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## CEORG AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC OPINION

Central European Opinion Research Group (CEORG) promotes comparative public opinion surveys in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. It also facilitates the contacts between those interested in public opinion and market research in Central-East Europe and CEORG member organisations, namely the Institute for Public Opinion Research (IVVM) in Prague, the Social Research Center (TARKI) in Budapest, the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in Warsaw and the Praaning Meines Strategic Communication in Brussels.

The present publication presents comparative research notes on a wide spectrum of important political and economic issues, as seen by public opinion in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In addition to general public opinion surveys, CEORG member organisations regularly conduct market research and other commercial as well as academic research. All surveys presented below were conducted by IVVM, TARKI and CBOS on representative random samples of their respective countries' populations. Lithuanian (VILMORUS) and Ukrainian (KIIS) agencies have joined some of CEORG surveys as well. Each sample consisted of about 1000 adult persons. All research notes reprinted below were previously published in the CBOS bulletin "Polish Public Opinion". Full length reports were published by IVVM, TARKI and CBOS in their national languages.

## WAS IT WORTHWHILE? - THE CZECHS, HUNGARIANS AND POLES ON THE CHANGES OF THE LAST DECADE

October 1999

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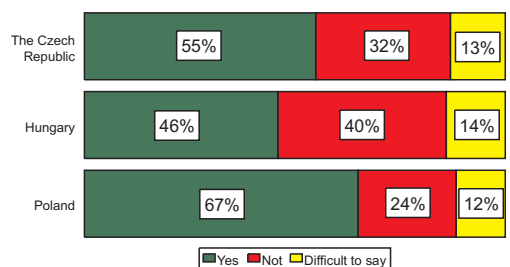
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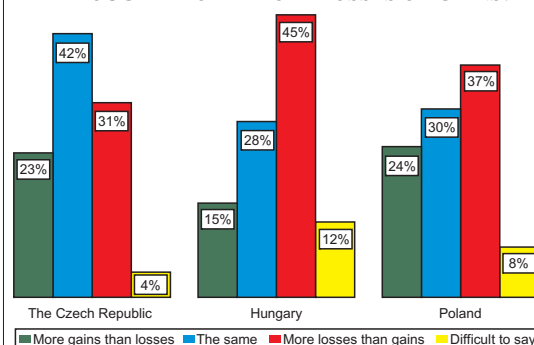
A short time ago, we have celebrated the tenth anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which was regarded as the symbolic beginning of geopolitical changes in our part of Europe. From such a historical perspective, how do the Czechs, Hungarians and Poles evaluate the sense of the change that started then?

The opinions of Poles analysed over a longer period show that respondents do not agree as to the balance of the changes that have taken place since 1989. Almost two-fifths of them believe that the changes generally brought the Polish people more losses than gains. However, a majority believe that gains

FROM A TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE, DO YOU THINK THAT IT WAS WORTHWHILE TO CHANGE THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC/ HUNGARY / POLAND



HAVE THE CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC/ HUNGARY/ POLAND SINCE 1989 BROUGHT PEOPLE MORE LOSSES OR GAINS?



and losses are at least equal. One-fifth believe that there are more gains than losses. As compared to the opinions of the citizens of two other "Visegrad Triangle" countries (the Czech Republic and Hungary), the opinions of Poles are not the worst. Hungarians evaluate the changes taking place in their country the least favourably than the Poles and the Czechs.

However, the vast majority of Poles (over two-thirds), asked to evaluate the changes from a historical perspective, say that it was worthwhile to start political and economic transformation ten years ago. Only a quarter of respondents question the sense of the efforts of the last decade.

Although the present opinions of Poles on this matter are a little less positive than four years ago, they are still exceptionally positive as compared with the opinions of the citizens of the other Visegrad Group countries.

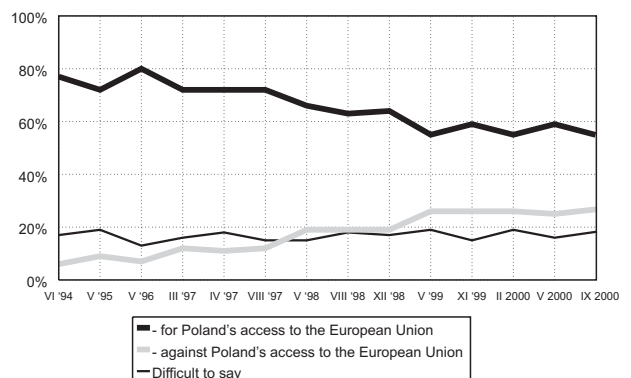
Among the three nations discussed here, the Hungarians seem to suffer the most as a result of the changes of the last decade. Their evaluation of the economic changes is much worse than the opinions of the residents of the other two countries, and a vast majority of Hungarians believe that their material conditions of living have deteriorated. They are also the most pessimistic about the situation on the job market. Their evaluations of the changes in their personal situation and personal life are also the most negative. They question their present prosperity as compared with that of ten years ago the most frequently; also, they observe that the situation has changed for the worse, as far as safety is concerned, more often than the residents of the other two countries. At the same time, they evaluate the previous economic system, i.e. socialism, more positively than the Poles and Czechs. Interestingly enough, in spite of their pessimism, the Hungarians appreciate the political changes the most. They notice that citizens have more opportunities to participate in public life (politics and local affairs) now than before 1989 relatively more frequently than respondents from other countries.

## ON THE WAY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

September 2000

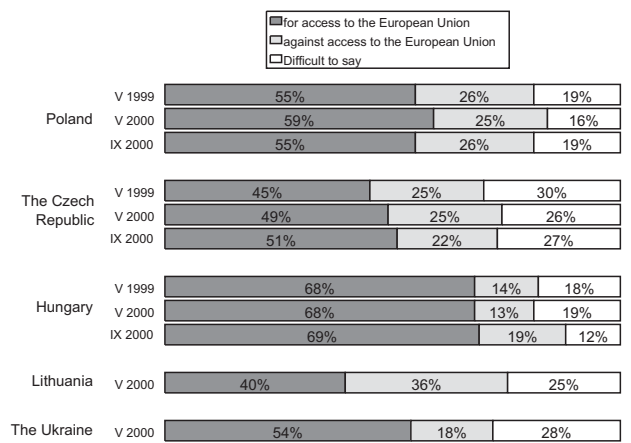
The decisive phase of the negotiations of the Czech, Hungarian and Polish membership in the European Union has just begun. However, the EU more and more frequently signals that their entry may be postponed not only due to any potential delays in the implementation of the European Union law or other shortcomings on their part, but also because the necessity to complete the reforms of EU institutions and because of growing fears of citizens of some EU member countries.

IF A REFERENDUM ON POLAND'S ACCESS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION WERE HELD NOW, WOULD YOU VOTE:



Public opinion in the countries compared reacts differently to this situation. The number of those who support Poland's integration with the European Union has oscillated during last year between 55% and 60%, though it previously was showing a declining trend.

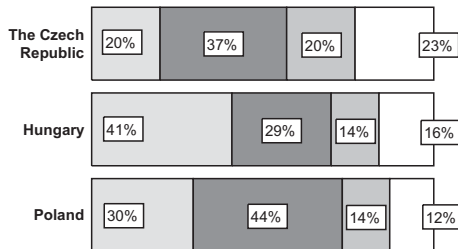
IF A REFERENDUM ON THE ACCESS OF YOUR COUNTRY TO THE EUROPEAN UNION WERE HELD NOW, WOULD YOU VOTE:



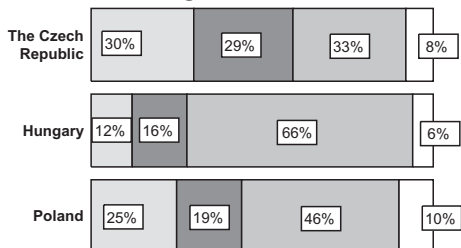
In Hungary, the support for integration with the European Union is clearly the strongest. As a year ago, over 2/3 of Hungarians declare their willingness to vote for integration in a referendum. As compared to other countries, the support for access to the European Union is higher in Hungary and Poland than in the Czech Republic. Support for integration is relatively high in the Ukraine, although this country does not officially attempt at

PLEASE COMPARE YOUR PRESENT SITUATION WITH THE SITUATION BEFORE 1989 AND SAY WHETHER:

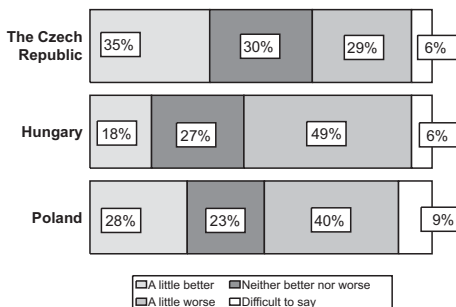
**The opportunities of having an impact on the political life in the country are now:**



**Material conditions of living are now:**

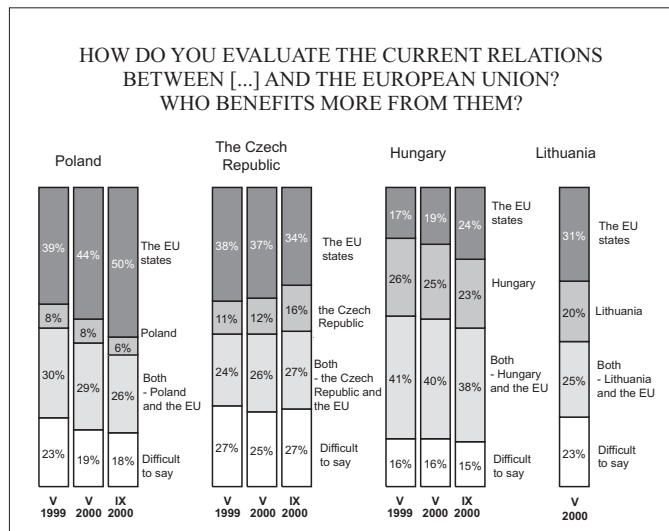


**Your life is now generally:**



membership yet. While the access of the Ukraine to the European Union seems still quite distant, over half of Ukrainian respondents would be willing to vote for it, should a referendum be held on this issue. The support of Ukrainians is, however, much lower than the support expressed by Poles before Poland has started membership negotiations. The lowest acceptance of integration can be noticed in Lithuania, where supporters outnumber opponents by a small percentage only.

The Hungarians not only declare the strongest support for integration, but also highly evaluate current relations between their country and the European Union. As in 1999, the largest percentage of Hungarians describe these relations as equally beneficial for their country and the Union. Almost one in four describes them as beneficial for Hungary in the first place. In contrast, Poles are relatively the most critical about the relations between their country and the EU: 50% of Polish respondents believe that they are beneficial first and foremost for the EU. The Czechs evaluate their relations with the Union better than the Poles, though not as well as Hungarians. However, this perception improves in the Czech Republic, while it deteriorates in Hungary and Poland.



The societies of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland are close to each other in their evaluations of the distance between their countries and the EU membership. In each of these countries the largest percentage of respondents believe that they are more or less half-way to becoming a member of this organisation. The Lithuanians and Ukrainians evaluate the access of their countries to the European Union as a clearly distant prospect. Most of our Eastern neighbours think that their countries are still far from obtaining membership in that organisation. This feeling is especially strong in the Ukraine.

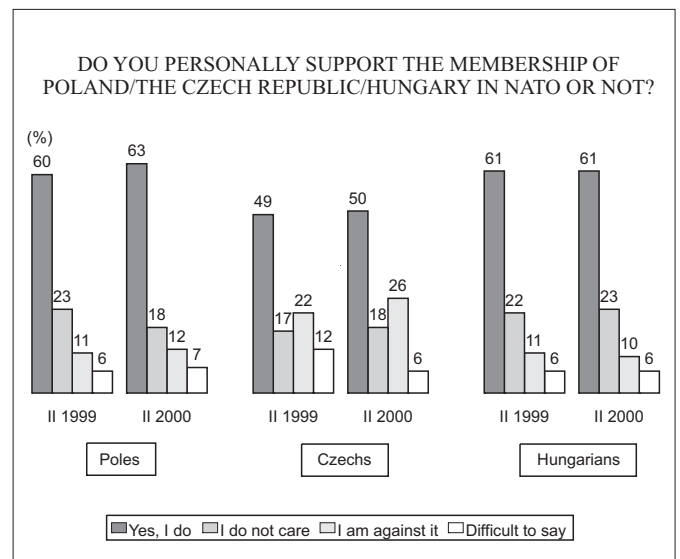
## THE ATTITUDES TO NATO MEMBERSHIP

February 2000

Since the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO, the predominantly positive attitude of their

societies to this organisation has basically remained unchanged. As with a year ago, the support for NATO membership is the lowest in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, the belief that NATO membership strengthens the position of a country on the international scene and secures peace and safety for the country is significantly weaker in the Czech Republic than in Poland and Hungary. As compared to the others, the Czechs are particularly afraid that their membership in NATO will increase the possibility that their country may become involved in an armed conflict.

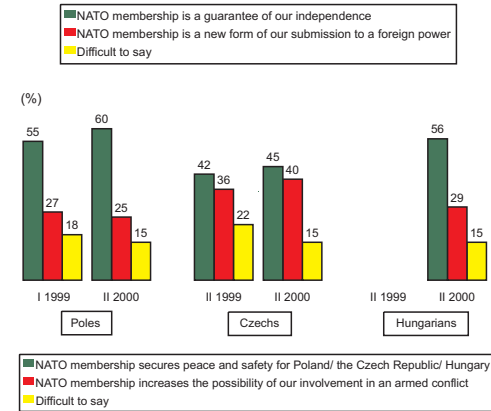
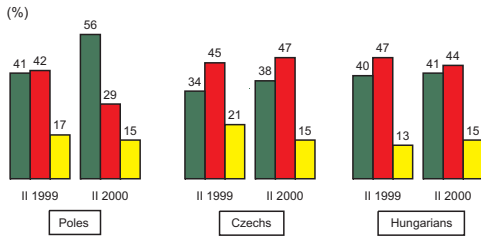
During the last year we have noted a visible change of the opinion of Poles concerning political aspects of NATO membership. A year ago the Poles' opinion on consequences of joining NATO was divided and the percentage of respondents who believed that NATO membership was a guarantee for independence was equal to the percentage of those who regarded it as a new form of submission to a foreign power. Now most respondents share the former view. A similar change of opinion, although on a much smaller scale, may be noticed in Hungary, while in the Czech Republic the evaluations are even more polarised now than before. The evolution of opinion in Poland and Hungary seems to be connected first and foremost to the perception of the goals of Russian politics. A definite majority of Poles (60%) and a large proportion of Hungarians (44%) believe that Russia will try to rebuild its sphere of influence in our part of Europe in the near future.



Most respondents in Poland (55%), the Czech Republic (59%) and Hungary (54%) share the opinion that foreign NATO troops should not be stationed in their countries. The Hungarians would accept the presence of the allied troops on their territory the most frequently (40%).

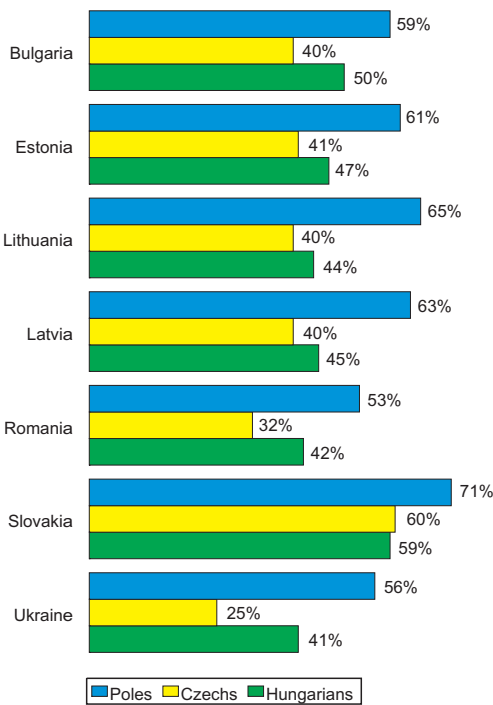
The Poles are the strongest supporters of further NATO extension to the East. Over half of respondents support the admission of other Central and Eastern European countries that emerged after the collapse of the former socialist bloc. The possible admission of Slovakia and Lithuania enjoys the widest support among Poles.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEW ON THE MEMBERSHIP OF POLAND/ THE CZECH REPUBLIC/ HUNGARY IN NATO?



Hungarians are less enthusiastic than Poles about the prospect of further extension of NATO, but the supporters of its extension outnumber the opponents in that country as well. The Czechs are the least in favour of the admission of other countries to NATO. Only the admission of Slovakia is accepted by most of them.

IN YOUR OPINION, WOULD IT BE GOOD IF THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES JOINED NATO? (Percentages of positive answers)



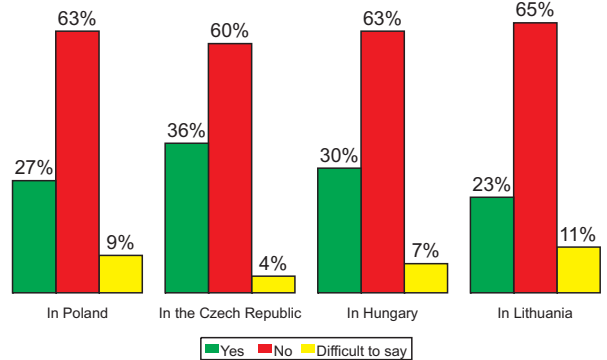
An additional question was asked in Poland, whether it would be good if two currently neutral countries, namely Austria and Finland, join NATO. The support for possible Finnish membership (69%) is much stronger than for the Austrian one (51%).

## OUR DEMOCRACIES

April 2000

The change of the political system in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Lithuania took place roughly at the same time. The way of these Central European countries to democracy was similar, although due to their different political tradition, as well as a different starting point (Lithuania was not an independent state until 1991), we cannot say that it was the same.

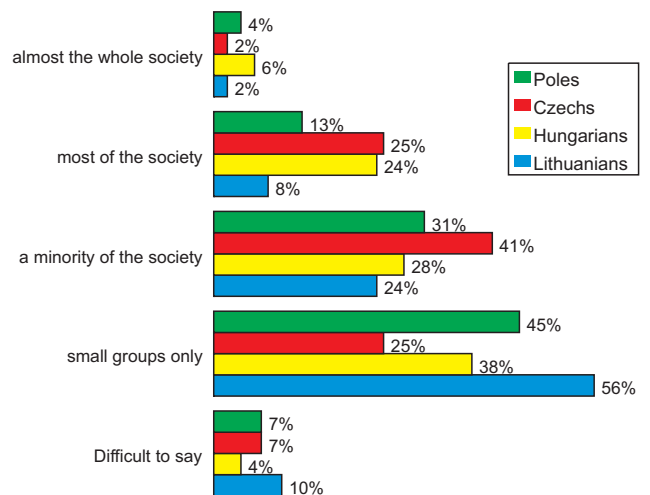
ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRACY?



After ten years of democracy, dissatisfaction with the functioning of this system prevails among the citizens of all four countries. One can say that in each of these countries expectations associated with the change of the system were higher than the chances for their fulfilment.

The Czechs are relatively the most satisfied with their democracy. The current functioning of the democratic system gained the least acceptance in Lithuania.

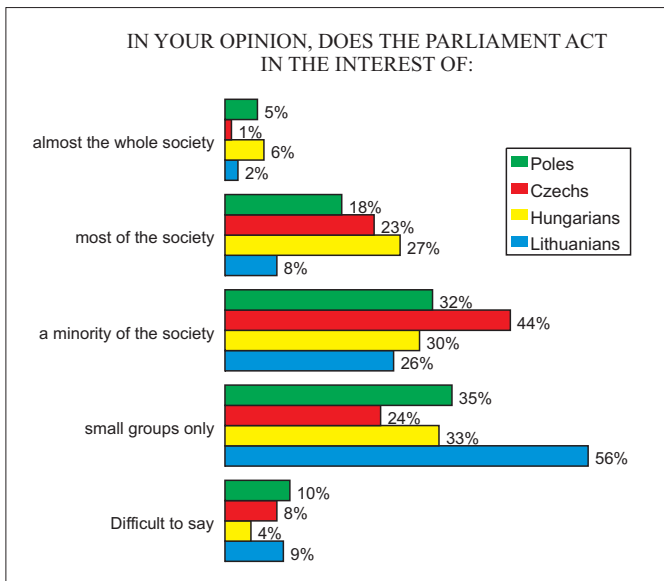
IN YOUR OPINION, DOES THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT ACT IN THE INTEREST OF:



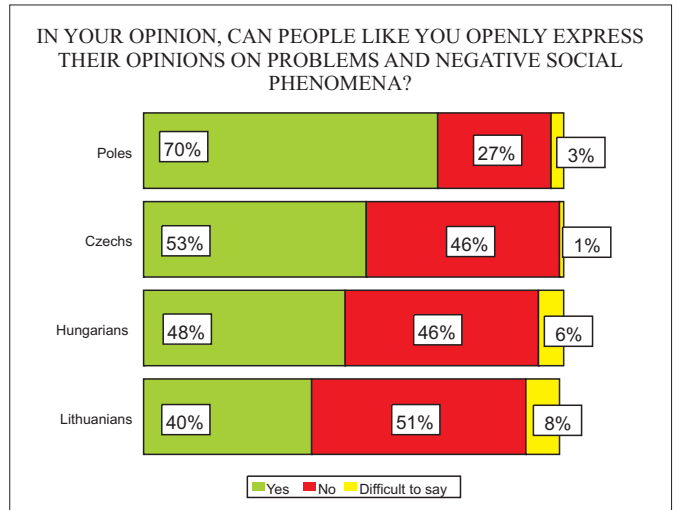
The governments of the countries discussed here are not evaluated positively, either. None of the cabinets was regarded by the public opinion as acting in the interest of most citizens. The feeling that the interests of ordinary citizens are not represented by the state administration is the strongest in Lithuania and Poland. Over half of the Lithuanians believe that the government of Andrius Kubilius acts in the interest of some social groups only. 45% of Poles think the same about Jerzy Buzek's government. The governments of Victor Orban in Hungary and Milos Zeman in the Czech Republic are evaluated relatively better.

The legislatures are evaluated similarly to the governments. The representativeness of the parliament is evaluated relatively the highest in Hungary.

Local authorities are identified as institutions much closer to the citizens. 51% of the Czechs and 52% of Hungarians believe that the local authorities act in the interest of most or almost all residents of the country. Almost two-fifths of Poles (39%) and one-third of Lithuanians (32%) share this opinion. Of the four countries compared here, Lithuanians have the worst opinion on their local authorities.



Dissatisfaction with democracy and a feeling that the citizens' interests are poorly represented both by the executive and legislative authorities are associated with a low level of perceived influence of citizens on the affairs of the state. In all countries discussed here most respondents do not believe that ordinary people can have influence on solving general problems that their countries face. The Hungarians (17%) and Poles (13%) feel that they are able to influence the way the problems of the society as a whole are solved a little more frequently than the Lithuanians and Czechs (7%). The influence of citizens on local affairs is evaluated a little higher. The feeling of having influence on local affairs is the strongest in Poland (39%). It is a little less common in Hungary (35%) and the Czech Republic (30%). The citizens' participation in power on the local level is evaluated the lowest in Lithuania (17%).



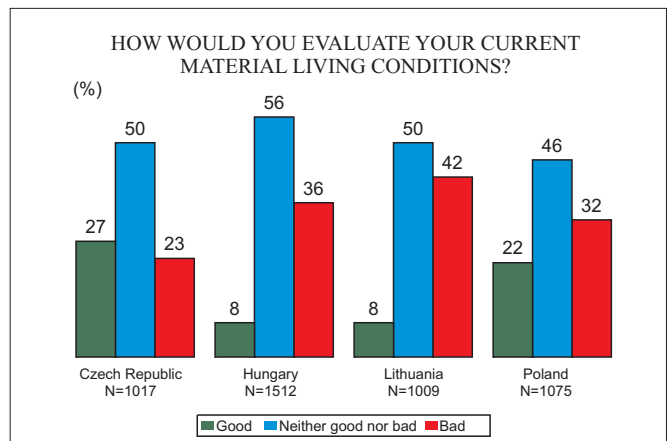
People cannot feel that they have influence on the way their country is ruled unless they are able to express their individual opinions on difficult problems and negative sides of social life. The citizens of Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Lithuania evaluate the situation in this respect differently.

The Poles and Hungarians evaluate their freedom of expression the highest. The residents of Hungary and Lithuania evaluate their possibilities in this respect less optimistically.

## WILL IT GET ANY BETTER? OPINIONS ON MATERIAL LIVING CONDITIONS

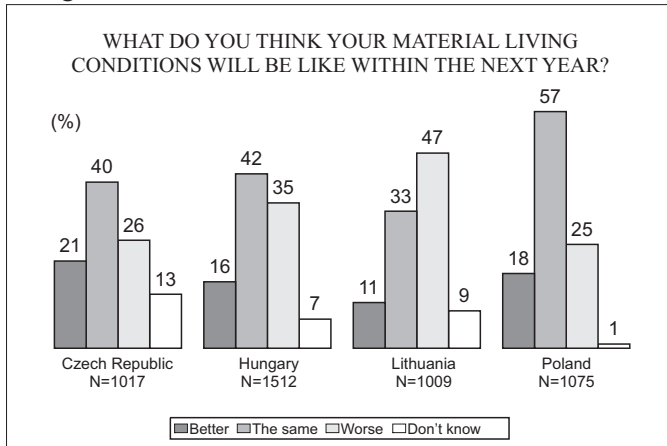
January 2000

In many ways Central Europe may be described as a burgeoning region: its population has well-developed consumer aspirations but is still unable to satisfy them fully. Dissatisfaction with current material living conditions prevails in each of the societies covered by this study.

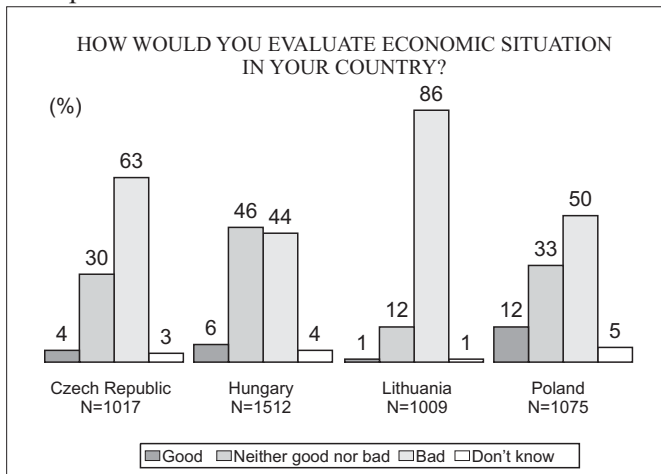


Those most satisfied with their material standards of living are the Czechs. As with elsewhere, the majority of respondents rate their own material situation as average, i.e. neither good nor bad. Unlike the remaining societies, however, the Czechs are slightly more often satisfied than dissatisfied with their material situation. In terms of satisfaction with their standards of

living, the Poles come second. The Hungarians, on the other hand, are much less content with their current situation: not only do they rate their current material situation more negatively than the Poles, and particularly the Czechs, but they are also very seldom satisfied with the standards of living they have achieved so far. An equally small proportion of Lithuanian respondents declare satisfaction with current material living conditions. They are most often of the four nations dissatisfied with their living conditions.

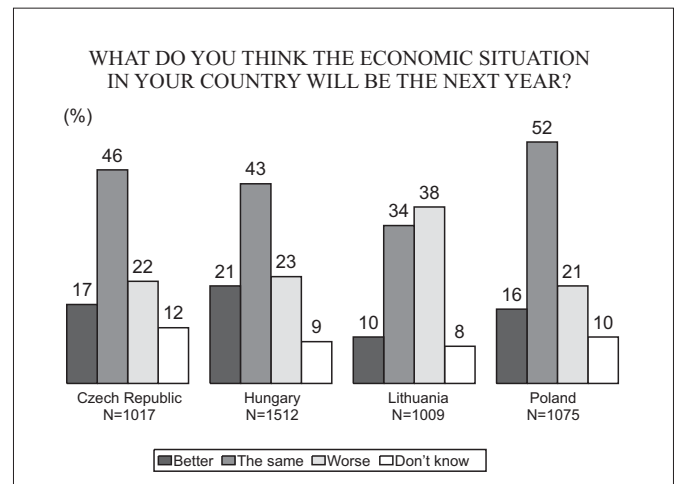


In all four countries respondents tend to rate the chances of improving their material living conditions within the coming year pessimistically rather than optimistically. The Czechs are both most optimistic and most satisfied with their current material situation. But even among them more respondents expect their living conditions to deteriorate rather than improve, whereas the majority expect no changes at all. Lithuanians are clearly more pessimistic than three others nations.



Ratings of the development of the economic situation in general are not good either. Regardless of the country, only a negligible proportion of respondents expressed their positive evaluation of economy. The proportion of positive evaluations was largest in Poland and smallest in Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

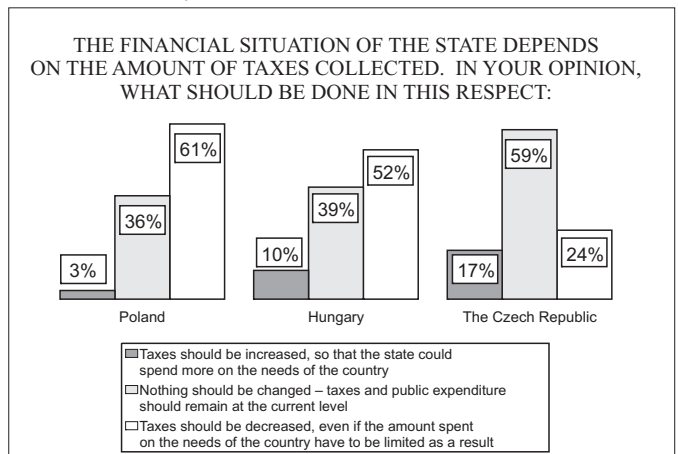
Lithuanians are the most pessimistic of the four nations about the future of their economy. Remaining three countries do not differ very much in this respect, Hungarians being a bit more optimistic than Poles and Czechs.



## THE POLES, CZECHS AND HUNGARIANS ON TAXES

September 1999

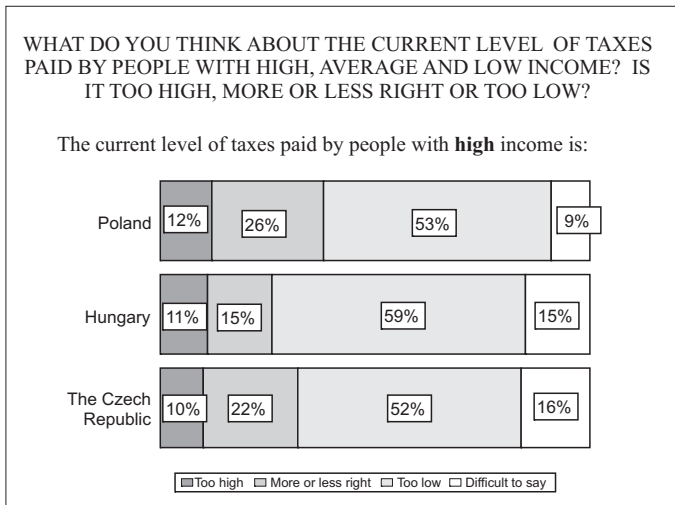
Among residents of the three countries, Poles are the most convinced that the taxes in their country are too high. Most of them believe that taxes should be decreased, even if public expenditure had to be limited as a result. Hungarians opt for lowering taxes rather than maintaining their current level, too. On the contrary, in the Czech Republic most respondents accept the current tax level, and those who would like taxes to be decreased are in a minority.



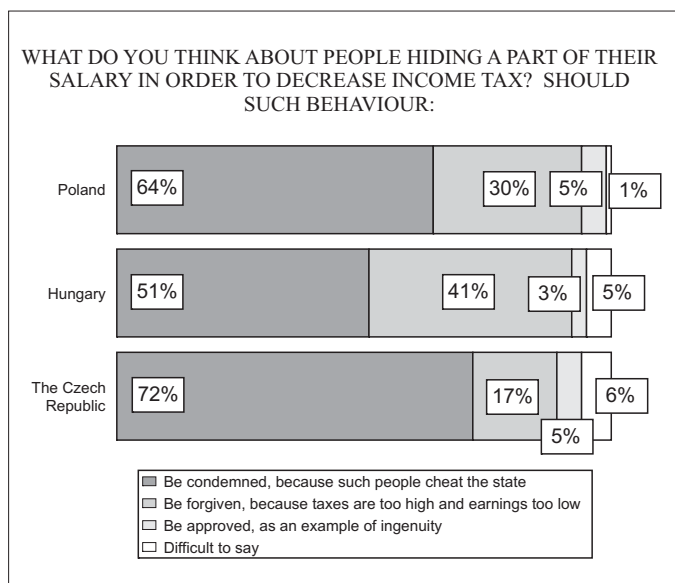
In all three countries, respondents believe that their tax systems tolerate too large differences between the incomes of individual citizens. Those who earn the most do not pay enough tax, while those with the lowest incomes pay too much. Obviously, a low level of tolerance to differences in income may be associated with rather strong egalitarian tendencies in this respect, which are characteristic of most societies that have experience of living in a socialist economy.

In all three countries, the respondents' views are the most consistent as far as taxes paid by people with low incomes are concerned. The vast majority believe that they are too high. The Poles are most convinced. As many as 91% of them believe that people with low incomes pay

too much tax. Hungarians have a similar opinion on taxes paid by the poorest residents of their country (80%). The Czech are less convinced - 63% share this view.



The opinion on taxes paid by the richest people is a little more divided, although in all three countries over half of the respondents believe that they are too low. The Hungarians are more convinced about it (59%) than the Poles (53%) and the Czechs (52%). The opinion of Poles in this respect is the most divided - one quarter of respondents believe that the level of taxes paid by the richest Poles is just right, and one in eight think that it is even too high.

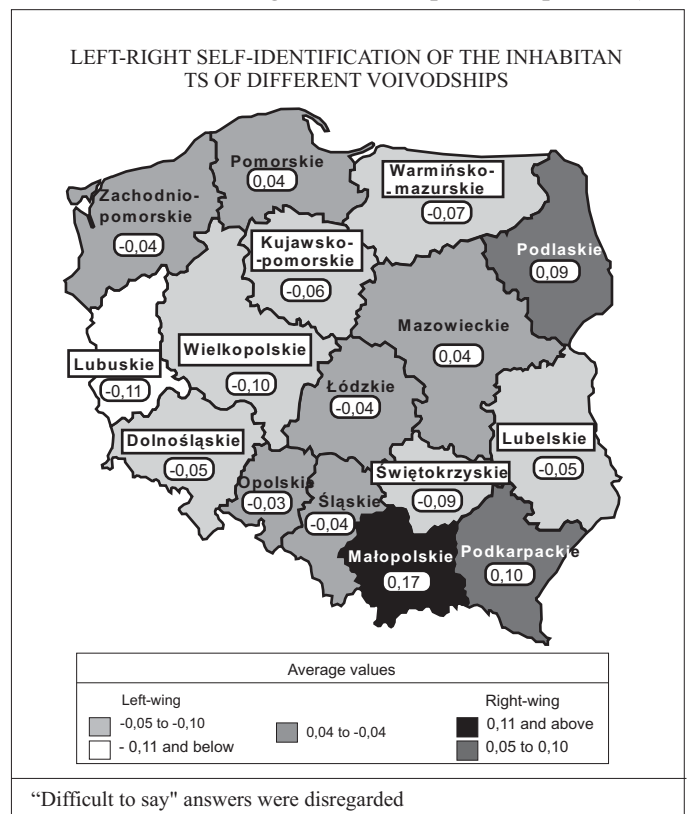


Taxpayers behave in a similar way everywhere. They try to reduce the amount of tax paid as much as possible, not always using legal methods. The simplest method of tax evasion is hiding part of one's income. In all countries that took part in our survey, most respondents regard such behaviour as blameworthy and treat it as cheating the state. The Czechs disapprove of such behaviour the most. In contrast, Hungarians seem the most tolerant to such acts, as two fifths of them expressed the opinion that such behaviour should be forgiven, because taxes are generally too high.

## POLITICAL VIEWS OF THE RESIDENTS OF DIFFERENT REGIONS OF POLAND

January 1999

Clearly defined differences between the political preferences of the inhabitants of different regions, reflected in their voting behaviour and support for different parties and their representatives, have been visible in Poland since the beginning of democratic changes. These differences are to a very significant extent confirmed by the declared right- or left-wing political self-identification. It should be noted, however, that the terms "left-wing" and "right-wing" are associated in Poland with their traditional meanings to a limited extent only. (Various leftist economic attitudes can be often found on the right side of the political spectrum).

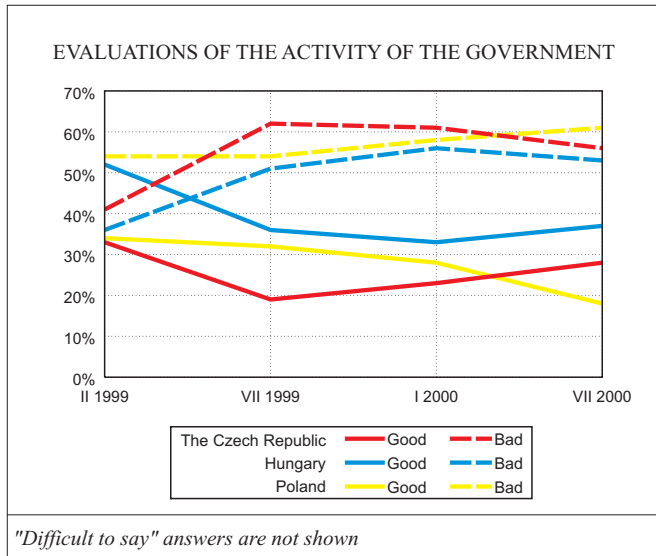


## EVALUATIONS OF ECONOMIC SITUATION AND GOVERNMENTS

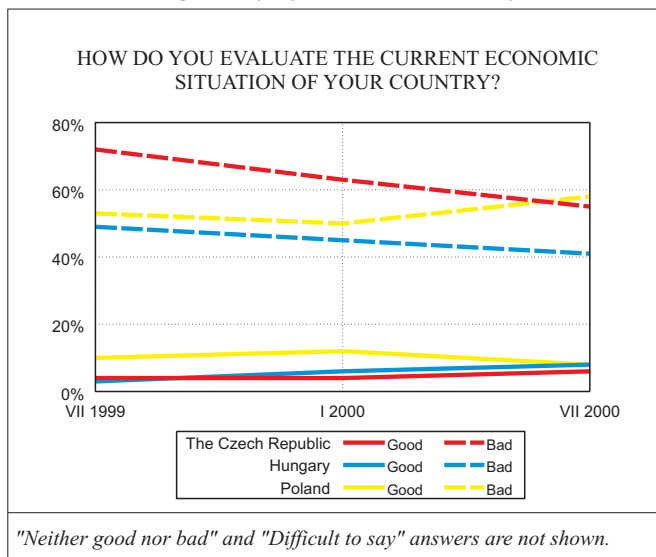
July 2000

The three societies of the Visegrad Group express critical opinions on those who rule their countries. The Hungarian government is evaluated the highest, although even in that country over half of respondents expressed negative opinions about its functioning. The cabinets in the Czech Republic and, especially, in Poland are evaluated even worse. The governments are criticised irrespective of the political option they represent. The present government

of the Czech Republic has been formed by the social democratic party, while Poland and Hungary are ruled by coalitions of parties that identify themselves with the right. Some differences can be noticed in the dynamics of the evaluations of the governments. The ratings of the left-wing government of Milos Zeman in the Czech Republic have recently improved, while in Poland we can speak of a growing crisis in the social perception of Jerzy Buzek's government over the last year.



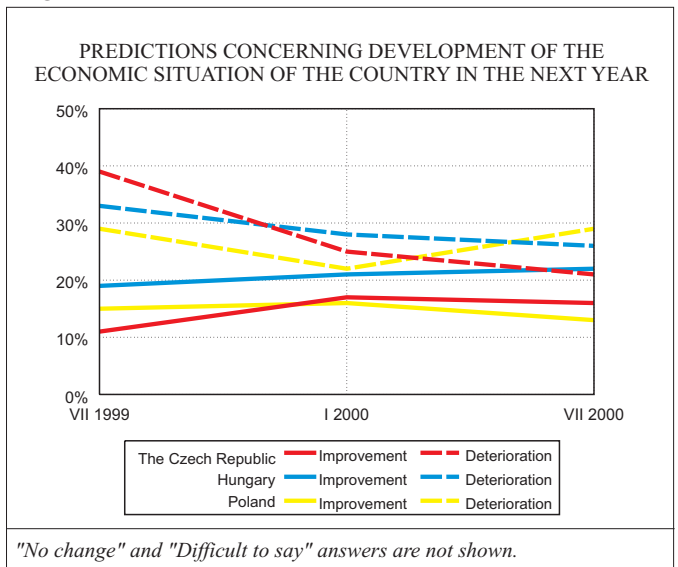
Not only the governments are criticised in the three countries, but also the opposition. The right-wing opposition in the Czech Republic is criticised the most, but also the left-wing opposition in Hungary and Poland is evaluated negatively by most of the society.



Asked to evaluate living conditions of their household, the Czechs (52%), Hungarians (53%) and Poles (49%) most frequently described them as average neither good nor bad. However, in Hungary and Poland, other respondents expressed negative opinions much

more often than positive ones (38% : 9% in Hungary and 32% : 19% in Poland, respectively). Only in the Czech Republic there is a balance between negative and positive opinions. Projections concerning changes in the standard of living are also rather pessimistic. Hungarians and Poles are the most pessimistic in this respect.

Although only a small percentage of Polish, Czech and Hungarian respondents evaluate the economic situation of their country as good, the opinions on the condition of the national economy differ rather considerably from country to country. In Poland and the Czech Republic negative evaluations prevail - they significantly outnumber both positive and ambivalent opinions. On the other hand, in Hungary the prevailing opinion is that the economic situation of the country is average neither good nor bad. In the Czech Republic and Hungary a systematic improvement of economic moods can be observed. The evaluations of the present economic situation and the forecasts for its future development improve. At the same time, the views on the economic prospects for the nearest future remain in Poland as negative as in 1999.



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