists and most frequently encountered in the studied reality stipulates that pessimism is rooted in underpay while affluent groups are dominated by social optimism. Our study has confirmed the theory that low income leads to a negative outlook. Contrary to expectations, while the under classes are proverbially pessimistic, the high-income brackets are not always as upbeat as is expected from them. On the whole, the status/income correlation can explain the individual and collective pessimism of some 54% of Bulgarians of legal age.*

*“The field anthropological studies highlight the correlation between the type of population center and the level and nature of the optimistic and pessimistic sentiment. But the typology is different. In population centers with a positive economic profile and outlook even the people with lower income hold a more optimistic view. On the other hand, in population centers with a negative economic profile and outlook even the people with higher social status feel pessimistic.”*

In addition to lowly income, social pessimism is also influenced by other powerful stratifying factors. In terms of potency, they can be ranked as follows: 1) income; 2) position in the professional hierarchy; 3) education; 4) type of population centre; 5) age.

The status theory about social pessimism is closely linked to the

social stratification which did not remain rigid during the transition. The social ranks of the socialist era are disintegrating to make room for a new configuration with new mechanisms for social mobility gaining the upper hand. The change in environment and mechanisms multiply the options for some while reducing opportunity for others to the point of atomisation.

The transition has drawn a line between the members of the society who have benefited from it and those who have missed out. The expected general trend is that positive economic changes in an environment of free enterprise, flexible labour market and unbridled competition would gradually energise economic activity and bring prosperity to a broader segment of the population who can generate public support for the reform agenda. To a great degree, this process underpins the near-term expectations that a positive change in macro-economic parameters and in employment and income figures would ennoble the socio-psychological climate and will promote consumer spending, economic activity and a boost in social optimism.

The “entry levels” of social pessimism and optimism used in the current study can be quantified as follows:

<b>Level of individual optimism</b>	
Improved	42%
No change	33%
Deteriorated	23%

<b>Level of social optimism (on national level)</b>	
Improved	17%
No change	37%
Deteriorated	43%

<b>The following integral variable can then be deducted</b>	
Optimistic in personal and in national terms	15%
Optimistic in personal terms but pessimistic in national terms	26%
Pessimistic in personal and in national terms	54%

The study makes it possible to outline definitively the limits of this paradigm

<b>Income per household member</b>	
Less than 50 levs	15%
50-100 levs	36%
100-150 levs	21%

150-200 levs	13%
200-300 levs	6%
Over 300 levs	3%

Structure of the population in terms of social status self-assessment	IV.2002	XII.2003	Change
Low (1 to 4)	80%	62%	-18
Average (5)	13%	20%	+7
High (6 to 10)	7%	18%	+11

		Optimistic in personal and in national terms	Optimistic in personal terms but pessimistic in national terms	Pessimistic in personal and in national terms
		Row %	Row %	Row %
<b>Education</b>	Graduate	27,8%	35,0%	32,7%
	Undergraduate	17,1%	28,0%	51,2%
	High-school	15,5%	31,2%	49,0%
	Primary	7,6%	12,8%	72,4%
<b>Average monthly income per household member:</b>	Less than 50 levs	5,3%	11,3%	78,2%
	50-100 levs	9,5%	21,6%	62,4%
	100-150 levs	20,0%	28,6%	45,9%
	150-200 levs	20,4%	42,1%	35,3%
	200-300 levs	28,7%	32,7%	37,6%
	Над 300 levs	36,8%	42,1%	19,3%
<b>Difference in current vs. 1989 position</b>	Decline	10,9%	22,0%	61,5%
	No change	20,7%	27,4%	45,5%
	Improvement	24,5%	38,4%	33,6%
<b>Structure of the population in terms of social status self-assessment</b>	Low (1 to 4)	7,2%	17,2%	70,0%
	Average (5)	19,9%	37,9%	37,6%
	High (6 to 10)	31,9%	43,6%	20,2%

The data confirms the people with the highest income tend to exhibit the strongest upbeat sentiment; the trend is especially relevant for people with monthly income exceeding 300 levs per household member. The

people with a monthly income of less than 150 levs and those with monthly income in excess of 150 levs sit on the opposite sides of the fault line identified by the study. The great divide applies to the personal outlook as well as to the view on where the country is headed. *The 150-lev-monthly-income divide has emerged as the most relevant Bulgarian divide, a cut-off line more divisive than the state borders.* The second point of differentiation is the position in the professional hierarchy; three highly distinct levels emerged here – top executive, mid-tier manager and staff. In terms of private versus public sector, people that are privately employed exhibited higher levels of optimism than their public sector counterparts. Third comes the educational background followed by the type of population centre and age; the better the education, the bigger the population centre and the younger the person, the more likely is he/she to feel greater social optimistic.

The younger university-educated urbanites are the people that benefited from the reforms and they carry the highest charge of social optimism. Some 14-15% of the population exhibit high levels of individual social optimism. A peripheral segment of another 14% can also be classified here although they are affected by this trend to a lesser extent.

This group has uninhibited consumer habits, borrows from the banks and has more savings opportunities; values education and has access to modern consumer goods; displays a positive outlook and a positive assessment of Bulgaria's course of development. This is the only group where the positive view about the country's development in the past 13 years prevails over the negative view.

### *Changes in status and optimism*

The comparison of current data with findings from prior periods has revealed several distinct changes in the trends affecting social pessimism and optimism.

The table below illustrates the changes in the self-assessment of personal circumstances:

<b>Current assessment:</b>			
	2002	2003	
Low /1 – 4/	80%	62%	- 18
Average /5/	13%	20%	+ 7
High /6-10/	7%	18%	+11

<b>Expectations for period after 5 years:</b>			
	2002	2003	
Low /1 – 4/	60%	38%	- 22
Average /5/	12%	16%	+ 4
High /6-10/	15%	28%	+13



No expectations	13%	18%	
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The expectations about forthcoming changes are more positive than the registered improvement in current assessments. The low assessment of current social status has deteriorated by 18% while the portion of respondents with low expectations has increased by 22%. The other, perhaps more relevant, factor is the significant change in the actual structure of the expectations about the personal financial status.

While a year ago the low assessments (60% - grades 1-4) clearly have the upper hand over the average- and high-assessment responses, the latest data reflects a shift towards a structure that is closer to that of societies with a middle class that is still taking shape: 38% low assessments, 16% average, 28% high and 18% with no response (people that usually gravitate towards the average level). If this trend persists, we could expect self-assessment responses to begin to be dominated by the “average” levels thus upending the current structure of the pyramid. Curiously, as many as 62% of respondents expected 18 months to be related to the bottom echelons of the social hierarchy within years but only 60% of informants placed themselves there in the latest poll. At the moment, 22% of respondents that said they are on the lower social rungs already perceive some upward mobility.

*The conclusion at this stage is that the positive dynamic affecting social mobility in the past year has generated no social optimism.*

The other indicated that should be examined here is the direction in which social status is changing in relation to the provisional starting point which is 1989. The comparison between the two studies reveals the following tendency:

In comparison with 1989		
	2002	2003
Decline	78%	66%
No change	10%	16%
Improvement	12%	18%

In comparison with 5 years ago		
	2002	2003
Decline	57%	50%
No change	29%	33%
Improvement	14%	17%

*A substantial portion of respondents perceive themselves as losing more ground on their position in 1989 than on their status of five years ago. At present, the portion of informants that have either maintained or improved their status from five years ago is levelling off with the sliders but it is the comparison with 1989 that determines the outlook for the*

*future. The comparison with 1989 is the frame of reference used by the people who have missed out on the reforms in assessing their social potential and the outlook for the society as a whole.*

*Positive change in the self-assessment*

***Elemental nature of the improvements***  
*Bulgaria is on the right track and things are gradually getting better (Varna, Bourgas, Tetevan, ect). Some respondents choose to focus on the right direction while others are bugged by the sluggish pace of progress. It should be noted that a very popular and very negative question is no longer asked: “when are we going to bottom out,” “when is thid light at the end of the tunnel coming,” etc. I would term this leitmotif elemental, natural or cyclical optimism because progress is not perceived as the result of the conscious actions of a particular subject. On the contrary, once things like macroeconomics, nominal growth, etc, come up, the respondents tune out and, effectively, dismiss the claims of the incumbents that they have accomplished something positive or useful. When the emphasis is on the right direction of movement, the opinions are worded as observations. When the slow rate of improvement is in focus, the cosmic optimism is just one in a range of rhetoric ploys used to strip the elite of its legitimacy.*

The first axis of adjustment is along the lines of self-assessment of the personal social status. In comparison with May 2002, the portion of Bulgarians who perceive themselves at the low-end of the social ladder has fallen by a fifth. Of the people that left this segment, 7% joined the respondents that see themselves mid-ladder while 11% said they have jumped straight to the top of the pile.

In comparison with 2002, the number of people with upward momentum has risen by 18%. It is also equally significant that the positive projections stretch to the near-term. A year ago, the expectations about the future were also

more positive than the assessment of the current social status. The comparison between the expectations recorded in 2002 and the view of personal circumstances circa 2003 shows that the two structures are very similar and that the difference consists in an outlook more positive than the initial projects.

	<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Actual status:</b>
	:	
	2002	2003
Low /1 – 4/	60%	62%
Average /5/	12%	20%
High /6-10/	15%	18%

The persistent social pessimism is largely due to the fact that the “reference social status”, the reconstruction of the pre-1989 social status continues to be a target well beyond the assessment not only of the current

but also of the social status in the foreseeable future. It should be noted that the hyperinflation of 1997 is no longer a reference point for social status comparisons. 1997 is no longer embedded in the collective unconscious as the push-off point. 1989, or the remembrance of 1989, is the only point of reference for the formulation of public expectations. Curiously, this applies in equal measure even to the younger generations for whom 1989 must be nothing more than a blur.

***Phantom improvements.***

*The second basic leitmotif, which applies to changes on regional and national level and to changes of macro-economic indicators or the urban environment, concerns the so called "cosmetic changes." This phrase is used to describe not only cabinet reshuffles and the work of mayors in the run-up to elections but as a catch-all term for everything happening in the country. It is frequently used to denote changes in the economic, political or urban environment perceived as insubstantial, immaterial, insufficient, minimalist or even bogus. Apparently, these developments are judged against an ideal for change that dwarfs all current goings-on. In most cases, the scale of the comparison is borrowed from the breadth of the socialist-era industrialisation with its juggernaut plants and plethora of jobs.*

Two trends have been identified in this respect. On the one hand, most of Bulgarians still feel like social back-sliders. The majority (57%) place themselves on the upper five rungs in 1989 while 22% say they were on the lower four. Now the ratio has been reversed: the majority (62%) see themselves on the lower four while 20% say they are perched on the top five steps of the social ladder. This reversal in the social status assessment is a valid cause for social pessimism. Respondents that have a positive view of their pre-1989 status and a negative view of their current position are that much more likely to have a negative outlook about the future. There is a very strong correlation between a downward movement on the social ladder and social pessimism. Curiously, the opposite is not true.

*The correlation between the upward movement on the social ladder and the level of social optimism is rather weak.*

*The perceptions about upward and downward social mobility influence the level of social optimism or pessimism but do so in different ways. A slip down to the bottom of the social ladder and the downward movement as a whole are observed to stoke social pessimism. But not necessarily vice versa. Neither the upward mobility nor the ascent to the upper reaches of the social ladder automatically improve social optimism readings.*

Therefore it is imperative to determine which social groups were the engines of the positive individual social betterment registered by the 2002 and 2003 polls. A comparison study identified positive trends in all social groups with the exception of the oldest segment of the population, of people with primary education and of people with a monthly income per household member of less than 50 levs. In their case, sentiment worsened by 2-2.5% which is within the margin of statistical error. All other

surveyed groups exhibited a change in the positive direction. The problem is that the groups characterised by at least one of those traits represent 46.9% of the overall population. The presence of even one of the three factors (age, education or income) immediately spikes the level of social pessimism to 70% - versus a national average of 54%, and increases the portion of respondents who say they occupy the nether reaches of the social ladder to 80%, versus an average of 62% for the overall population.

If we focus on the group of respondents who are younger than 60 and have only elementary education (a community that represents 17% of the overall population), we will see that it accounts for 41% of people in the lowest income bracket (less than 50 levs a month) and for 40% of people with monthly income per household member of less than 100 levs. As many as 50% of the members of this group live in rural areas while the ethnic breakdown reads as follows: 58% Bulgarians, 23% ethnic Bulgarian Turks, 17% Roma.

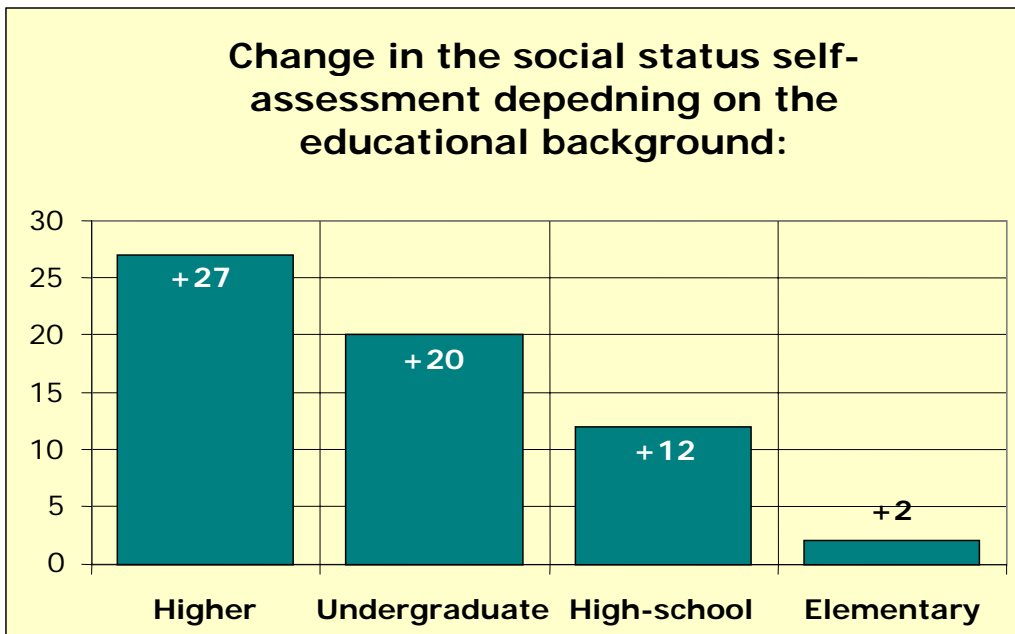
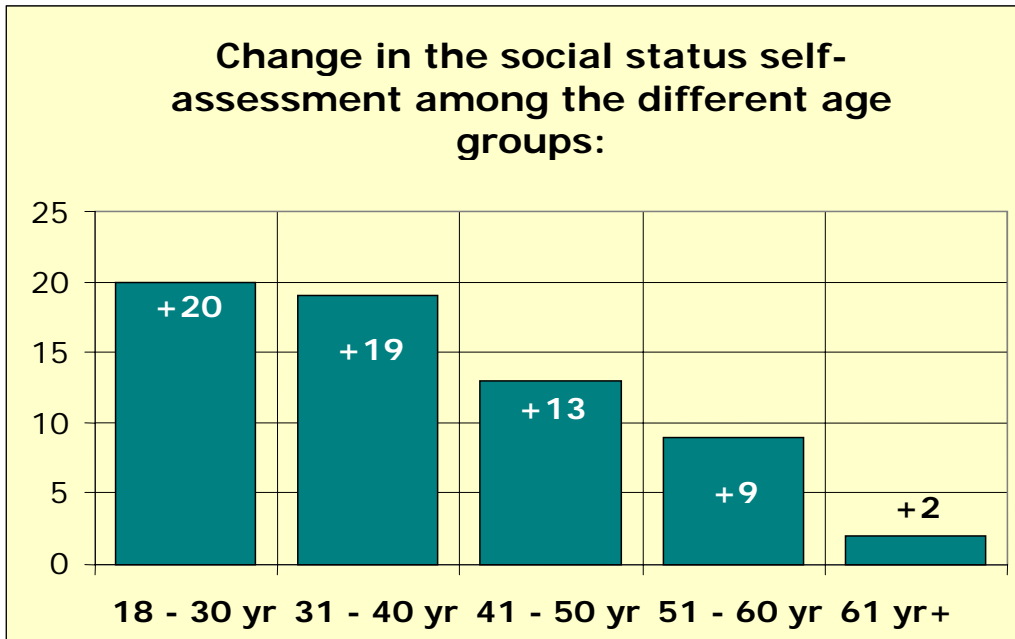
If we now isolate the group which sees no year-on-year change in its status (it represents 46% of overall respondents and breaks down as follows: 24% of the group is older than 61, 30% has elementary education and 16% has income of less than 50 levs; 80% of this particular group of informants say have been on the way down since 1989), it is important to determine which are the social groups that drove the positive movement on the social ladder.

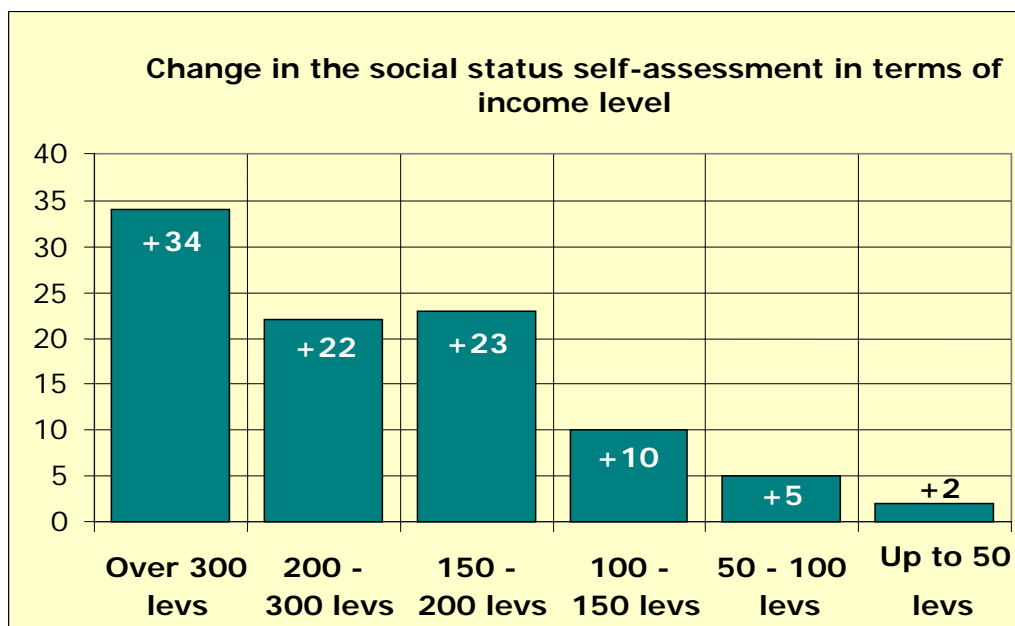
#### *General trends in social stratification*

The general trends in social stratification remain stable with Sofianites, young people and people with higher education and good income perceiving themselves to be in a better position. At the same time, the intensity of changes detected in these factors is relative. There is a strong correlation between educational background and income power; the correlation between the position on the professional ladder and income is even stronger; the correlation between the position in the professional hierarchy and the educational background is somewhat weaker.

Distance between the highest and the lowest positions on the different factors in 2002 and in 2003.

	2002	2003
Place of residence:	2.5:1	3.5:1
Age	2.5:1	5:1
Education	4:1	8:1
Income	30:1	32:1





Educational background, income, age and place of residence are power factors of social differentiation with the biggest change being registered in the movement towards the better positions. That explains while no major change in average-level readings was recorded and the respondents realigned directly to the top positions. The uptick in individual social optimism is attributable to the jump in positive sentiment exhibited by the groups in leading positions, the moderate gain recorded in the mid-tier groups and the lack of any changes in the mood of the low-income respondents. The people that benefited from the reforms have continued to reap the perks of ongoing social changes. This corroborates the theory that it would take a lengthy period of stable development for positive changes to occur in the respondents' personal life. Individual optimism is the result of raising income and an upward social mobility spanning a period longer than one or two years.

### ***Pessimism in the public sphere***

If the theory based on the status/income correlation explains comprehensively the views of 54% of Bulgarians, it falls short of rationalising the behaviour, expectations and the sentiment of the remaining 46%. Their behaviour is most often and most easily explained with the nature of the media environment.

#### *The media as a source of pessimism*

*The study has determined that the media are one of the mechanisms for the proliferation of social pessimism but they are not seen as the cause for its massive profusion. The influence wielded by the media is greatly exaggerated. The negative messages communicated by the media have the biggest impact on the section of the society whose pessimism is preconditioned by its status and income circumstances. In this sense, the*

*catastrophic image of current reality depicted by the media is more the result of “ambulance chasing” rather than fallout from the ideological strategy of the media themselves.*

*The fact that the wide-spread cynicism rules the press but is less present on TV is especially noteworthy. People watch news broadcasts, films and entertainment shows. It was found that respondents with higher education watch news bulletins more often but trust what they hear less than the people with high-school education who say they watch primarily films and entertainment shows. Respondents often talk about bad news and the fact that the bTV news bulletins sound like police logs. Curiously, few respondents confirm that they take media information seriously and claim they usually “tune out.” Some of the respondents – police officers and students, say they believe only the foreign media outlets like BBC, Euronews and CNN. It would be difficult to group the respondents in terms of their views on this topic because the responses were varied. One or two of the respondents mention that they have taken some media information into account when making personal decisions but that does not emerge as a popular approach.*

The Eurobarometer findings cited at the beginning of the report show that Bulgaria is the EU aspirant with the smallest portion of newspaper readers: only 15% of Bulgarians read newspapers on daily basis versus 43% of Hungarians, 32% of Estonians, 28% of Slovenians and 17% of Romanians. But the clout of the media is not a function of people’s perception of it. So there would be no point in taking these data as the only valid point of reference. The forte of the media is in providing the general moulds, the ready formulae for the interpretation of reality that package the different individual sets of experiences and set the general tone for emotional sensitivity.

The data collected by our study shows that the pessimism of only one third of Bulgarians can be traced to the media.

It should be noted that the TV channels are the highest penetration among the media, followed by the newspapers, which reach 20-25% of the population. But the influence of the newspapers is heightened by the snowball effect, i.e. the extensive chatter, recounting and rumours generated by the news on a scale far greater than the initial scope of the respective media. *The comparison between the anxiety readings for the different social groups shows that they are highest for the people that are the most infrequent readers or viewers (these are most often older people with lower social status and income and poor education).* This group is most susceptible to the influence of the different media. These people usually have a sketchy knowledge of the origin of a particular problem and of its causes and implications but are nevertheless greatly influenced by the anxiety of the message, which taps into their social predisposition towards a feeling of insecurity and no future. In terms of social profile, these are people with no resources to deal with problems on their own. *But the media explanation of the pessimistic streak is restrictive when we*

*have to explain why the people with improving income and social mobility still cling to their negative outlook.*

### *Democracy as a source of pessimism*

Is it possible that the very nature of democratic society with its inherent arguments, conflicts, discussions, debates, public battles, criticisms, highlighting of risks, drawing up of risk scenarios in connection with one decision or another, is the cause of a shortage of social optimism in the transition period?

#### **Deideologisation and anti-politicism**

*One of the main characteristics of field surveys is that respondents are reluctant to talk politics, they make generalisations along the lines “everybody thinks about themselves”; weak, deceptive governance; seekers of undue benefits at the top. Unlike previous governments, however, this one does not pose a threat, does not exude power, and does not stop those who selfishly seek undue benefits in everyday life. The businessmen surveyed often claim that now one can solve any problem by giving money to the right person. This also applies to people who have made a fortune under the UDF and the BSP. Business has shed its subordinate position to power and negotiates with it on business-to-business terms. There is anger at people in government only in depressed regions, mostly among pensioners.*

Compared to the other EU applicant countries, a mere 22% of Bulgarians are satisfied with the quality of democracy at home, as against 73% on the still divided island of Cyprus, 60% in Malta, 50% in Slovenia, 41% in the Czech Republic and so on. Confidence in democracy is lowest among Slovaks at 17% and Romanians at 21%.

Our survey shows that the social pessimism of one in four respondents is strengthened by the very mechanism of decision-making in democratic society, namely arguments and discussions. These people tend much more to support decisions imposed from above

and are receptive to messages such as “elections, referendums, parliaments, MPs... are just a waste of money”.

The idea that lack of pluralism and citizens' control may lead to total abuse of power is alien to them. This outlook includes the perception of democracy as “anarchy”, “abuse of freedom”.

The survey registers a group of about 25% to 30% of people who are directly and unambiguously influenced by the media environment and identify the problems of the functioning of democracy with its principles. As has already been said, about 80% of this group consists of people of lower social status, elderly people, somewhat detached from active public life. There is, however, a group of some 15% to 20% of people holding rather senior positions, with high incomes, who, as a rule, are not sympathisers of the major political forces, and whose negativism results less from the general stereotypes and ideas imposed in the public sphere than from direct encounters with top management practices. Some of



these people are probably part of this mechanism. They are pessimistic about the development of society because they know how they themselves rose in this society. Or, to paraphrase Groucho Marx, "I cannot be optimistic about a society in which I am one of the winners".

*It should be noted that we live in a society in which the vast majority of people do not know what is good about democracy and have forgotten what is bad about socialism.* The answers to an open-ended question about the advantages of socialism and democracy show that the characteristics of socialism are much more distinct in mass consciousness than those of democracy. 27% single out the lack of unemployment as the main advantage of socialism, 13% opt for safety, 6% mention peace and good living, and 6% say free education and healthcare. The disadvantages are rather less outstanding:

- Bans, restrictions – 4%
- Lack of personal freedom – 4%
- Lack of information – 2%
- Other - about or less than 1%

As to the image of democracy, the largest proportion of respondents, 18%, say its main advantage is freedom, followed by free speech 8%, and freedom of movement across borders 4%. Private business and personal enterprise are mentioned by 1.8% and 1.3%, respectively, that is, as we said above, they have not taken hold as its solid healthy principles, they are not identified as effective engines of steady upward economic development. On the contrary, the "dark side" is much more distinct and is mainly associated with:

- Unemployment – 20%
- Crime and insecurity – 15%
- Poverty – 12%
- Corruption – 3%
- Anarchy – 3%, etc.

It should be noted that there is a much more pronounced accretion of several main positive traits around the image of socialism and of several negative ones around that of democracy. Further, the positive image of socialism is linked with the individual's social and economic status, including employment and security; on the contrary, the present model is perceived as a loss of this status, marked by unemployment, poverty and insecurity.

*The predominant view in society is that even if the model of current economic development can guarantee individual successes, it cannot guarantee broader opportunities to a larger portion of society. Bulgaria suffers from the lack of a collective project.*

<b>Self-assessment of social status in the following years:</b>		
	<b>1989</b>	<b>2003</b>
Below average (step 1 to 4)	10%	57%
Average (5)	19%	20%
Above average (step 6 to 10)	57%	18%
No answer	14%	5%

<b>Reconstruction of the social trajectory depending on the self-assessment of one's place in society in 1989 and 2003</b>	
Drop	66%
Unchanged	15%
Rise	19%

*Total consensuses and functional pessimism of the imagined majorities*

Neither the status nor the media interpretation of the issue raised can encompass the entire range of causes and sources of pessimism at a time of stable economic growth. Even the individuals who sense an improvement in their living standards and expect the environment to improve are not inclined to formulate a positive vision of the country's development. Many of our contemporaries have a consumerist or optimistic investor behaviour: they set themselves aims, make plans, save money, take out loans, buy homes, used cars, mobile phones, cookers, washing machines, fridges, microwave ovens, computers, television sets, etc, and at the same time publicly reproduce pessimistic assessments of the present and the future.

Mediana surveys confirm one of the main conclusions of the report on "The State of Society in 2002": it is not just sharp social stratification we are witnessing, but the socialist-era vertical networks are being replaced by horizontal networks, in which communication exists only among social equals. The majority of poor people in Bulgaria do not know a single rich person, and they see anyone with an income exceeding 1,000 leva as rich. The emergence of horizontal networks answers the question why those who lost from the change cannot see the positive changes in social life. But why are reform beneficiaries "blind" to change, too?

Social optimism cannot be reduced to, and deduced from, personal status characteristics alone. There are also more general collective prerequisites, of which the individual may not be aware, yet they determine his overall outlook and behaviour. This is so because individual optimism is unable to overcome the general negative vision of the country's condition and governance. Moreover, it is not directly linked with a rise in confidence in the institutions or with a positive attitude to the policies pursued. Insofar as it exists, social optimism is a product of self-actuated economic mechanisms,

which expand the individual's options. In this sense, the survey strikingly shows that the social differentiation registered does not lead to different views on the problems facing society or their causes.

*...When you ask them to describe the man in the street, no great nuances are registered; everybody says: "I'm an average person, those who scavenge through garbage are badly off, and since I cope with life, I'm an average Bulgarian." I talked with a young mother in the park, who said many people scavenged in litterbins for food. I told her I had not seen anyone doing this, she looked around to see someone of that description and though she didn't, she didn't believe me...(Pleven)*

There is practically a consensus in Bulgarian society on the sense of an economic slowdown and the idea of all-pervading self-reproducing poverty. 86% of respondents in our survey single out poverty as Bulgaria's worst problem, and 84% express the even more extreme view that "many people in Bulgaria have to scavenge for food in litterbins". These are the two highest levels of unanimity registered in the

entire survey, without any statistical correlation between their supporters and their social, educational and income status. The total sense of poverty is less characteristic of poor societies than of impoverished societies.

Another point of consensus is the inability of the political forces and the state bodies to cope with this slowdown, as well as with the main problems facing the country in general. Between 65% and 78% have no confidence whatsoever in parliament, the government, the court and the political parties. These percentages have stayed almost the same in recent years. The exceptions are the president, the banking system and the media (above all television). Here again, there is no considerable difference in the assessments by the individual social groups. There are certain differences in their views on the causes of their inadequacy: mostly "personal" in the lower status groups and "linked with the functioning and control mechanisms" in the higher status groups. The result is the same, however: an all-pervading social conviction that the state bodies and the political forces as they are now cannot generate economic progress and justice in social relations.

A comparison with the past, on the one hand, and with the present lifestyle of other countries, on the other hand, finds a paradoxical expression: a conviction that one cannot succeed in Bulgaria on the strength of one's personal qualities. 80% of respondents say that one cannot prosper in Bulgaria without "connections". This, even if it does not render utterly meaningless, strongly erodes the meaning of all personal effort, economic activity, professionalism and personal decency. The lower an individual's confidence in his ability to direct and control his own life through personal efforts, the stronger his pessimism. This is one of the most powerful correlations observed in the survey.

All theses analysed above are characterised by the following: First, they are shared by the absolute majority of people, irrespective of their specific

social and economic situation, i.e. these are generally valid stereotypes, which play the role of a mass makeshift explanation of the social world. Second, they are shared with a very high degree of unanimity, irrespective of the specific practical experience of the individual social groups. Third, they lend sufficient stability to the social world they describe, which further strengthens their validity. They make the thesis of existence in poverty publicly legitimate (that is why it does not really matter that the economic indicators have moved up a few notches when Bulgaria still has the lowest GDP, is the poorest European country, meets with the worst reception, etc). The cause for this situation of the country is identified as a weakness and inadequacy of the institutions and politicians, the result being social injustice, which de-legitimises the very idea of success. This is going round in circles: the impossibility to achieve success by fair means makes poverty self-evident and self-understandable, and the two put together can breed nothing but... pessimism.

### *The imaginary majorities*

We have come across an extremely interesting phenomenon in an attempt to determine the levels and the causes of the discrepancy between growth and optimism. 42% of respondents say they manage to cope with all difficulties and problems, but a mere 17% say this is true of people around them. 23% of Bulgarians aged 18 or over believe their life is going from bad to worse (their plight is deteriorating), but 43% are convinced that this is happening to a growing number of people. Thus from a personal perspective, the distinction between optimism and pessimism is drawn not only along the line of objective socio-demographic indicators, but also of the subjective perception of the relation between one's own and the others' prosperity.

*From "who stole the money" through "there's no money" to "people have no money".*

*New notes come up in discussions of the general affairs of villages, small towns and neighbourhoods in recent years. They do next to nothing as usual but the explanations are different now. During my tour in November and December I kept hearing "there's nothing we can do because people have no money". Some want parents to raise money to paint the school, others want the neighbours to repair their street, still others suggest that the village should open a bakery turning out cheaper bread – and all these plans run into a general lack of money. Some years ago this would have triggered off talk about the money stolen from the state, and now they say people have no money.*

The logical question is: if 44% of people are convinced that they cope with life, there should be a majority of people who cope, while the general impression is quite the opposite – a mere 17% of people manage to cope. This apparently obvious paradox could be explained relatively most precisely using the concept of "imagined majority", i.e. forming an imaginary idea of the opinion, position, behaviour and values of the majority of people. This very perception then begins to leave a mark on the individual's outlook.

Pessimistic talk turns into a socially prestigious position, being a way for those who benefited from the changes

to reintegrate into a society which considers itself a loser as a result of those changes. This self-induced logic of public consciousness is supported by other survey indicators as well.

This, for instance, people aged between 45 and 50 are convinced that the situation in the country, the region or their population center is deteriorating. Pessimism is most pronounced about “the country”, and the views that have the widest currency are most easily reproduced about it. People are most critical of the institutions they know least.

Also, total consensus and imagined majorities become the main suppresser of individual optimism because it does not translate into a positive expectation for the development of the country as a whole. Those who have benefited from the changes have “waived” public representation of their experience.

### ***Collective memory as a generator of pessimism***

The theses of the status-related nature of pessimism and of the public sphere as a barrier to optimism are of limited theoretical and explanatory value. This is due to the fact that life in the present and expectations for the future presuppose past individual and collective experience, which to some extent sets the horizon of this life and these expectations.

*Anthropological field studies show that “abroad” is no longer an imaginary concept. The opening of the borders and the elimination of visas have led to an outflow of people abroad, which, according to respondents, is slowing down. Bulgarian groups abroad, the possibility to find a temporary or a permanent job abroad through them, either legally or illegally, is a standing source of individual optimism for people aged under 45 or 50. For some regions or population centres it is Greece, for others Spain, Italy, Germany, or the US. A recurrent topic is the existence of communities – population centres or neighbourhoods – of people from the same area, such as Pleven residents near Madrid, people from Doupnitsa near Milan, ethnic Turks and Bulgarian Muslims in Germany, etc.*

In this sense it can be assumed – and the survey proves – that the Bulgarians’ social pessimism is largely rooted in the “catch-up” model of modernisation characteristic of Bulgaria. An enduring sense of frustration arises from the considerable difference between economic conditions in Bulgaria and the developed countries. As a result, society focuses its attention on the country’s lagging behind “the developed countries” rather than on the relative improvement from earlier, more unfavourable economic periods. Contrasted with those countries, the Bulgarian nation views itself as a systematic loser, to which those countries are hostile on top. *In socio-psychological terms, the anthropological part of the survey established an interesting correlation: comparisons with 1989 are a source of pessimism for those who lost from the*

*changes, low-income and downwardly mobile groups, while comparisons with Europe are a source of pessimism for the reform beneficiaries, upwardly mobile social groups.*

Historically, periods of great upswings in the Bulgarian economy are rare and short as a rule; as a result, there is no collective memory of economic success and particularly of models of legitimate personal success, of a healthy economic environment where economic agents, not the state, play the leading role.

Bulgaria's predominant catch-up model of modernisation and the unchanging gap between economic conditions in Bulgaria and the developed countries create lasting prerequisites for the idea of the country's permanent backwardness to dominate public consciousness, which forms a solid basis for reproduction of social pessimism. This social atmosphere creates the ideal breeding ground for extreme fatalistic theses, which form a self-sufficient circle of apparentcies – explanations for the lack of economic progress and at the same time for the shortage of individual economic activity.

#### *Post-socialist pessimism*

Given the absence of a long enough period of economic and social upsurge in a free-market economy and under democratic political governance, the socialist model of “industrialised” upturn serves as a model of positive upward economic development. Apart from socialist industrialisation, there is no other model of upward development in the social memory of contemporary Bulgarian society.

*Bulgaria is in absolute and total collapse; only one man expects that the country will slowly recover; their town used to be a prosperous industrial centre, which is now in decline; coal mines, steel, mechanical engineering; the plant in Chervena Mogila soaked up many workers. Now only young people do not mention this at all. People aged over 40 believe the closure of industries in Pernik spelled the end of the region because there are no proper conditions to develop agriculture and because they cannot imagine any other means of survival for people who have worked all their life in the pit or the plants. Young people do not care that much: what matters more to them is that there are more cafes and shops now. (Pernik)*

Consciously, or more often unconsciously, the idea of what successful economic development would be like is set against the rigid (and idealised) parameters of socialism: plants, industry, jobs for all, peace and safety. Since current development does not live up to this vision (and no other vision is offered), it is assessed not only as negative but as prospect less as well.

The mass public concept of successful development centres round two top priorities, characteristic of the predominant vision of socialist industrialisation:

- Industrial development and plant construction (61%);
- Attracting investment (62%).

It is true that the percentage of respondents setting a priority on

*On the whole, Vidin is considered a town in decline, which does not stand much chance of quick recovery. Respondents see the restart of the chemical plant as a way to revive the town. Before its closure, the plant had a workforce of 4,000 to 5,000; now when it is privately owned, it has some 500 workers. Almost every Vidin resident is personally linked with the chemical plant because either he or she or at least one family member worked there. Some respondents, who run a private business, are involved in politics or have an administrative job, do not believe that the plant will ever work as it did before. They realise it is uncompetitive and there is no reason why it should operate at the same capacity as before. In Vidin, the chemical plant is a topic which crops up every time people talk about the town's rise and fall. Only one respondent said the plant was to blame for the region's poor condition: "We used to have a chemical plant here, which was no good, it made no profit at all. They used to send buses round the villages to take young women to work at the plant, they would give them a flat after a couple of years' work, and now they need people to cultivate the land, but there is no one there. People saw it was better to live in the town. Villages were denuded of people, and the plant in the town was closed and plundered." (Vidin)*

“plants and industry” and on investment is practically the same, but in many cases the latter is thought of

as investment in major industrial enterprises. Services, tourism, high technology, education and science are ranked lower (25% to 49% of respondents).

To understand to what extent and how this socialist industrial model of progress is instrumental in generating social pessimism, it is essential to analyse the social groups expressing it. As has already been said, although the social groups differ in their assessments, the difference again is not statistically significant. We will present the distribution of the top three ranked priorities by some major social characteristics:

How can development, progress and prosperity be achieved in the country?			
	By attracting investment	Industry and plants	Services and tourism
Sofia	84%	40%	51%
Regional capital	70%	71%	61%
Small town	53%	64%	41%
Village	51%	58%	37%
18-30	67%	51%	51%
31-40	70%	60%	55%

41-60	64%	<b>63%</b>	51%
Over 61	49%	<b>69%</b>	39%
Student	68%	<b>51%</b>	52%
Decision maker, public sector	78%	<b>53%</b>	64%
Decision maker, private sector	72%	<b>52%</b>	54%
Non-decision maker, public sector	64%	<b>59%</b>	53%
Non-decision maker, private sector	74%	<b>63%</b>	56%
Unemployed	57%	<b>61%</b>	43%
Pensioner	47%	<b>69%</b>	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>49%</b>

The table shows clearly that industry and investment are vying for the top position in almost all social groups. Even in Sofia, whose population has the relatively most modern mindset and has outgrown to the largest extent the imposed socialist stereotype of economic development, the percentage of respondents who opt for it is not below 40%. It is no less significant that this view is shared by 51% of the youngest respondents and by 52-53% of people in senior positions. Given that some of those who opted for “investment” probably see it in the form of new factory chimney stacks, it is clear that the socialist stereotype of progress still is extremely viable and hugely influential in society.

*GORUBSO, the company which used to be the backbone of the town until 1990, is operating at minimum capacity. There were dramatic workforce cuts, to be followed by more job losses, wages are too low and are paid several months in arrears. No money is allocated for work safety. Workers cannot feel safe because the materials they need are not provided. It is dangerous for miners to go down the mine. No one guarantees their safety. The equipment has been outdated for many years but no investment has been made to replace it and make working in the ore mines safer. No money is invested in the opening up of new ore mines, and some, which can still be used, are being closed. Mines whose resources have not been exhausted are closed down to save electricity. Only two ore mines are operating now. An informant said GORUBSO shed 100 jobs every month and intended to wind up by the year's end, though a large proportion of the town's population works there. Some say the town survives largely thanks to pensioners: most young people are unemployed and pensioners draw above-average pensions. (Madan)*

The differences between the social groups are symptomatic of the direction of future changes. However, the fact that 12 years after the start of transition the socialist model still is a yardstick of economic development shows that no other effective model of economic development has caught on.

The basic attitude in Bulgaria is that it has neither a successful model of economic development nor effective institutions. That is why living standards are low and people cannot succeed by honest means; the only effective model which holds sway of social memory is that of



socialism (linked with industrialisation, as well as with benefits such as free health care, job security, a peaceful life, safety, etc), which is rejected by the entire ideology and practice of transition. The fact that today's economic growth was achieved in the conditions of de-industrialisation makes it seem illegitimate, phoney, to society.

### *The sociological map of pessimism*

The sources of negative expectations for the future amid stable economic growth outlined above, namely low status, the media environment, the nature of democracy, the imagined majorities, the characteristics of collective memory, including socialist-era examples which are unrealistic in principle, lead us to look back at the main groups and their characteristics. So far in the survey we have found and distinguished among three main and one intermediate group, which can be presented in terms of the following four types:

*Absolute pessimists* – unfavourable expectations both for themselves and for the country as a whole; *untypical pessimists* – with a comparatively higher income and social status but with unfavourable expectations both for themselves and for the country as a whole; *optimists* – favourable expectations for themselves and for the country as a whole; *people optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country* – favourable expectations for themselves and unfavourable expectations for the country as a whole.

### *Pessimists*

The first group, about 54% of the population, is the most clearly manifest and distinct one, comprising the largest relative proportion of people.

In Bulgaria these are sizeable social communities: pensioners, people with low education and qualifications, who are out of work for longer or shorter periods of time. The following predominate: fears; low social activity; mistrust of the political institutions; downward social mobility is associated with and derived from Bulgaria's contemporary history (after 1989), and the general verdict is "wrong development". This group's pessimism results directly from its social experience over the last decade. This is the group of people who have not only lost from reform but have practically no resources to change their present situation. This is the losing majority of Bulgaria. They draw their incomes from jobs requiring low education and qualifications. They have been marginalized and pushed out of the modern world, with a much lower rate of access to computers, hence the Internet. This group is strongly influenced by apocalyptic media images as they mirror its own sense of helplessness; people in this group are most inclined to imagine that "outside pressure" is exerted on the country's development, as well as to catch at rescue models.

*Characteristics:*

Low income: 66% earn up to 100 leva a month

Mostly women

Low education: 86% secondary or lower; of them 43% elementary or lower

Elderly population: 33% of pensioners

A total of 56% do not work

Extremely pessimistic expectations for the country and for their own life

Extremely low citizens' activity

*Untypical pessimists*

There is a subgroup of pessimists, namely the group that does not have the objective characteristics placing them at the bottom of social stratification. These are people with higher education and incomes, who, however, fully share the pessimistic vision. Their distinctive characteristics: public sector employees (64% public sector, 31% private sector); they have done more planning and have achieved more than the rest; their vision does not stem from personal failure but from the reproduction of general clichés. They believe more than the rest that there are many people who scavenge for food in litterbins and that one can find a good job only if one has connections. One thing we cannot check here is whether there is social pessimism fostered by illegitimate channels of social mobility these people may have used. What is special about them is that they are not certain they will be able to continue using them, which is a source of personal and social pessimism.

Analysing this social group, it should be noted that it is not society alone that accumulates pessimism and negativism when it witnesses cases of illegitimate social mobility. The representatives of this type of mobility themselves are sources of pessimism, too, because they cannot be sure they can hold on to the resources for the reproduction of this mobility (given the frequent changes in government and the lack of strict rules for administrative and civil servants, such illegitimate mobility is altogether justified; this accounts for the fact that its main representatives are public sector employees).

*Optimists*

The third group comprises people who are optimistic about themselves and the country.

This is the only group, which sees the general course of the country's development in the last 12 years as correct, that is, as opening up a better chance for personal and social prosperity. In demographic terms, it mainly consists of younger, highly educated people with high incomes, holding senior positions in the public and the private sector, more proactive, but also showing strong mistrust of the institutions. They share the mass visions of poverty in the country and the need for industrialisation. At the same time, two thirds of people in this group expect a change for the better in the country's development, as well as in their own life, in the

coming years. It is important for them to be able to make decisions at the workplace, and most of them are. They feel they are in control of their life that is why their fears are much smaller. Criticism and scepticism about the political class is as high as in the other groups. These people dissociate their personal success from the political institutions and processes. Even people in this group, which expresses the greatest social optimism, do not think their social status is really higher than it was in 1989 or five years ago.

	Compared to 5 years ago	Compared to 1989
Drop	33%	48%
Unchanged	41%	21%
Rise	26%	31%

Among the optimists, just one in three claims he or she is upwardly socially mobile. This makes their attitudes very fragile. This model of perception (and probably of behaviour) largely fits into the hypothesis about non-sustainable social development. The short periods of economic growth, fear of new unfavourable development and comparisons with similar positions abroad account for this group's guarded optimism.

***People optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country***

This group (26%) consists of people who are optimistic about their own development, though not about the country's. The group fits into the model of optimistic behaviour but maintains a pessimistic discourse, above all postulating the truth of the experience of "the imagined majorities", not of its own experience. These people are convinced that they manage to cope with life and do stand a chance, but the majority of people in Bulgaria are badly off.

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, they differ substantially from the pessimists and very little from the optimists as far as their structure, basic values, attitudes and personal social experience go. They are more strongly influenced by media messages than the optimists.

The three groups differ strongly in their attitude to job security under socialism: it is important for 5% of *optimists*, 16% of *those optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country*, and 32% of *pessimists*.

*People who are optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country* share the statist, holistic and industrial model of state socialism, with all socio-demographic groups setting absolutely the same priority on investment, plants and factories (slight differences are observed in some of them, but the difference goes no further than "scoring level with investment"; no significant statistical deviations are observed). To them,

mass success is not the result of personal effort but of connections and patronage.

Personally, they have a rather strong proactive behaviour; loan taking is widespread among them; a comparison between plans and results shows a high ratio between planners and achievers, i.e. pessimism cannot be put down to the failure of personal strategies. The percentage of their implementation in the second and the third group is the same. Their personal experience is approximately the same. It is the others' experience that carries a different weight.

Given that the importance of concrete personal achievement is nullified by the general feeling of dissatisfaction, this is a group characterised by proactive behaviour and critical potential.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

The search for answers to the questions “Why doesn’t growth give rise to optimism?” and “For whom doesn’t growth give rise to optimism?” helps us distinguish among several groups of answers and determine the priority target groups of a future policy of expansion of the social base of the policy of economic growth and sustainable development, which was *the main aim of the survey*.

The survey tested different hypotheses, which complement one another and interact with one another to answer the question why economic growth does not generate social optimism. The status-income hypothesis has the highest explanatory value. It explains the expectations, views and behaviour of 54% of Bulgarians, which also reflects the socio-demographic character of Bulgarian society. In this social group, income growth is measured in terms of reduction of poverty, not of opportunities opening up for future development. This is the group of long-term losers, whose pessimism objectively reflects their socio-economic prospects.

The impossibility to turn upward social mobility into a positive vision for one’s own and the country’s development proved to be the clue to the puzzle of the Bulgarian transition. The survey registered a trend to stronger social mobility among more than 40% of respondents. Such positive trends, however, are hard to transform into individual optimism because the vast majority of respondents view their present situation as loss of status from 1989, and because this majority has no model of social progress other than that of socialist modernisation. Negative expectations become understandable through the prism of the other hypotheses: the conflict nature of democratic society, media negativism and the imagined majorities through which we contemplate our own world.

Personal experience is not the prism through which reform beneficiaries think of the future of the country as a whole. That the winners consider themselves an exception is confirmed by their conviction that they have succeeded despite, not thanks to, the system.

The dramatic discrepancy between optimism about one’s own future and pessimism about the country is also explained with the specific experience of certain social groups such as migrant workers. This sociologically significant social group returns from its “work trips” to Europe better off, though not with a sense of positive social mobility. The anthropological part of the survey shows that, on the whole, this group does not transfer either values or know-how. Unlike “the peasant with the bicycle” of the socialist industrialisation era, who sees his migration from a village to a town as upward social mobility, “the city-dweller on the bus” of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century considers his work in Europe a loss of status – a feeling which is one of the reasons why even the recognition of one’s own prospects is not seen as giving grounds for social optimism.

<b>Optimism - pessimism</b>	<b>A household member has worked abroad</b>	<b>No household member has worked abroad</b>
Optimistic about themselves and the country	16%	16%
Optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country	33%	27%
Pessimistic about themselves and the country	51%	57%

Income and social status of people in households in which someone has worked abroad and households in which no one has worked abroad.

<b>Income per household member</b>	<b>A household member has worked abroad</b>	<b>No household member has worked abroad</b>
Under 50 levs	11%	23%
50-100 levs	36%	39%
100-150 levs	23%	19%
150-200 levs	20%	11%
200-300 levs	13%	5%
Over 300 levs	7%	3%
<b>Social status on a scale from 1 to 10</b>		
Low (1-4)	58%	55%
Medium (5)	23%	23%
High (6-10)	22%	21%

### *Challenges to reform policy*

The conclusions of our survey bear out the observation that economic growth does not automatically lead to positive expectations for the future. The findings, however, disprove the psychological explanations, as well as those based on national psychology, of the current situation. They also disprove the naïve psychological theory that the collapse of extremely unrealistic overexpectations for change in individual lifestyle is a source of

social pessimism. The individual world has been torn from the social world, though not necessarily due to a collapse of individual strategies.

On the contrary, the newly emerged social mobility is a prerequisite for a change in the way a considerable minority of people is beginning to perceive the world of transition, but the results of the change in one's prospects lag 3 to 5 years behind the change in an individual's income and vector of development. But while the individual's social optimism stems directly from the change in the environment, there is a need for political effort if this personal optimism is to translate into a positive expectation for the country's overall development. So far attempts to expand the social base of the growth policy have largely been planned and made in a way rather inadequate to the changed social situation. They address yesterday's issues and groups. They combine features of budget populism, addressing the groups' income alone, with attempts at a communication policy which must convince society that one government or another is successful.

The survey shows, however, that a policy of budget injections and positive thinking mantras does not bring about a change in optimism.

The challenge facing the Bulgarian transition is not how to neutralise losers, but how to mobilise the beneficiaries of change. There is a majority of upwardly socially mobile people in the active population.

People optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country are the most important target group from the point of view of expanding the social base of sustainable growth policy. This group fits into the model of optimistic economic behaviour but maintains pessimistic discourse, mostly postulating the truth of the experience of "imagined majorities" rather than of its own social experience. These people do not trust their own experience, they do not believe their eyes. They are convinced that they cope with life and do stand a chance, but the majority of Bulgarians are badly off. This is the target group of the policy seeking to consolidate support for reform. The strategy regarding this group should be designed to give it the largest possible political representation. This group is looking for recognition, not help.

The policy to the majority of people, who have lost from reform not just subjectively but objectively as well, is the second major challenge. The survey data show that educational policy is strategically most important with a view to creating a just society in Bulgaria. Within a year, education has doubled its influence as a factor in social stratification. The provision of quality education to underprivileged groups is the only significant criterion for the progress of Bulgarian society.

What we are witnessing is a double failure. Economic policy has engendered growth, but reform beneficiaries lack political representation. The underprivileged strata have no access to quality education and Bulgaria faces the risk of the emergence of a large underclass.

In Albert Hirschman's terms, the losers have no exit option and the winners have no voice option.