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The Disillusionment with the Cost of Transition

(Abstract)

Recent public opinion survey results show that: young people in Bulgaria know little about the pre-1989 period; half of the people consider the country's development after 1989 to have been unsuccessful. Despite reaching some major goals like restoring private ownership, being free to travel abroad, and accessing the EU, distrust of institutions is shown to be running high among the Bulgarian public. From among nine former Eastern Bloc countries where negative attitudes towards transition-related processes have been observed, the percentage of Bulgarians displeased with the economic situation in the country is one of the highest. According to national statistics, one in five Bulgarians lives on 60 percent of the national medium income, and one in ten Bulgarians grapples with utter poverty. Among the people paying the price for change have been industrial workers, retirees, and residents of peripheral areas of the country. With the vast numbers of people deprived of jobs and prospects for the future, hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians have chosen emigration as a way out of the predicament. Emigration and plummeting birth rates have led to demographic collapse. Researchers see Bulgarian post-1989 capitalism as characterized by poverty, incompetent and corrupt state administration, dependence on international institutions, and a weak civil society. One of the consequences of this state of affairs has been the negative changes in the sphere of morality. Moral norms do not seem to be of particular significance. Added to that is mass pessimism and a continuous trend of people feeling unhappy and displeased

with their lives. Seeking the reasons behind the difficulties of transition, observers point to passiveness, collectivism, and egalitarianism of people in post-communist societies. The process of transition has also been looked upon through the prism of memory and transitional justice. Adding to the internal peculiarities of the Bulgarian transition the effects of external influences such as economic and migration crises, it is not easy to formulate effective steps for dealing with the causes of disillusionment. One thing is clear, however. Success is not going to be reached unless a stop is put to the abuse of power and the rule of law is not ensured.