

Trust and Well-Being: Bulgarian in a Comparative Perspective¹

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Trust and Well-Being: Bulgarian Case in a Comparative Perspective. This study is an analysis on representative empirical data from two field surveys in Bulgaria (2006 and 2009) within the methodological framework of the European Social Survey programme in comparison with other EU countries. Data and analysis show clear the reasons of Bulgarians to feel themselves “at the bottom” in a lot of criteria in respect of their self-estimations of well-being and quality of life, of satisfaction of life and work of main state institutions. One of the basic reasons is the fact that for its people Bulgaria is “a low-trusted society” – in social and political meaning. There are a lot of conclusions on empirical data confirming the analysis.

Key words: Well-being, Trust, Quality of life, Bulgaria in EU

Dôvera a blahobyt: Bulharsko v komparatívnej perspektíve. Štúdia predstavuje analýzu reprezentatívnych empirických dát z dvoch terénnych prieskumov v Bulharsku (v roku 2006 a 2009) v zmysle metodologického rámca Európskeho program pre sociálny prieskum v porovnaní s inými krajinami EÚ. Zdroje dát a analýza jasne poukazujú na dôvody, prečo sa Bulhari identifikujú “na spodu” v rámci mnohých kritérií vzhľadom na problematiku blahobytu a kvality života, spokojnosťou so životom a prácou hlavných štátnych inštitúcií. Jedným z hlavných dôvodov je fakt, že obyvatelia Bulharska posudzujú svoju krajinu ako nedôveryhodnú spoločnosť – v spoločenskom aj politickom chápaní. Mnohé závery štúdie potvrdzujú tieto predpoklady.

Kľúčové slová: blahobyt, dôvera, kvalita života, Bulharsko v EÚ

It is not at all accidental that Bulgarian citizens have a *sustained and exceptionally low level* of assessment of their well-being and quality of life compared with all other EU member-states, as shown, among others, by the authoritative *European Social Survey*, conducted in Bulgaria in 2006 and 2009². According to data from various international surveys carried out since the early 1990s and until the present, Bulgarians have, overall, *the lowest level of satisfaction* of all EU countries, and the lowest satisfaction with the work of the main state institutions. Typical for us Bulgarians is pessimism, not optimism: fewest are the people in Bulgaria that would call themselves “satisfied”, “happy”, “successful”; the horizons of our future seem the most restricted, in our country people have the lowest degree of trust in institutions and in other people. The low, or, frankly speaking, bad, quality of life induces us to “close” ourselves to the outside, to mistrust not only the state institutions

¹ Note: This study has been published in its full variant only in Bulgarian in the book: Tilkidjiev, N. (editor and co-compiler) and L. Dimova (co-compiler). 2010. *Well-being and Trust: Bulgaria in Europe? (Comparative Analysis after ESS Rounds 2006/2009)*. Sofia: East-West Publishing House: 33-61. This text includes new different parts than the original version in Bulgarian.

² For more details on the large-scale European programme for social surveys *European Social Survey-ESS* cf. <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/> and (www.ess-bulgaria.org)

but also the people that surround us, suspecting they mean to cheat us. Bulgarian society has turned into a *low-trusted society* – as displeasing as this may be to our patriotic self-esteem.

1. Why are Bulgarians “at the bottom”?

The low assessment of their personal well-being and quality of life is not just one more “catastrophic” picture of the situation of people in our country, but has been entirely drawn in closely following the data from the above-mentioned empirical surveys, starting with those from the 1990s and including the latest ones. There are many facts confirming the assessment that, as regards the basic social indicators, Bulgaria is indeed “at the bottom” in the EU. This low position and extreme pessimism have long ceased to be news and have become a permanent characteristic of Bulgarians’ self-assessment regarding the development of their society in the last 20 years. Let us try to go “behind the data” and explain the deeper causes for this continuous Bulgarian dissatisfaction and discontent.

Various attempts have been previously made to explain this negative and pessimistic self-assessment and the “*lack of faith*” and *mistrust* among Bulgarians, their low self-confidence. Here it would be fitting to sum up some of the most often used lines of explanation and discussion, for this situation goes back far enough in time and there are certainly not one but many different reasons, grounds for it. The usual analytic explanatory framework of the “exceptional Bulgarian negativism and pessimism” includes emphases, or combination of emphases, on:

- The hard legacy of the communist past and the lack of radical de-communization;
- The role played by, and the reproduction of, the former secret services;
- The transformation of the nomenklatura from a political into an economic elite;
- The dependence on, Russia and in the relations with the West, USA, NATO, and the EU;
- The unsuccessful reforms in the course of post-communist changes;
- The lack of clear and long-sighted national priorities and of nation-responsible politicians;
- The disadvantageous attitudes in the national psychology and mentality;
- Subjective mistakes of the various governments and ties of state power with organized crime;
- The non-transparent and unfair privatization and the liquidation of agricultural production;
- Corruption at all levels of management and administration, criminalization and mafiotization;
- The inconsistent policy towards the basic ethnic minorities; etc.

It could hardly be disputed that, as regards the unsuccessful development of our country, including the overall low quality of life of Bulgarians and their mistrust in other people and institutions, most or even all of the listed factors have played a certain role. What we have is facts registered using various methodological tools, from various research perspectives, in various time spans during the last approximately twenty years. It is thus a question of agreement and of selected context which factors and causes will be focused on in the analysis as decisive and crucial for the failures that occurred during the post-communist transition in Bulgaria.

2. Quality of life - well-being - trust: the European doctrine

In order to delve deeper into the problem field of *trust*, to understand its nature and its empirical indicators, in a comparative European aspect at that, it proves especially fruitful to set a “coordinate system” in the context of the very broad concept of “quality of life”. There are three basic dimensions of the generic concept of quality of life: 1) *the objective living conditions*, including living standard, 2) *the subjective well-being*, including the *cognitive* component of self-assessment as to “degree of satisfaction” with life overall and its most important aspects and areas (healthcare, education, employment and economy, family and community life, leisure, etc.), the *emotional* component: the self-assessment of one’s achieved level of “happiness”, respectively of anxiety about life; 3) *the societal quality of life*, referring to the indicators of cohesion and sustainability, in following the discussions, especially, of Wolfgang Zapf, Heinz-Herbert Noll, Ruut Veenhoven, and their colleagues: Veenhoven 2000, 2003; Noll 2002.³ The key distinctions here are between *the objective* and *subjective* aspects of quality of life, between the *individual* level of a separate person and the *societal* level, that of society as a whole, as well as between the cognitive, emotional, and evaluation aspects.⁴

³ Veenhoven, R. 2003. *Measuring Human Well-Being*. New Hampshire : Houndmills; Noll, H.-H. 2002. Social indicators and quality of life research: background, achievements and current trends. In: Genov, N., ed. *Advances in Sociological knowledge over half a century*. Paris: ISSC. The start of interest in the problems and study of quality of life is not a European but an American initiative that began in the early 1960s with the participation of eminent social scientists. Since then the field has developed with its high and low points and has formed a widely branched operative research network throughout the world (see for instance: <http://www.isqols.org/>); but it was in the mid 1990s that the topic experienced a strong revival within the framework of the EU research units, such as the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, under the European Commission.

⁴ It is exceptionally important to achieve research consensus on the dimensions and comparisons of the state and development of European societies by studying the quality of life, in order to place them in *solid theoretical and methodological frameworks* in the broad “*integrative and holistic*” context (Fahey, T., B. Nolan, C. Whelan. 2003. *Monitoring Quality of Life in Europe*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities) and for making measurements

Well-being is a subjective feeling of satisfaction harbored by the individual, his/her self-perception of the degree to which his/her quality of life, well-being, and prosperity are good or very good, to which his/her personal and family living standard is good, to which relations with the people around him/her are good, the conditions, achievements, and prospects of his life and work are satisfactory. Although it is a feeling and self-definition at the individual level, it is directly and indirectly connected with the objective life conditions (the assessment of which is part of well-being itself) and with the individual's appraisal of the state of society, the general quality of life of society, the latter's stability, security, sustainability, cohesion, integratedness. More concretely, well-being is a subjective self-perception of the person as to how successful he/she has been in life, both in terms of interiorized objective social conditions of one's life and as a perceived balance between work and family life (partner, children, friends, relatives), and of satisfaction with what has been achieved, with the security and prospects for today and for tomorrow.⁵

Trust is also an important part, aspect of well-being, of the general feeling of satisfaction. The specifics of trust can be reduced to the following four aspects:

- *Connectedness-integratedness.* Trust is the *support structure of legitimacy of social relationships*, it plays the role of “social magnet”, “social glue”, connecting people to each other and to other communities and institutions. Without trust there is no *connection, cohesion, solidarity, and integratedness* in society. As Georg Simmel pointed out, trust is one of the most important synthesizing, cohesive forces in society.
- *Reliance-predictability.* Trust is *to have confidence in someone or something*; if confidence means accepting ideas and values, trust is “con-fiding”, i.e. imparting a subject-object direction to confidence – *in and toward* an individual, community, institution. Trust is to *rely* on someone (a person, community, institution), on his/her promises and agreements concluded – being *confident in the performance* of assumed commitments, that a given conduct and performance of certain social roles is *adequate, relevant, predictable*; all this *makes social relationships and cooperation possible and*

and comparisons more pragmatic and rational. Societies and social structures are compared *according to criteria of usefulness*, inasmuch as the situation today is *better than yesterday* (in terms of the *better-ness of well-being*.) Such a unity of criteria implies *universalizing the public openness of comparisons*, which were essentially impossible in previously “hermetic”, “closed” societies. The development of each member-state of the EU takes place literally before the eyes of all, including of the citizens of the states themselves; development is measured against the others, and homegrown, “provincial” criteria and assessments are becoming impossible. This guarantees the assurance of leaders and researchers and is especially promising for the adequate assessment of the Bulgarian case.

⁵ Kaase, M. and K. Newton. 2003. *Trust in Management*. Sofia: GAL-IKO, in Bulgarian.

predictable on the basis of shared, mutual interests and dependency (to paraphrase Max Weber).

- *Security-care*. Trust means being *sure* with regard to the other or others, not suspecting others might deceive you, beguile you, double-cross, take advantage of you, betray you. Trust is being *convinced* that a person, people, a community, institutions are interested in you, consider you and your problems positively, that they *take care of you*. Trust is to *recognize* a person, a community, an institution as being “good”, “just”, “correct”, “normal”, acting in accordance with your positive expectations or the expectations of your reference environment. It is being able to *share your concerns*, problems, ideas, and values, including the intimate details of your life. Without trust, social relationships are perceived as the result of accidental or imposed circumstances, or even as a result of a violation of order, of the accepted norms and standards.
- *Reliability-orderliness*. In fact, trust makes our lives *more reliable, more secure, more orderly, more coordinated*, it creates an *overall feeling that there exists and functions a certain recognized and sustainable social order*, one with explicit and tacit rules, norms, dependencies, where everyone has a place and role.

In the next text I use the understanding on “trust”⁶ proposed by Jan Delhey and Kenneth Newton, a discussion of their views would give greater methodological and empirical coherence and homogeneity, their standpoint and concepts are evidently part of the doctrine underlying the main questionnaire of the ESS (the so-called ‘core module’), whose data I am analyzing in this text.⁷ (See also: O’Hara 2004: 8-9, 53⁸).

3. Trust in others – “social” or interpersonal trust

With regard to the question about trust towards other people (i.e. “social trust” in interpersonal contacts), a question that in ESS is studied using three basic

⁶ Works by Adam Seligman (Seligman, A.B. 1997. *The Problem of Trust*. Princeton: Princeton University Press), Piotr Sztompka (Sztompka, P. 1999. *Trust. A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Kieron O’Hara (O’Hara 2004. *Trust. New Crisis in Society*. Sofia: Krugozor – in Bulgarian: 56-95) are specially devoted in detail to the history and definitions of the concept.

⁷ In the Internet site for the ESS programme, the following clarification by Kenneth Newton is provided: the “social and political trust” module contains three chapters (origins of social trust, explaining social trust, and political trust). Central questions in this module are: What is social trust? Why are some people more trusting than others? What is the main difference between social trust and political trust? Social and interpersonal trust are based on direct, first-hand experience in interacting with other people, while political trust is more generalized, based on indirect, distanced experience. (<http://essedunet.nsd.uib.no/cms/topics/2/>)

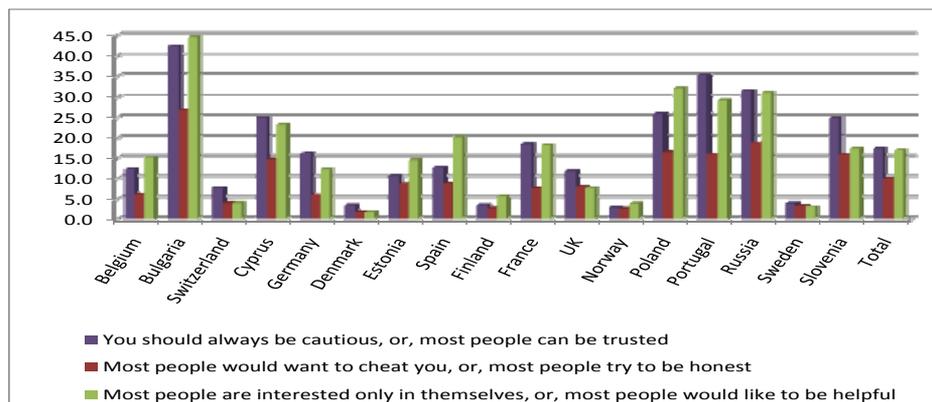
⁸ O’Hara 2004. *Trust. New Crisis in Society*. Sofia: Krugozor, in Bulgarian.

indicators, the answers show that we indeed have reasons to believe that *present-day Bulgarian society is a “low-trusted society”*.

Figure 1 - Social or interpersonal trust by countries – ESS-2009

(low levels of trust 00-02 from the scales 00-10:

„Most people cannot be trusted/...not to be honest/...not like to be helpful”)



This European survey clearly shows that Bulgarians are indisputably the Europeans with *the lowest level of social trust*, i.e. *the lowest interpersonal trust* (comparing the data for the three indicators); in our country the opinion is more predominant than in all others that one should always be cautious, suspicious, and have reservations about the true intentions of other people. Comparatively close to these attitudes are some other Eastern European countries, Russia and Poland, as well as the EU “Southerners”, Portugal and Cyprus. In the old EU member-states, Germany, France, UK, Belgium, Spain, people mostly have a balanced and rather positive attitude towards other persons. In the strongly positive range of the trust scale, where social trust is high, are people from the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland (Swiss respondents give similar answers); among these, the share of suspicious respondents (in positions 00, 01, and 02) is insignificant, while those with high trust in others (positions 08, 09, and 10) is very high: these respondents expect that others are mostly honest, positively concerned, and helpful. These findings once again categorically support the conclusions of Delhey, Newton and O’Hara, quoted above, about the five “*trust-based*” countries (here we lack data about Iceland), where the widespread feeling of stability “*transforms trust into an educated, reasonable decision*”, into a “*reasonable trust*”. There is an unquestionable correlation between trust and

level of quality of life, respectively well-being, of people and their respective societies⁹.

4. Trust in institutions – “political” trust

Trust in institutions (i.e. “*political trust*”) is, in fact, the degree to which people are *willing to accept* the institutions, procedures, norms, and values of their society’s system of government (Kaase and Newton 2003: 216)¹⁰.

While “social trust” towards others is harder to register inasmuch as it is at the same time a self-assessment of one’s own communication qualities, of the qualities of one’s relations with others, the assessment of trust in institutions, “political trust”, is displayed more directly and is more accessible to registering. In social trust respondents might possibly be embarrassed inasmuch as their own capacity for social communication is also being evaluated; in political trust what is being registered is an attitude to something objective, external to the respondent. That is why here we have reasons to rely on obtaining more expressive assessments at the extremes of the scales.

Table 1 - Trust in institutions in Bulgaria – ESS-2009/2006 (%)

	<i>Low trust (positions 00-02)</i>		<i>High trust (positions 08-10)</i>		<i>Don't know</i>	
	<i>2009</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2006</i>
B4-B10. <i>To what degree do you trust the following institutions?</i>						
Politicians (<i>Mean: 1.61-2009; 1.77-2006</i>)	69.9	68.7	1.7	3.4	4.1	4.6
Political parties (<i>Mean: 1.70-2009; 1.77-2006</i>)	68.2	67.8	1.8	2.2	4.6	5.2
Parliament (<i>Mean: 1.88-2009; 2.18-2006</i>)	66.4	61.1	3.6	4.8	3.4	4.3
Judicial system (<i>Mean: 2.23-2009; 2.45-2006</i>)	59	54.7	4.3	5.9	7.1	8.3
Police (<i>Mean: 3.21-2009; 3.82-2006</i>)	45.1	37.5	9.9	14.8	3.1	5.2
The European Parliament (<i>Mean: 4.56-2009; 4.63-2006</i>)	21.3	19.9	14.6	15.1	16.8	30.1
The United Nations Organization (<i>Mean: 4.73-2009; 4.84-2006</i>)	18.3	19.1	15.5	16.5	24.9	32.1

The remaining answers to 100.0 % on the horizontal level are in the intermediate positions (03-07).

* The statistical mean values have been calculated for the results of answers on the 11-point scales (from 00 to 10 inclusively).

⁹ It is not by accident that the Scandinavian countries are called the welfare states, the countries of prosperity and well-being.

¹⁰ Delhey, J. and K. Newton. 2002. „Who Trusts? The Origin of Social Trust in Seven Nations”. In: *FS III* 02-402.

In the third and fourth waves of ESS-2006/2009 trust in institutions is also measured on an 11-point scale; the respondents are asked about their trust in 5 national and 2 international institutions. The data for 2009 clearly show the *drastically low level of trust among a large portion of Bulgarians* in the nation's politicians, political parties, the parliament, the judicial system, and the police. We should specify that the fieldwork for the survey was conducted in the spring of 2009 and the answers are valid for the situation at that time. The basic government institutions do not meet with the trust of people. Let us compare these assessments with the previous wave, ESS-2006, in order to compare dynamics of responses over time. (Cf. Table 1)

Several conclusions can be drawn from the comparison between the data of the two ESS – waves, 2009 and 2006:

Firstly, trust is categorically low among a large portion of Bulgarians with respect to the official state institutions in the country; the lowest degree of trust goes to representative political institutions – politicians, political parties, and the parliament¹¹;

Secondly, this distrust is a continuous attitude among people, registered in two separate periods in time over the last three years (deviations of data from the two waves are below or very close to the statistical error limit)¹²;

Thirdly, external, international institutions, the European Parliament, and the UN, although not familiar to a large part of the population, *enjoy higher trust*, and the share of respondents with low trust in them is smaller (in the three years between ESS waves, the share of those who indicate they “don't know” has decreased; some respondents seem to feel they have grown more familiar with the activity of these international institutions). The difference

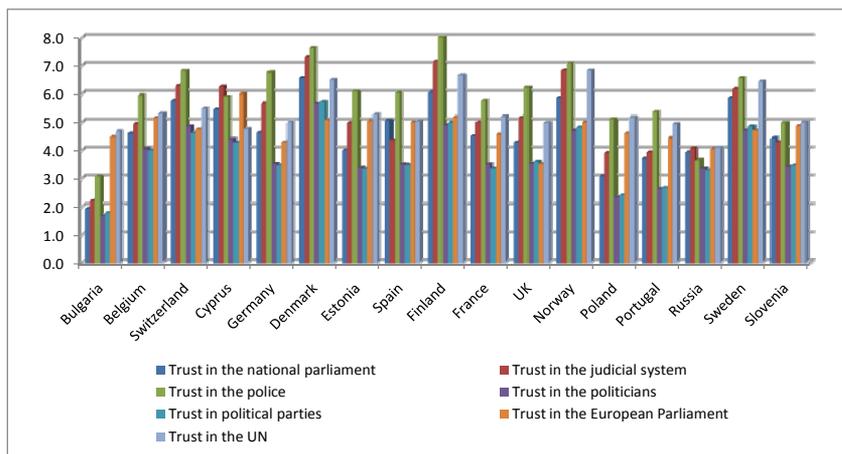
¹¹ The fact that respondents are less competent about the work of the judicial system may explain why assessments of it are more lenient.

¹² The conclusion about the low trust in official institutions as a *stable, long-lasting tendency* is confirmed by many analyses by other colleagues. Boryana Dimitrova, a head of a private sociological agency, for instance, sums up her surveys: “All three waves (2002, 2006, 2007) of the study establish the exceptionally low values of trust in political parties and institutions with high party representation: parliament, government, municipal councils. ...The causes of this permanent erosion of trust...can be look for...in the alienation of citizens from the pseudo-representative institutions at the time of the communist regime, ...[then passing through] the artificially generated weakness of institutions in the years of transition, which made room for the connection of representatives of shady business and organized crime with state officials, and down to the impossibility of the state to ensure equality before the law, fairness in the judicial system, and an acceptable quality of public services. As a result...*the rapid deterioration of trust in state institutions has taken on the features of a permanent social phenomenon*, and the deficit of trust generates...an even higher degree of alienation from the state...[In this situation, a positive fact is] the emergence of the „*discontented democrats*” – citizens who are displeased with the way politics are done in the country, but do not question the need for a liberal democratic order of the state.” (Dimitrova 2008. “About social attitudes: political, economic and status changes in 2002-2007”. In: *The State of Society*. Sofia: Open Society Institute: 15-16)

between the degrees of trust in Bulgaria as compared with international institutions makes the low trust in national institutions here stand out even more starkly. The relatively higher trust in the two international institutions also indicates that for quite a few Bulgarians the country's membership in the EU is a definite *guarantee for the "correct course" of the transition* and that we are moving in the right direction, that our following the well-established principles and rules applied in the developed countries is a condition for a successful transition to normality. The general conclusion is unambiguous: *people do not have trust in the activity of the official national institutions.*¹³

Let us assess this low degree of trust in institutions in a wider *European context*. How are Bulgarians situated in this respect against the backdrop of the attitudes of other Europeans towards their respective institutions: What are the comparative dimensions of "political trust"?

Figure 2 - Trust in institutions by countries (ESS-2009) – mean values



The compared data categorically affirm that *in Europe Bulgarians are in the lead with regard to "political distrust" in the five official national institutions*. In no other EU country is there *such a high percentage of respondents indicating low trust in the institutions of their country*. Comparable very low degrees of trust are 8 to 10 times smaller in percentage among the Finns, the Danes, the Norwegians, the Swedes, and the Swiss. The acute disappointment

¹³ Of course, all this is in the context of the fact that Bulgarians, as a rule, do not set politics at the top of their value priorities. According to EVS – 2008, the clearly top values are "the family" ("very important" for 85.1 %), followed by "work" (60.5), "friends" (38.3), "leisure time" (27.2), "religion" (17.6), while "politics" is rather far behind them (7.4).

in political representatives in Bulgaria is something *unique, exceptional*. This mistrust appears to be our country's "trademark" and "exceptionalism" against the European backdrop. At the other extreme, things stand quite differently: the particularly high degree of trust indicated by the Finns, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, and Swiss in their police and judicial systems, i.e. in the most important law-enforcing and judicial authorities of the state clearly *delineates* the higher "political trust" felt within these countries; the respondents there assess the work of these institutions as useful and effective. Along with this, their rather middling, balanced assessments of the European Parliament suggest that, being confident in their own force and stability as societies and in the successful work of their own institutions, they are not extreme enthusiasts as regards the EU. They look upon the EU as a necessity, but they also feel their participation in the EU implies some redistribution of their achieved prosperity to other, less developed member-states.

5. Trust and satisfaction

As pointed out by Jan Delhey and Kenneth Newton, *good governance is the essential causal and structural basis of trust*. Governance without grave corruption and that observes democratic norms creates the base structure whereby individuals can act with trust and expect that most others will do the same (Delhey and Newton 2004: 28)¹⁴. Trust depends on the degree of *satisfaction* the assessing person feels in respect to the activity of official state institutions and the positive result of the activity of those institutions for the individual, for people, and for society. Probably, it is precisely *this satisfaction that serves as a transmission*, whereby low or high levels of trust in institutions exert a direct or indirect influence on, respectively, low or high levels of "social", interpersonal trust, and hence on the overall, generalized trust amidst society and individuals.

This important explanatory framework is fully supported by the results of ESS waves for Bulgaria. It is confirmed by the obtained data about the low degree of satisfaction in the activity of the government, in the state of the economy, of healthcare and education, and of the democratic processes. The activities and results in this respect have a direct or indirect impact on the well-being and prosperity of people; this is what the confidence of people in a good quality of life today and tomorrow depends on, people's satisfaction with their present life as a whole, and their feeling about how happy they are.

¹⁴ Delhey, J. and K. Newton. 2004. „Social Trust: Global Pattern or Nordic Exceptionalism?“. In: *WZB Discussion Paper*, June 2004, Bestell-Nr./Order No.: SP I 2004. Sociologists have concluded that there are statistically significant correlations between "generalized social trust" and the confident action of political institutions as well as the satisfaction with how democracy works in society (Zmerli, S. and K. Newton. 2008. *Social Trust and Attitudes toward Democracy*. Public Opinion Quarterly 2008. 72(4).

Table 2 - Satisfaction with the work of the institutions and personal satisfaction in Bulgaria - ESS-2009/2006 (%)

	<i>Low trust (positions 00-02)</i>		<i>High trust (positions 08-10)</i>		<i>Don't know</i>	
	<i>2009</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2006</i>
B24-B29. <i>How satisfied are you with the following...?</i>						
How the government is doing its job (<i>Mean: 2.23-2009; 2.79-2006</i>)	58.9	46.8	2.5	2.4	5	7.6
The present state of the Bulgarian economy (<i>Mean: 2.31-2009; 2.60-2006</i>)	55	48.7	0.9	1.4	5.5	9.4
How democracy in our country is "working" (<i>Mean: 2.42-2009; 2.66-2006</i>)	51.9	46.4	2	2.2	8.1	9.0
The state of the healthcare system (<i>Mean: 3.14-2009; 2.56-2006</i>)	43.1	55.9	5.4	4	3	2.9
The state of the education system (<i>Mean: 3.82-2009; 3.53-2006</i>)	26.1	31.8	5.6	5.7	14.4	15.9
Your present life as a whole (<i>Mean: 4.31-2009; 4.66-2006</i>)	26.4	23.2	11.8	14.8	0.4	0.8
I feel happy (<i>Mean: 5.22-2009; 5.23-2006</i>)	16.9	15.7	21.8	18	1.2	4.1

The remaining answers to 100.0 % on the horizontal level are in the intermediate positions (03-07).

* The statistical mean values have been calculated for the results of answers on the 11-point scales (from 00 to 10 inclusively).

The data lead to the following conclusions.

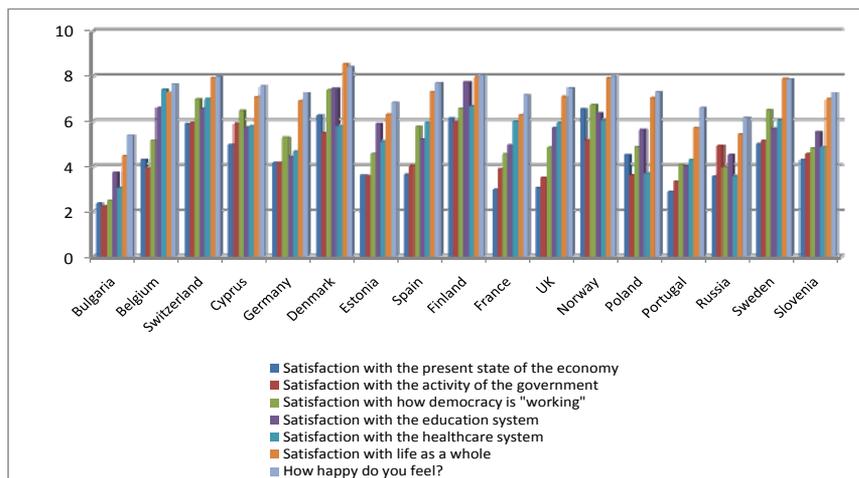
First, the majority of people in our country definitely and very clearly do not approve of the work of the government, the state of the economy, the course of democracy, and what has been achieved in the most important social spheres – healthcare and education. It is not strange then that, given this low degree of satisfaction, government leaders at that time (during the mandate of the triple coalition between Bulgarian Socialist Party, Movement of Freedom and Rights of Bulgarian Turks, and National Movement of the Simeon the Second, the previous monarch) *lost the trust* of the voters at the time of the parliamentary elections in July 2009. The data were gathered in fieldwork that took place 2-3 months before the elections.

Second, it is evident that the degree of satisfaction is *considerably lower in comparison* with that on the same issues three years previously, in 2006.

Third, the general result that *over one fourth of the people are not satisfied with their present lives as a whole* (the situation was similar in the wave three years previously) is indicative in a comparative aspect as well, as we shall see. Dissatisfaction is the logical consequence and summary result of the other, more partial dissatisfactions with the work of state institutions.¹⁵

¹⁵ We should also take into account the important trend, that “an enormous amount of surveys on quality of life indicate that general satisfaction with life, as well as satisfaction with its specific

Figure 3 - Satisfaction with the work of institutions and personal satisfaction by countries according to ESS-2009 data, mean values



Fourth, comparative data show the *stability of the processes*, which have accumulated in the previous three years, and the conviction that this is not a case of some deliberate or subjective interpretation¹⁶.

And how do things stand in a comparative *European* aspect, when data for the same questions in other European countries are set side by side? What is the degree of satisfaction with the work of the state and state organs in other EU

aspects, is much less dependent on objective and external factors than on internal and subjective ones. Once some level of health and security has been attained, people turn to personal and subjective standards when assessing their material and spiritual conditions. This is why the capacity of reference groups to draw the individual to them is important... It is well-known from previous surveys that there is a considerable difference between satisfaction with personal life on one hand and with public life on the other... people are more pessimistically minded about public than about personal issues”(Kaase, M. и K. Newton. 2003. *Trust in Management*. Sofia: GAL-IKO (in Bulgarian):196, 225).

¹⁶ Often the main Bulgarian daily newspapers publish the results of surveys by Eurostat and other international agencies, which shed ample light on the position of our country in the comparative aspect. For instance, on May 25, 2007 the official report was published of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, under the European Commission: there Bulgaria is at the bottom of the EU as regards the minimal monthly salary (82 euros). At the other, extreme among EU member-states is Luxembourg, with a minimal monthly salary of 1503 euros, which is 18 times as much (www.news.dir.bg). Similar data have been published in the daily *Trud* on August 28, 2009. These and other separate facts have an added effect for the formation of the realistic assessment of all Bulgarian citizens regarding the place of our country in the EU family.

member-states? What is the level of personal satisfaction and of the feeling of happiness?

Comments on the data:

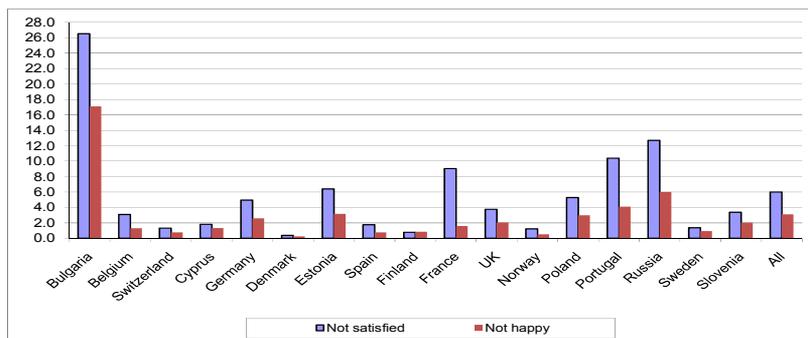
First, the low degree of satisfaction is a stable phenomenon for the mass state of mind of Bulgarian citizens. For all seven traits, respondents in Bulgaria indicate the lowest values compared with other countries. The old member-states of EU, the West European ones, including Slovenia, are twice as satisfied by these indicators, while the ones with the highest values, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, are three-and-a-half times as satisfied.

Second, it is not surprising that all the countries with highest values should be highly satisfied with the state of their educational systems, since, for them, education is not merely an officially declared priority, but an actually pursued *top priority*. For instance, education is the cause of the “Finnish miracle”, of the impetuous progress of Finnish society by many indicators of social-economic development in a comparative aspect with countries of the world, especially in the last approximately 20 years¹⁷ (in Bulgaria only 5.6 % are satisfied with the education system). Whereas half the Finns are highly satisfied with their healthcare system, *only 5.4 % of Bulgarians* feel that way about ours. While 2/3 of Danes assess the state of their economy very positively, *only 1 % of Bulgarians* give such an estimate to their own economy. The differences in survey results are simply overwhelming and speak for themselves.

Third, as a synthesized result of these data comes the general conclusion about the satisfaction with life as a whole in our country, respectively, the feeling of happiness. As we could have expected, *the Bulgarian* respondents are the ones for which *the lowest degree of satisfaction with their lives* is registered (over ¼, 26.4 %); among the Nordic and Scandinavian countries and the Swiss, only 1 % or less are so dissatisfied. In addition to the latter and other West Europeans, other nations indicating high satisfaction with life in general and the feeling of happiness are the Slovenians, the Cypriots, and even other East Europeans such as the Poles, Estonians and Russians. Among Bulgarians, the highly satisfied and happy ones are respectively only 11.8 and 21.8 %. The curves of “satisfaction” and “happiness”, as for other countries, are generally parallel realities of the same order (which is especially obvious in Figure 3 and Figure 4); of course, “happiness” reflects a mostly emotional, spontaneous evaluation, while “satisfaction” is a cognitive and more lasting assessment.

¹⁷ For details, see: Tilkidjiev, N. 2007. „Why they, why we not? Finnish miracle: a reading for researchers and politicians”. In: *Journal of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*. Sofia: Academic Publishing House, № 2, in Bulgarian.

Figure 4 - **Satisfaction and feeling of happiness (ESS-2009)**
(low levels 00-02 from the scale 00-10)



Dissatisfaction as a special Bulgarian “trademark” is very distinct on the figure for separate low values (Figure 4). Here the values for dissatisfied and unhappy Bulgarians stand out categorically against the European backdrop. Whereas for the Nordic countries – Danes, Finns, Norwegians, Swedes, and for the Swiss, and for the Mediterranean countries Spain and Cyprus, dissatisfaction and the feeling of unhappiness is an exception (under 2 and even under 1 percent), the Bulgarians dissatisfied with their lives in general are over ¼ of all surveyed - 26.4 %, and nearly 17 % indicate they are not happy.

The detailed analysis of the empirical data on the profile of “dissatisfied” and “unhappy” Bulgarians reveals a considerable heterogeneity in their social characteristics. Among them are residents of villages and of large cities; in general they have a lower level of education, most of them have not worked for pay in recent years, most of them are married, but there are some who have not never been married; a large portion of the dissatisfied self-assess themselves as poor or rather poor; most of them have little interest in politics. In brief, the “dissatisfied Bulgarian” does not have a distinctive social-professional profile, because he/she more or less belongs to different social and professional groups, being a widespread type throughout the nation.

The correlation between degree of satisfaction and the degree of “social” and “political” trust is very strong. The data categorically show that the people highly satisfied with life as a whole and with the work of institutions are also the people with a high degree of trust towards others around them and towards the official institutions. On the contrary, as in the case of a large part of Bulgarian citizens, the low degree of satisfaction underlies low trust. Recalling what has been said about trust, when there is low satisfaction, the cohesive role of trust is lost or becomes questioned; a person cannot rely on others or on the

official institutions, he/she does not feel that other people care; the sense of social order is lost, and one imagines the world around as chaotic. How, under such conditions, can one have high trust?!

6. The fears of Bulgarians as a factor of distrust

Another specific aspect should be added in our discussion, for without taking this into account, the explanation of the unique level of distrust among Bulgarians would be incomplete: the fears that serve as a basis for distrust.

The Bulgarian seems to be ridden with fears. Among other reasons, he/she is suspicious because many fears weigh upon him/her. This is a person fearful for his/her survival and livelihood, fearful of being short of the money necessary for leading a normal life, of being able to get by on his/her salary or pension, not to be a burden for his/her relatives and friends. Bulgarians are afraid they might find themselves without a permanent job, without regular income. That they might fall seriously ill, which would deplete their income if they had to pay expensive treatment or medicaments. They are afraid of the constantly rising household expenses – electricity, water, heating. In brief, these are fears for his/her own well-being and that of his/her family. In addition to this, Bulgarians feel insecure at home and outside, in the street, in public places: they are afraid of house robbery, of having stolen the little money they have saved up to cover their daily expenses and pay taxes; afraid of being the victims of house burglary, which would be a heavy blow to their material status. They are also afraid of being physically assaulted and robbed in the street. They are afraid of “other ethnic groups”, of Roma raiding their farms and winter preserves, of the aggressiveness of ethnic Turks in the administration and public services in the regions with mixed Turkish and Bulgarian population. They are even afraid of external threats, of terrorist acts that might befall Bulgaria...

These are not groundless claims, but facts learned from the empirical data gathered in ESS 2206 and 2009. *How is it possible, with all these many kinds of fears, for Bulgarians to live calmly and trustfully?* It is understandable then that such people will vote to be governed by politicians who are expected to show strictness, to provide order, discipline, observance of laws, justice...

Let us go on to the concrete data. By the middle of 2009, 69.7 % (in 2006 the percentage was 71.8 %) of respondents indicated they *were afraid* that their home might be robbed; 50.7 % in 2009 (47.1 % in 2006) admitted they felt *insecure* to walk in their neighbourhood at night; 69.1 % in 2009 (67.6 % in 2006) frankly declared they *were afraid* they might become victims of crimes jeopardizing their health and lives.

Evidently these are *lasting fears* among people, and the high values have remained almost unchanged over the 3 years. There are also fears related to external threats: in 2009 69 % (in 2006 – 63.2 %) believed that a terrorist attack

could occur in Europe in the next 12 months, and 58.5 % in 2009 (51.1 % in 2006) indicated this could happen in Bulgaria. Tension and anxiety have not only taken firm hold in the mass consciousness in recent years, but have even grown amidst this turbulent world.

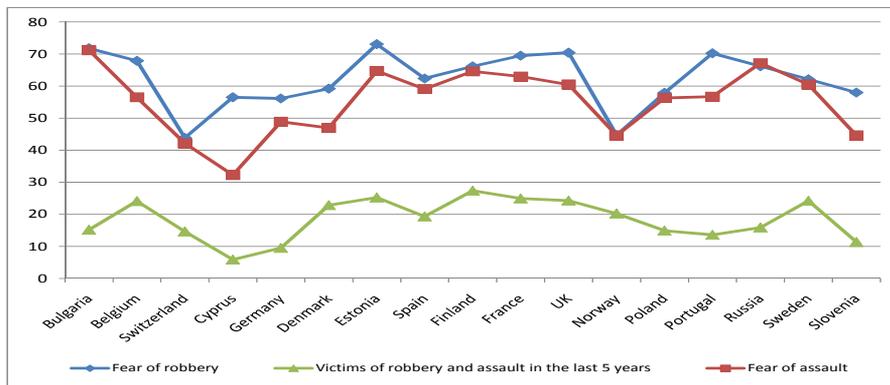
Fears are maintained and nourished also by a certain “*social-structural pessimism*” amongst Bulgarians, through their personal subjective representation about the state of things; this too has increased pessimism by the middle of 2009: according to 1/3 of respondents, about 50 or more percent of the people in our country *do not have enough money for basic necessities*; according to 22 % of the respondents, more than ¼ of the people in our country are *invalids* or are people with serious physical or mental disabilities, a situation that would give rise to dramatic problems; according to over 40 % of respondents, *the unemployed* in our country, looking for work, are over 25 % of the able-bodied population. For 77.2 % of respondents, the living standard of *pensioners* in Bulgaria is “exceptionally bad” (positions 00-02 on the 11-point scale); 79 % believe such is the standard of the *unemployed*; for 42.5 % the opportunities of *young people* to find work in our country are “exceptionally bad”; 32.1 % feel there is a probability they themselves might become unemployed in the following months and within a year; 59 % feel it is possible they may find themselves without money for the household’s basic needs within a year; 42 % believe they might soon be left without healthcare, etc. ...

There is no doubt that fears, anxieties, worries play quite an important role in the everyday lives of a large part of Bulgarians today and in their thoughts about tomorrow. Fears acquire a predominant role in mass consciousness and cannot be neglected in analyses of trust and well-being.

But there is one other thing. In comparing the data on fears and anxiety registered in different European countries in 2009, we find that there is an *exceptional disparity* between, on one hand, *the fear of robbery and assault* and, on the other hand, the actual distressing experience of *actually having been a victim of robbery and assault*. It is a telling fact that Bulgarian respondents have the greatest fears, but at the same time, *Bulgarians are not the ones who have most often been subjected to robbery or assault*. Compared with Bulgarians, in the past 5 years, according to comparative data from ESS-2009, victims of such crimes have far more often been the citizens of Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, UK, Norway, and Sweden. Despite this, *Bulgarians are much more afraid* that this might happen to them. What is the reason for so much greater fear? This disparity between fears and actually falling victim to deviant behaviour is easily seen on Figure 5 in the *distance* between the percentage of people with fears and the actual victims of robbery and assault: for Bulgarians this distance is greatest, amounting to about 55 %; a similarly great distance between fears and actual cases of violence occurs in

other East European countries, for instance among the people of Russia. The distance is least for respondents in Denmark and Norway – about 20 %. As we see in the figure, the fears of people are in all countries greater than the actual incidence of robbery and assault. This is evidently a general dependency amidst the generally insecure and risk-ridden life in Europe today.

Figure 5. **Fears of robbery and assault and actual victims in the last 5 years**



But this distance between fears and the realities is especially typical for Bulgarians today. This is not merely a result of preventive fear, by which we hope to ward off evil in expecting it. We may presume that the main cause for excessive fear in our country is in the *low trust in state institutions*, and in the weak or at least *unsatisfactory work of the basic national institutions* directly or indirectly related to observing public order and maintaining the security of people: the police, the judicial system (according to data from the middle of 2009). In Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, Germany, UK, Norway, Sweden, far more people have actually been victims of robbery and assault in the last 5 years compared with the numbers in Bulgaria, but the fear in those countries is much less, probably due to the more effective work – according to the assessment of citizens – of their law-enforcement and judicial systems, the police and courts of law. These organs, as we saw, enjoy *high trust on the part of citizens*, and for the most part people are satisfied with their activity, feel sufficiently safe and protected, and hence, are far less worried about their personal security, being confident in the stability of public order.

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