

## Working Conditions as Perceived by the Employed

A West-Central-East Europe View

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**Abstract:** The need for international comparisons of work conditions and the labour market has grown together with the pace of integration of the post-communist countries into the EU. This need is most probably met to some extent by a multi-focus international research programme entitled "Employment conditions, labour market insecurity and work motivation of the employed and unemployed". The project was prepared on the basis of British methodology and besides the Czech Republic also Great Britain, Slovakia, and Bulgaria took part in it. The idea behind the whole research was, according to the central theme of it, to point out the differences that exist in the particular countries in the given field. This paper deals firstly with people's reactions to the effects of market mechanisms: to problems with job-seeking and possible strategies to cope with the loss of one's job, which at the same time basically indicate the conditions of the labour market. The second main topic is a description of complex attitudes to work including an analysis of basic development tendencies. On the basis of the comparison of the situation in the particular countries the crucial common features as well as significant differences are described.

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### Introduction

The need for international comparisons has grown with each advancing stage of (actual or potential) integration of the post-communist countries into the EU. Sporadic international projects taking place in the 70s and 80s (for example, – Automation and industrial workers, 1976) have been quickly joined by others since the end of the 80s [e.g. as to social structure analysis cf. Peschar 1990, Matějů 1995, researches by ISSP]. Today, it would be difficult to find an area without at least some basic information of a comparative nature.

Yet, more detailed analyses are needed more than ever. The issues of the labour market and employment form one of the areas where this need is most acutely felt, mainly in the developed western countries. The decision-making process over whether to invest or not in the post-communist countries depends to a certain extent upon workforce assessments in relation to these countries, in other words their abilities to meet the economic effectiveness criteria of such investments. Berger states: "Specific components of Western bourgeois culture (especially those of activity, renewability, and self-control) are inevitable conditions for capitalistic development" [Berger 1993: 235]. Therefore, an important consideration in this is worker profile, focusing on profession, qualifications, values, motivation on the level of adaptability, assertiveness, and so forth.

Specific information on these issues, based on international comparisons has been provided by research programmes focusing on the effects of the transformation and pri-

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vatisation processes, both at the global level [Pollert, Hradecká 1994], and at the factory or enterprise level [e.g. Vláčil et al. 1996]. However, there is a lack of more systematic analyses of the social consequences of work and employment as well as of those relevant characteristics that are either common or different in the Czech Republic and in the Western countries. At present, the requirements for a more detailed study in the area of human resources are most probably met best by a multi-focus international research programme entitled "Employment conditions, labour market insecurity and work motivation of the employed and unemployed".<sup>1</sup> The project was prepared on the basis of British methodology [Gallie, White 1993] and besides the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Slovakia, and Bulgaria also took part. This contribution draws upon data from this study; the group of countries established *ad hoc* reflects, at least from the point of view of typology, the important West-Middle-East axis.

The different paths which the European regions have taken in their development so far have led to different economic and social standards as well as differences in the cultural and axiologic spheres [Berger 1993]. The further development of these regions is also obviously determined by these roots: while the Central-European countries may follow up their pre-communist, although not always entirely democratic, past, the Eastern European countries mostly lack such experience. Therefore to draw closer to the developed countries is for them not only an economic and political problem, they have also, to a great extent, to face up to this historical inheritance (perhaps first of all). Any international comparison has to count with these differences; otherwise there is a great risk of false conclusions. This aspect of comparative research programmes, especially of those concentrating on countries with unequal economic and political development levels, is pointed out by many authors [e.g. Smith, Meiksins 1995]. At the same time, it is also true that the word and the idea of 'transformation' has been heard (or had been heard up until some time ago) rather frequently, even in developed countries of Western Europe, and especially in Great Britain in the times of so-called Thatcherism. Thus the results of research devoted to the effects of these processes are valuable not only because of the gain in methodological experience but also due to their content [e.g. Barrell 1994; Drucker 1993; Rubery, Wilkinson 1994].

The analysis of conditions under which people enter the working process may concentrate on two main fields of interest: an objective one where current social and legal norms and the situation in the labour market are dealt with, and a subjective one where individual qualities and their functioning in the market are considered. For the purposes of the present analysis, institutional employment aspects and those of the labour market in the specific countries are omitted in spite of their importance in understanding all the relations [Solow 1990]. The focus will be on basic subjective phenomena: the presumption concerns the dynamics of mutual relationships between what one prefers according to one's individual needs and what one adapts to because of the pressure of external influences. Behavioural changes reflect both changes in one's expectations, and in the rate of submission or constraints. If value orientation changes express themselves more in the changes of preferences, then the changing market forces influence mainly the level of

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<sup>1)</sup> The project was carried out as a grant of the EU No. CIPA-CT93-0223 in the years 1994-1996, partly (survey of the unemployed population) as a grant of the Grant Agency of Czech Republic during 1995-1996. For description of the research (sampling, methodology) see the Appendix.

adaptability [Etzioni 1988: 253]. A quite wide specification of understanding the idea of 'perceiving working conditions' emerges from the described relations, this being a complex reflection of the above-mentioned objective phenomena (external pressure) and subjective qualities (value preferences) [Dubois 1994].

This paper will first concentrate on people's reactions to the effects of market mechanisms: Problems with job-seeking and possible strategies in the event of the loss of one's job basically describe *the situation in the labour market*. As soon as partial changes in attitudes are generalised for the whole society, they gain the substance of quasi-objective indications of the prevailing value system of that society. Consequently attention will be paid to complex *attitudes to work* and its basic descriptions including analysis of basic development tendencies.

### 1. Job-seeking strategies

The level of social and economic development in Great Britain, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria is markedly different. In a slightly simplifying manner it may be said, with the exception of Great Britain, these countries may be considered types of European governmental systems which are recreating themselves after the breakdown of communist regimes. The Czech Republic should be one of the first countries to achieve integration into the EU. Although united in one state with the Czech Republic for three-quarters of this century, Slovakia will probably wait somewhat longer for integration. Bulgaria belongs to those countries for which, at present, full integration is rather a long-term consideration [Moerell 1995].

The horizons of integration mentioned above are only an external frame for the evaluated trends. In its objective dimensions, the labour market determines the present chances of an individual. The first issue here is what opportunities a person is offered by the labour market and, obviously, what obstacles he has to face, and to what extent he is able to assert himself on the labour market [Colbjørnsen 1986]. It is clear that in similar comparisons – between countries of a seemingly equal level, such as the countries of the EU [cf. Barrell 1994] – the independent intervening variable is the social and branch structure of particular countries.

Both actual opportunities and opinions of the citizens are heavily differentiated in the social sphere. Meanwhile, the ongoing social and economic transformation is associated with growing diversity and enables new, at least hidden sources of social conflicts [Večerník 1995]. Especially the lower social status groups (according to education, incomes, lifestyle) are more and more prepared to listen to populist promises (from both left and right of the political spectrum) concerning 'simple' and 'equitable' solutions to present problems. From this point of view Bulgaria is a significant case. Although it was a rather prosperous agricultural and industrial country at the end of the 80s, it almost reached a point of economic collapse in the middle of the 90s thanks to its post-communist governments. However, due to the aims and the limits of this study, the following results of the analyses cannot deal in depth with the influences of transformation effects such as the new stratification of society and the emergence of a private owners class, changing working demands, growing income differences and so on.

Bearing in mind all these limits, the structure of answers to the question concerning the *possibilities of choosing an accessible job* is quite explicit. The highest number of possibilities was declared by the British (21%) and the Bulgarians (14%). Adding up

both the positive variants ("a wide choice" + "some choice"), more than half of the Czech (59%) and British respondents (54%), and almost half the Slovaks (49%) had a wide choice. Only 37% of the Bulgarians declared this variant. The negative variants may perhaps be more significant. These were declared by a half of the Bulgarians but only by 19% of the Slovaks, 16% of the British and 12% of the Czechs.

Thus it is clear that from the viewpoint of the chances of choosing a job the most oppressive situation is in Bulgaria, where a half of working people would in fact seem to have no choice. This state applies to almost the whole of the social class structure (60% of unskilled workers, 54% of routine non-manual workers and 42% of professionals). The influence of class position on the distribution of this choice is most pronounced in Slovakia, and it is least pronounced in the Czech Republic. However, generally it can be stated that people with higher education and in a higher social position have better chances in choosing a job.

It is worth mentioning that age and gender play no important role here. The probable cause of this is the fact that there had been constant (and, in fact, egalitarian) conditions for employment choice in the so-called socialist countries for a long time. As a consequence of insignificant social and territorial mobility, relatively stable patterns of employment choice (and 'non-choice') were created. Although after 1989 social mobility has become more dynamic, there is still doubt as to whether this change is assumable in a situation of extended pressure on the labour force.

The labour market situation is illustrated by possible strategies of coping with unemployment that may arise. They concern not only the chances offered by the labour market, but also (and perhaps mainly) a willingness to choose from within the offered possibilities, that is, they concern boundaries up to which an individual is ready to gradually relinquish his requirements [Beharrell 1992]. Here, the density of the social safety net undoubtedly plays an important role (the higher the density of a safety net, the weaker are the incentives for people to work and the more they rely on government assistance). The unemployment rate in a particular country is, obviously, of great importance here as well. At the end of 1994 this rate was 3.2 in the Czech Republic, 8.7 in Great Britain, 14.8 in Slovakia, and about 13% in Bulgaria. A certain picture of the mentioned boundaries of possible concession of individuals is already implied by these figures.

Thus, what are people in the compared countries ready to give up for a job, and what they are not? An outline of positive choices is shown in Table 1.

With the exception of the first possibility (training in a different type of skill) the Bulgarians are ready to give up more than all the others. The foregoing statement concerning their significantly limited chances in job-seeking is thus proved here. Although on the one hand it gives empirical evidence of their willingness to sacrifice, on the other it makes the present occupational structure of Bulgarian society unstable to a great extent. The structure loses the ability to stand occasional disruption that may lead in its implications to further instability in the society as a whole.

On the opposite end of the scale to the Bulgarians are the Czechs whose readiness to give up something is the lowest. A converse risk is menacing here – Czech society is far too stable, unemployment as a social problem in fact does not exist here. The absence of labour market pressure, expressed in little or no personal experience with unemployment, has an impact that people are not sufficiently prepared for changes and any possible disruption that might occur, especially after the country's integration into EU.

Interestingly, the Slovak attitudes in their selected strategies sometimes resemble the Czechs and sometimes the British.

Table 1. Strategies of coping with possible unemployment – positive answers (in percentages)

	GB	CZ	SK	BG
Training in a different type of skill	73.2	52.5	58.5	72.9
A lower level of skill or qualification	35.2	27.8	35.1	66.9
Worse physical work conditions (heat etc.)	22.7	17.0	19.6	55.3
Night work	34.9	27.5	34.7	50.0
Weekend work	49.1	39.0	46.3	57.6
Less pay	27.9	7.7	9.8	44.1
Moving to a different area	33.7	15.1	15.3	35.9

Question: *If you were to lose your present job, would you be prepared to consider another job which, by comparison, involved...*  
 (1) Yes, (2) No, (3) I am not sure

Nevertheless, a generally accepted strategy is based on agreement with a change in one's present occupation, but within the same qualification level as far as possible (especially in the Czech Republic, not in Bulgaria). The second most frequent strategy would mean working on weekends. The variant almost completely rejected (namely in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia) is lower earnings – however even this variant would be acceptable for almost a half of Bulgarians. The negative attitude towards moving elsewhere for a job in all post-communist countries would seem influenced most of all by the non-existence of a housing market. For this reason such a variant is hardly possible.

## 2. Attitudes towards work

We start the analysis of work attitudes with a discussion of the present situation among the employed population and seeking answers to basic questions. Do the particular countries differ in this sphere? If so, in what aspects? A partial answer is offered by the first analytical step – the evaluation of basic reasons for keeping a job. The variants of the offered answers covered a basic motivational spectrum of possible choices, which means social, economic and individually psychological aspects. In the questionnaire the particular motives were investigated by separated dichotomy variables (in the form of "agreement-disagreement") on the one hand, and by one nominal variable that included all variants on the other. For the following comparison we used the latter, only contingency coefficients  $C_n$  are calculated from the former.

In this table the particular percentage frequencies are not as interesting as are the differences between the countries. These differences reflect very clearly the general social and economic characteristics of the given social systems. The polarity is established by Great Britain on the one hand, and Bulgaria on the other, as is similar to all other comparisons. The lower standard of living in Bulgaria implies the most significant evaluation of work as a source of income for meeting basic needs. This value of work is, on the contrary, of lesser importance in Great Britain. While only a very small part of the British consider the main reason for having a job is because they see it as a normal thing, the share of this evaluation of work is five times higher in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria only 1%

of respondents placed an interest in working in first position, while in Great Britain this reason is considered as the priority by more than one tenth of all employed.

Table 2. Basic working motives (in percentages)

	GB	CZ	SK	BG	C <sub>n</sub>
Working is a normal thing to do	2.7	7.0	8.6	14.4	0.438
I need money for basic essentials (food, rent, loans, etc.)	64.6	68.7	74.8	78.6	0.177
To earn money to buy extras	7.3	3.5	1.3	1.4	0.182
To earn money of my own	6.1	7.9	5.6	2.2	0.223
For the company of other people	2.1	2.0	0.9	2.0	0.230
I enjoy working	11.0	9.0	7.6	0.9	0.177
To follow my career	5.8	1.2	1.0	0.4	0.246
Other reason	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.1	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Question: *Which statements best describe your reasons for working at present?*

Thus it is clear that work attitudes demonstrate basic differences between the countries. If for the British an understanding of work as an individual's choice prevails, the Bulgarians understand work more often as an objective necessity. However, besides the level of economic development, a level of modernisation in the respective countries is probably reflected as well [Machonin 1996]. It is unclear to what extent Bulgarian society reflects (or can reflect regarding its development to date) post-materialistic values [Moerel 1995]. A transition from one to another understanding of work is not only an expression of a certain standard of living, but also a shift in the value system. While the standard of living can be raised quite quickly, a change of values is a matter of several generations' exchange [Ishikawa 1994].

This hypothesis is proven by the findings on the relationship between work as the means of economic security. This relationship was observed in the question on willingness to work even in a situation of full material affluence (a question which is not referred to in the tables here). The data do not prove a linear dependence between the standard of living, self-realisation, and work attitudes. The Bulgarians would go on working in most of the cases (77%), the British (68%) and the Slovaks (64%) less often, and the Czechs least often. Undoubtedly, it may be discussed how different people understand this question. The British probably know that living without having an engagement or business is possible, while the experience of living under socialist regimes (with a legal obligation to work) in the Czech Republic and Slovakia on the one hand, and in Bulgaria on the other, is different, from this point of view. Albeit we speak of manifested attitudes that were more or less modified in factual consequences, it is clear that social and cultural patterns of behaviour are different in particular countries.

Employment is not the only thing that is dealt with here in this connection. There are differences in work conditions in the compared countries, for instance in average working hours – they are the longest in the Czech Republic (43 hours weekly) while in Great Britain only about 40 hours (with information about Bulgaria unavailable). We deal with the interiorisation of a complex of alternative lifestyles. Work is substantial but not the only part of them. While the Czechs can thus connect material affluence with a

possibility of not working (to leave off work) more often, for the Bulgarians it is not a reason in itself to quit the job (they probably understand 'material affluence' differently).

Subjective perception of working conditions is usually measured by means of a set of basic characteristics of work. According to this experience approximately 15 characteristics may be selected that are mostly used in the particular countries and that cover fundamental dimensions of work attitudes. A cross-sectional approach is at issue here (why do people have a job?) as well as the investigation of the dynamics of changes (what have been the changes in the meaning of particular characteristics since 1989?). The former (cross-sectional approach) is presented in Table 3 which shows the share of positive evaluations (1) of the above-mentioned characteristics in the particular countries and contingency coefficients  $C_n$ .

Table 3. Characteristics of work ("It is essential", in percentages)

		GB	CZ	SK	BG	$C_n$
Friendly people to work with	PEOPL	23.8	26.8	24.2	31.3	0.131
Good promotion prospects	PROSP	10.5	19.4	20.2	8.3	0.356
Good pay	PAY	25.9	45.1	53.8	55.2	0.273
Good relations with supervisor	MANAG	29.3	14.3	15.8	21.1	0.272
A secure job	SECUR	36.0	30.2	38.0	19.2	0.199
A job where I can use my own initiative	INIT	24.3	17.6	17.1	53.7	0.350
Work I like doing	INTER	34.4	26.7	25.2	16.3	0.261
Convenient hours of work	CONV	13.0	13.3	12.0	26.3	0.113
Choice in my hours of work	HOURS	8.4	11.6	9.4	10.1	0.151
The opportunity to use my abilities	ABILI	28.1	18.7	15.5	18.3	0.286
Good fringe benefits	BENEF	6.9	9.5	12.5	24.4	0.279
An easy workload	EASY	3.0	5.2	4.8	9.1	0.162
Good training provision	TRAIN	26.8	10.5	10.3	11.6	0.354
Good physical working conditions	COND	22.2	19.8	24.1	21.1	0.150
A lot of variety in the type of work	VARIE	16.9	14.8	8.8	10.5	0.329

Question: *In a list of factors people usually look for in a job tell me how important they are for you*

(1) Essential, (2) Very important, (3) Fairly important, (4) Not very important, (8) Does not know

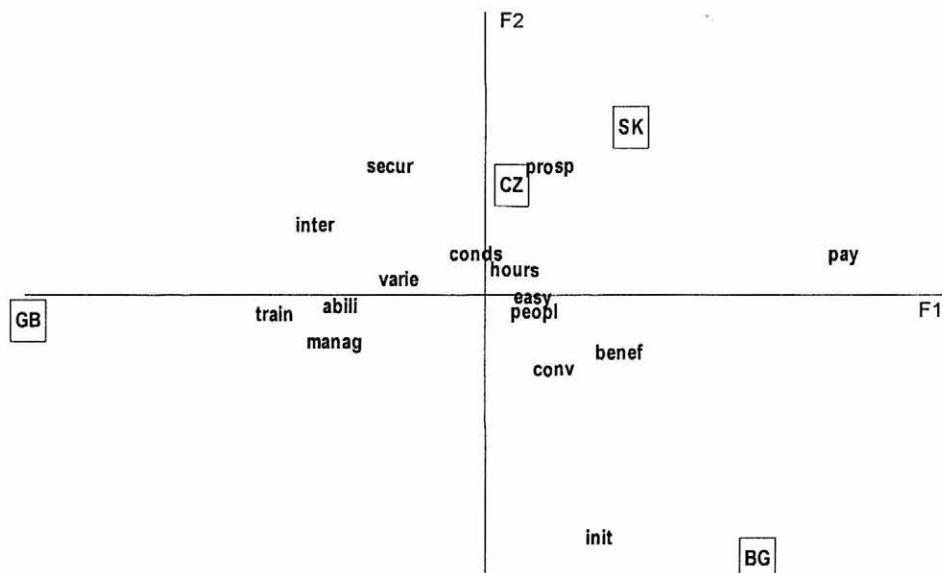
The most significant deviations between the particular countries may be found in evaluations of promotion prospects, training provision, using one's own initiative, and of variety in the type of work. By contrast, there is quite good accord in opinions on working hours and on choice in one's hours of work, in evaluation of working with other people, and of physical working conditions.

By looking at the distribution of basic frequencies (positive answers) one can read other specific features – such as preferences of particular characteristics in the different countries. A complex picture of these preferences is visible in results of the LINDA method (linear decomposition analysis) that works on the principles of correspondence analysis. The basic data entry for this analysis are the above-mentioned frequencies of positive answers.

The resulting Chart 1 shows the positions of the particular characteristics and of the respective countries in the space defined by their interrelationship. The first axis may be called an 'axis of work effects'. It is specified by good pay on the one end and by good training provision on the other. Other characteristics that define this axis are doing work one likes, good relations with a supervisor, and the opportunity to use one's abilities. This axis exhausts 49% of variance, which means that the people's attitudes in the particular countries are first of all determined by the position on this scale.

The second basic axis is established by possibilities of using one's own initiative as an opposite to a secure job and good promotion prospects. Other characteristics establishing this axis are again work a person likes doing (but with reverse load), and convenient hours of work. This axis may be called 'stability of work' (45% of variance).

Chart 1. Characteristics of work



The identification of the countries in the space defined in such a way is quite simple. The first factor is explicitly connected with Great Britain, the second one (with the same load) with Bulgaria. While the opposition in the first factor is Bulgaria (preferences of material effects of work), in the second factor it is Slovakia (preferences of prospects). In the two-dimension space, the Czech Republic and Slovakia occupy a common quadrant with a tendency (especially in the case of the Czech Republic) to the central parts of this space.

The chart shows the mutual distances of particular countries, in other words, what is typical for each of them:

Britain. Of all the countries it is such items as good training provision, good relations with supervisor, interest in the job, the opportunity to use one's abilities in the job and a lot of variety in the type of work that are most frequently evaluated as positive. By

contrast, significantly, good pay and good fringe benefits are stated here to be most important in least of cases.

Czech Republic. Attitudes in almost all characteristics come close to the average evaluations. Somewhat higher importance is ascribed to good promotion prospects (together with Slovakia) and to variety in the type of work (together with Britain), less importance was given to using one's own initiative. Good relations with one's supervisor are declared to be the least important of all the countries in the study.

Slovakia. Attitudes here are similar to those in the Czech Republic. A specific feature is the highest importance of good promotion prospects, good pay and a secure job. The least weight is carried by the chance to use one's own initiative.

Bulgaria. In many characteristics the attitudes are in opposition to British attitudes. It is the most pronounced in the evaluation of the importance of using one's own initiative, which is the absolutely dominant characteristic here. The highest importance among all countries is also ascribed to good fringe benefits, good pay gained quite a high importance (together with Slovakia), as did convenient hours of work. The least often declared are the importance of a secure job and of good promotion prospects, an interest in the job, and good training provision.

It is clear that these preferences show the differences of the modern history of the compared countries mentioned in the beginning. While in Great Britain the dominant characteristics concern long-term work effects (importance of qualifications, interest in the job, using one's abilities; with good pay being relatively unimportant), in Bulgaria they concern short-term effects (importance of using one's own initiative, fringe benefits; with a secure job and interest in the job being relatively unimportant).

The lifestyle in a given country and the attained standard of living are obviously markedly reflected in the presented distribution. It is clear that a preference for good pay rises with the need of it and with its importance in the individual's value orientation. The position of fringe benefits suggests something about distributive models valid in the given society. Concerning other indicators, similar specifications are somewhat contradictory. The importance of personal initiative in the job might indicate distinct meritocratic principles as well as a certain absence of relevant institutions and their substitution by elements of personal initiative. At the same time it may express an effort to gain higher earnings and thus a better feeling of self-expression. This would prove the foregoing hypotheses about a lack of alternative lifestyles in Bulgaria. The final judgement concerning these ideas is, obviously, dependent on the context of other factors.

When comparing the observed countries according to their mutual distances (Table 4) a contrast between Great Britain and Bulgaria is rather evident. At the same time the affinity of the Czech Republic and Slovakia is clear. Britain has relatively the closest distance to the Czech Republic but even this distance is further than that between the CR and Bulgaria. It means that although the Czech Republic with its attitudes is situated approximately in the centre of these countries, its position is still closer to Bulgaria than to Britain.

Table 4. Matrix of distances between countries – an evaluation of the present state (2 factors, after rotation)

	Britain	Czech	Slovak	Bulgaria
Britain	0.00			
Czech	5.90	0.00		
Slovak	7.40	1.53	0.00	
Bulgaria	8.98	7.18	7.75	0.00

### 3. The dynamics of changes

To be able to evaluate the present state, the trends (i.e. changes) within this period should be known. On basis of these the possible trajectories of future development may be formulated, but with an awareness of the higher or lower determination of such considerations by a set of exogenous factors. The key question is the choice of the time interval within which we want to observe the validity of the mentioned trends. Concerning the post-communist countries there is no doubt that the starting point of this interval for measuring the present trends should be at least the last year of communist rule, i.e. 1989. The data collection of our survey took place five years after 1989 (in 1994). Thus the interval in which the changes were observed covered this crucial period in history in the British survey. (Coincidentally, the data collection was carried out in 1992.)

The development trends (Table 5) were observed in two ways: firstly using the same set of characteristics of work, as in the previous case (i.e. on the higher level of universality), but with a different evaluation scale. The second approach was related to the respondent's work performance (over the preceding 5 years). We start with the more general view, the basic analytical approach will be similar – using variant 1 as a basis.

Table 5. Changes in the meaning of characteristics of work  
("More important", in percentage)

		GB	CZ	SK	BG	C <sub>n</sub>
Friendly people to work with	PEOPL	26.6	21.1	20.6	30.7	0.137
Good promotion prospects	PROSP	24.8	33.8	32.9	16.0	0.206
Good pay	PAY	45.8	56.6	58.4	65.8	0.166
Good relations with supervisor	MANAG	30.5	19.7	30.1	38.5	0.186
A secure job	SECUR	52.8	50.4	54.8	66.0	0.121
A job where I can use my own initiative	INIT	34.3	21.7	18.7	21.9	0.237
Work I like doing	INTER	35.1	21.9	18.9	22.9	0.251
Convenient hours of work	CONV	24.0	14.8	9.9	19.7	0.170
Choice in my hours of work	HOURS	22.3	17.3	9.8	11.2	0.204
The opportunity to use my abilities	ABILI	37.1	25.4	23.3	26.5	0.191
Good fringe benefits	BENEF	18.1	20.6	22.3	40.7	0.228
An easy work load	EASY	12.1	8.0	7.5	13.0	0.154
Good training provision	TRAIN	36.4	24.4	19.0	18.1	0.220
Good physical working conditions	COND	28.9	33.3	36.7	27.5	0.200
A lot of variety in the type of work	VARIE	27.6	15.3	9.8	13.6	0.255

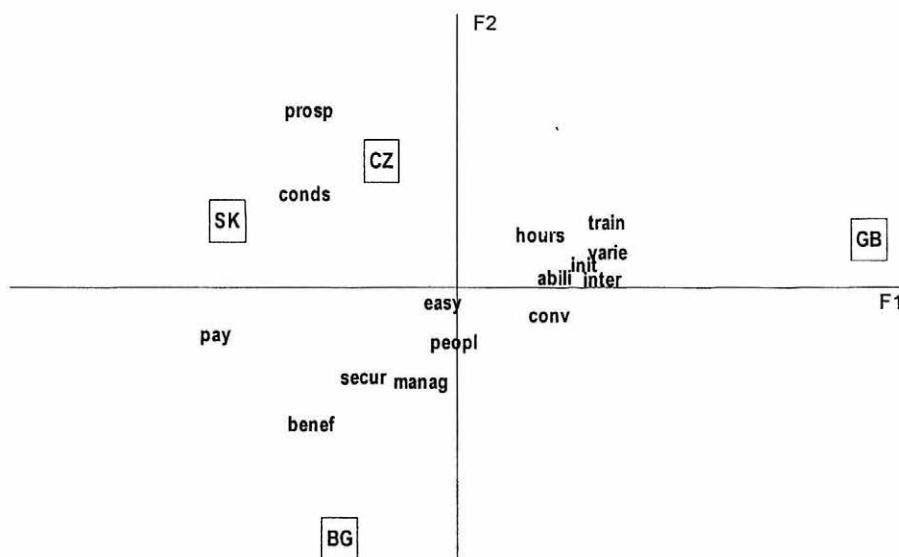
Question: *Has the meaning of these aspects changed for you since 1989?*

(1) More important, (2) Less important, (3) It is the same, (8) Don't know

In comparison with Table 3 it is revealed that differences between the countries are not as significant in the case of development trends as they were in the evaluation of the present state. The highest number of changes has been found in the evaluation of variety in the type of work, work one likes doing, using one's own initiative and fringe benefits. The only insignificant differences are in attitudes towards a change in the importance of a secure job and friendly people one works with.

As in the preceding case, a LINDA method was applied here. The result is an identification of two main factors (chart 2). The first one may be specified again as 'factor of work effects' because it is established by the same polar characteristics as was in the analysis of the present state – i.e. good pay on the one side and promotion prospects and variety in the type of work on the other side. This latter factor is not very clear-cut; a higher number of tested characteristics may be involved in it. Towards the opposite side (good pay) these characteristics are work one likes doing, using one's own initiative, and with a reverse sign of load (closer to good pay) there are fringe benefits, good physical working conditions, and good promotion prospects (in case of the present state this characteristic was a part of the other factor). This factor exhausts 48% of variance.

Chart 2. Characteristics of work – changes since 1989



A somewhat smaller part of variance (45%) is covered by the second, much more polarised, factor. One pole of it is established by good promotion prospects, and the opposite pole by fringe benefits. This factor may be called a 'factor of time horizons of benefits' (long-term versus short-term). Together with the first one it shares the evaluation of good physical working conditions. Besides this, it is established by a secure job and good relations with a supervisor.

The basic position of the particular countries conforms to the evaluation of the present state. Here, again, the first factor is especially characteristic for Great Britain, while

the second one for Bulgaria, with the same load but with a reverse sign. An opposition in the first factor is Slovakia with its preferences for material work effects, in the case of the second factor it is the Czech Republic with preferences for long-term advantages.

The typical features of the particular countries are clear from Chart 2. It gives an answer to the question as to what has changed in the course of the previous five years from the point of view of mutual comparison. What is most important at present?

Britain. This country exhibited the highest growth of importance among the compared countries in the case of good training provision, variety in the type of work, work one likes doing, and using one's own initiative. Significantly, the least increase of importance concerns good pay and fringe benefits, changes in the importance of a secure job were also low.

Czech Republic. In this case most of the changes are again close to the average. The most significant deviations are in the growth of importance of good promotion prospects (together with Slovakia) and, on the contrary, the least growth of importance in good relations with one's supervisor.

Slovakia. The highest changes were recorded in the evaluation of importance of good physical working conditions and of the already-mentioned good promotion prospects (together with the Czech Republic). The evaluation of working hours changed least of all.

Bulgaria. Here there is again a distinct counterbalance to the British evaluation. The importance of fringe benefits changed much more markedly, along with characteristics of a secure job, good pay, good relations with one's supervisor and friendly people one works with. On the other hand, in particular good promotion prospects and good training provision were least often evaluated as more important at present.

The presented development trends largely correspond with the findings concerning the importance of individual work characteristics at present. In Great Britain, a gradual strengthening of factors expressing mostly the long-term consequences of work has occurred (qualifications, interest), while especially in Bulgaria such a development concerns rather factors of short-term advantages (fringe benefits). Obviously, some qualitative characteristics have gradually gained ground here, too (friendly people to work with, relations with supervisor). Their dynamics are slower, however, because the satisfaction of contemporary, mostly basic subsistence needs logically takes priority.

A somewhat different situation is that in the Czech Republic where a traditional model based on career planning with long-term perspective has clearly strengthened (at least concerning some socio-professional groups. There are small differences in the management hierarchy [according to Bata's thesis of "we are all in the same boat"]).

Lastly, when again comparing the particular countries with one another from the point of view of the calculated distances (Table 6), the similarity in the development dynamics with the evaluation of the present state is pronounced. However, distances between the countries are in the case of development changes slightly shorter (which means that the evaluation of the development trends is less clear-cut) with one exception – a greater distance between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This means that the dynamics in both countries are more unequal than the evaluation of the present state. In other words, while the given state is evaluated in a similar way, the assessment of the development trends is different. It is also worth mentioning that the distance of this evaluation

between Great Britain and the Czech Republic is almost the same as between Slovakia and Bulgaria.

Table 6. Matrix of distances between countries – evaluation of development trends (2 factors, after rotation)

	Britain	Czech	Slovak	Bulgaria
Britain	0.00			
Czech	5.59	0.00		
Slovak	7.21	2.18	0.00	
Bulgaria	8.08	7.03	5.95	0.00

Another approach in discovering changes during this five-year period was based on a comparison of the factual contents of work in 1994 with that of 1989. Here the personal experience of respondents was reflected, which measured changes in the importance of distinct issues by means of a simple mobility scale "increase-stability-decrease".

Table 7. Changes in job characteristics in the period 1989-1994 (in percentage)

	SECUR	Increased				Decreased				C <sub>n</sub>			
		GB	CZ	SK	BG	GB	CZ	SK	BG				
Job security	SECUR	27.5	26.7	29.0	7.0	36.7	51.3	60.3	65.8	0.288			
The level of skill I use in my job 0.245	SKILL					62.1	51.9	51.7	35.3	9.0	3.3	4.0	7.0
The variety of tasks I perform	VARIE	65.0	46.1	40.2	22.3	9.6	7.1	8.5	11.5	0.341			
The provision of training	TRAIN	39.2	26.9	18.2	14.7	18.6	16.9	27.0	22.5	0.236			
Tightness of supervision over my job	TIGHT	29.0	50.4	57.6	38.3	31.2	9.8	6.2	10.7	0.296			
The effort I have to put into my job	EFFOR	61.5	66.5	69.3	39.7	7.5	3.6	3.5	6.4	0.228			
My chances of promotion	PROM	31.1	19.1	14.7	15.9	24.1	22.1	33.0	19.8	0.199			
The responsibility involved in my job	RESPO	64.6	60.4	62.3	50.4	8.3	3.9	3.7	3.9	0.171			
The stress involved in the job	STRES	53.4	47.9	46.3	53.8	12.4	6.6	4.8	5.2	0.147			

Question: *Compare your current job with what you were doing five years ago (even if you were in the same job). For each of the following things would you say there had been a significant increase compared to five years ago, a significant decrease or little or no change?*

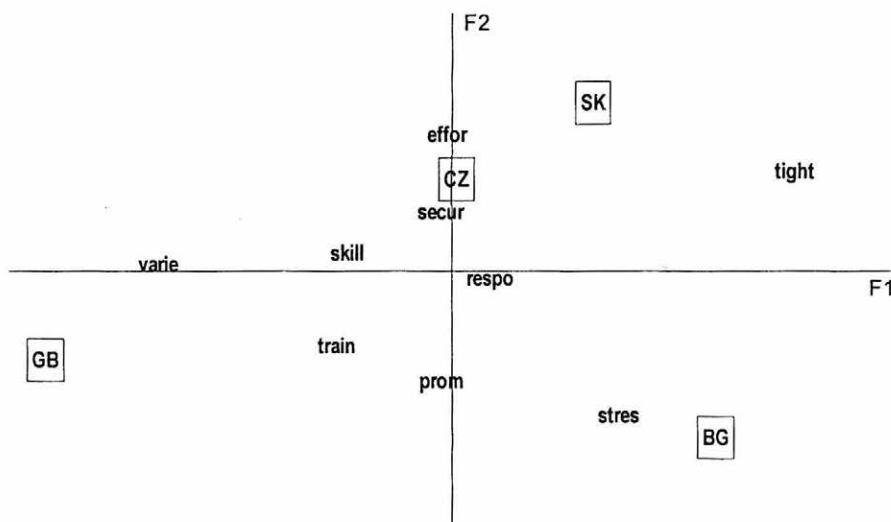
(1) Increased, (2) There has been little or no change, (3) Decreased, (4) Don't

The most pronounced differences between the particular countries are in changes of variety of tasks in the job. The most marked changes here took place in Great Britain, while this work characteristic changed only among a small part of the population in Bulgaria. The least differences between the compared countries were recorded in the proportion of changes in the extent of stress involved in the jobs, with only small differences in changes in responsibility.

The LINDA method again reveals deeper relations between the particular countries and the mentioned characteristics. Firstly, there are differences in the characteristics increasing their importance. The first factor is defined, on the one hand, by the variety of tasks, and by the tightness of supervision over one's job on the other. It exhausts 58% of variance, and it is quite close.

The second factor is not so close. Its axis is defined by performance and a stress, as well as chances of promotion, tightness of supervision over one's job, the provision of training, and job security. This factor exhausts 40% of variance.

Chart 3. Increase in levels of job characteristics



Both factors are markedly influenced by the situation in Bulgaria. In the first one, its opposition is Great Britain, in the second one, it is Slovakia. Chart 3 reveals the positions of the given countries with respect to the particular characteristics. It implies that for Great Britain a growth of importance of promotion chances and the variety of tasks one performs is symptomatic. For Bulgaria a pronounced growth of stress involved in the job, as well as the chances of promotion are typical. In Slovakia the biggest growth was recorded concerning the tightness of supervision over one's job. The Czech Republic oscillates around the average again without any significant deviations.

While relatively the smallest growth is ascribed to tightness of supervision in Great Britain, in Bulgaria it is performance in work and variety of tasks. There is a clear difference in the dynamics of creative characteristics of work in these countries, giving probably the best picture of both the present socio-economic conditions and short-term development tendencies.

Regarding a decrease in the importance of some of the mentioned characteristics, the situation is somewhat simpler as it concerns only few of them. Firstly, it concerns job security, the importance of which has decreased in all countries, most of all in Bulgaria. The tightness of supervision fell in Great Britain, with the chances of promotion and the provision of training decreasing in Slovakia.

Table 8. Matrix of distances between countries – evaluation of the increase of importance of characteristics of work (2 factors, after rotation)

	Britain	Czech	Slovak	Bulgaria
Britain	0.00			
Czech	4.63	0.00		
Slovak	6.20	1.57	0.00	
Bulgaria	7.58	2.94	1.38	0.00

The matrix of distances between the particular countries (Table 8) has a similar structure as was in the previous cases. Here, again the Czech Republic is nearest to Great Britain, and similarly the smallest distance is between the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

### Conclusion

How people in different social, economic, political, and cultural systems perceive the conditions of their work says much about both the systems themselves and the ability of the people to handle these conditions. Each of these systems plays its role in understanding the contemporary state in different ways. As to the countries that were subject to this analysis, the most important seem to be the factors of history and culture. The chosen axis, 'West-Central-East', shows not only differences in the economic standard of the specific countries but at the same time it defines boundaries that are either completely or at least in the near future untranscendable. The values and aspirations of the inhabitants of historically Protestant Britain, Catholic Slovakia, and Orthodox Bulgaria will most likely differ for a long period of time. It would probably be closest to the truth to describe the position of the Czech Republic on this axis as the 'western middle part'.

The idea behind the entire research was, according to the central theme, to point out the differences that exist in the specific countries. This paper was not aimed at evaluating the quality of labour markets but to grasp their specific features bearing in mind the ongoing European co-operation and potential integration.

The starting point of the analysis was the consideration of the situations in the labour markets in the specific countries, from the viewpoint of those who participate in that market. The vast difference between the attitudes of the Czechs and the Bulgarians reflects the general situation in the labour markets in both countries – almost zero unemployment in the Czech Republic and the significant stability resulting from it, and still growing unemployment and huge (today we may say disastrous) economic instability in Bulgaria.

The analysis of expected working conditions has shown a differentiated approach to their evaluation in specific countries. While in Great Britain preferences orientated towards a long-term working perspective have already gained ground (qualifications, variety, the exploiting of one's abilities), in the post-communist countries, namely in Bulgaria, this approach is more of a distant perspective. Mainly short-term effects are preferred here (pay, social benefits). The most common features are, of course, shared by Czech Republic and Slovakia, due to their shared history. And although the Czech Republic of all the post-communist countries is the next closest to Great Britain in all relations, with the other two countries (Slovakia and Bulgaria) it still has rather more things in common.

Nevertheless, differences in the dynamics of development are becoming visible. Probably the most important piece of knowledge here is the rather different attitudes of the employed to the development up until now, in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia. These represent not only the different political and economic models applied today in both the countries (and also reminders of the past social development) but their potential expressions in the labour market as well.

Although the present analysis covers only a part of the whole area, the wide range of themes that were subject to the research and the quality of the collected data make it possible to comment on the other important circumstances of employment, unemployment, and the labour market. The study of the attitudes of the employed has proven useful in this aspect; it is no surprise after all that the strategies of the people engaged in the labour market contribute fundamentally to its constitution and functioning as a 'new' institution.

## Appendix

The international project "Employment Conditions, Labour Market Insecurity and Work Motivation" was carried out with a grant from the Commission of EU in the years 1994-1996, partly (a certain part of the survey of the unemployed population) with a grant from the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. It was realised in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Great Britain and Bulgaria. The co-ordinator of the international team was Duncan Gallie, Nuffield College, Oxford, the co-ordinator in the Czech Republic and Slovakia was Pavel Kuchař, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, in Bulgaria the co-ordinator was Dobrinka Kostova, Centre for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Sofia University.

The research consisted of two parts – a survey of the employed population and a survey of the unemployed. Data collection in both these parts was provided in the Czech Republic by the UNIVERSITAS inquirers network, and in Slovakia by the Sociological Services inquirers network.

### **The employed population survey**

The data collection in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria was carried out in the period October-December 1994, in Great Britain in the same period in 1992.

A stratified random sample was applied in all countries, and on the level of households was carried out on the basis of the Kish tables. It involved economically active individuals who were employed at the time of the survey. The sample did not include women on maternity leave, employed pensioners or the unemployed.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia the respondents were people aged 18-60. The size of the observed samples was 2,009 in the Czech Republic, 1,001 in Slovakia.

In Bulgaria the respondents were men aged 20-59 and women aged 20-54. The size of the observed sample was 2,002.

In Great Britain the age group 20-60 was investigated. The sample size was 3,869 respondents.

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# **The territorial dimension of public administration reforms in East Central Europe**

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**Summary:** Territorial decentralisation of government has been an important part of the democratic reforms in East Central Europe after 1989. In the paper, some aspects of the decentralisation efforts in Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland are discussed – their political and intellectual background, expectations they have caused, results they have so far delivered and problems they have created or visualised. Territorial decentralisation of government did not materialise as expected, and the reforms were halted half-way, particularly in Czech Republic and Poland. While decentralisation to the local level was mostly successful, it is pending on the regional level in these two countries and recently more centralist policies have been re-introduced. The author argues that both an insufficient decentralisation on the regional level as well as an excessive fragmentation of government on the local level are the problem.