

Press Release

Public opinion on the state of the economy and material living conditions in a Central European comparison – January 2017

- ⊙ Czechs rate the state of their economy better than respondents in the other three countries do and they are followed by Poles. Slovaks rate the state of their economy worst.
- ⊙ Expectations about the state of the economy in the future are on the whole slightly more pessimistic than optimistic, but in Slovakia and Hungary in particular and to a lesser degree also in the Czech Republic the vast majority of people think that there will be no change in the state of the economy in the near future.
- ⊙ Poles give their living conditions a better rating than respondents in the other countries do and they are followed by Czechs in second place and then by Slovaks. Hungarians typically take the most critical view of their material living conditions, although a significant improvement was observed among Slovaks, Hungarians, and Poles since the summer of last year.
- ⊙ Czech citizens are somewhat more sceptical than Hungarians, Slovaks, and Poles in their expectations about their material living conditions in the future.

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In January 2017 the Public Opinion Research Centre examined how citizens rate the material living conditions of their household and the state of the economy in their country. Under the auspices of CEORG,¹ surveys on this topic were conducted in January 2017 in Poland² and Hungary³ and at the end of November 2016 in Slovakia.⁴

Table 1. Public opinion on the state of the economy⁵ (%)

	CR	Poland	Hungary	Slovakia
Very good	3	1	1	1
Good	37	32	20	18
Neither good nor bad	39	41	51	38
Bad	17	17	23	36
Very bad	2	3	4	6
Don't know	2	6	1	1

Note: Column percentages.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost) 9–22 January 2017, 1039 respondents aged 15 and over, face-to-face interviews; Poland – CBOS, 7–15 January 2017, 1045 respondents aged 18 and over; Hungary – TÁRKI, 13–23 January 2017, 999 respondents aged 18 and over; Slovakia – FOCUS, 23–29 November 2016, 1008 respondents aged 18 and over.

The first question in the survey asked respondents how they rate the state of the economy in their country. The results in Table 1 and Figure 1 show that Czechs and Poles take a more positive than negative view of the state of the

¹ CEORG (The Central European Opinion Research Group) comprises three institutions devoted to public opinion research, one in the Czech Republic (Public Opinion Research Centre at the Institute of Sociology CAS / CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i. - Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologického ústavu AV ČR), one in Hungary (TÁRKI – Társadalomkutatási Intézet és Társadalomkutatási Informatikai Egyesülés), and one in Poland (CBOS – Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej). The Slovak agency FOCUS also collaborates regularly with CEORG.

² The survey in Poland was carried out from 7 to 15 January 2017 on a representative sample of 1045 respondents aged 18 and over.

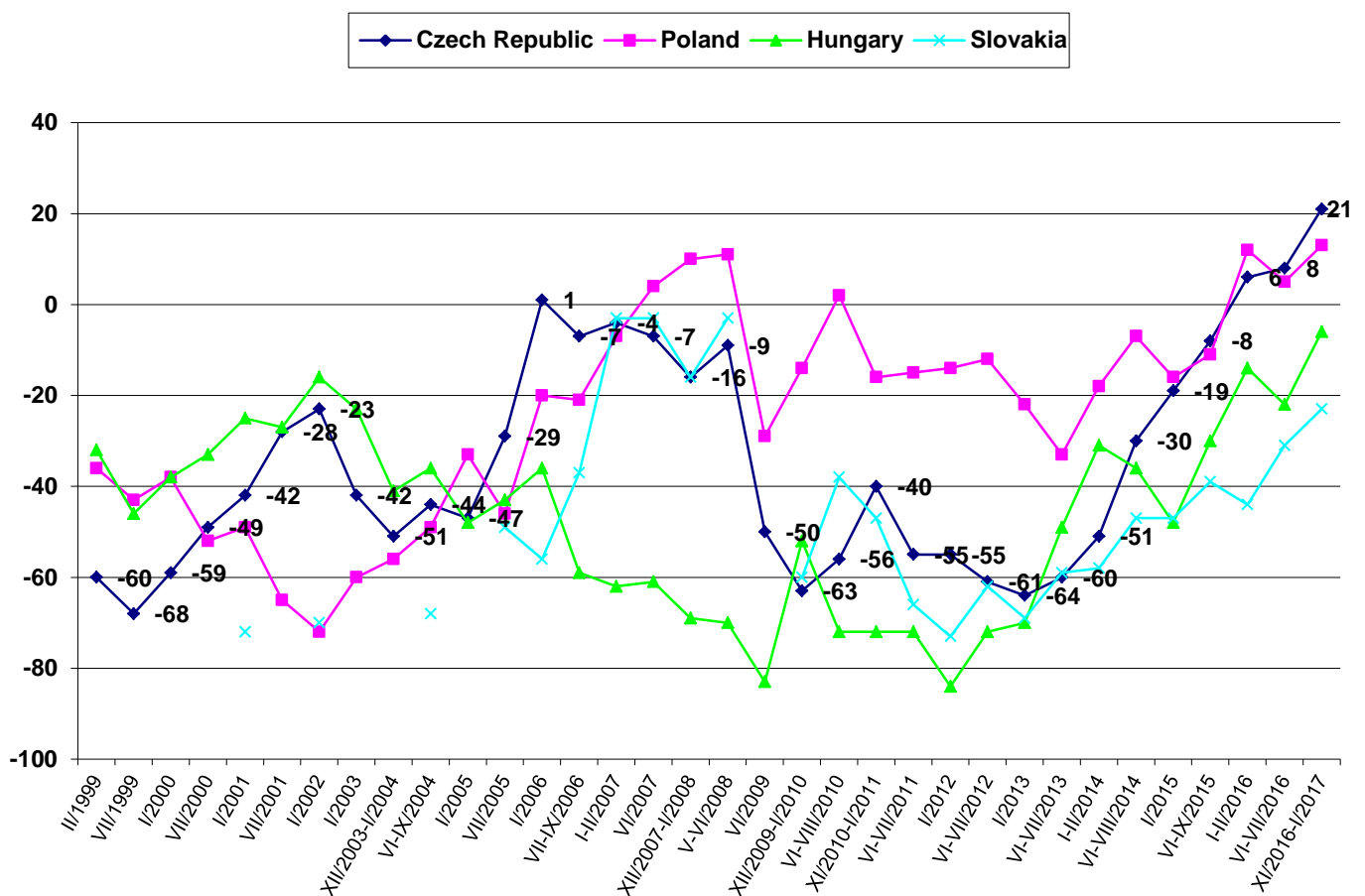
³ Data collection in Hungary was carried out from 13 to 23 January 2017 on a representative sample of 999 respondents aged 18 and over.

⁴ Data collection in Slovakia was conducted by FOCUS from 23 to 29 November 2016 on a sample of 1008 respondents aged 18 and over.

⁵ The survey question read: 'How would you rate the state of the economy in our country? In your opinion is it very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, very bad?'

economy in their countries, while in Hungary and Slovakia opinions on the state of the economy are more negative than positive. In the Czech Republic, where the view of the economy is the most positive, almost two-fifths of the Czech public rate the state of the economy positively (40%), while approximately one-fifth (19%) take a negative view, the difference thus equalling +21 percentage points. The Czech Republic is followed by Poland with the next best rating; the difference between the two countries is small but statistically significant. One-third (33%) of the Polish population rate the state of the economy favourably, with one-fifth (20%), a share comparable to the CR, expressing a negative opinion of the economy, resulting in a difference of +13 percentage points between positive and negative views in Poland. Approximately two-fifths of Czechs and Poles rate the state of their economy in neutral terms as 'neither good nor bad' (39% in the CR, 41% in Poland). Hungarians and Slovaks take a more negative view of the economy than Czechs and Poles, with just a slightly better view of the state of the economy recorded in Hungary. Approximately one-fifth (21%) of Hungarians rate the economy positively, while slightly more than one-quarter (27%) take a negative view, resulting in a difference of -6 percentage points between the two groups. In Slovakia, at 19% the share of positive views is not very different from Hungary, but two-fifths of Slovaks rate the economy negatively (42%), resulting in a difference of -23 percentage points between positive and negative ratings.

Figure 1. Public opinion on the current state of the economy – a time comparison



Note: The numbers in the graph indicate the difference between the sum of 'very good' and 'good' responses and the sum of 'very bad' and 'bad' responses.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost); Poland – CBOS; Hungary – TÁRKI; Slovakia – FOCUS.

Compared to the last survey in the summer of 2016, public opinion on the current state of the economy has improved in all four countries, and in the Czech Republic and Hungary current public opinion on the state of the economy is the best it has been since 1999, when the Public Opinion Research Centre began using comparable measures in its

surveys. The same is true for Poland, although there similar results were recorded in 2008 and at the start of last year. Slovaks gave the state of their economy a slightly better rating in 2007–2008, just before the onset of the global financial and economic crisis.

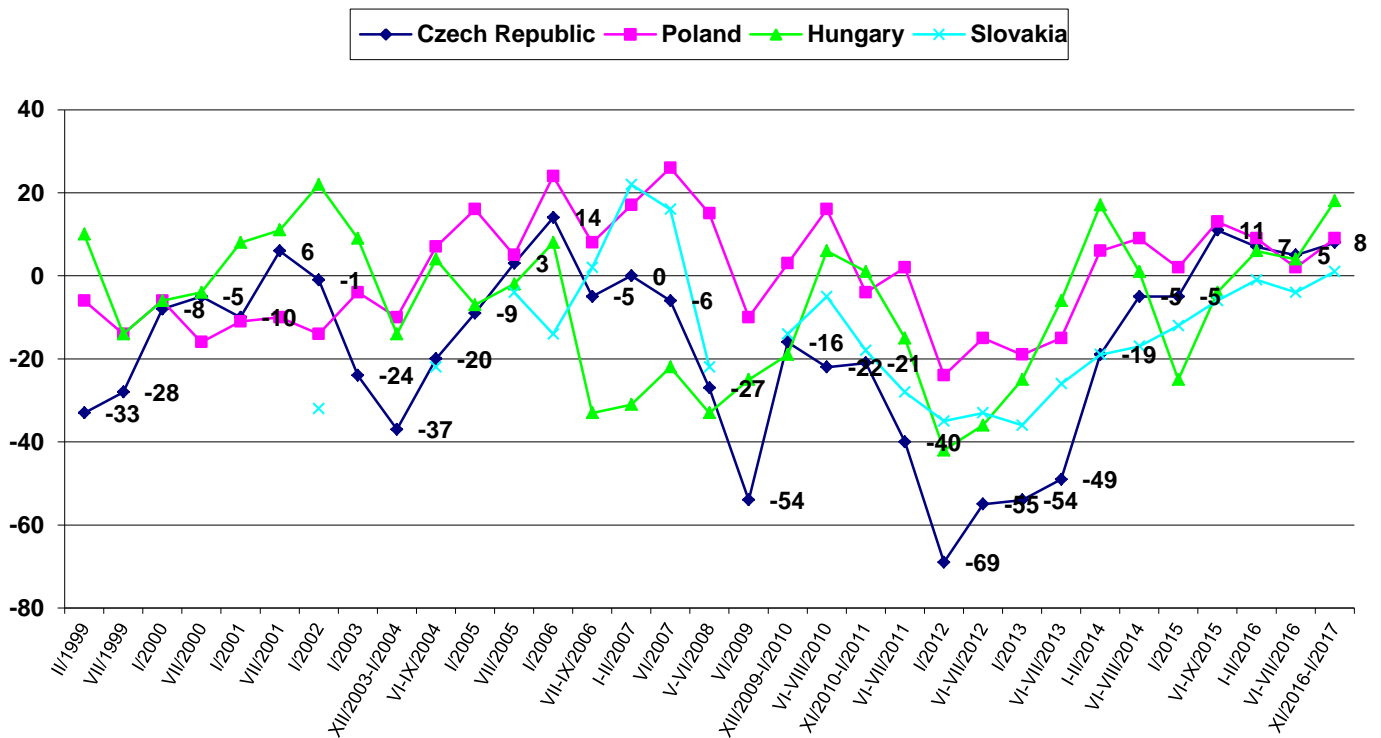
Table 2. Expectations about the future state of the economy⁶ (%)

	CR	Poland	Hungary	Slovakia
It will improve greatly	1	2	1	0
It will improve slightly	25	29	29	18
No change	49	37	55	57
It will get slightly worse	16	18	10	13
It will get much worse	2	4	2	4
Don't know	7	10	3	8

Note: Column percentages.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost), 9–22 January 2017, 1039 respondents aged 15 and over, face-to-face interviews; Poland – CBOS, 7–15 January 2017, 1045 respondents aged 18 and over; Hungary – TÁRKI, 13–23 January 2017, 999 respondents aged 18 and over; Slovakia – FOCUS, 23–29 November 2016, 1008 respondents aged 18 and over.

Figure 2. Expectations about the future state of the economy – a time comparison



Note: The numbers in the graph indicate the difference between the sum of responses 'it will improve greatly' and 'it will improve slightly' and the sum of responses 'it will get much worse' and 'it will get slightly worse'.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost); Poland – CBOS; Hungary – TÁRKI; Slovakia – FOCUS.

⁶ The question read: 'Do you think that the state of the economy in the Czech Republic will this year improve greatly, improve slightly, won't change, will get slightly worse, or will get much worse?'

Table 2 and Figure 2 show that public expectations about the future state of the economy do not vary widely between countries, unlike public assessments of the current state of the economy. In all four countries more people expect the state of the economy to improve than worsen, although among the comparatively more sceptical Slovaks the positive share is not larger by a statistically significant amount. Overall, Hungarians are the most optimistic, as three in ten Hungarians (30%) expect the state of the economy to improve and only just slightly more than one-tenth (12%) expect it to worsen, which represents a difference of 18 percentage points in favour of improvement. Among Poles a comparable or even very slightly larger share of people expect the state of the economy in their country to improve in the coming period (31%), but more than one-fifth (22%) of Poles expect the state of the economy in their country to worsen, resulting in a difference of 9 percentage points leaning towards improvement. A very comparable difference of 8 percentage points is observed in the Czech Republic, but between a smaller share of people expecting the economy to improve (26%) and expecting it to worsen (18%) and with a much larger share expecting no change in the state of the economy in the country in the coming period (49% in the CR, 37% in Poland). Among Slovaks just under one-fifth (18%) expect the state of the economy to improve and just one percentage point fewer Slovaks expect it to worsen, and almost a majority of three-fifths (57%) expect no significant change in either direction. No change in the state of the economy is the most common expectation in all four countries, but it is significantly more common in Slovakia and Hungary, where well over one-half of respondents chose this response. It was slightly less common in the CR, where it accounts for approximately just one-half of responses, and it is the least common expectation in Poland, where it accounts for slightly more than one-third of responses.

A statistically significant shift from the last survey in the summer of 2016 occurred in the form of an improvement in the case of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, while the slightly positive shift that was observed for the Czech Republic was within the range of sampling error.

Table 3: Public opinion on the material living conditions of households⁷ (%)

	CR	Poland	Hungary	Slovakia
Very good	6	20	2	3
Good	42	36	27	33
Neither good nor bad	39	38	48	46
Bad	11	4	19	14
Very bad	2	2	4	3
Don't know	0	0	0	1

Note: Column percentages.

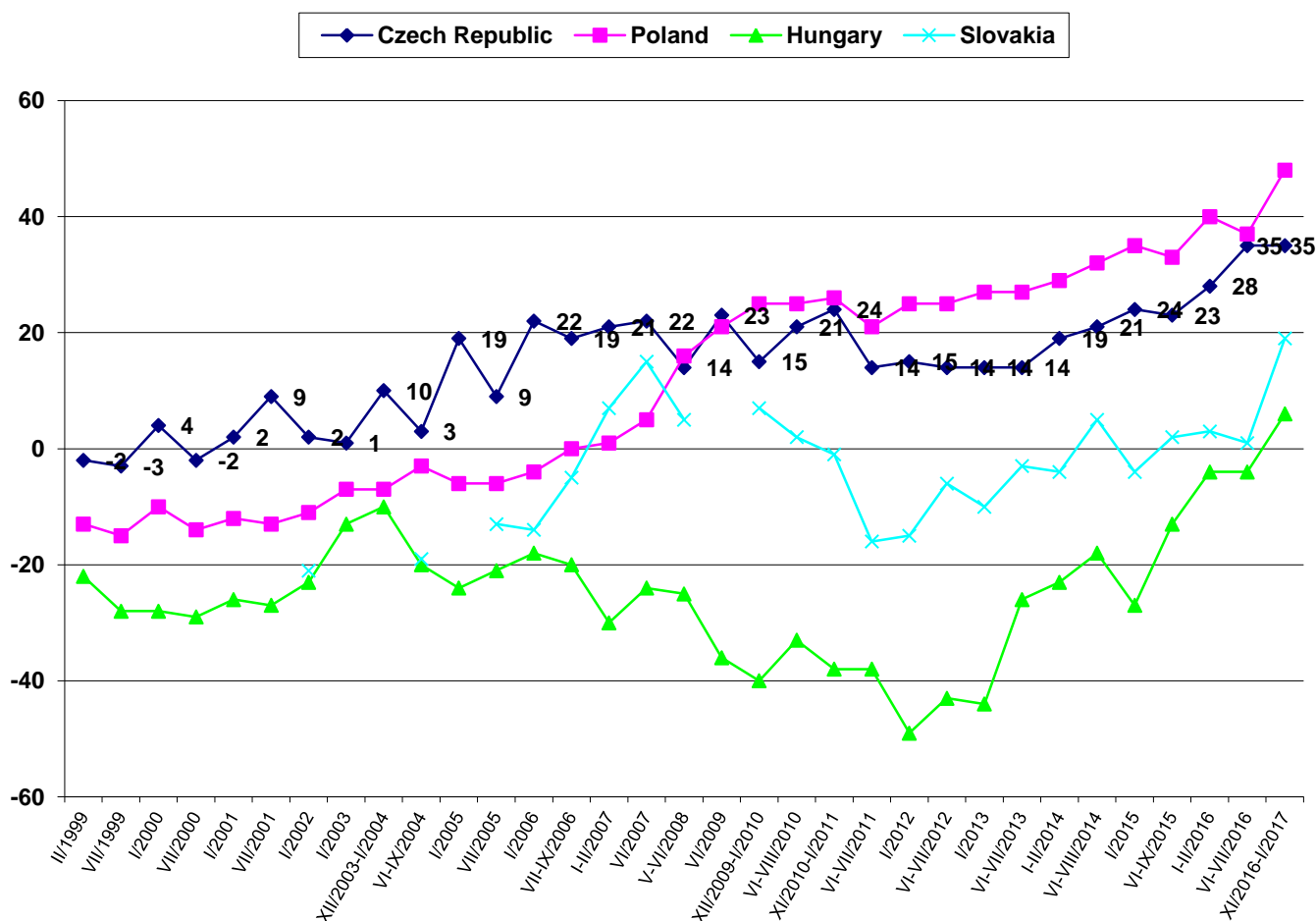
Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost) 9–22 January 2017, 1039 respondents aged 15 and over, face-to-face interviews; Poland - CBOS, 7–15 January 2017, 1045 respondents aged 18 and over; Hungary – TÁRKI, 13–23 January 2017, 999 respondents aged 18 and over; Slovakia – FOCUS, 23–29 November 2016, 1008 respondents aged 18 and over.

Respondents in all four countries more often rate the material living conditions of their households positively than negatively. This is the first time that this has been observed in the surveys since 1999. In Poland, which had comparatively the best assessment, an absolute majority of the population rate material living conditions favourably (56%), while well below one-tenth rate them negatively (6%). Among Czechs, almost one-half of respondents rate living conditions positively (48%), while just over one-tenth give a negative assessment (13%). In Slovakia slightly more than one-third of opinions are positive (36%) while around one-sixth are negative (17%). Among Hungarians, who are traditionally more sceptical in their assessment of the material living conditions of households, 29% rate their living conditions positively and just under one-quarter negatively (23%), which marks the first time since 1999 that more people have assessed their material living conditions favourably than negatively.

Compared to the summer of 2016 the public assessment of the material living conditions of households improved in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. In the Czech Republic there was no change from the June 2016 survey. In all four countries the current assessment of material living conditions of households is the best it has ever been since comparable measures began to be used in 1999 (see Figure 3).

⁷ The question read: 'How would you rate the current material living conditions of your household? As very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, very bad?'

Figure 3. Public opinion on the material living conditions of households – a time comparison



Note: The numbers in the graph indicate the difference between the sum of 'very good' and 'good' responses and the sum of 'bad' and 'very bad' responses.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost); Poland – CBOS; Hungary – TÁRKI; Slovakia – FOCUS.

Table 4: Expectations about the future material living conditions of households⁸ (%)

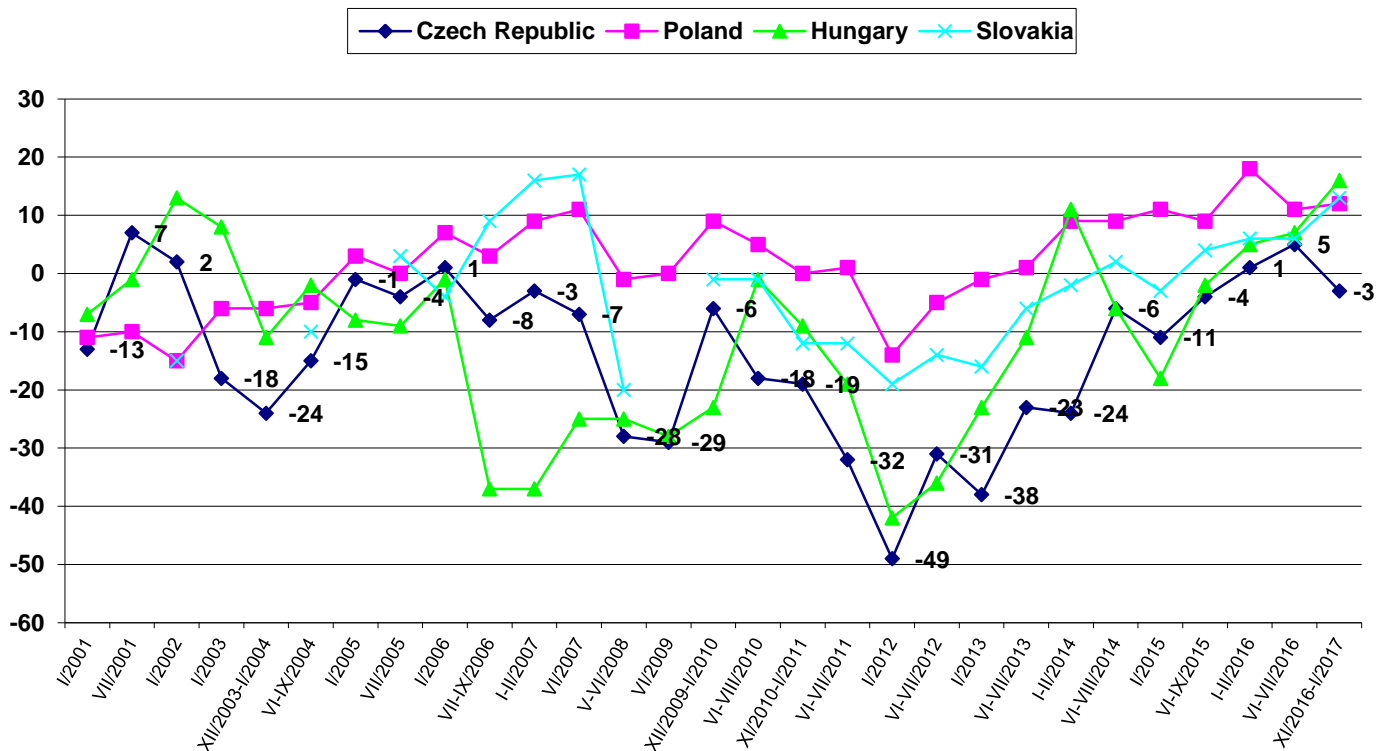
	CR	Poland	Hungary	Slovakia
Much better	1	2	2	1
Slightly better	16	19	22	21
No change	58	70	65	62
Slightly worse	17	7	6	7
Much worse	3	2	2	2
Don't know	5	0	3	7

Note: Column percentages.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost) 9–22 January 2017, 1039 respondents aged 15 and over, face-to-face interviews; Poland – CBOS, 7–15 January 2017, 1045 respondents aged 18 and over; Hungary – TÁRKI, 13–23 January 2017, 999 respondents aged 18 and over; Slovakia – FOCUS, 23–29 November 2016, 1008 respondents aged 18 and over.

⁸ The question read: 'Do you think that this year your material living conditions will become much better, slightly better, won't change, will become slightly worse, will become much worse?'

Figure 4. Expectations about the future material living conditions of households – a time comparison



Note: The numbers in the graph indicate the difference between the sum of responses 'much better' and 'slightly better' and the sum of responses 'slightly worse' and 'much worse'.

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology CAS (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR, v.v.i.), Czech Society (Naše společnost); Poland - CBOS; Hungary - TÁRKI; Slovakia - FOCUS.

In all four countries the absolute majority of respondents, ranging from approximately three-fifths to seven-tenths, do not expect material living conditions to get better or worse than what they are now, while in Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland the share expecting an improvement is slightly but statistically significantly larger than those expecting conditions to worsen. The share expecting an improvement is in every case within the range of one-fifth and one-quarter and the share expecting conditions to worsen is almost identically across countries less than one-tenth. Czech are somewhat more sceptical in their expectations regarding future material living conditions, with only one-sixth of respondents expecting an improvement and one-fifth expecting conditions to worsen.

Compared to the summer of 2016 expectations regarding future material living conditions have worsened slightly in the Czech Republic, which marks a break in a trend that has existed (with several short-term fluctuations) since the second half of 2012 in which there have been consistently more positive than negative expectations about the future material living conditions of households. Future research will show whether this shift is a more lasting trend or just another short-term change. In Hungary and Slovakia, by contrast, expectations about material living conditions have improved slightly. In Poland expectations have remained comparable to views recorded in the summer of 2016. Despite some fluctuations current expectations in all four countries are much better than they were at the start of 2012 (see Figure 4).

Technical parameters of the survey

<i>Survey:</i>	<i>Czech Society, v17-01</i>
<i>Survey by:</i>	<i>Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences</i>
<i>Project:</i>	<i>Czech Society – Continuous Public Opinion Research Project of the Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences</i>
<i>Field survey dates:</i>	<i>9–22 January 2017</i>
<i>Sampling method:</i>	<i>Quota sampling</i>
<i>Quotas:</i>	<i>Region (NUTS 3 Regions), size of place of residence, sex, age, education</i>
<i>Data source for quota sampling:</i>	<i>Czech Statistical Office</i>
<i>Representativeness:</i>	<i>Population of the Czech Republic over the age of 15</i>
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	<i>1039</i>
<i>Number of interviewers:</i>	<i>244</i>
<i>Data collection method:</i>	<i>Face-to-face interviews conducted by interviewers with respondents - combined CAPI and PAPI questioning</i>
<i>Research instrument:</i>	<i>Standardised questionnaire</i>
<i>Questions:</i>	<i>EV.10, EV.11, EU.33, EU.34</i>
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Glossary of terms:

A quota sample replicates the structure of the basic population of the study (in this case the population of the Czech Republic over the age of 15) by setting quotas for different parameters. In other words, a quota sample is based on the same proportion of persons with the selected characteristics. We used data from the Czech Statistical Office to create the quotas. In our surveys quotas are set for sex, age, education, region, and community size. The sample is thus selected so that the percentage of men and women in the sample corresponds to the share of men and women in each region of the CR. Similarly the sample reflects the corresponding shares of the population in individual regions in the CR, citizens in different age groups, people with different levels of education, and people in different sizes of communities.

A representative sample is a sample from the total population whose characteristics can be validly inferred to apply as the characteristics of the population overall. In our case this means that respondents were selected with a view to generalising the collected data as applicable to the population of the Czech Republic over the age of 15.

The Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM) is a research department of the Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences. Its history dates back to 1946, when the Czechoslovak Institute for Public Opinion Research began operating as part of the Ministry of Information. The current CVVM emerged in 2001 when its predecessor (IVVM) was transferred from the Czech Statistical Office to the Institute of Sociology. Its incorporation within an academic institution provides a guarantee of high professional standards and quality, and as part of an academic environment the CVVM is required to fulfil criteria that ensure it meets the highest professional standards. The CVVM's work is centred on the Czech Society research project, in the frame of which it examines public opinion by conducting ten surveys annually on a representative sample of the population over the age of 15, with approximately 1000 respondents participating in each survey. The questionnaire's omnibus format makes it possible to cover a wide array of topics. Political, economic, and other generally social topics are regularly added to the survey. The surveys include both repeat questions, whereby it is possible to observe phenomena over time, and new topics that reflect current events. The long-term and continuous nature of this project focused on surveying public opinion is unique in the Czech Republic.]
