About the project

In early September of 2012 IME started a joint project with three other organizations\(^1\) in post-communist countries (Lithuania, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan). The two-year project aims to improve the image of the entrepreneur as a key player in the economy due to indications of worsening perceptions of society towards this figure. In addition to establishing the image of entrepreneurs in society at present, the partners will try to find an explanation for existing perceptions, and to improve it by conducting a public campaign.

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Introduction

Economists and politicians for years regarded entrepreneurs as an important engine for economic growth, employment and innovation. Although it is generally assumed that the activity of entrepreneurs is critical to any economy, public perceptions are often mixed. They both depend on the stage of economic development, and other characteristics (political system, government policies regulating the economy, quality of education, the rule of law, family traditions, the role of religion in public life, etc.).

Understanding of entrepreneurship is extremely important because it depends on:

- Whether there will be people who want to become entrepreneurs - who see a case to start their own business;
- Whether there will be people who think they can be entrepreneurs - who have the necessary skills and knowledge;
- Is there fear of failure - what are the expectations in general and whether they deter potential entrepreneurs to start a business;
- Are there people who consider a career as an entrepreneur wanted - the extent to which society respects these people, and what is the social status of entrepreneurs;
- What is the attitude of the media towards entrepreneurs.

We will try to address these questions and to present our point of view, which is based on the results of the representative opinion poll survey we did in Bulgaria. We asked several researchers with different expertise and insight to look at the results and present their point of view (sociologist, anthropologist, economist, philosopher, historian and theologian).

\(^1\) Lithuanian Free Market Institute - [www.lrinka.lt](http://www.lrinka.lt), initiator and project coordinator; New Economic School, Georgia - [www.nesgeorgia.org](http://www.nesgeorgia.org); Central Asian Free Market Institute - [http://freemarket.kg/](http://freemarket.kg/).
Short comparison of the results of the onion poll in the four project countries

Comparing the results of sociological research in the four countries shows some similarities but also clear differences on certain issues.

Similarities

- In all four countries, the majority of respondents identify entrepreneurs and companies as a source of economic growth.

- The entrepreneurial experience is still little. Of all surveyed, less than a tenth were or are currently entrepreneurs. For Bulgaria this share is even much lower (3%) compared with Kyrgyzstan (7%), Georgia (6%) and Lithuania (5%).

- The main factor for the formation of attitudes towards entrepreneurs in all four countries is the personal experience like consumers and/or employees.

- The main function that the developer is expected to perform is to create jobs - Bulgaria (73%), Georgia (70%), Kyrgyzstan (59%) and Lithuania (56%).

- In all countries the respondents identified as the least important function of an entrepreneur as "to allocate limited resources" - three percent of respondents in Bulgaria, Lithuania and Kyrgyzstan, and 4 percent in Georgia.

- The basic perceptions of entrepreneurs have not changed dramatically over the last five years in any country.

- In all countries, the failure of a business venture is seen as a normal phenomenon, although Bulgaria result is almost equal to the respondents' perceptions of a failure like that the entrepreneur does not fits the job.

- The primary distinguishing characteristic of entrepreneurs is "hard work" according to respondents in the four countries. Next are "responsible" and "take risks."

Differences

- In Bulgaria and Lithuania just over half of the respondents said they did not want to become entrepreneurs, which is radically different from the situation in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, where just over half of the respondents showed such a desire.

- Respondents in Bulgaria and Lithuania indicated that lower taxes and fewer regulations would help entrepreneurship while in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan the most indicated that state aid would encourage entrepreneurs.

- While the strongest factor in forming the opinion about entrepreneurs has is friends in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, media is the strongest influencer in Lithuania and Bulgaria.
The national representative survey “The Image of the Entrepreneur in Bulgaria” outlines the several specific features of the public attitudes to the entrepreneur:

- In general the distrust significantly dominates over the trust to entrepreneurs and their image has been deteriorating in the past years;
- The perceptions of various aspects of the entrepreneurs’ image and activity are contradictory: positive assessments of their personal activity (hard work, taking risks etc.), and negative of their financial and material status (perceived as illegally acquired in breach of the moral principles). The result of their activities (new jobs opened, goods produced and services provided, paying taxes) has been positively evaluated, while the way of achieving those results (both as genesis and daily practices) is viewed negatively;
- A large part of the negative features of entrepreneurs are shared not only by the general public, but by the private proprietors themselves. Between 40 and 60% of them are convinced that the entrepreneurs are only interested in profits and often break the moral norms; that their wealth was acquired during the dissolving of the socialist system; that they do not care about the environment etc. To summarize, the self-identification of a considerable part of this group is not just unable to send a positive message about itself but is contaminated by the overall negative group images. This needs an explanation not less than the widespread public attitudes.

Beyond the historical, socio-psychological and situational reasons for these attitudes several sociological factors can be pointed out that contribute to the explanation of the overall picture.

1. Weak modernization and competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy, increasing social stratification without the emergence of a stable and sufficiently large middle class.

The late economic reforms in Bulgaria, the lack of investments and the poor development of the high-technology sectors with high added value respectively, the parcelled and backward agriculture, the regulatory burden and the bureaucratic impediments to the small and medium businesses led to loss of social and economic status for the larger part of the people. Bulgaria shares the last position in gross domestic product per capita in the EU with Romania. The purchase power and living standard remained low even during the years of economic growth (2002-2007).

For the 20 years after the end of the communist rule, a sustained and considerable in size middle class has failed to form. The sociological surveys show that the majority of the Bulgarians place themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The economic and financial behaviour, the dependence on the state, the values and market behaviour of

\[\text{Unfortunately the international research project did not include the question of who is identified by the people as an "entrepreneur". Probably it was assumed there was a public consensus as to who is an entrepreneur, which the empirical observation did not confirm. Other qualitative surveys have shown that most often a private proprietor, a businessman and an entrepreneur are perceived as one and the same thing. Therefore this analysis shall consider them a single group.}\]
these people are much closer to those of the lower social strata, up to the lower middle class perhaps than to the typical middle class. Let us just remind that after the end of communism it was exactly the free entrepreneurship in a free market economy that was viewed as the road to the welfare state and the increased standard of living.

Logically since the entrepreneurship has not visibly contributed to significant increase of the incomes and the formation of a middle class, then the public opinion cannot visibly evaluate it positively. According to the public opinion the individual entrepreneurs may possess certain positive features (such as diligence, inventiveness, creativity – results we can find in the survey), but their entrepreneurial activity has not increased the peoples’ social status. Consequently the entrepreneur is envisaged as accumulating benefits from hired labour, while the blue collars remain in poverty and deprivation. It is indicative that the strongest negative associations with an entrepreneur are related to luxury and sumptuousness, passion for money and accumulation of wealth through exploitation of hired labour. This leads us to the hypothesis that until the results from the activities of entrepreneurs become visible in the form of increased standard of living for the “average Bulgarian” and the formation of a stable middle class (and not visible just from their own material status and implied functions such as opening jobs and paying taxes), then entrepreneurs will be perceived predominantly negatively.

2. The birth of Bulgarian business from several “impure conceptions”:

- The late socialism establishment, the credit millionaires, the transformation of political power into economic.
- The so-called mass privatization (1994 – 1996) performed by the socialist government with funds that were supposed to turn the Bulgarian citizens into shareholders but that practically concentrated enormous economic resources in the hands of a handful of people with zero responsibility to the "shareholders”.
- The late “market” privatization of the UDF government (1997-2001), where the so-called “worker-manager” companies had a considerable share. Instead of producing investments and vibrancy of the enterprises, they led to their disappearance, to emigration and huge regional misbalances.
- The outburst of construction (2000- 2008) and the overbuilding accompanied by destroying the nature in the mountain and sea resorts. This process precisely led to the formation of the main entrepreneur figure in the Bulgarian public opinion, i.e. the “construction entrepreneur” 3

The merging of all those practices has formed a rather controversial image of Bulgarian entrepreneurship. Its representatives are not uniform either in the origin of their economic resources, or in their values and ethnic norms, or in their professional standards and principles. Very often it turns out that similar material status or similar parameters of economic activity have been achieved in quite different manners. Or the inverse, achieved in similar manners but with different political patronage. Almost the entire 20-year period of development of market economy and entrepreneurship in Bulgaria was accompanied by political patronage over certain businessmen and groupings (whole periods can be marked with symptomatic names of circles like Multigroup, Orion, Olympus, TIM etc.), close links with the ruling, dependence through

3 In everyday talk there is practically no other stable association with entrepreneur except “construction entrepreneur".
the public procurement mechanism. The commitment to various political patrons, the “internal” knowledge of the road to success or the distancing from the mass practice makes the entrepreneurs themselves differentiate between them, and not to share any group identity. Their relationship to the others is not “I am one of them”, but rather “I and the rest”. This contradiction is further reinforced when it comes to the public opinion. Entrepreneurship, much of which does not work in a competitive environment, does not make innovations, but use the political protection, clienteles and corrupt practices is unable to create its own positive image, and even less – to spread it in the society. The honest representatives of this layer distance individually from the widespread type but see themselves as an exception rather than a rule and cannot change the dominant public attitudes.

3. Bad work regulation framework (working hours, leaves, securities, work conditions, quality of goods etc) and ineffective control of the compliance with fundamental labour rights enhance the “exploitation” image of the entrepreneur.

As the survey data show, the two most important factors in the personal experience of people exerting an influence on their opinions of entrepreneurs are “experience as a client/customer” and “the hired worker/officer” experience. So, the immediate work and consumer environment of the people has a strong impact on the entrepreneurs’ profile. For people with basic education and low qualification living in smaller settlements and employed in manual labour there is a high level of statistical correlation between the negative opinion of the entrepreneurs and its formation on the basis of the personal experience of a hired worker or a consumer.

Having in mind that a considerable part of the practices involving abuse of working conditions, paying securities (or actually either not paying them or paying the minimum possible), working hours, leaves, and irregular payment of salaries etc. affect those social groups precisely, we could judge about the “contribution” of the incorrect employer practices to the image of entrepreneurs. For example, according to the results of various studies the share of the grey sector and work without a labour contract is quite high exactly in the main “entrepreneurial” sector, i.e. construction. Social responsibility is still an alien concept for a large part of the business and the entrepreneurial class. When we add to this faulty goods, misleading commercials or improper conditions in contracts it becomes clear that the problems of entrepreneur reputation, directly referring to the quality of supplied goods and the conditions in which the workers and officers are placed also have their “contribution” to the formation of their negative image. In the recent years a series of measures have been taken in terms of working conditions and consumer protection in particular that, if systematically implemented, could lead to positive changes. This will however need a longer period of time and sustainability of the achieved results.

The main conclusion of this analysis is that the drivers, shaping the image of the entrepreneur in the public opinion are not just historical, and socio-psychological, acting via “inertia”, but also related to the present developments. The most important among them are the controversial genesis of the present entrepreneur’s layer, the level of responsibility to the workers/employees and clients, the lack of a significant results from entrepreneurial activities on the material status of the Bulgarians and on the formation of a stable middle class. Namely, this class and its prosperity could become the solid foundation for change and more positive attitudes towards the entrepreneurs in the society.
THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Ana Luleva
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Science

“Alpha Research” has presented the results of the nationwide representative study done in October 2012 that aims at revealing the public perceptions towards entrepreneurs in Bulgaria.

The questions relate to the nature of entrepreneur’s activities, his social functions, features, factors that influence perceptions of entrepreneurs, the confidence in entrepreneurs, the dynamics of the perception of entrepreneurs, the perceptions of success/failure in business and more – the ideas for the systemic conditions that encourage entrepreneurship and evaluation of this activity compared with the former post-socialist countries and the rest of the world. Some of these questions suggest answers that are more normative and outline an ideal/imaginary image of the entrepreneur. Another part gives room for answers stemming from the personal experience and attitudes of respondents (e.g., “Are there entrepreneurs who you respect and trust?”, “Would you like to become an entrepreneur?”, and “Would you like your son/daughter to become an entrepreneur?”). As a result, we can compare the normative ideas about the figure of the entrepreneur with opinion based on the personal experience gained from interaction with entrepreneurs or images taken by the media.

The data on gender, age, education and size of the settlement allows differentiation of findings, highlighting differences between groups of respondents and deepening of the analysis.

The anthropological perspective of the results

Anthropology is a holistic discipline that is based on the "thick description» (Geertz), the micro level and works with set of tools, which aims to reveal the motivations in the behaviour of social actors, to compare views and their cultural practices. The distinctive look of anthropology "from the bottom" is based on qualitative methods - ethnographic research, in-depth interviews, included observation. The results can be compared with the analysis of public discourse, and, using the method of triangulation, with quantitative data. This achieves a more complete picture of the research community and its culture, and the analysis can answer the questions "how" and "why. In short, anthropology focuses on the culture of the people as members of a society or community and clarifies how the human activity is culturally determined, motivated and implemented.

The anthropological aspect of the business is analyzed in intensively developed in last decades field of business anthropology (Baba 2012). The anthropology reveals the importance of cultural factors in business development, for the decision to start a business, the attitudes and behaviour of entrepreneurs and consumers (Baba 2012; Lalonde 2010).

On the basis of the data of the survey, the anthropological analysis will show how cultural values, ideas and identities underlie the opinions expressed for and the attitude towards entrepreneurs. This will outline the socio-cultural context that affects the motivation and the entrepreneurs’ behaviour in Bulgaria on one side, and the public’s perceptions towards them on the other. In the specific case, the data from opinion poll presents mainly the second aspect of entrepreneurship: the external view - that of the
society on them and to a lesser extent – entrepreneurs’ self-reflection. Only 5.2 percent of respondents identified themselves as private owner/entrepreneur. 3.1% said they were entrepreneurs in the question “Which of your personal experiences influenced the most your opinion about entrepreneurs?” (Answer: “My experience of an entrepreneur”). These are mainly people aged between 31 and 50 years, with college or higher education, more often men than women (5.1% to 1.3%), living in cities. Others have direct experience of this activity as a business partner (3.5%) and friends and family of entrepreneurs (10%). The rest have personal experience as consumers/customers (36%) and hired employees/workers (29%). About half of the respondents identified themselves as student/unemployed/retired.

According to the data provided the greatest importance among the factors shaping public opinion about entrepreneurs has the media (32%), friends (31%) and family (24.8%). Civil servants and politicians also have a strong influence (20%). Media, family and friends are the most influential in the capital. In all groups friends are considered as more important factor than family. Friends are the most important factor for people between 18 and 50 years (40-41%), while for older people media are the basic factor. A comparison between men and women shows that the latter points the family as a more influential factor, while men for this are friends. For both sexes the media have a big impact. State officials are cited as a significant factor more often in the capital and regional cities and by people between the ages of 40 and 60 (24%), university and college graduates. For young people (18-30 years) and those older than 61 years they are less important factor (17.6%).

The two questions on the social functions of the entrepreneur (“Who creates economic growth in a society?” and “What are the two most important functions of the entrepreneur?”) suggest a rather normative responses reflecting the perceptions of the entrepreneurs’ role “in general”, and not specifically to Bulgarian entrepreneurs. According to the majority of respondents (55.1%) entrepreneurs and companies create economic growth in a society vs. 23.7% who responded that it is the government. The government is recognized as a source of economic growth more often by respondents in small towns (32%), by the age groups of young people (18-30 years old) and by people over 50 years. This view is shared more often by women than by men. Middle aged respondents - between 30 and 50 years old - definitely give more importance to entrepreneurs and businesses for economic growth in the society.

Regarding the functions of the entrepreneur, the largest share of people believes that the most important function is that he/she creates jobs (73.1%). The other answers are the following: to produce goods and services (32.5%) and to create and improve products and services (17.5%). One third of respondents’ point that paying taxes is the entrepreneurs’ most important function. Job creation as entrepreneurs’ function is important for all age groups (with minimal deviation downwards for people over 61 years old), more often in regional and small towns and villages than in the capital. On average, 16.3% believe that the entrepreneur should form a profit. The highest proportion of respondents shares this opinion in the capital (35.5%), while for residents of smaller and regional towns and villages these answers ranged respectively 9% to 13.6%. In fact this is the only function of the entrepreneur that receives significantly different estimates depending on the residence of respondents. Men more often agree that the entrepreneur needs to make a profit, compared with women (19% vs. 13.7%). Accordingly, the majority of Bulgarians anticipate the entrepreneur as a figure that has the most important economic significance for the creation of economic growth in the community, for providing jobs, creating and delivering goods and services, but at the same time not to realize a profit. The latter reflects the dominant views of egalitarian
The view of the entrepreneurs as exploiters is more prevalent in small towns and villages, among people without higher education and those aged 61 years and above.

The question "What are the three basic characteristics of an entrepreneur?" refers to the ideal (imaginary) image of the entrepreneur. It highlights the positive qualities: hard working (33%) responsible (32%), risk taker (31%), longsighted (30%), constructive and creative (23%). Significantly lower is the share of those which characterize the entrepreneur as an exploiter (17%), greedy (15%) and corrupt (14%). Only for about 19% of the respondents, he/she is moral, while 12% define him/her as a crook. Positive qualities (visionary, hardworking, responsible, risk taker, creative and inventor) are indicated by people with university and college degree, in the capital and regional cities, and lesser by those living in small towns and villages and people with secondary, primary and lower education. They, on the contrary, more often agree that the entrepreneur is an exploiter, greedy, corrupt and a crook. People aged between 31 and 50 years have similar views about the quality of the entrepreneur. They more often than others define him/her as visionary, responsible, hardworking and less - as an exploiter, corrupt, and scoundrel.

Hard work (40%), risk (26%) and creation (25%) are associated with the notion of the entrepreneur. One third of Bulgarians associate him/her more with the idea for luxury and a quarter - with social status. The share of those who connect entrepreneurs with corruption and crime is significant -35%. The idea that an entrepreneur is someone who works hard is shared by most of the people with university and college degree living in Sofia or in a small town, aged between 31 and 50 years. Most often the entrepreneur is associated with a crime by people in adolescence (18-31 years) or over 61 years old with primary or lower education. People of working age (31-50 years) and with higher education rarely agree. The entrepreneur is associated with corruption again mostly by elder people (over 61 years) and younger, more often by men than women, by those with less education, without significant difference according to the residence. This similarity in the views of younger and older is observed also in their responses to other questions. While for the youngest respondents it can be assumed that their views are influenced by friends, family and the media, the oldest respondents have the negative attitude towards entrepreneurs probably because of the personal experience during the transition and at the end of their employment, or as retirees.

The Bulgarian entrepreneurs can be related strongly to the responses expressing agreement / disagreement with the statements: "rich entrepreneurs are those who unlawfully acquired property during the collapse of the socialist system" and "entrepreneurs often violate moral principles." The first is confirmed by more than 78% of respondents and rejected by only 10%, the second - 74% agree while 15% disagree. The unconditionally of those two statements made by respondents demonstrates the domination of the Bulgarian society perceptions for the nature of the transition and the role of wealthy entrepreneurs in it. The claim that wealthy entrepreneurs are those who have illegally acquired property during the transition is shared by all groups overwhelmingly. In comparison, it is impressive to note the slightly lower indices of respondents with primary or lower education and those living in rural areas. In terms of age, the lower the percentage is for the respondents between 18 and 30 years, while people of other age groups share almost equally belief. This is probably due to the fact
that the period of privatization coincided with the early childhood of youth respondents aged between 18 and 30 years and therefore they have no recollection of the scandalous stories that accompanied this process, they have not developed the feeling that privatization was unfair and related to the illegal profiteering associated with a handful of very wealthy businessmen. In regional towns and cities the belief that wealthy entrepreneurs illegally acquired property in the transition period is stronger (80-86%). They are followed by a 74% from the capital and 70% from rural places. This situation is likely due to the fact that the cities in the province experienced privatization that took place "in front" of the people, they are more strongly linked to informal networks of friends and relatives through which the information about the privatized companies and wealth of large local businesses flew. This has created a conviction for the illegal origin and criminal nature of big business. Rural residents have less direct contact with wealthy entrepreneurs and thus their perception of their illegally acquired property is not explicitly negative.

69% of respondents believe that entrepreneurs do not care about nature. The breakdown by gender, age and education does not show significant differences. Regarding the type of village it is noteworthy that the residents of the capital and regional cities deny more strongly the concern of entrepreneurs towards the nature, compared to those living in villages and small towns. It could be argued that the residents of Sofia and big cities are more sensitive to nature conservation and have higher requirements regarding the environmental activities of entrepreneurs. This is confirmed by the protests against the destruction of natural resources, which are often run in the capital and major cities. They reflect the motives of universal values and citizenship consciousness to confront specific business interests.

Anthropological studies show that entrepreneurs are not perceived as a homogenous group. While big business is most often associated with political clienteles networks, links with the underground world or the ex-secret services (known as "appointed businessmen"), the perceptions for small and medium business have positive trend (Chavdarova, Petrova). In the specific case, the positive opinion for entrepreneurs is expressed by the confirmation of statements such as "entrepreneurs are creative and inventive" - 61% of respondents, against 26% of the opposite opinion, and "entrepreneurship brings more benefits than harm to society" - confirmed by 63% of respondents against 27% who deny it. These positive views about entrepreneurs are shared the less by adults over 61 years, those with primary or lower education, and those living in rural areas. Residents of the capital and people of working age between 31 and 50 years, university and college graduates without gender differences are of the opposite opinion.

Entrepreneurship is not a source of pride. This is the interpretation of the data by which on average 47% of respondents deny the statement "I am/ would be proud to be an entrepreneur," and only 26% said yes. The denial is the most severe by adults living in villages, and those with primary and lower education. Relatively greater is the agreement with the statement by respondents with university and college degree, living in the capital or in a small town, and in the age group between 18 and 40 years, but in these groups the negative responses are again higher than positive. These negative attitudes towards the image of the entrepreneur as possible social identification correspond with the predominantly negative answer to the question "Would you like to become an entrepreneur?" given by 55% of respondents, against 21% who responded in the affirmative. Bulgaria became the only country in the group that dominantly gave negative answers to this question. But when the question is "Would you want your son/daughter to become an entrepreneur?" 44% of respondents gave positive answers.
(they want their son to become an entrepreneur), against 28% who disagreed. About 39 percent approved that their daughters become entrepreneurs while 29% didn’t. With the exception of the very old people (over 61 years) who gave predominantly negative answers - 37% vs. 26% positive for sons and 35% vs. 32% are positive for daughters - entrepreneurship is a desirable future for their sons and daughters, especially for people aged between 30 and 60 years, university and college graduates, and those living in cities. For respondents at the age of up to 50 years the entrepreneurship is highly desirable for their sons than for daughters, while those aged between 50 and 60 years did not give preference to either sex.

Closest indicators of approval/denial of the prospect of an entrepreneurial career for sons and daughters testify to prevailing egalitarian views on professional choice for both sexes in this age group. Entrepreneurship is a favourable carrier for sons than daughters regardless of education of respondents and distances are more pronounced for people with secondary, primary or lower education. The latter and rural residents more often responded that they would not want their daughters to be entrepreneurs. There were no differences in the responses to the two questions in the capital. In other cities the biggest share of respondents preferred entrepreneurship to be a carrier for their sons, compared to those who find that suitable for daughters. The data indicates the existence of patriarchal attitudes and gender inequalities in terms of division of labour in the Bulgarian society. Notions of entrepreneurship as an activity better suited to men/sons than for women/girls is shared by people of all ages - from 18 to 50 and over 60 years old, regardless of their education, living in villages and small regional towns. It can be said that only in Sofia among people aged between 50 and 60 years there is a relatively egalitarian views about gender. The other groups do share views typical of patriarchal gender order. They are also reflected in the distribution of answers by gender of the respondents.

Impressive is the unanimity of men and women in the preference of sons as an entrepreneur over daughters: 43% of men responded that they would like their son to become an entrepreneur, 28 percent - have no such desire. On the same question, 44% of women answered positively, 28% - negative. 38% of men and the same share of women said they would like their daughter to become an entrepreneur and 29% in both groups would not want that. The agreement of women with the views of men in this case is indicative of the fact that they have adopted and maintain norms and values of the patriarchal gender order. With the exception of the capital and those among the age group of 51 to 60 year olds the dominate notions of entrepreneurship is as it is suitable activity for men. This state of affairs corresponds to dominant cultural construction of masculinity in which successful entrepreneur is one of the images of hegemonic masculinity (Luleva 2008).

The presence/absence of systemic trust in the Bulgarian society towards entrepreneurs can be judged by the responses to the question "In general, do you have confidence in entrepreneurs?" The question refers to entrepreneurs "in principle", which are unknown, anonymous. Predominantly negative responses are registered - 37% of respondents had no or tend not to trust, 20% - have positive and only 4 % have full confidence remaining 15% - partially, a third - "I have not nor do not trust». The comparative data shows that Bulgaria registered the highest degree of public distrust in entrepreneurs. With increasing age, the share of people who do not trust them increases. Most adults (over 61 years) and those with primary or lower education have the highest level of distrust and consequently the lowest level of confidence in entrepreneurs. The youngest (18-30 years) more often say they do not trust the developers, compared with those in the next age group (31-40 years). The group of 31-40 year olds is only where
the degree of confidence in entrepreneurs is greater than the degree of distrust (29% vs. 27%). People with higher education and those living in the capital have similar responses of the degree of trust and distrust in the entrepreneurs (29% vs. 28%). In all other groups, a significant degree of distrust is registered than that of trust.

The picture changes significantly when we talk about personal trust. It refers to the question "Are there any entrepreneurs who you respect and trust?" 45% of respondents reported that there are such entrepreneurs. 35% answered in the negative. People with higher education - college and university - and aged between 31 and 50 years, living in Sofia and major city more often responded that there are entrepreneurs who they believe. The lowest personal trust towards entrepreneurs is within the respondents over 61 years old, with primary or lower education, living in the village. The degree of personal confidence in entrepreneurs puts Bulgaria as last in the group of analysed countries.

39% of respondents believe that lower taxes and less government regulation would promote entrepreneurship in Bulgaria. This view is shared by people irrespective of their education, from all age groups and regardless of the place of residence. Next, as factors that would stimulate entrepreneurship in Bulgaria, is ranked the easier access to credit (25%), more state aid and better education. People with college degrees and those living in Sofia showed their support for more state aid. A better education is the focus of young respondents (40 years old and less) and those with university and college graduates living in Sofia and major cities. Men more than women insist on state aid and easier access to credit, while women give preference to lower taxes and government regulations, better education and improvement of public attitudes towards entrepreneurs.

The assessment of the business environment in post-socialist countries is presented with the answer to the question "do you think entrepreneurs in the former socialist countries are better or worse than entrepreneurs in the rest of the world?" 31% of respondents believe that entrepreneurs in the former socialist countries are worse off than those in other countries. Only among residents of the capital the groups argue that entrepreneurs in post-socialist countries are better dominates. In all other groups, the belief is that entrepreneurs in post-socialist countries are worse than entrepreneurs in the world. Relatively small is the difference between negative and positive responses in the age group of 30-50 year olds. These results correspond with registered by ethnographic studies belief that the business environment in Bulgaria is not good and is particularly detrimental to small and family businesses (Luleva 2012).

The data shows that 40% of respondents have not changed their perceptions about entrepreneurs in the last five years. As far as there is any change, it is towards deterioration among all groups. In this respect Bulgaria without any doubts leads to other countries. For people with higher education there is a relatively higher proportion of those whose perceptions on entrepreneurs have improved (21% vs. 31% responded negatively), while those with college degrees register the most negative perceptions of entrepreneurs (only 11% has slightly improved their image of entrepreneurs and 43% responded negatively). People between 18 and 40 years old more often than other age groups responded that perceptions of entrepreneurs have improved. For their group too, however, the proportion of those who say that their perceptions had deteriorated prevails (29-31% vs. 17-19%). These numbers show that the image of the entrepreneur is changing slowly and the change is negative.

The opinion poll results show existing distinct differences in social groups in terms of ideas and their perceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. While people of
working age between 30 and 50 years, university and college graduates and those living in Sofia share a positive image of entrepreneurs and more trust in them, the youngest and adults above 60 years define them more frequently as exploiters, people who are only interested in profit and do not trust them.

The reasons for this can be found in the culture, which was formed in the decades of state socialism and the way the majority of Bulgarians suffered post-socialist transition.

During the socialism the dominant ideology and the legal system denies private ownership as a reason for exploitation of the proletariat. Propaganda to eradicate the "morality and selfishness private ownership" as well as "private ownership interest and misappropriation of others labour" was conducted. Accordingly, "the private person", the person who is creative, seeks profit and is close to the notion of an entrepreneur is represented as an exploiter and enemy of working people. There were calls for accepting the public ownership. During the period of late socialism this rhetoric was abandoned and the private initiative was permitted within certain limits. As research for other former socialist countries shows, the communist rule could not exist without some islands of entrepreneurship in all socialist countries; the informal sector was creating an entrepreneurial culture elements (Eyal&co 1998; Benacek 2006). In a centrally planned economy, some business leaders appear as quasi-entrepreneurs. People from the nomenclature successfully participated in post-socialist privatization; they transformed their social and relational capital thus becoming the new entrepreneurs.

During the post-socialist transformation the figure of the entrepreneur has emerged as emblematic of the new economic regime and it “took” all the negative and positive notions of the transition. The image of the entrepreneur in Bulgaria is ambiguous, related to contradictory experience of transition. Therefore, the entrepreneur is a social role that is both loaded with important social functions and expectations while degraded and is rejected as unwanted and unnecessary.

Entrepreneurs are not a homogenous social group. They are not perceived as such a group by society as well. Since the image of the entrepreneur is not monolithic but "divided", it is more correct to speak of entrepreneurs in the plural. Ethnographic evidence suggests that many people clearly distinguish large from small and medium entrepreneurs. While for the first the relationship is negative and always involves assumptions for illegitimate and illegal sources of wealth, connections with the political elite or criminal networks, for the small business there is a positive attitude. Small entrepreneurs, in turn, shared their disappointment with the functioning of the institutions and give examples of barriers to their business because of overregulation. Often they described the situation as "survival" in a hostile environment, not prosperity. It gives them a sense of insecurity and distrust that generate informal strategies to overcome the difficulties arising from systemic conditions (Luleva 2012; Chavdarova 2012).

The registered negative attitude towards entrepreneurs from the youngest (18 to 30 years) and older respondents are probably due to the fact that youth unemployment and poverty among people over 60 years is very high. The negative view of entrepreneurs shows large social distance, dissatisfaction with life, a sense of social exclusion. People of working age (30-50 years) living in the capital share positive image of the entrepreneur and relatively optimistic view of the world.

Ambivalent attitude towards entrepreneurs reflects the dissatisfaction of the majority of the Bulgarian transition and the conditions for doing business, a great sense of social inequality and a sense of injustice.
Literature:


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THE PHILISOPHAL PERSPECTIVE

Ivan Kolev
Sofia University, Faculty of Philosophy

We assume that trust is the foundation upon which most features of the image of the entrepreneur depend. The confidence in its genesis and history, in justification of its objectives, and trust in the integrity of the ways entrepreneur seeks to achieve its objectives.

The image of the entrepreneur in Bulgaria gets very low trust (12.4%, according to research agency Alpha Research, 2012) and to explain why is the main task for the analyst on the topic.

The image of the entrepreneur in Bulgaria is not monolithic and consistent - it has a rather amorphous structure. On the one hand it has historical overlays; on the other hand, this image is not consistent in the perspectives of different social strata.

As to historical factors, one of the most important circumstances is the lack of historical connection between the stages of entrepreneurship in Bulgaria. Here, the most important fact is that the layer of personal experience of entrepreneurship from the era before the socialism in Bulgaria is almost completely absent. Also of importance is the deficit of positive first-hand information about people who have been entrepreneurs in that era. Indicative of this is the example of one of the largest individual donors in Bulgarian history, Alexander Georgiev - Kodzhakafaliata from Bourgas, whose donation exceeding in value the donation of Evlogi brothers and Hristo Georgiev, but the case of the merchant from Bourgas remained unknown for decades and only in recent years appear first scanty evidence for this big merchant of Bourgas made huge donations to their city. Crowding out of the national and local collective remembrance of the memory of entrepreneur of that rank is a clear indicator that even indirect acquaintance and appropriate recognition of major home entrepreneurs is sparse and there are significant gaps.

Another important factor is the social egalitarianism, a legacy of decades of socialism, which resists the positioning of the image of the entrepreneur entirely positive. National History pantheon is occupied mainly by revolutionaries and political activists. The place of indisputable positive image of entrepreneurs is extremely scarce (limited mainly to Evlogi and Hristo Georgiev, Dimitar Tsenov).

Mistrust in the genesis

The second capitalism in Bulgaria started sharper than the first. While in the post-1878 entrepreneurs from free Bulgaria continue what already exists as a Bulgarian commercial and industrial community in Ottoman Turkey, and then in 1989 the speed of the distribution and transformation of economic resources took place created deformations that are difficult to be legitimized by the society.

- Foreign trade companies. The darker image of the entrepreneur has generic marks the beginning of the transition (the first years after 1989), when a small part of the start-ups are born from the transformation of the capital of foreign trade companies. Crucial here was the closure of Ministry of foreign economic activity, when the capital, which was in the hands of the managers of those companies quickly became their property. The process was facilitated by the fact
that the state secret services structures that previously controlled the movement of capital, came under the control of new political parties, and some of these structures were simply liquidated precisely to eliminate state control over foreign trade capital companies.

- This capital entered the Bulgarian emerging market economy as an important resource and through it became possible to obtain dominance in entire sectors of the Bulgarian economy (Hristov, 2009).

- Mafia groups. Another generic feature of Bulgarian entrepreneurship is related to the role of violent groups which on one hand racketeered the emerging private business, and the other prevented new competition where they conquered territories. The influence of mafia groups in the 90s created an atmosphere of resignation among many potential entrepreneurs.

- Credit selection. The lack of historical free cash in Bulgaria made start-ups totally dependent on bank loans. Given that it was difficult for the new economic players to get foreign credits it was obvious that new companies would be totally dependent on the lending from Bulgarian banks. However, since the banks were mostly government and those emerging have been under political control, the access to credit selectively and significantly regulated the "right to business initiative."

- Political corruption. Another birthmark on the genesis of the Bulgarian business comes from the period of privatization through management-employee companies (MEC). In many cases appointed by political parties managers became owners of the companies. The political objective of the strategy was to create a party-dependent businesses and even politically dependent class. These expectations of the politicians however did not come true because once the property over a company was acquired; the managers most often refused to follow the line of the party headquarters.

Mistrust of identity.

One aspect of the modern image of the entrepreneur is marked by sustained ambiguity. It is about the identity of the entrepreneur. The process in Bulgaria in the years after 1989 confirmed the belief in a substantial part of the Bulgarian public that many of the new economic agents do not coincide with the authentic entrepreneur and play "mandate" role.

- The party companies. The widespread in Bulgarian society stories of "briefcases of Lukanov" and the "money from Vienna" showed the perceptions that some economic players who are popular public figures actually just legitimize other persons or groups who through them exercise the real economic power.

This way, a lasting perception in the Bulgarian society was created about the business results of a company – that they are not a direct outcome of the managers – because of lack of the authentic owner/manager. This "identity crisis" acted in the opposite direction of recognition. The positive results from a business remained "weightless" and did not contributed to the positive image of an entrepreneur who represents what is happening in the Bulgarian economy as a positive stage of economic development. As a result, even large Bulgarian companies have bad image and neither their products, nor their corporate policies can create public confidence.
- **Companies with party protection.** Another shadow on the figure of the entrepreneur falls from the fact that part of the strongest companies in Bulgaria is perceived to be operating under the protection of a given political party and thus the party financially supports the company. For these companies it is known that they easily win public procurement tenders and receive illegal competitive advantages. This in turn is a disincentive for some of the nonpartisan entrepreneurs or prospective entrepreneurs, because they know that you have to declare some party affiliation or at least sympathy to have the chance in the big public procurement tenders.

- **Offshore cover-up.** Since the early attempts of privatization it became clear that many economic agents prefer to remain hidden using offshore companies. The fact that the Bulgarian law did not imposed any restrictions on the participation of such offshore companies in the privatization of economic resources was an indication that political parties had a direct interest for the existence of anonymous players in the Bulgarian economy.

### Deficit of prestigious Bulgarian products

Traditionally, entrepreneurship is associated with creation of innovative ideas. Such entrepreneurs in the world are Henry Ford, Bill Gates, Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, Ingmar Kamprad. The onion poll, however, shows that only 22.5% of respondents have identified the "constructive and creative" among the three main characteristics of the entrepreneur. This underestimation of creativity suggests that in Bulgaria the entrepreneur is associated mainly with the image of the privatizer of the business that began in the era of socialism, or the image of a foreign dealer, or of services provider.

And even when these businesses are very few in one country, their presence could be enough to enable the country to form a convincing positive image of the entrepreneur.

Unfortunately, there are almost no publicly Bulgarian business figures that are associated primarily with innovation. Even when Bulgaria has such firms as Walltopia, their existence is known by a small circle of people and their successes are not sufficient for determining the formation of a positive image of entrepreneurs in Bulgarian society. Such achievements should be included even in textbooks and there is some hope in this regard, because of the Ministry of Education plan to include teaching subject "Technology and Entrepreneurship" in schools who can at least at certain point give some positive information on entrepreneurship.

### Compromising the integrity and the benefits of entrepreneurship

Even when the origin and identity of an enterprise has no traces of vague past and unclear personalization, there are many cases in which the reputation of an entrepreneurship is contaminated by corrupt business practices.

For the general public the most important cases readily available are those for entrepreneurs who had caused damages, despite the jobs creation.

- **Productions with harmful effects on the environment.** The benefits from the entry of large foreign companies in Bulgaria often become negatives when public announcements of facts on the impact of on the health of workers in these industries become evident. For example, when a major producer of tiles creates several hundred jobs, but it turns out that his motive is not so much cheap labour as weak legal protection of workers in Bulgaria and the ease with which even the existing
rules can be violated, then the employment creation effect conflicts with the growing concern for the health of employees.

Even more serious are cases in which large companies arrogantly damage not only its employees but also those living in the area, and even entire regions of the country.

Part of the negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship in Bulgaria is caused by the fact that many entrepreneurs damage aggressively the nature that is traditionally perceived in Bulgaria as a public good. Cases of arrogant over construction on the seacoast and mountain resorts create the impression that the entrepreneur is a solo activist who is not interested in the overall and long-term effects of his activities.

- **Malignant products.** One powerful reason for distrust of consumers in the unconditional benefit of private enterprise is the belief of the majority of the Bulgarian population that the quality of food produced by private entrepreneurs is worse than the food produced in the era of socialism and the quality decline is not offset by the wide variety of foods and their widespread availability and accessibility. Many Bulgarian citizens have reason to suspect that entrepreneurs in the food industry are consistently willing to sacrifice quality or even consciously insert ingredients harmful to health, just to get a "good look" of its products and a competitive advantage. This, of course, is facilitated by the weak requirements of a market with limited paying ability (low income).

These several factors often create a preference of the status quo to any modifications by the entrepreneurs because there are lasting suspicions by the society that behind every change there is some damage.

**The entrepreneur is not sufficiently socially responsible**

In the years of transition to market economy a positive liberal expectations quickly emerged that the state may be shrink and give in many of its functions to private or commercial organizations.

The opinion poll shows that job creation is considered as the most important function of the business. The fact that 73% of respondents put this in first place, while the production of goods and services remains far behind with 32.5%, convincingly confirms this statement.

However, a number of crises that have occurred in the last 22 years in Bulgaria were conducted in the manner and caused such effects that the result was decreased optimism that this trend towards small government and market self-regulation should continue in the future. For many Bulgarians the entrepreneurs can not play appropriate social roles and in times of a crisis entrepreneurs” cooperation to overcome and reduce social problems is not enough. The state paternalism image built in decades failed to transform into protection by the "socially responsible business". Moreover, liberal attitudes are created in the era of globalization and the entrepreneurs tried to follow the global economic logic rather than social appeals of local communities. The capital went to economic areas with less resistance and more consumers and could not perform what the traditionally territorial state is obliged to do.

**Corruption**
With the emergence of the market economy in Bulgaria, one of the arguments in favour during the public discussions was that the market economy will eliminate corruption, or at least dramatically reduce it to manageable proportions.

As the opinion poll shows, however, too many people associate the entrepreneur with corruption (23.4%). The competition not only did not eliminate corruption, but also became a motive for the creation of a specific corruption pressure. This corruption pressure is seen in both legislation and law enforcement. Large corporations are able to influence state institutions and to advance adoption of favourable regulations to their benefit, but also to prevent the rule of law application and easy violation of certain civil rights. In this sense, the activity of entrepreneurs is constantly accompanied by news on corruption.

As specific corruption can be pointed the cartel agreements for which there is multiple data (e.g. between large food chains). There are even corruption examples in inter-companies dealings. Studies show that suppliers of goods apply corruption methods towards major in order to ensure their products “visible advantages on the shelves”.

In this regard, the emergence of new electronic media (online and internet forums) played an ambiguous role. On one hand, they can easily, quickly and freely inform the public for of corrupt acts and practices, but on the other hand the “specific lightness of their existence” easily leads to blurring of the reality of things and hinders the formation of a united and strong public position.

**EU membership has not been a panacea**

One side factor that affects the sustainability of the shadows in the image of the entrepreneur in Bulgaria is that the legitimate expectations of a decisive turning point in the business practices of the entry of Bulgaria into the European Union did not materialised. Many Bulgarian citizens believed that one of the effects of Bulgaria’s EU membership will be associated with the creation of clear and fair rules for doing business and creating strong protection of consumer rights. Unfortunately, several years after this historic transition the real change in towards fair competition and scrupulous implementation of the obligations of business to citizens is too small compared to the huge expectations that preparations for membership accumulated in Bulgarian society.

This in turn creates the impression that the negative entrepreneur image is so persistent that even such a historic change and a new global political and institutional context can not bring the expected positive results.

**The global crisis and the crisis of laisser faire ideology**

The worsening of the image of entrepreneurship was possible because to its social irrelevance and the damages it sometimes causes, something else was added - significant portions of the Bulgarian society feels that the laisser fair ideology is not the most appropriate substitute of state socialism.

The case of the collapse of major banking institutions in the U.S. and the subsequent chain bankruptcies inevitably are compared to the contrast behaviour of united Europe in the provision of aid by European institutions to stabilize the financial situation of Member States.

The comparison imposes the conclusion that a completely liberal economy, at least in short historical period, is not able to prevent the financial and social crises and to
minimize their effects, while the state and state derivative structures (EU) have policies and resources to directly exert positive influence in a crisis situation.

**Media deformation and misinformation**

An important factor for the shadow image of the entrepreneur is the media. According to the opinion poll media are the stronger factor that influences people’s perceptions of entrepreneurs (32.0%). During the early 1990’s the first influential free democratic media were newspapers and small private radios but their attitude to what is happening in the economy was more distant and without taking any particular side.

The transformation of media in pure businesses, however, changed the situation. Some of them began to keep a very straightforward policy in favour of one or other businesses and corporations to advance their interests in the public sphere, rather than to be a critical analyst of what is happening in society.

Then the hope was that true image of entrepreneurship can be obtained from specialized analytical media. Actually several such media appeared in the middle of the 1990s (e.g., Capital Weekly newspaper, launched in 1993). In the last 2-3 years, however, developments in the media showed that even these media outlets are not impartial analysts, but under their public image of the true experts, specific business and political interests lay.

This further increased the arguments of those who believe that corruption has penetrated the entire spectrum of the Bulgarian business - from its origins and identity to its media presentation.

The overall conclusion of the review of sociological data and assessment of the situation is that the image of the Bulgarian entrepreneur has difficult to be removed shadows due to the genesis of the modern Bulgarian entrepreneurship, its identity and sustainable practices.

**Literature**

Христов, Христо (2009) Империята на задграничните дружества. София: СИЕЛА.
The economic theory finds it difficult to define entrepreneurship. Intuitive perceptions are most often linked to risk-taking and the idea of the entrepreneur as an inventor. These two concepts are somewhat similar, and certainly not strangers to entrepreneurship, but hardly cover fully the nature of the entrepreneur. "The traditional" economics, somewhat understandably overlooks entrepreneurs and does not put them at the heart of economic theory. In a static equilibrium model, the role of the entrepreneur remains in the background - this view of the economy focuses on taking the best decisions to meet any needs with the limited resources available. Such a model lacks entrepreneurs and requires simple managers to "optimize" the scare resources.

The traditional economics is basically a science of decision making - how the limited resources available should meet the "known" needs. Entrepreneurship in turn refers to the action (meaning "entrepre"), i.e. it is a dynamic process. The entrepreneur is not just there to "optimize" but to discover new resources (or new uses of existing resources) and satisfy both known and unknown needs. The developer can take a central place in the economy only if the economy is seen as a science of human action, not as a science of optimal solutions. Not accidentally the so called "Austrian economics" that defines economics as a science of human action, puts entrepreneurship at its base.

The Austrian tradition defines entrepreneurship as "alertness" for profitable opportunities. This definition may seem somewhat common, but any attempt to narrow the definition will be problematic. Linking entrepreneurship with the action automatically engages risk taking and uncertainty - this is true of every human action. The presence of risk and uncertainty, however, does not exhaust the definition – the search for profitable opportunities is the key. Within this framework, the driving force for changes in the market is the entrepreneur, i.e. we abandon the absolutism of the familiar phrase "demand determines supply".

This formulation of the role of the entrepreneur presupposes that he/she aims at realization of profits only. This, however, is not quite true - the profit is at the heart of entrepreneurship, but its pursuing puts the entrepreneur in many other roles. The leading role, of course, is to cover different needs that are the provision of a good that is beneficial to consumers. This is the only way for the "real" entrepreneur to realize his goal - to make a profit. The entrepreneur is also a job creator. This is not his fundamental goal, but a result of his desire for profit. Note that although these different roles exist, their interpretation can not undermine the entrepreneur as such – he/she is not responsible for the society neither for the created jobs nor for the "moral" or

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4 The term „entrepreneur” very precisely reflects the nature of the entrepreneur in the Bulgarian language. „Entreprue” as: start, take the initiative, try, to create. This is the meaning of the old French „entreprendre” – to start something.

5 The term „Austrian economics” is used somehow colloquially. In regard to entrepreneurs, the „Austrian economics“ endorses the ideas of Jean-Baptiste Say (the so called Say’s Law), Friedrich Hayek („dispersed knowledge” in the society), Ludwig von Mises (the science of “human action”) and Israel Kirzner (on entrepreneurship as „awareness for new opportunities”).
"usefulness" of the goods created by him. The entrepreneur is seeking profit through constant approval (purchase) of consumers, not by public approval.

Assuming that the entrepreneur discovers/engages resources committed to meeting the given (known or unknown) needs for a profit, its role by definition should be "positive". The profit springs from his knowledge and customer satisfaction – so the profit is no guaranteed or of violent nature. However, in the modern world, the entrepreneur is not always approved and liked - either because he "exploits" resources or workers, or because he realizes profit on the "back" of the consumers.

When considering the role of the entrepreneur and his image in the society we should look at the negative shades and find their explanation. The positive image of entrepreneurs is logically embedded in their role - to be explorers, to satisfy needs, and to drive development, which means that the real challenge here is to look at the negatives. The opinion poll shows that the image of the entrepreneur is not seen clearly and uniformly. While at an individual level he/she is associated more with positive characteristics (hard working, visionary, etc.), his/her wealth is often seen as illegally acquired in violation of moral principles. This automatically puts the focus not so much on the personal qualities of the entrepreneur but on the environment (institutional, social, etc.) that determines his actions in search of profitable opportunities.

"Zero sum game"

Some people may easily explain the image of entrepreneurs with all its nuances and traditions by some features of the Bulgarian mentality. Here, however, we will defend the thesis that there are actually purely economic factors that determine both the role and perception of entrepreneurs.

It would be naive to explain the negative shades in the image of entrepreneurs with just a massive misunderstanding of economics. The most common argument in this direction is tied to the myth of the so-called "zero sum game". It is argued that in order for someone to win someone else should lose. In other words, we are talking about the rhetoric that profit is always at the expense of someone else. Such a concept automatically makes entrepreneurs bad as when they realize a profit automatically penalizes someone else.

This myth, although widespread, can not fully explain the darker colours in public perceptions towards entrepreneurs – the big group of intelligent people surely understands, even if intuitively, that the world around us is inconsistent with this myth. The economy is not a "zero sum game" and all can benefit from voluntary exchange.

So much for the "easiest" argument for misunderstanding economics. Below we will look at the "rational" economic reasons for the negative image of entrepreneurs.

Public negative features of the image of the entrepreneur

The "public" perceptions to the entrepreneur are formed by various factors and are not limited to theoretical assumptions. To some extent the idea of the entrepreneur as the founder and driving force for development lies in the intuitive understanding of contemporary society. In addition, however, comes the reality, that personal touch to the entrepreneur - whether in the form of consumers of their goods or employed by entrepreneurs. Normally, a greater role for the construction of a perception has the role of the people as consumers - this gives a much more complete and diverse picture compared to the direct relationship with an entrepreneur as being an employee. This
thesis is confirmed by opinion polls in all four countries. In short, the attitude towards entrepreneurs is largely determined by the economic reality around us - if on a certain market there is no real choice and there are privileged companies, then the entrepreneur can easily take the role of the "bad" guy.

Defining entrepreneurs automatically leads to the possible reasons for the negative perceptions: "exploitation" of resources and earning on the "back" of consumers. This is not necessarily anti-market rhetoric - if there is an exclusive right to a resource, people can really "exploit" it in the negative sense, and if there is no competition in a market some people can really win on the "the back" of the consumers. To these possible causes we should inevitably add the periods in which public policy changes and the transition from state to private ownership since the emergence of many new entrepreneurs was inevitable, but did not happen in the very natural way. The role of the state as an entrepreneur and as a defender of consumers is also taking its toll. The next lines will theoretically approach - rather than making their conclusions practices, we will seek a theoretical justification of negative attitudes to entrepreneurs.

**Profiting from the "public" resources**

It is difficult to define exactly which entrepreneurs face negative attitudes towards "exploitation" of resources. In general, we consider the exclusive rights for the use/management of a resource loaded with public "attention." In order not to get into trouble with definitions, it is best to handle with examples – such an example would be the mining of certain resources (e.g. gold) or management of certain natural resources (e.g., investments in the mountains). Experience shows that both are regarded as public issues and can be loaded with serious negatives.

The reason for this seems to lie in the understanding for the source of the profit - not so much the knowledge of the entrepreneur as the exclusive rights to profit from a resource. Since this resource is considered as "public" - shared by all citizens- the one who realizes profits must be "bad" guy. Historically, this was not the case. Resources were not loaded with such "public" perceptions and their use has been "regulated" market – the discovery process was leading (e.g., the California gold rush\(^6\)), as well as the entrepreneurs risk taking. In modern times this is very different - the state actually owns these resources (either gold or mountain) and is giving on concession the rights to use them. Therefore the entrepreneurs at some extent are transformed into elects of the administration. Not that this unloads the traditional "burden" of entrepreneurs (to search for profitable opportunities, invest, take risks, etc.), but the existence of exclusive rights by the state casts a shadow on the "pure" idea of an entrepreneur.

Leading for the public perceptions here undoubtedly are the institutions. If institutions work properly and the confidence is high, this shade of exclusive rights will not be dark and people would broadly agree that this right was fairly won (in competitive procedures), and the rules are followed accordingly. Vice versa, the inactive institutions inevitably lead to doubts and negatives for the entrepreneurs. Institutions are important, but the foundation of the problem lies in the exclusive right granted by the state.

**Profiting from the lack of competition**

\(^6\) The California gold rush (1848-1855) is the reason for the fast development of San Francisco – from 1,000 to 25,000 people only in the first 2 years since the "rush".
The concept of profit "on the back" of the consumers has similar features to the already discussed problems. Here the leading problem is not so much the resource by itself but the concentrates profits in the "absence" of choice - in sectors without serious competition, but with mass consumption. Such examples are water supply and electricity production, as well as the mobile services. Note that for these types of consumer goods the question of whether or not to be consumed does not stand- such goods and services in the economy are defined as inelastic, i.e. their consumption is not so much price sensitive.\(^7\)

The understanding for lack of competition is not limited to the number of competitors or other static market factors. A necessary condition for the existence of competition is the opportunity to enter the market, i.e. the emergence of new competitors. The lack of such an option means that there is no competition dynamics, which inevitably give the sense of a lack of real choice for customers – i.e. the market of mobile services have several competitors, but it is impossible for a new one to enter the market, which limits the dynamic processes.

In practice, where there is no real competition, negative attitudes emerge towards entrepreneurs - in this case, often colloquially referred to as "monopolies". The barriers to entry in these sectors are again built by the state - be it when an electricity company is defined by the state as the only one for a give region or by a license for a mobile operator. In these cases, the society recognizes that someone has the exclusive right to provide a good or service whose consumption is guaranteed. The perception is that for these sectors there is already a defined knowledge (knowing what and how to produce, and the demand is guaranteed) and structurally it is set to win only one or a few, but without the allowance of new competitors.

This perception is wrong in terms of "defined knowledge" of the society, but not with regard to the given exclusive rights and barriers to entry. Statically speaking all characteristics of the "entrepreneurs" are there – risk takers, investors, service providers, profit seekers. The knowledge of the entrepreneur is apparently not predetermined and is put to a test - the alternatives of success and failure are still available. Dynamically speaking, however, the high barriers to entry for new competitors kill entrepreneurial spirit - we have some limited to a certain circle of people "awareness" for profitable opportunities.

These can be both the above mentioned sectors ("the monopolies"), as well as the regulated professions for example. This type of professions often has barriers to entry for new competitors and thus higher (or simply guaranteed) profit - such classic example is notaries. In other sectors, where a company has captured the entire market, but there are no administrative barriers to entry for new competitors, there is lack of any public perception of "undeserved" profits - we can point to as gum and croissants sector.

**Lack of work**

Jobs and attitudes towards employees inevitably are a major factor for the negative perceptions of entrepreneurs. This largely depends on the labour market - if the market is flexible and has high employment, and then it is very hard for the employer-entrepreneur to be labelled as "bad." However, if there is low employment and inflexible

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\(^7\) One should not ignore the popular belief that consumers have some "natural" right to such goods and services. This automatically puts entrepreneurs in a delicate situation, because it implies a balance between profit and public opinion.
labour market, the entrepreneur - employer may take the role of the strong and "take advantage" of workers.

The example of Bulgaria is eloquent – traditionally low employment levels and low qualifications of the workforce, i.e. lack of flexibility and alternatives for the majority of the working population. This, coupled with years of structural changes in the economy – from heavy industries to services, turns the lack of work (or "well paid job") a major source of discontent. For young people it is observed a strong reluctance to enter the labour market because of the gap between their expectations for the type of work they want to be employed in and the "fair" pay on one hand and the reality of the market on the other. Not surprisingly, according to the opinion poll the vast majority of people believe that the primary function of entrepreneurs is to create jobs. The lack of work, as a key to the poverty in the country, in practice makes entrepreneurs "responsible" to the public - for example, that accumulate profits rather than hiring people.

This dissatisfaction is predetermined by the specified by objective factors of low economic activity and employment, as well as by the common perceptions that entrepreneurs are to some degree "immoral." However, the division of public perceptions is y the work criteria – university graduates whose employment is higher are more moderate in terms of the "labour exploitation" characteristic of entrepreneurs, while the "morality" of entrepreneurs is widespread among all respondents irrespective of their education and employment status.

**Transition and wealth accumulation**

Particularly interesting from an economic point of view is the case of entrepreneurs in transition years - from a planned economy to a free market economy. This transition is accompanied by privatization, i.e. change of ownership and the emergence of entrepreneurs-owners. Regardless of how this is happening, inevitably there are new entrepreneurs who have become such not in a natural way, and in the process of changing ownership. This negative attitude comes from a belief similar to that commented previously in the text on the exclusive rights over resources. This is the view that profit again comes not from the knowledge of the entrepreneur but of the acquisition of already "working" enterprise.

Such perception is flowed with many objective contradictions. It is a fact that the entrepreneur-owner has paid to the society (the state) certain amount in privatization process, it is also a fact that some knowledge is needed so the enterprise to be profitable. In this part, there are no solid arguments for the "bad" entrepreneur, but the big question is whether the process of change of ownership was "fair"? Again, if the institutions do not work (or there is a distrust) it is quite expected and probably justified for the entrepreneur to fall into the role of the "bad" – he/she benefited from the regime change, acquiring unfairly the ownership of "working" businesses.

Such is the argument for the unexplained wealth accumulation in the first years of transition. It is not linked with privatization only, but with doubts about the access to financial resources, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of "lead" entrepreneurs. The negatives associated with many big entrepreneurs in the country are largely tied precisely with that – public suspicions of unfair enrichment or unfair start. Here it seems that the important is the dynamic argument, i.e. accepting the hypothesis of dishonest wealth accumulation, does this guarantees the economic success of the entrepreneur? In

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8 By "working" here we do not refer to profitable or not. We mean that the company is already in operation (has a structure, activity and revenues), without commenting on whether it is successful.
this example, we can present a simplified reversed example - if a wallet of a middle class working man has been stolen on the bus, this is a loss and injustice for him, but does this predetermines his (non)success in a dynamic plan? In this simple example the answer likely is no, so that injustice is a fact, but does not affects the dynamic irreparable damage.

The argument for the dishonest wealthy entrepreneur, however, is slightly different. The access to "unjustified" large financial resources in the early years of the transition could turn an entrepreneur in the "successful" even if he has problems with the knowledge, ideas, etc. The availability of huge capital in a period of transformation of the economy is a major advantage over conventional "disadvantaged" entrepreneurs, which may persist in the long run. This inequality can be maintained and further exacerbated by an institutional environment that is not prone to "inventors" but to people with financial resources that are close to the state. Lack of competition (or the ability for the emergence of competition) in some sectors would facilitate successful entrepreneur with suspicious capitals.

Not surprisingly, the most explicit perceptions in the opinion poll conducted in Bulgaria is just that - suspicions of illegal wealth accumulation during the transition years as a prerequisite for the emergence of wealthy entrepreneurs. Moreover, this perception is not affected by education or age of respondents, i.e. it is universal. Only in Sofia there is a less categorical perception which is probably due to the dynamic argument - more variety and options in the capital lead to the emergence of many new successful entrepreneurs who have nothing to do with the transition and gradually push the accumulated negatives in the public domain.

The state as an entrepreneur

When discussing the role of entrepreneurs in a society, one must inevitably comment on the state as an entrepreneur. Modern state clearly tries to play that role - to provide goods and services other than purely social transfers. Either in energy or rail transport, the state is engaged in certain activities, for its purpose is not so much profit as provision of certain goods to citizens. This function is not compatible with the definition of an entrepreneur - to find ways to realize profits, but state intervention in various sectors predetermines the development opportunities for entrepreneurs. If the state provides "free" education, for instance, the entrepreneurs in this field should consider that. If rail transport is a state monopoly by law, the entrepreneurs can not seek profit in this field, etc.

The state can be also an employer for the entrepreneurs through the public procurement process. In this case, for example, when selecting a contractor to build the road, the entrepreneur is again looking for a profit, but the profit depends on the selection decision of the administration, and not on the users of the good (i.e. the road built). Moreover, many businesses are dependent on such public procurement tenders, i.e. more dependent on political rather than market situation - an example is the "green" energy sector that shows how a public policy can result in record profits and consequential losses. This is a classic case where the "alertness" for profitable opportunities is in practice alertness for government decisions rather than customer needs.

The big state "entrepreneur" that provides many goods/services and contracts huge projects to the business automatically blurs the public understanding of entrepreneurs – in peoples’ immediate environment and life many things happen that are not the result
of market but of politics. This process almost neglects the natural power of the consumer and empowers the voters (in some cases the workers). The competition is not on the market (for gathering information and consumer preferences) but in politics (to derive benefits). Moreover, the big state "entrepreneur" inevitably results in directing and concentration of resources, which does not repeal the argument for "unfair" wealth accumulation – on the contrary, it actually enhances it.

**State "protection" rather than contractual relations**

Important role in public perceptions towards the market (and entrepreneurs) has the role of the state as a protector of consumers. Each market transaction builds on any agreement of both parties, that each party may seek its rights in case of dispute. Even if there is no formal contract, for example by ordering a simple lunch in a restaurant, the consumer may still be protected by the laws and seek his/her rights in the court. Under state "protection" we consider not the protection given by laws and the courts, but by the executive power. Such protection of consumers is less dependent on contracts and laws, but more on the work of a political body. The difference can be visualizes where disputes appear - whether justice is dealt by the court or by an executive body. There are regular cases of punishment which is not in the form of "compensation" for the benefit of the client (imposed by a court) but in the form of a "fine" imposed by the state (a Commission for example).

This type of protection neglects the role of consumers and empowers the state. It is implied that the consumer is helpless to the goods and services provided by entrepreneurs and only the state can protect him/her. This creates the perceptions of the "good" state and the "bad" entrepreneurs. The Bulgarian society witnesses precisely this phenomenon - hefty fines of different "consumer" commissions and very few cases of asserting rights in court.

**The negative characteristics of entrepreneurs**

All the above said, we can distinguish several reasons for the negative perceptions towards entrepreneurs:

- The exclusive rights to "public" resources - the notion that the entrepreneur realizes profit not because of his/her knowledge but due to the exclusive right to use/manage a public resource;
- The exclusive rights for the delivery of goods/services and barriers to entry for new entrepreneurs - the notion that the entrepreneur realizes profit not because of his/her knowledge but due lack of competition;
- Inflexible labour market and low employment - the notion that the entrepreneur realizes profit by exploiting workers;
- Years of transition and change of ownership (privatization) - the notion that the entrepreneur has benefited in the years of transition and change of ownership;
- The state as an entrepreneur - the daily confrontation with goods provision of which is solely dependant on political process not the market; removing entrepreneurs from everyday life;

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9 Whether it is a Commission for protection of consumers, the competition or against discrimination.
• State "protection" rather than contractual relations - the trick with the "good" state and the "bad" entrepreneurs.

The foundation of these reasons is not just the size and scope of the modern state, but the confidence in the government and institutions. Corrupted and inefficient institutions in the modern "social" state inevitably lead to negative attitudes towards entrepreneurs. Of course, the intuitive positive perceptions remain - entrepreneurs continue to be a driver for development and to meet consumers' needs - but it is garnished with negative shades of all these factors. This perception is not even relevant to entrepreneurs as such, but rather regards to "unfair" profits. That is why the inexplicable wealth accumulations are so powerful factor in shaping public opinion.

Inefficient institutions and high administrative burdens lead to some not so "good" characteristics of entrepreneurs. If the realization of a project, be it real estate investment and management of commercial property requires many administrative permissions by poorly functioning institutions, then some form of corruption is almost inevitable. In other words, a successful entrepreneur, along with his/hers ideas, knowledge and skills, should be ready for this kind of informal relationships in order to achieve his goal. This is not surprising from an economic point of view, but it means disregarding some moral principles, and, eventually something “wrong” happens. When this becomes the usual practice, then it is not only the development that is harmed, but the process would cause the appearance of "bad" entrepreneurs who have no moral restraints in handling the cumbersome administration. The opinion poll confirms this - along with the wealth accumulation during the transition years, the frequent ethics violations aiming at profits is one of the most common perceptions for entrepreneurs in the Bulgaria.

Some conclusions

The strong relationships between government and business will inevitably lead to profits that are not quite market driven - be it by granting exclusive rights to resources or the provision of certain goods (lack of competition). Similar examples exist in every country, but along with their scope, an important factor is the quality of work of institutions or the lack of confidence in government. If institutions do not work – they are not effective and there are abuses – then the feeling of injustice is amplified. Then the profits of some entrepreneurs do not only spring from some form of exclusive rights by the state, but are topped with doubts about the fairness of the distribution of exclusivity.

The recent example for the investments in the capital Sofia and the Vitosha Mountain is symptomatic - there is a public desire (and approval) for investment and development, people understand that this should be done by someone (an entrepreneur) who will seek profit. Lack of trust in institutions, however, and the fear of abuse in the selection of the "entrepreneur" are so huge and strong that the public opinion tends to deny investment and development, just to protect itself from abuse.

The emergence of a new entrepreneurial class in the first years of transition is a major challenge in the analysis of public perceptions towards entrepreneurship. Apparently the "popular" belief is that some entrepreneurs have become unjustly such during the transition - be it legally or illegally acquiring resources. The belief is that some have benefited illegally, and this inevitably made them successful. This understanding is
mostly towards the biggest entrepreneurs, but it also imposes a general sense of connection between the unclean start and subsequent success.

The low employment as a key factor for poverty in the country has also contributed to the negative image of entrepreneurs. Problems in the labour market are so severe that most people expect from entrepreneurs to create jobs rather than to provide goods and services. This view, however, although widespread and largely understandable, is not dominant in building public image of the entrepreneur - it is determined by whether people have jobs, so it does not matter by itself. The concept of "immoral" profits on the other hand is not so dependent on the economic cycle and is largely structurally embedded in Bulgarians.

In short, although the role of the entrepreneur remains inherently "positive" there are purely economic "rational" factors that explain the emergence of negative perceptions towards entrepreneurs in society. These negatives are not so tied to the entrepreneurs as such, but to the attitude towards "dishonest" profits. These "unfair" profits are not necessarily bound with the moral of entrepreneurs, but more with the structure of the modern state and institutions. In other words, differences in attitudes towards entrepreneurs in different countries are not rooted in their morality (there is not a cluster of inexplicable moral entrepreneurs in one country at the expense of immoral one) but in work of public institutions.

The relatively negative image of entrepreneurs in Bulgaria stems basically from the binding of the state and the business, that of politics and the profits, and the low confidence in institutions. This explains the better perceptions towards small entrepreneurs that hardly have anything to do with politicians and on the other hand a total disapproval of biggest entrepreneurs who have a lot in common with the political class. Years of transition, including privatization, the collapse of the banking system and the hyperinflation in 1996-1997 inevitably created a feeling of injustice and artificial appearance of leading entrepreneurial class. These perceptions are difficult to change with words only. The negatives will disappear when the reasons for their appearance disappear - the strong relationship between the state and the business, and inefficient institutions. This, together with the economic development, working places and the new successful entrepreneurs without the "vague" past, will return the intuitive positive image of the entrepreneur as the inventor.

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THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Martin Ivanov, PhD
Archives State Agency, Chairman

Until now the subject of entrepreneurship has remained outside the interest of Bulgarian historiography. Individual references [Why, 1994, Avramov, 2007; Bochev, 2008], while only in passing, are not enough to draw the complete picture with clear ideas about trends and changes that occur in public attitudes toward this social phenomenon. Therefore, here we will only offer a more generalized description of the image of the entrepreneur separated into two parts - before and after World War II.

At least three division of Bulgarian perception of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in historical perspective can be made. On one hand, entrepreneurs live and work in the world of risk taking, which differs radically from the dominant conservative pre-modern society. Secondly, higher risks are associated with higher incomes and hence - much better social and property status. For a nation without aristocracy, that has only rejected the levelling out of the pastoral rural life but only to be trapped in a new, this time an ideological levelling, the "possession and wealth" create more envy than respect. And last, for centuries Bulgarians lived in a more or less state and nationalized economy that leaves small space for development of private enterprise. These three historical divisions inevitably put a mark on today's perceptions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. In the following pages I will try to present more arguments for each of the three historical lines that were very schematically outlined above.

I. Perceptions towards risk taking and change

At least until the 1960’s the Bulgarian society is predominantly rural, in the best case, proto-industrial, whose daily rhythm is dictated by natural cycles. The natural change of seasons creates confidence and ability for predictions and planning on the basis of experience over centuries, transferred from generation to generation. With minor modifications of technology for land cultivation within huge periods of time (at least from the late Middle Ages - 13-14 century until the Liberation), the Bulgarian peasants can reliably predict and expect that compliance with traditional working methods will bring him low, but guaranteed income with which to feed his family and to pay state taxes and fees. In such a conservative environment change is perceived as a potential threat to the "natural" course of history. Risks associated with the new methods of cultivation or the new crops are overestimated, and the potential benefits - seriously underestimated.

There is lack of extensive research but it can be said that probably because of these perceptions the adoption if overseas plants such as potatoes, tomatoes, corn, tobacco happened much later than in other parts of Europe. Potatoes, for example, appear in our land nearly three centuries later, and even in the late 1940’, the state organized awareness campaigns for their usefulness especially in mountainous and hilly areas [Angelova, 2008]10. Similar is the story with tomatoes that reach the Bulgarian land in the late 19th century, but until 1930’s they are only used as green for pickles [Dechev, 2010]11. Without going into further details, I think that even in so important for

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10 Potatoes appear in our land only in the first quarter of 19 century, while in Europe they were brought in 1570, i.e. nearly 300 years earlier.
11 This naturally dethrone the Bulgarian shopska salad as the "traditional" and "national" dish.
everyday life file such as eating, the traditions prevail for a long time. Translated into the language of economics, however, at least until the second quarter of 19 century the Bulgarian society was not ready for innovation and systematically avoided risk taking. Or put another way - entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs were not popular.

Besides those factors, there are two other reasons for the dominant traditionalism of the Bulgarian society.

First, the climate characteristics are not stimulating the need for alternative security strategies for the population to re-insure against natural disasters. With the exception of earthquakes which to present are beyond our ability to predict, for at least the last 500 years in Central and Eastern Balkans almost no devastating natural disasters that threaten crops happened and hence to there was no big threat for feeding the population [Ivanov et al. 2010-2011]. We certainly can not exclude mountainous areas where drought, floods, cold spring and so on have a much greater effect. To summarize, temporary climatic variations certainly do appear, but the overall environment does not require more creativity and entrepreneurship for a survival.

Second, the social stratification does not facilitate the emergence of innovation and entrepreneurship. The lack of established elite (aristocracy)\(^\text{12}\), the "foreign" nature of the rulers over long stretches of time turned age as almost the sole criterion for determining authority in society. The social fabric is structured around the family and the village, and there "power" belongs to the elders. The respect and honour is due to their age, which ensures their knowledge of the traditions. There was a society whose institutions are constructed so as to minimize the risks of innovation and change. The sole reason for making one or another decision was because „it was like this before and it should be like this in the future.”

II. State capitalism

However, here and there were cracks through which entrepreneurship of single people managed to break through the traditional society. An environment that desperately seeks to suppress change beyond doubt is not particularly hospitable to the deployment of successful businesses. Those who take the risk to do something on their own are required to comply not only with the prevailing conservative attitudes towards entrepreneurship, but with the smothering hug of the state.

Historical studies show that over the past 6-7 centuries the small number if entrepreneurs dared to break almost all social taboos are forced to comply with a state longing for control and intervention in the economy. Any business project was seen as unwanted competition and intrusion into the restricted areas reserved for the state. The business initiative, as long as it exists, can only exist in harmony rather than confrontation on with the state. Entrepreneurship is suitable only in areas that complement or assist the state in its business activities.

If we look at our society before the Liberation the most profitable activities are the redemption of taxes (as for the state it is cheaper to outsource this work), buying and supplying the state with food (mainly livestock and corn), clothing the army and the administration (which provides a strong incentive for crafts in our small mountain towns). We don't need to remind that the first modern Bulgarian factory of Dobri Zheliazkov also began with the under the auspices and the financial support of the Sultan. The only possibility of "independent" business is to trade abroad (this was the

\(^{12}\) More on that in the following sections.
preference of the outstanding entrepreneurs of the Renaissance - Hristo and Evlogi Georgievi and Taphileshtov). In the absence of sufficient solvent clientele among the rural population, however, ultimately even the imported goods have to rely on government officials to buy them.

Unfortunately, the Liberation does not change the situation radically and almost 130 years after the state would continue to "appoint" the business people. Prone, even stimulating corruption, the state manifests the sustainable power to allocate resources led by to non-economic considerations [Penchev, 2011]. The total nationalization of the property over the 45 years of socialist rule led to the extreme these processes (party appointed directors in companies), and the collapse of totalitarian society after 1989 created another new (and hopefully last) generation of "appointed" entrepreneurs.

Although it is empirically impossible to prove that, there is hardly anyone today who doubts the so-called "red suitcases" with the help of which the foundations of economic transition were build [Ivanov and Ganev, 2009].

III. High property and social status

The dominant conservatism and stifling embrace of the state, doing business in Bulgaria has always been a high risk venture, which few people take over. However, people who dare to venture into it have a fair chance of success as long as they are willing to play by the state imposed "rules" (corruption) or are of suitable "origin" (proper connections). By definition, entrepreneurs are more flexible and innovative than the cumbersome bureaucratic administrative structures. This gives them a competitive advantage and as long as they do not come into open conflict with the government, they can gain a good return on their invested capital.

This way, almost a century before the Liberation began, little by little a thin "class" of Bulgarian entrepreneurs started to emerge. Significantly higher profits that can be achieved from trade and industry than agriculture created the beginnings of a long absent social stratification of society. In the absence of the Bulgarian national institutions in the Ottoman Empire (school administration, church) entrepreneurship is almost the only social ladder to form a small elite group. Like any emerging elite, the Bulgarian entrepreneurs also relied too much on external visible symbols of high status – from the narrow-Frenkel pants and gold watch chain to fancy cars and cigars.

For the then traditional society such showing off and luxury inevitably caused a wave of envy and hatred. Another cause for concern public attitude towards entrepreneurs is the fact that most, if not directly "appointed" by the authorities find it difficult to explain the "first million". Imminence cooperation with the Ottoman state coined the cliché of the "robber gaffer", which is present surprisingly tough until today. Undoubtedly to this persistence of the negative perceptions towards entrepreneurs contributes the fact that socialism imposed similar ideological stamp. Among other "Renaissance" transgressions (national traitors) the entrepreneurs “acquire” new sins. Or more precisely, the Botev "villain" almost seamlessly was transformed into "exploiter".

IV. Sustainability of the image

To summarize, until very recently, the Bulgarian entrepreneur is "rare bird" that is forced to contend with both traditional egalitarian attitudes of the society and the

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13 See for example the poem of Hristo Botev "In the tavern".
suffocating embrace of the state. Engaging in risky business ventures may carry sizable profits and abilities to climb the social ladder. Beyond doubt, however, this happens at high price. Choosing to be different within pre-modern conservative society inevitably stigmatize anyone who dared to defy the traditions. Moreover, forced to live with a thirst for control state the entrepreneur is forced to "compromise" that adds new black colours to his public portrait. Corruption and the cooperation with foreign nation-state branded the image of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie and since the early Renaissance he is widely seen as "villain" and "plunderer". The Bulgarian literature and poetry (Botev and less Vazov) emphasized this negative image of the "boss" that seeps through the centuries and survived until today. Its toughness is a result and to the new ideological layers during communism ("exploiter") and the happening of the "primitive accumulation of capital" since 1989.

The surprise in the opinion poll however is how quickly this clichéd negative image starts to crack. Only 20 years after the change, the recent pre-modern perceptions start to change into Weberian assessments of entrepreneur as a person who is hardworking, building, creating economic growth and risk taking, not stigmatized by society. Surprisingly, the assessments of entrepreneur as a "robber", "exploiter" and "crook" are almost three times more unpopular than the positive. The sum of all "positive" and "negative" answers of the question: "What are the three basic characteristics of an entrepreneur" the ratio is approximately 3:1. Similar is the situation (2:1 in favour of positive assessments) with the question: "Which of the following do you associate/connect with the entrepreneur?"14 Impressive is also the change of values according to which the improvement of the business environment in which he operates can happen primarily through withdrawal of Leviathan state (lower taxes, less regulation) - 38.7% and by building social capital (in good education) - 23.6%.

The change in attitude is far from over still. Even the Weberian minded respondents still do not have a unified vision of the world of entrepreneurs. In the minds of the same people there are patriarchal stereotypes of the "illicit enrichment" and "immorality" with assessments of hard-working and creativity. In this respect, very revealing example gives the answers the question: "Do you agree with the following statements," where roughly equal number of respondents give two contrasting images of the entrepreneur. It will be useful to see how this mixture is due to our sharpened social sensitivity as a result of the five years global economic crisis. Without comparable surveys one can only speculate how much the worsening perceptions towards entrepreneurs are not due to just that.

Noteworthy are two curious accents that stem from both the opinion poll and the historical research. For a number of reasons the Bulgarian entrepreneur is perhaps social, but not economic innovator. He dared to defy the traditional conservative environment (social innovator) and to borrow mainly generated elsewhere business models that he only transplanted on home soil (economically conservative). This is quite what most of the respondents got right – they do not associate the Bulgarian entrepreneur with innovation and discovery. The innovation is only the seventh association with the entrepreneurs -14.3% against 23.4% for "corruption", 34.3% "splendour and luxury," and 40.9% for "hard work".

Second, the low interest of today entrepreneurs in charity and social gestures is quite impressive - only 12.6%. The lack of need for the business to support socially significant causes is felt accurately by respondents in the poll. Anywhere in the world charity is an

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14 Since the respondents gave more than 1 answer, the overall percentage for the 1st question is 173% positive answers and 61.4% negative, as for the 2nd question respectively – 144.4% and 76.7%.
important tool for legitimizing social entrepreneurs in building their positive image. An example is Alfred Nobel, who only a century after his death is remembered more for his prizes than his chemical company producing dynamite.

The recently published three volumes on the philanthropy in Bulgaria prior to World War II show that the situation was very different until the so-called "socialist revolution." Both before and long after the Liberation most, if not almost all socially useful initiatives were being implemented with the financial support of the business. The construction of thousands of schools, community centres, libraries, churches, monuments happened with donations from local entrepreneurs. Again they allocated resources for training and treatment of children from poor families, for buying books, protection of the cultural and archaeological heritage, etc. In this context, it can be assumed that a more active involvement of the business in public causes could contribute to overcoming the negative stereotypes of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship layered in the last centuries.

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THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

Kalin Yanakiev, PhD

Sofia University, Faculty of Philosophy

The entrepreneur is a rare being in a society which considers itself to be a group of clients and workers (or, one might say, servants). This is why the image of the entrepreneur contains so many traces of certain ideologies (a new, ill-learned libertarian ideology or a long-lasting, deeply rooted communist one). The image of the entrepreneur is drawn, especially in the Bulgarian setting, against a background which can only be described as ill-faced, from which background his image wields the most negative of traits.

In my analysis I had taken the liberty to assess the respondent’s answers from the point of view of two ideologies (which, in my opinion, are the cause of the responses): left-wing liberalism (also known as libertarianism) and Marxists socialism (the ideology of communism).

Obviously, here I talk not of ideologies consciously adopted and known in detail by the public, but more of their “daylified” versions which reach the public through mass media. Because of the very short period of active market economy in our country as well as the peculiar period (a totalitarian state with non-market economy) which our state went through, the most basic ideologemes of libertarianism got a firm hold of Bulgarian mass consciousness, in the form they took after the process of simplification conducted by the media: namely, the ideas that “the state (always, inevitably, any state) is a bad owner”, “low (and flat) direct taxes are the most important factor for economic growth”. I have witnessed the direct impact of those ideologemes in many of the responses given in the survey (and have promptly noted so). On the other had (much to my surprise, I must say) I also noticed how deeply rooted in the mass consciousness are the concepts of Marxist socialism: ”capital (any capital) cannot come from anything else but theft”, “an entrepreneur is, above all, a person who exploits other’s labor”, “an entrepreneur is a person longing for a luxurious lifestyle”.

I must say outright that I neglected any possible religious interference in the formation of the entrepreneur’s image, since the survey gave me no notion of such interference. This is not unexpected, first of all, because Bulgarians are not religious. Second, Orthodoxy, which is the most widespread Christian denomination in Bulgaria, has not developed any economic doctrine (such as the ones developed by Protestantism since its birth and, with some special efforts, by Catholicism in the 19th century). Third, as far as I know, the Protestant ethics (after Max Weber) forms the very foundation of economic liberalism in modern Europe, and, for that reason, it is also the foundation of libertarian ideology. Since that ideology has been adopted extremely superficially by our society, no trace of this religious (Protestant) foundation of liberal ideology can affect the public opinion, and no such trace can be found the results from the survey.

Despite the dynamics of the social mobility in post-socialist Bulgaria, two distinct “cultures” have appeared: a modern consumerist culture (with all its local Bulgarian characteristics) and traditional patriarchal culture (again with its unique features), which any research on these topics must take into account.
The methodology chosen for this research, after analyzing the different accretions of social, moral and other concepts and the making the necessary interconnections, allows for several conclusions which I will summarize in just a few points.

I. Two dominant ideological systems have big impact on the formation of the image of the entrepreneur in the mind of the post-communist Bulgarian citizen. The first can be defined as left liberal (anarcho-liberal or libertarian), while the second one is socialist, or communist, whose resilience, as is shown by this survey, is not to be underestimated. An interesting fact is that those two dominant ideological systems tend to form a peculiar – and, in a way, monstrous by its internal inconsistency – twofold unity in Bulgarian mass consciousness.

According to the first –liberal, or, moreover, libertarian – ideological scheme entrepreneurship as a whole, its social image and successes (or failures, respectively) are in no way linked to the character and conditions of the social environment. Social environment - the presence or absence of rules and security in it, of morality (in its broadest sense), the level of corruption, the arranged (or missing) balance between legal regulation and individual initiative – are not perceived as a factor which can lead to the success or failure of the entrepreneur's undertakings, and does not contribute to his image. Typical for the libertarian ideology reflections can be seen. The state, for instance, is perceived as an “obstacle” to entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship; it is also the primary reason for the failures of entrepreneurs; low tax rates, on the other hand, is something that is bound to have positive effects on entrepreneurship by itself; the characteristics of an entrepreneur are exclusively one of personal and individual character (later I’m going to elaborate on this topic). On the other hand, persistent traits of the image of the entrepreneur – who, according to 55% of the answers is the “reason for economic growth in the society”, and according to 33% “brings more benefit to the society” – are those of the “exploiter”: he is “greedy”, “corrupt” (sum of ¾ of the respondents), “interested only in money” etc. In other words, the predominant characteristics in the image of the entrepreneur are ones who originate from the communist ideology.

For Bulgarians influenced by libertarian ideology the main reason for economic growth in a society are almost exclusively “entrepreneurs and companies” (55.1%) rather than a beneficial (balanced) social environment ("society" – a mere 5%) and the joint action of that environment with entrepreneurs and companies. “Low taxes” and “less government regulation” (38.7%) are perceived as dominating factors which can encourage entrepreneurship in Bulgaria, which also corresponds to the concepts of libertarian ideology. It is evident that these libertarian dogmas are learnt “by heart” by Bulgarian mass consciousness which would rather share them “as is” even though it considers Bulgarian entrepreneurs to be corrupt, prone to breaking rules and regulations, one who generally enriches himself dishonestly (and certainly not as a result of his entrepreneurship) etc. How given those circumstances, the question is if it is possible to perceive government regulation more like an impediment to entrepreneurship and the role of social conditions in economic growth as relatively small? The answer to this question comes in “ready-to-use” libertarian formulas that the average citizen has never really considered critically.

If libertarianism is one of the ideological spheres which generate the image and characteristics of the entrepreneur in Bulgaria, leftist-communism is the other. This polarity means that the formation of the image of the entrepreneur in Bulgarian mass consciousness is a process which has nothing to do with rationality or experience but
originates from such uncontested ideologemes. I will emphasize this important finding once more: the answers given to many of the questions show that Bulgarians tend to consider the social environment in which they live and entrepreneurs take their undertakings (which reflect in the substantial number of negative moral traits in his image) and in the same time there is no (or almost no) perception of the necessity to change the conditions of this social environment in order to improve the entrepreneur’s “entrepreneurship” as well as his personal-public characteristics. So, I must ask, what radical change will “low taxes” and less “government regulation” bring to benefit an individual who is by definition “greedy”, interested only in money, enriches himself dishonestly and aims only in luxury, who manages to achieve his goals primarily because of his audacity and willingness to take risks rather than because of his education, family traditions etc.?

It is quite possible that this high rate of “ideologization” (whether libertarian or communist) that influences the formation of the image of the entrepreneur to be caused by the fact that it is formed almost exclusively, so to say, “from the outside”. We must keep in mind also that this image is formed by the image that the clients (that is 36.4% of the people) have for the entrepreneur’s undertakings. Adding to this about 30% who form their ideas of entrepreneurs solely by being their “hired workers”, we have a whole 67.5% who judge the Bulgarian entrepreneur from the “other side” of the business relationship. Personal experience in entrepreneurship or partnering in such endeavors have only 6.6% which is way too little in order to create an image which is not so easily influenced by external ideological schemes, which in a country such as Bulgaria can be no other than those aggressively imported after 1989 anti-statist (or individualist) libertarian ideas and the legacy communist concepts. From this one must conclude that the entrepreneur is far too distant of an image for the majority of the population of Bulgaria and therefore it is really hard for this majority to get closely acquainted with it so that it can truly assess it on the basis of personal experience with it.

II. What personally stroke me is that personal traits from habitual character are dominant in the image of the entrepreneur as seen in Bulgarian mass consciousness. The entrepreneur is known and characterized with features of a certain personal habit rather than social, intellectual and moral ones (unless when it comes to those who see the image from a very leftist, communist point of view). We must not be misled by those 33%, who have put “diligence” among the three main characteristics of an entrepreneur. Taken by itself, this characteristic can be considered to consist of purely natural (habitual) virility. This is the most likely case since the third most quoted feature is “risk taking”, followed by a number of negative moral features, which easily go together with “diligence” and an inclination to take risks.

We’ll have to admit that a “cheater” (11.6% consider the entrepreneur to be one) can easily be “diligent” and a “risk-taker”; so can be the “greedy” one (14.7%). If we compare this with the fact that 23.4% (a quarter of the respondents) associate entrepreneurship with “corruption” and 12% with “crime”, “diligence”, “foresight” and “ingenuity”, who are the most quoted features must not be interpreted as positive. I repeat: I have a certain hypothesis that by these generally positive features the majority mean not characteristics of social morality but habitual characteristics which are not necessarily to be linked to morality and can easily be linked to a completely immoral person.

Here I will pay special attention to the answers linked to the compliance (or incompliance) with the assumption about the entrepreneur, in which some 41.5% agree with the statement that “entrepreneurs frequently break the laws of morality”, 39.2%
agree that they “are only interested in money”. When we compare these results, we can with some confidence state that most of the “positive” features of the entrepreneur describe characteristics of his personal habitus, which characterizes him as “natural” and not a socially positive being. I can safely say that, based on the analysis of all the answers, in Bulgarian mass consciousness the image of the entrepreneur is formed in the following way. The entrepreneur is such an actor in our (here “we” is a body of workers and clients) society who is fortunate enough to be born naturally virile (“diligent”) and ingenious “by design”, and on top of that is – also “by design” - audacious, willing to take risks (I think that “responsible” also means “willing to take personal responsibility”, i.e. to suffer the consequences of his unscrupulous actions). As such – an unstoppable, ebullient, egoistic creature – he is also one who has no trammels (“audacious”) when it comes to breaking rules and regulations, is not against corrupting an being corrupted himself; as a result of all this, given the poor state of our social environment, he is successful, unlike those, who are devoid of these traits by nature. It is quite possible that this analysis of mine will be greeted with some suspicion, but taken together with the dominant ideological “landscape” from which the image of the entrepreneur is derived and which must be taken into account with its extremes (in its radicalism). Liberal anarchic and communist ideologies are the “field” on which we should “interpret” the dominant “diligence”, “ingenuity” and “foresight” traits.

At the end of this section I also want to point out a certain “coincidence” of the answers, which further strengthens my hypothesis regarding the “habitual” construction of the image of the entrepreneur which shows its moral indifference. Even though a number of people claim that entrepreneurs are more “good for the society”, and so are “diligent”, “responsible”, “ingenious” etc. people, a large number (37%) of Bulgarians have little or no trust for entrepreneurs (as compared to 19.2% who have one, and 3.9% who definitely have it). How can we comment this “coincidence”, other than reaching a conclusion that the entrepreneur is a person who, despite being virile, audacious, ingenious, and, in general, “successful”, is not to be trusted.

III. We must also not the fact that the image of the entrepreneur in Bulgaria also tends to go out of its definition and to get mingled or completely mistaken for other images. The fact that among the traits associated with the entrepreneur the second place (34.3%) is held by his association with luxury – which links not to his “entrepreneurship”, not even with his “activity” as a whole, but with consumption, consumption capability and social prestige, means that (the reason for this can also be found in the leftist-communist component of the ideological landscape) an “entrepreneur” in Bulgaria is simply a “rich”, “opulent” person. An “entrepreneur” is not only the person who undertakes certain economic initiatives, who conducts certain “entrepreneurships” in the society and for the society, which brings him certain benefit, but, it seems, also one who works towards the improvement of his personal social prestige and the enlargement of his own consumption (and such actions can differ greatly from economic initiative). It appears to me that this social misconception regarding the “entrepreneur”, identified mainly as the “enterprising” person in every respect – in the economic sphere as well as in the sphere of social prestige and social status confirms my observation that the entrepreneur is considered to be “alien” to the public, just as the ones to which we are “subservient” to, those who are distant or simply in power, the ones who have a higher social status.

Quite drastic regarding this image displacement of the entrepreneur as primarily economic actor towards the image of the general “high ranking” person is quite common; so is the widespread opinion that “rich entrepreneurs are those, who have illegally acquired property during the decomposition of the socialist system” (41.5%
agree with that statement). This, however, means that in the mass consciousness “entrepreneurs” in Bulgaria are also those (moreover, mainly those) who have never undertaken any activity in the socio-economic sphere in order to be able to become important actors in this sphere, but have simply have acquired property, stolen and taken some benefit from “above”. This again confirms my idea that “entrepreneur” in Bulgaria means mainly a bundle of habitual characteristics, mainly concerned with the lack of qualms. For this reason, the high percentage (55%) of those who answer that they do not want to become entrepreneurs for any reason must not be interpreted as a lack of interest in economic activity in a society but more as a presumption that this is impossible since this society is economically “occupied”, been it by illegally and criminally-made “actors” or by people of a distinct immorral habitus, such as “we” (more than half of the respondents) simply do not possess. This is also another implicit sing for the low estimate of the characteristics of the social environment, for the improvement of which (in libertarian terms) we have neither the capacity, nor the will.

**Conclusions**

If I have to summarize the image of the entrepreneur, created by the survey, I will say that in the mass consciousness of the modern Bulgarian society, he has well-defined communist characteristics. In addition to being put under severe moral doubt (which is partially due to the power of Marxist ideology), this actor bears the characteristics of an individualist – a Rastignac of a sort, a person with no background or tradition, who owes everything to his personal qualities and the lack of qualms, a person of historic chance. Nowhere in the responses and statements can be found any trace linking entrepreneurship to any background, any family tradition, or any heritage (right here, had the answered been “open” we would have had even more intriguing results). The new Bulgarian entrepreneur is certainly not a “continuator”; his image lacks organics, lacks continuity.

Characteristics which link his image with visions of the future, of creation of large family businesses also are not present. I will put it outright – his image is exclusively one of an entrepreneur of the „first generation“. This, however, is quite logical, since he appeared after a major change of the socio-economic conditions of the country (as well as delayed restitution), in a period of strong internal migration and a complete lack of city (burger, bourgeois in the very etymological sense of the word) culture, scarred by tradition and deeply interiorized rules of economic and market behavior. Together with that, construction of the image of the entrepreneur from personal experience – and “inside” knowledge on entrepreneurship in general – is also missing.
Basic results of the opinion poll

What creates economic growth in a society?

Do you trust entrepreneurs in general?
What personal experience mostly influenced your opinion about entrepreneurs?

- My experience as an employee
- My experience as consumer/customer
- My experience as an entrepreneur
- My experience with business partners
- My experience with relatives and friends that are entrepreneurs
- No answer

What external factors had influenced your opinion about entrepreneurs?

- Government officials, politicians
- Media
- Family
- Friends
- Religious institutions
- Institutions of education
- Other
- No answer
What are the two main functions of an entrepreneur in a society?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Function</th>
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<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Kyrgyz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create jobs</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay taxes</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make profit</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocate scarce resources</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>59%</td>
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</table>

What are the main 3 features of an entrepreneur?

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<td>Risk taking</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative and innovative</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Cheating</td>
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What do you associate an entrepreneur with?

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<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How has your perception of entrepreneurs changed in the past 5 years?

- Became much better
- Became slightly better
- Did not change
- Became slightly worse
- Became much worse
- No answer

Would you like to become an entrepreneur yourself?

- Yes
- No
- No answer

Are there any entrepreneurs that you trust and respect?
What would encourage entrepreneurship in your country?

<table>
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<th>Kyrgyz</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better public opinion</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>More government aid</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower taxes and less government regulation</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better access to credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
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How do you evaluate an entrepreneur that failed in his business?

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A failure is a normal phenomenon in business</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>The entrepreneur does not fit for business</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The entrepreneur perhaps failed intentionally to steal others money</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>No answer</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>
Do you agree on the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Rather yes</th>
<th>Rather no</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entrepreneur is creator and innovator</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurial activities provide more benefits than disadvantages to the society</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurs get rich by exploiting other people’s work</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurs are only interested in money</strong></td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rich entrepreneurs are those who got property illegally due to the collapse of soviet system</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurs often break moral principles</strong></td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurs care about the environmental issues</strong></td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I am/would be proud to be an entrepreneur.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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Are entrepreneurs in post soviet countries better or worse from entrepreneurs in the western world?

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Much better</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slightly better</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The same</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Slightly worse</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Much worse</strong></td>
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### Would you like...

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