

9. Public opinion: hopes and realities of the reforms

Transition towards a market economy, the economic reforms and radical social changes that have been taking place in Moldova since the early 1990th had a positive support from the community, that hoped to see good results in short time.

Unfortunately, those fundamental changes and transformations effectuated sporadically, as well as their further evolution changed the vector of feelings from initial hope to total desperation and deception. This phenomenon affected essentially the entire post-Soviet environment, including the Republic of Moldova.

In these regards, it is clear that any radical reform requires acceptance from population, because people are the main beneficiaries of reforms undertaken for the prosperity of the country. Unfortunately, the latter has not been reached. Political, cultural, as well as social sphere achievements are quite modest, while the future prospects for development of the society are quite obscure. In spite of the fact that some new positive phenomena had appeared, general consequences of changes and reforms that occurred so far are appreciated as negative, according to public opinion pools. Economic crises, Transnistria conflict, corruption, massive lay-offs, pension and salary arrears, massive poverty and many other cataclysms became attributes of everyday life.

Generally, the dynamics of public opinion polls initiated by the Independent Service for Sociology and Information (SISI) "Opinia" since 1991 show the existence and maintenance of a permanent tension in the society, induced by the adverse results of reforms. Thus, the share of population, defining the current situation in Moldova as *favorable*, does not exceed ten percent, while the share of those considering it as *critical* is between 80 and 90 percent.

According to the monitoring study "The Results of 1997" 58 percent of questioned population consider the direction of economic development to be *improper*, and only 31 percent consider it as *correct*. As regards to the social sphere, almost 60 percent of participants in public opinion polls have a negative attitude towards the reforms conceived here. It is worth mentioning that the dynamics of public opinion with respect to the discussed problems has been virtually unchanged lately.

High economic cost of reforms and the drop in living standards bring about protests and indignation of population. Consequently, the share of supporters of transition towards the market economy declined by 10 percent in 1998 compared to 1996, according to SISI "Opinia", and constitutes only 42 percent of country's population. In the same time, only 11 percent of population agree that Central Government has a well thought program of action, oriented towards the revival of economy and of the social sphere.

Recent studies of SISI "Opinia" show as the main concerns of population the following: inflation, poverty (77-87%), salary and pension arrears (66-73%), chaos and anarchy, lack of discipline and order at all levels of power (48-68%), corruption, criminality, and massive fraud (45-54%), economic crisis and fall in production (40-50%), unemployment (37-47%), and also country's future (33-39%).

The poll dynamics also reveals a strong stratification of population according to their living standards. The share of socially vulnerable population (at the survival level) increased from 20 percent in 1993 to 34 percent in 1998.

The problems mostly affecting the society and the entire community lead to continuous tension in day by day life, discontent about the life. At present virtually 2/3 of citizens (10 percent more than in 1992) have a miserable life, almost 20 percent are below poverty level, and only 10 percent are satisfied with their present life.

Consequently, over half of Republic's population considers it impossible to tolerate any

further the indigence they suffer. The share of population uncertain of tomorrow is quite stable - 80 percent of total citizens.

Comparative sociological studies (dynamics of opinions) in 1992-98 reveal the persistence of apathy and indifference (40-55%), resentment (46-54%), fear (26-39%), cruelty and aggressiveness (21-33%). The feelings of dignity (3-9%), confidence in the future (3-18%), and pride for the country and people (3-13%) have become secondary now.

In spite of society's democratization process, the polls are continuously showing a pronounced detachment of governing institutes from people's needs, problems and interests. Thus, people's dissatisfaction by the level of democracy in our society and by the quality of public administration constitutes 81-83 percent. For several years (1994-98) 80-87 percent of country's population consider that decision-making on vital issues for the Republic of Moldova is made without any consultations with people.

Conclusions:

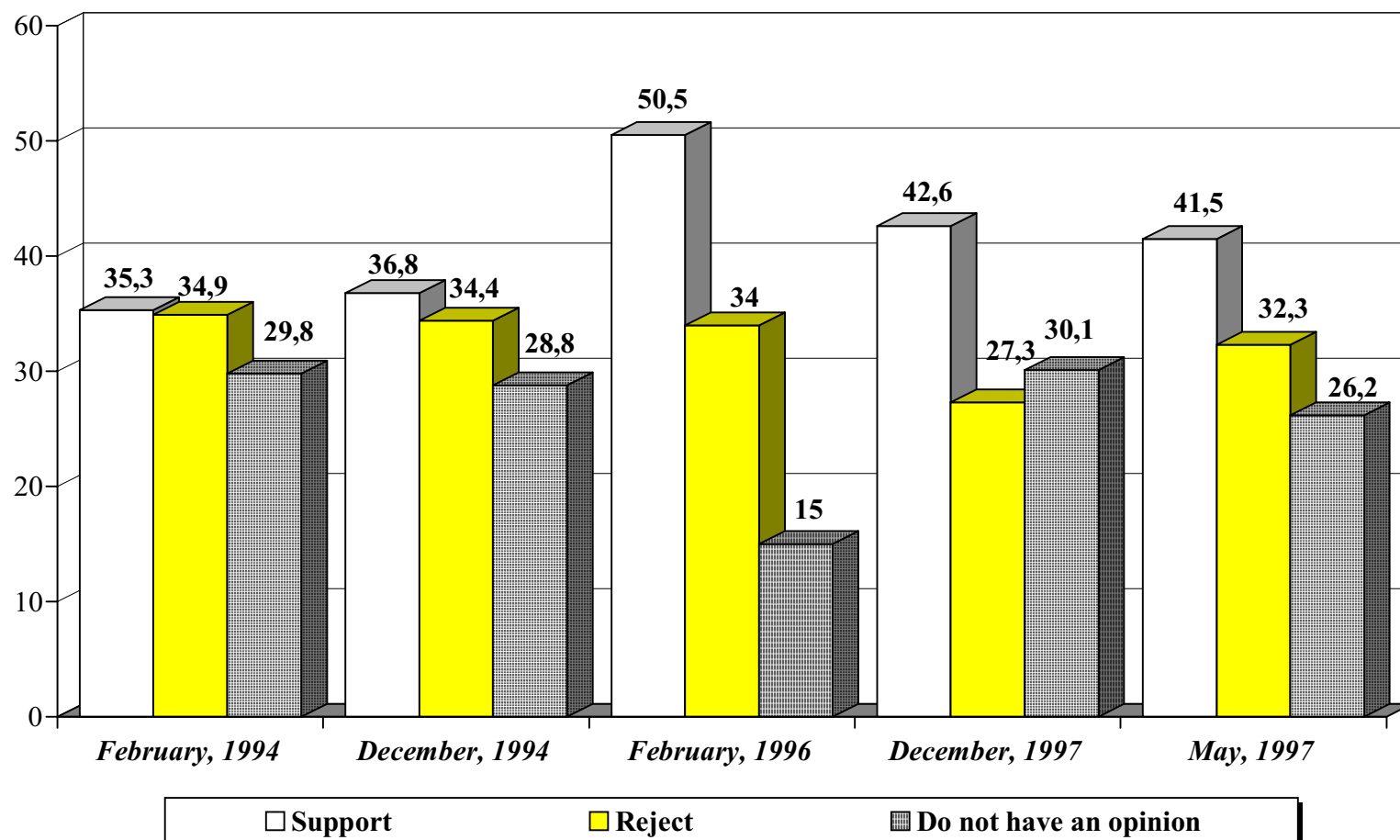
- Changes taking place in our society in the last few years have a rather negative than positive effect, according to public opinion polls;
- The degree of citizen's information and familiarization with reforms occurring in the country is very low; consolidation between state and personality in the process of social changes is weak;
- The degree of population's lack of faith in the course and outcomes of reforms increases its disbelief;
- A process of amplification of resentments occurring in the society, leads to tensions;
- People are looking with pessimism into the future of the country, to the possibilities of improvement;
- The dynamics of opinion polls exhibits an increasing dissatisfaction of residents with the level of democracy, with the total ignorance towards public opinion from the governing bodies in regard to changes and social processes in the Republic Moldova.

Recommendations:

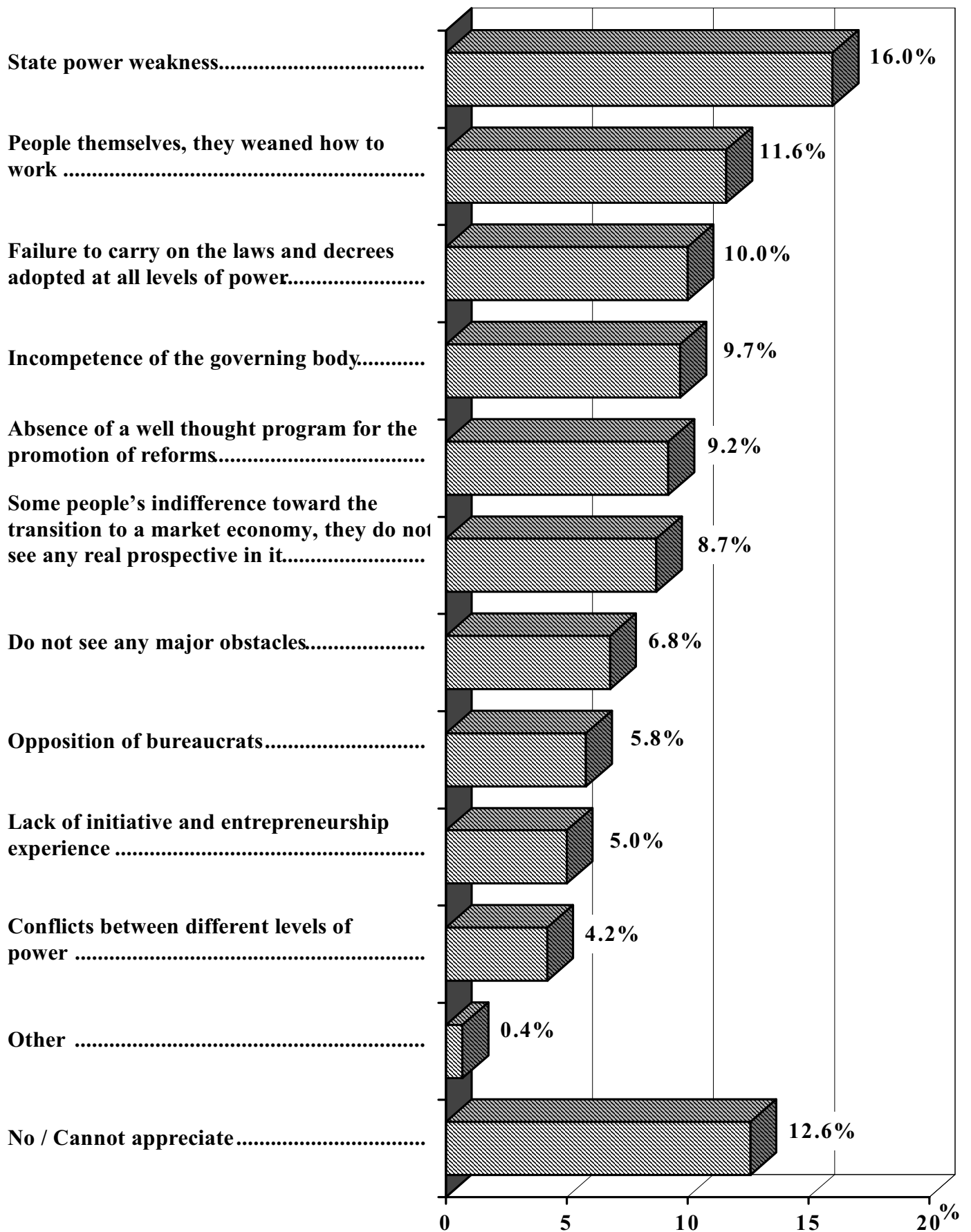
- Any social change is going to fail if it is not deeply understood and accepted by community. The actual reform process requires a profound public familiarization and information with the development strategies of the country, its prospective and implementation process;
- The most vulnerable demand a special attention from the state: unemployed citizens, young people, the intellectuality – country's cultural and scientific potential. Correct, well-thought and efficient programs must be an imperative;
- Empirical results show that the public opinion plays a very important role in social-economical development. Unfortunately, the public opinion results are consulted only during election campaigns, a permanent research of different aspects of actual realities being completely ignored.

The governing bodies, other social institutes should permanently base their activity on public opinion, should permanently keep the hand of the pulse, evaluating correctly the reaction of public opinion to all changes in the society.

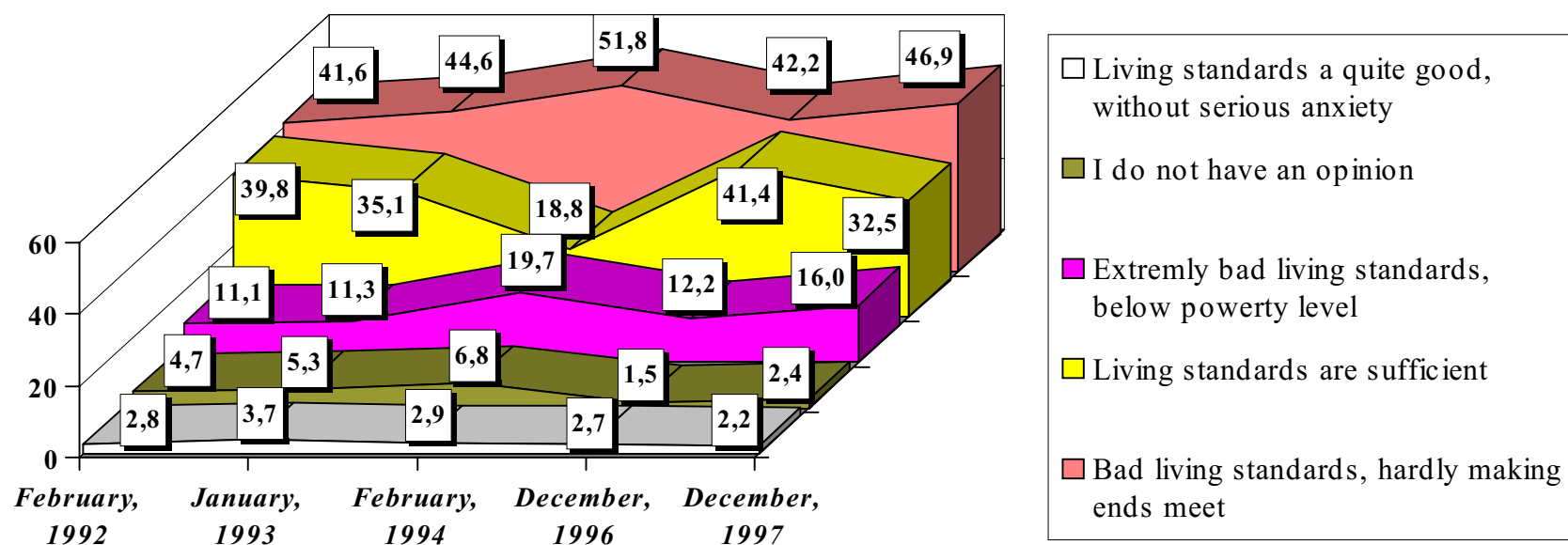
Moldovan population attitude towards the transition to a market economy



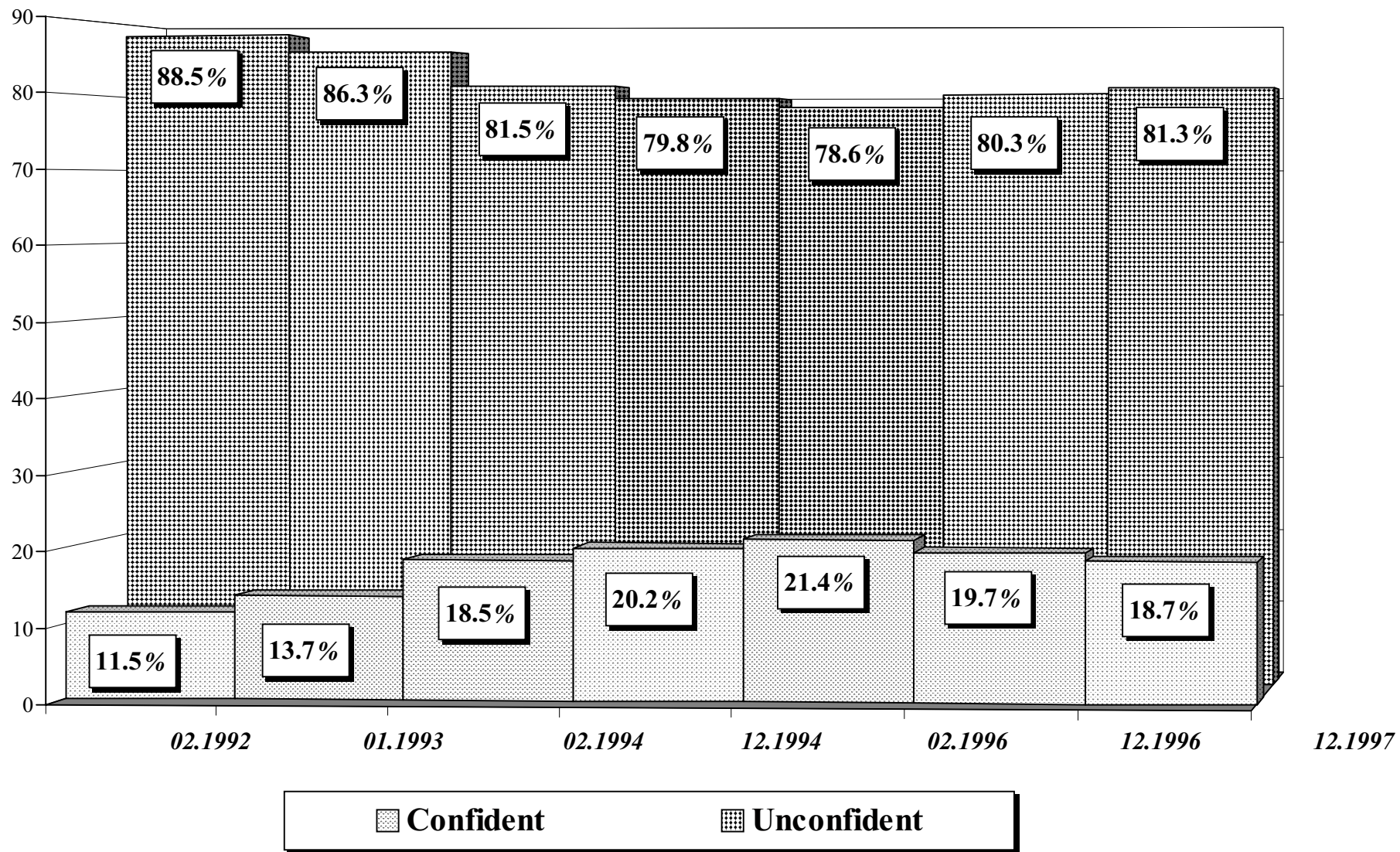
Which is the main obstacle in the course of reforms, in your opinion?



Living standards of Republic of Moldova's population



Population confidence in the future



Problems of the society that make population worry the most

	02.1994 %	02.1996 %	12.1996 %	12.1997 %
1. Increase in price level, inflation, worsening of living standards, poverty	86.9	75.6	78.4	77.1
2. Salary and pension arrears	***	66.0	70.2	73.0
3. Chaos and anarchy, lack of discipline and order at all the levels of power	68.7	51.4	58.5	48.1
4. Corruption, outburst of mafia and criminality, massive fraud	51.3	48.4	45.3	45.9
5. Expectations towards of the future of country and population	***	37.0	33.3	39.2
5. Unemployment	***	42.3	42.3	36.9
6. Economic crisis, production drop, insufficient management skills	49.8	38.3	41.0	33.9
7. Social protection and equity, lack of state support for people needs and problems	27.9	25.6	23.2	21.0
8. Lost of interest for a honest way of work and production	***	***	20.9	18.0
9. Destruction of the environment	15.3	20.9	7.2	14.9
10. Crisis of morality, culture, spirituality, inter-human tension	25.0	15.5	10.4	14.8
11. State power's weakness, incompetence and impotence	37.5	21.4	10.1	14.4
12. Conflicts and intrigues, lack of coordination between branches of power	***	***	9.3	7.5
13. Interethnic extremism and separatism, Republic's disintegration	26.2	***	5.0	5.2
14. Other problems	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.4

*** – These indicators were not studied

Changes occurred in Moldova in recent years and their consequences, according to public opinion polls

Which of the following changes brought more good or more harm for the Republic, in your opinion?

