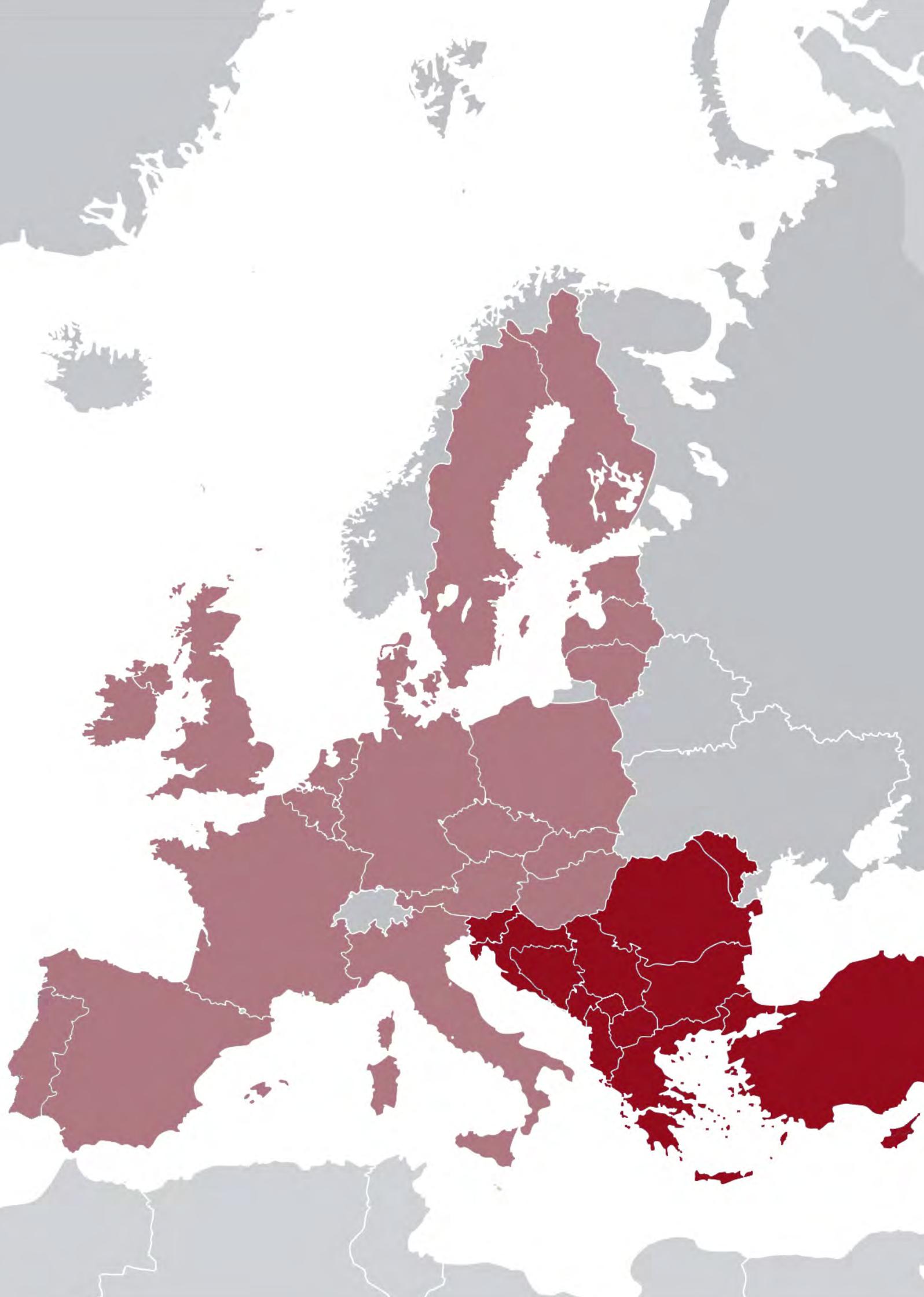




Jasmin Mujanović (ed.)

# The Democratic Potential of Emerging Social Movements in Southeastern Europe



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**Sarajevo 2017**



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Felix Henkel</i>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Jasmin Mujanović</i>	
<b>Romania's Years of Turmoil, 2012–2015</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Victoria Stoiciu</i>	
<b>Vectors of Ex / Inclusion in Bulgarian Civil Society Post-2013</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Jana Tsoneva</i>	
<b>Breeding Grounds for Croatia's Conservative Social Movements</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Dario Čepo</i>	
<b>Social Movements and Democratization in Serbia since Milošević</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Marko Kmezić</i>	
<b>Towards a De-Ethnicized Politics: Protests and Plenums in Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Emin Eminagić</i>	
<b>Civil Society Against the Party- State? The Curious Case of Social Movements in Montenegro</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>Bojan Baća</i>	
<b>Vetevendosje and the Democratic Potential for Protest in Kosovo</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Hana Marku</i>	
<b>Students in Macedonia: The Road from Apathy to Active Citizenship</b>	<b>47</b>
<i>Dona Kosturanova</i>	
<b>Movements and Parties: Trends in Democratic Politics as Challenges for Social Democracy in Southern and Eastern Europe</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>Tina Olteanu and Dieter Segert</i>	
<b>Epilogue: The Policymaker's Takeaway</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>Jasmin Mujanović</i>	
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>59</b>



# Preface

This publication started as a series of informal conversations in Sarajevo, Belgrade, Zagreb, Berlin, and Graz in the summer and autumn of 2015. All of these discussions concerned a succinct question: what was the future of progressive politics in Southeastern Europe and what role should the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), with its two-decade long presence in the region, play in that future?

The answers that have emerged over the subsequent two years are complex but might be distilled to the notion of renewal. While we encountered no small amount of disillusionment and frustration among our friends and colleagues, we reached time and again the conclusion that social democracy, as a movement and as an ideal, was imperative for the future peace and prosperity of the Western Balkans, Southeastern Europe, and the European continent in its entirety.

What the FES can, and has historically contributed, to the global cause of social democracy is to facilitate dialogue. Ours is a movement composed of disparate and sometimes opposing camps; from party members to student activists, from labour organizers to religious leaders. And yet the cause of human dignity, whether it was the eight hour work

day or the abolition of apartheid, has always depended on our ability to advance a shared vision of social justice.

This volume focuses on the role social movements play in the process of democratic renewal in Southeastern Europe and how their activities should inform the work of organizations like the FES. This text is only a segment, however, of the expansive constellation and network of projects that the FES Dialogue Southeast Europe has commissioned on this topic. Other studies, analyses, and public fora concentrate on the role of political parties, youth, the wider international community, and the interplay between each of these as concerns the region's ongoing democratic evolution.

None of the individual contributions in this publication, or those in any of our other projects, necessarily reflect the views of our office or those of the FES as an organization. However, each of them, on some level, contributes to the conversations that we believe are necessary for progressives in Southeastern Europe to have at this time of almost unparalleled global upheaval. The future of the region and social democracy's fate within it depends on our restoring the ties that bind our movement, our societies, and our continent.

*Felix Henkel, Director,  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung,  
Dialogue Southeast Europe*

*October 2017*



# Introduction

*Jasmin Mujanović*

The complex network of peace agreements and bilateral accords that constitute the post-Yugoslav order in the Western Balkans represent the most thorough and expansive international state building and democratization project since the end of the Second World War. From Dayton to Ohrid, the international community has shaped peace keeping and reconstruction efforts in the region at every level and in virtually every way. From constitutional reform to highway infrastructure, from Sarajevo to Skopje, policymakers in Brussels and Washington have, at one time or another, been involved in matters ranging from technical minutia to grand strategy in the region.

Next door, in Bulgaria and Romania, the EU's engagement has been less robust but no less transformative. In order to transition from one party rule to Euro-Atlantic integration and membership, successive governments in Sofia and Bucharest have, with the direct assistance of a constellation of donor states and institutions, embraced expansive reform programs that have left no aspect of their respective political systems untouched. Moreover, when Bulgaria and Romania formally joined the EU in 2007, their addition to the Union was considered by many analysts, on both sides of the Atlantic, as a critical (if not conclusive) episode in Europe's broader post-Cold War reintegration.

In short, nurturing democracy in Southeastern Europe – both in the former Yugoslavia and the greater Balkans – has been a stated objective of both governments in the region and policy makers in Brussels and Washington. Yet despite headline-grabbing successes like Croatia's EU accession in 2013 or Montenegro's NATO entry in 2017, the past decade has primarily been characterized by a

significant decline in the quality of democracy and political stability across the region. Media freedoms are slumping; parliamentary governance is in shambles; while the promise of free and fair elections increasingly gives way to “managed democracy” and/or outright authoritarianism. Corruption and clientelism remain the norm, while transparency and accountability are largely buzzwords thrown about by the internationals, and lacking the weight of actual implementation.

An obvious question emerges: how could the international community's virtually unprecedented degree of involvement in Southeastern Europe's postwar and post-communist reconstruction have this persistent disorder as its result? And what can be done to salvage the democratic project in Southeastern Europe?

The answers this volume provides to that question concentrate not on the role of the international community or local political elites but the role of local civil society; a generally neglected segment of the broader democratic mosaic. In other words, if the existing international approach to the region has been top down, we are here concerned with the bottom up. We are concerned with the emerging and nascent social movements and civil society initiatives, from the short lived “Bosnian Spring” to the “Colorful Revolution” in Macedonia, which are challenging and confronting the failures of existing democracy promotion paradigms.

The argument is simple: while elections and parliaments may be conducted and constituted with the aid of foreign powers, the health and vitality of a democracy are ultimately dependent on local conditions and local struggles. And it is just these local struggles, and their leaders and architects,

who have been unduly marginalized in Southeastern Europe by both local elites and the international community. And, in the final analysis, they have likewise been marginalized in the policy discussions concerning the political future of this entire region.

It is a standard talking point of the EU's foreign policy establishment that "there is no alternative to enlargement," that the remaining non-member states (in the Western Balkans in particular) are inevitably destined to join the continent's broader political and security structures. Yet the longer the region's democratic crises persist, the more this mantra sounds like a fleeting hope rather than sober analysis. Meanwhile, we continue to neglect the transparently unfinished (and degenerating) processes of democratic consolidation in existing member states.

Indeed, what now seems truly inevitable is a great social reckoning between what ought to have taken place in Southeastern Europe and what is actually the case on the ground; a rupture between the promise of representative democracy and the persistence of authoritarianism. This is the intersection at which the chapters in this volume operate and the point on the horizon at which their analytical gaze is fixed. This volume concerns the battle over the fundamental nature and quality of democracy in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe more broadly.

To this end, we might say that the majority of the progressive, civic, and left-leaning movements examined in this collection view their efforts as a matter of actualizing and grounding the promise of democratization. As such, contra growing media narratives about globally declining trust in democratic governance, these emerging social movements in Southeastern Europe are in fact arch-democrats. Indeed, the shared sentiment of their collective mobilizations concerns the qualitative deficiency of existing arrangements in the region; to these activists, Southeastern Europe and the Balkans are, if anything, insufficiently democratic.

But there is an edge to this critique. Distrust of existing institutions and governments in places like Croatia and Kosovo but also Bulgaria and Macedonia is feeding into right wing and reactionary populist sentiments, wherein the appeal to popular mo-

bilization often translates to nationalist xenophobia and chauvinist jingoism. These right wing populists have reminded us that spectres of the region's past still percolate ominously in its dark corners. What coherent statement can then be made about these apparently wildly divergent manifestations?

The simplest answer, as noted, is one of anticipation. The existing post-war and post-communist (and increasingly post-neoliberal) consensus in Southeastern Europe is breaking down, and as a result, new social actors are emerging. This volume is unequivocal in its commitments to and belief in the positive and transformative capacities of these movements. Yet we are also aware that crises are unpredictable and destructive. In the confrontations between rising social movements, resurgent reactionaries, and weakening and corrupt establishments the outcomes are likely to be varied and contradictory. What is unquestionable, however, is the necessity for activists and policymakers, in both the region and in Europe as a whole, to carefully analyse and assess the "state of play" as it concerns the fate of democracy and democratization in Southeastern Europe. This volume is an attempt to shape and inform those discussions.

Finally, a general but important word about the authors we have asked to contribute to this volume. With the exception of the last chapter, which serves as a broad comment on the state of social democracy in Eastern Europe as a whole, each of the chapters in this volume has been written by activists and scholars from Southeastern Europe. We have especially prioritized contributions by authors whose work has only rarely appeared in English. This was a deliberate decision. To speak of the power and agency of Southeast European civil society requires us to elevate voices from the region itself, especially the voices of experienced activists and emerging leaders.

Having compiled this volume, we hope it will serve to inform the debate amongst scholars, policymakers, and activists about the broader crisis of democracy in Southeastern Europe, a crisis that affects not only the region itself but the continent as a whole. Most importantly, contained here are not only perspectives on the origins of this crisis but suggestions (and agents) for the way forward.

# Romania's Years of Turmoil, 2012–2015

Victoria Stoiciu

This chapter analyses the context in which the social movement #UnitiSalvam emerged in Romania after the 2012 protests and the impact it had on the country's broader democratic dynamics. In short, the main contribution of #UnitiSalvam to the country's democratization process consisted in an attempt to "re-politicize" the public sphere by revealing some of the fundamental antagonisms of Romanian society, whose persistence has been obscured during the post-communist transition by dominant, neoliberal anti-communist and good governance narratives. The chapter also points to the limits of this emerging social movement and its respective offshoots, in particular, their self-proclaimed "apolitical" character which stands in marked contrast to the re-politicization and democratization process as a whole.

## Romanian Post-Communist Apathy

The post-communist period in Romania has been marked by deep socioeconomic and political transformations, but despite economic and social dislocation, no significant mass protest or social movement manifestation occurred during these transition years, with the exception of those that accompanied the initial fall of the communist regime. This "social peace" – the term for this period of social anesthesia – was made possible due to the discursive dominance of anti-communist, neoliberal good governance narratives.

Shortly after the fall of the communist regime in 1990, a peaceful student protest against the ex-communists in the Romanian government ended violently when miners from the Jiu Valley attacked and

dispersed the peaceful protesters. This established the main cleavage through which Romania society and politics were to be thenceforth understood: communism vs. anti-communism. These events were indicative of a process of "de-politicization," where matters of public concern became individualized and private.<sup>1</sup> Instead of addressing the real conflicts dividing Romanian society, all issues having to do with contemporary governance were blamed on the still recent communist past and thus transformed from concrete political discourse into a vague cultural (and emotional) one. Blaming the communist past, condemning communist crimes, and universalizing anti-communist discourse became the way in which to obscure, mystify, and ultimately neglect contemporary problems.

The good governance discourse started from different premises than the anti-communist rhetoric but achieved similar results. The notion of good governance first appeared in the intellectual and public sphere in the early 1990s, when Romania signed the first stand-by agreement with the IMF, followed by another nine similar stand-by agreements between 1991 and 2015. Starting in the 1990s, the IMF increasingly advanced the concept of good governance as an idea bound up with the normative framework of neoliberalism, equalizing good governance with the technical qualities of financial management.<sup>2</sup> In Romania, the ascension of the good governance discourse as advanced by the IMF and World Bank coincided with the spread of neo-

1 Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

2 Morten Boas, Desmond McNeill, eds., *Global Institutions and Development: Framing the World?* (London: Routledge, 2003).

liberalism as an economic doctrine, public policy agenda, and as an analytical framework for social discourse.<sup>3</sup> The IMF-World Bank view was that economic crises were not produced by external factors but by the failure of domestic governments to adopt appropriate policies.<sup>4</sup> The problems that Romania faced in the post-communism period were regarded strictly as the result of Romanian politicians' failure to adopt the appropriate economic and political reforms; that is, those promoted by the IMF and World Bank. The good governance principle became the proverbial "common sense" of Romania's opinion makers but also a cultural hegemonic paradigm – a universally dominant ideology that justified the status-quo and hid the constructed and partisan character of post-communist social institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the IMF and World Bank endorsed de-industrialization and mass privatization policies, which were accompanied by growing inequality, social exclusion, and the growth of precarious employment regimes. None of these phenomena were included or addressed in the mainstream political discourse, nor in public policy debates. In Romania, like in many post-communist societies, social contradictions remained simply unaddressed. In other words, they existed but they were not publically acknowledged.<sup>6</sup> The gap between citizens and political decision-makers in this period increased, leading to declining levels of trust in political parties, democratic regimes, and parliamentary democracy itself. Between 2007 and 2012, satisfaction with democracy in Romania decreased from the already low level of 36 to 13 per cent, the lowest among EU member states aside from Greece (11%), and well below from the European average of 47 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

## The End of Consensus and the Emergence of #UnitiSalvam

The post-communist consensus ended in the winter of 2012, when massive street protests began in all major Romanian cities as a reaction to a draft

3 Philip G. Cerny, "Embedding Neoliberalism: The Evolution of a Hegemonic Paradigm," *The Journal of International Trade and Diplomacy* 2:1, (2008).

4 Surendra Munshi, Biju Paul Abraham and Soma Chaudhuri, *The Intelligent Person's Guide to Good Governance* (N.p.: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2009).

5 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Buttigieg, Joseph A., ed. (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1992).

6 Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs [The Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-Communism]* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).

7 "Table of Results," *Standard Eurobarometer*, No. 62, 63, 65, 68, 72, 74, 76, 78, 2004–2012.

law aiming to privatize the healthcare system. If adopted, it would have reduced state-funded health benefits, de-regulated the health insurance market, and privatized all Romanian hospitals. The health bill came on top of several years of austerity and structural reforms. In 2010, for instance, wages of government employees were cut by 25 per cent and social security benefits by 15 per cent, while the value-added tax (VAT) was increased by five per cent, from 19 to 24 per cent. 2011 was also the year of "structural reforms," requiring dramatic alterations in the labor market, social assistance, and social dialogue legislation.

The financial crisis and the subsequent austerity measures deepened those hitherto unseen cleavages that cut through Romanian society. And although the health bill was dropped a few days after the protest began, civic unrest continued for another two or three months, with new and growing demands continuously being advanced by the protesters. Soon, the anti-system character of the protest became evident: all of the political parties were equally blamed for the social and economic crisis the country found itself in. Meanwhile, typically silenced concerns about inequality, corruption, and cronyism were voiced publicly, arguably for the first time since the collapse of communism.

But the 2012 protests were only the first step toward the formation of a truly all-Romanian social movement. The decisive moment was in the autumn of 2013, when protestors took to the streets in fifty Romanian cities in response to a draft law opening the way to a highly contested mining project in Roșia Montană, a village in western Romania. The protests lasted for more than three months, coming to an end only in mid-December 2013. All manner of civil disobedience and protest took place during this time; from demonstrations and marches to flash mobs and road blocks. Some called it the "Romanian Autumn," an allusion to the "Arab Spring" and the revival of citizens' participation in a number of countries in its immediate aftermath. A new network of activists – "#UnitiSalvam" – emerged as a result of these protests. The movement derived its name from the main slogan of the protest: "Uniti, salvam Roșia Montană" (United, we'll save Roșia Montană).

Since then, the network has emerged as one with an informal and diffuse character and mainly mobilizes through social media. Most of the time the community #UnitiSalvam seems to be dormant – recent years show that it activates itself on an ad hoc basis, often as a reaction to particular political developments. Since the autumn of 2013, there

were a number of occasions when the movement (re)acted. One of these instances was in the spring of 2014, on the eve of the European Parliamentary elections, when a large number of participants announced a “citizens’ strike” by way of a boycott of the elections.<sup>8</sup> Their aim was to delegitimize the “democratic simulacrum” of the vote, to lay open the “electoral farce” by submitting blank votes or simply by not participating at all. “On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May we vote on the streets,”<sup>9</sup> they announced. Their concrete demand was a change in the legislation regulating electoral and political parties, one of the most restrictive in Europe; specifically, they wanted to be able to register a new political party with only three members, instead of the existing requirement for 25,000 members. The network activated itself again during the presidential elections in November 2014,<sup>10</sup> against illegal logging in May 2015,<sup>11</sup> and over a fire in a Bucharest nightclub in November 2015, which led to a rash of government resignations.<sup>12</sup>

In short, with #UnitiSalvam we observe a shift from the vertical forms of organization which politics used to rely on in the past, to more horizontal forms: networks and informal groups. “Free people do not have leaders” was one of the slogans of the Romanian 2013 protests, a slogan that marks a red line between status quo politics, embedded in rigid hierarchies, and the “new” way of understanding politics as a field in which individuals are all equal and participate together in creating this equality. More to the point, the #UnitiSalvam movement achieved several victories as results of these protests: the laws that triggered the protests were abandoned, legislation concerning elections and parties was changed, and several government officials resigned because of the protests as noted. Yet despite these gains the Romanian political arena is still far from truly reformed,<sup>13</sup> although we can clearly discern the positive democratic evolutions that have accompanied the emergence of the #UnitiSalvam social movement.

8 “Comunitatea Uniti Salvam declara greva cetateneasca. O fi bine?” in *Romania Curata*, May 19, 2014.

9 May 25, 2014 was the day of the elections for the European Parliament.

10 “Proteste in tara – Zeci de mii de oameni, in strada. S-a fortat intrarea in sediul PSD si s-au ars afise cu Ponta,” in *Ziare.com*, November 17, 2014.

11 “Uniti Salvam a anuntat pentru sambata un nou protest impotriva despaduririlor abusive,” *Hotnews.ro*, May 15, 2014.

12 “Tacerea ucide – protest joi in capital in urma tragediei din Clubul colectiv,” in *Romania Libera*, November 5, 2015.

13 Diana Margarit, “The days we don’t give in – the Romanian social movements between 2012 and 2015,” *Eastblog*, 2015.

## Democratization via Re-Politicization

Although the #UnitiSalvam movement had accomplished some key policy achievements, it would be a mistake to look for its effects in the institutional and “official” conduct of politics in Romania. The movement’s main change was the creation of a new democratic dynamic that unleashed and mobilized the fundamental social antagonisms within Romanian society. It also elevated new social and political actors, in particular, ordinary citizens by legitimizing their claims and ability to participate in the exercise of politics and governance more broadly.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, we must address here a common characteristic of all the protests that followed 2012: their self-proclaimed “apolitical” attitude. This claim persisted in the protests that followed in 2014, 2015, and 2016, despite the clearly political demands of the protesters, ranging from concrete legislative changes, and the resignation of particular government officials, and so on.

I argue that the Romanian protesters’ claim of being “apolitical” is, in fact, a refusal to be associated with the political parties as well as a distancing from institutionalized politics but is not “anti-political” as such. Despite their particular demands, the post-2012 protests all advanced a rejection of the political establishment’s style of doing politics, which can be characterized as “para-political.” Parapolitics replaces the actors of political conflicts with the parts/elements of the state apparatus, making politics less about dissent than about proceduralism.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary post-politics (as described by Rancière and Žižek)<sup>16</sup> breaks people down into individuals, and replaces the class struggle dimension of politics with a Hobbesian “war of each against all.” While recognizing the multiple axes of society, post-politics channels the political energies triggered by this heterogeneity into a market-like competition between individuals.<sup>17</sup> For Žižek, for example, who adds to Rancière’s theory, post-politics is a specifically post-modern form of foreclosing political disagreement and reducing politics to serving the needs of global capitalism. These characteristics of post-politics are easily recognizable in the domi-

14 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

15 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

16 Ibid; Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999).

17 Jonathan Metzger, Philip Allmendinger, Stijn Oosterlynck, *Planning Against the Political: Democratic Deficits in European Territorial Governance* (Routledge, 2014); Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

nant narrative of post-1989 Romania. Especially with regards to its attempts to dilute the collective identities resulting from the harshness of economic transition and to detach them from the official political process, which in turn became increasingly distant from the real conflicts that shaped Romanian society after the fall of communism.

Despite proclaiming themselves as apolitical, the protests that started in 2012, and which emerged in the context of wider social movement mobilization in the years after, are the most political occurrence in the Romania's recent history. As Žižek notes, a popular uprising starts becoming political when the particular demand

*starts to function as a metaphoric condensation of the global (universal) opposition against Them, those in power, so that the protest is no longer just about that demand, but about the universal dimension that resonates in that particular demand.*<sup>18</sup>

This is precisely the direction in which Romanian social movement culture began evolving with each protest: the specific claims became the expression of a wider and more profound opposition against the political establishment. It created a window of opportunity for the re-politicization of society, by revealing one fundamental, but unrecognized cleavage of Romanian society; the opposition between the overwhelming majority and the ruling minority, a fundamental conflict between the two over power, privileges, and resources, over "who gets what, when, and how."<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, the self-professed apolitical character of these movements should not be entirely ignored. The persistence of this label holds the risk of stunting further advances in the re-politicizing process. It can cause citizens rejecting institutionalized politics to turn towards outright apathy. The apolitical narrative thus has nesting

18 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999).

19 Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who gets what, when, how* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1936).

aspects of the hegemonic neoliberal and good governance discourse, and therefore obstructs the political character of everyday life, transforming it into a question of private affairs that require private solutions. The outcome is the de-politicization of social and economic relations, regarded as natural and typical, while participatory, disruptive politics is demonized. This disruptive character of the #UnitiSalvam movement risks being obscured by the apolitical narrative, in other words, and could eventually be annihilated if the breaches created inside this broader hegemonic discourse are not strong enough resist the system's re-consolidation.

## Conclusion

It remains to be seen how #UnitiSalvam will evolve in the future. Further surveys will be needed to determine if the movement will accomplish its re-politicizing and democratizing potential, expand its disruptive capacity by developing an alternative framing of reality or if it will entirely succumb to the good governance narrative and reinforce the status-quo in spite of its initial potential.

Therefore, the main challenges for the future are related to the movement's capacity to assume its political character and its ability to come up with a coherent narrative as an alternative to the dominant good governance rhetoric. To assume its full democratic potential, this discursive transformation must be accompanied by new democratic practices (deliberation, participation, horizontal communication) that can establish themselves as complementary to elections and other institutionalized forms of democratic participation.

Finally, it remains to be seen whether the movement can develop as a genuinely proactive political agent, or whether it will remain reactionary and ad hoc, responding only to particular political crises but unable to articulate a lasting vision and program of change. Only such a sustained effort can bring out the kind of systemic change necessary for the Romanian political system as a whole to change.

# Vectors of Ex/Inclusion in Bulgarian Civil Society Post-2013

Jana Tsoneva

2013 could be dubbed “the long year” in Bulgaria because of the protests which had effects on the political life of the country and which reverberate nearly five years later. These protests engaged in a polemical redefinition of the meaning of “civil society.” Given that every identity is established by excluding what does not belong to it, I discuss two such redefinitions of civil society premised on radically opposed logics of inclusion and exclusion: one “totalistic” and the other “minoritarian.” My main point is that as post-2013 “civil society” became a narrow and exclusionary category in Bulgaria, a contracted idea of the model citizen came to compete with the constitutionally consecrated one. But before I explain what happened to the imaginings of belonging to the national community and civil society, a brief familiarization of the reader with the protests in their historical context is in order.

## In the Aftermath of 1989: Civil Society as a Universalist Category

The transition to democracy began in Bulgaria with the great promise that the changes would usher in great improvements in the standard of living and material conditions for everyone.<sup>1</sup> Correspondingly, civil society in the earliest dissident accounts was something akin to “the masses,” shorthand for the community of all citizens. This “mass base” of civil society as well as the potential for universal-

istic improvement is attested to by a wide range of documents from the period.

One of the seminal articles on the idea of civil society was written in 1988 by Zhelyu Zhelev, a dissident philosopher and Bulgaria’s first democratically elected president. He imagined civil society as the anonymous democratic multitude standing united behind the intelligentsia.<sup>2</sup> It included everyone except the bureaucratic class, which is the enemy against whom Zhelev defined the boundaries of belonging to civil society. It was not only in Bulgaria that the first theories of civil society cast it as the negation of the party-state and its bureaucracy; the most influential corpus of dissident literature on the subject is best known for the rallying cry of “civil society against the state.”<sup>3</sup>

However, despite the overt hostility to the bureaucracy, Zhelev’s conception of civil society was not necessarily anti-communist and is thus considered as an entity not opposing but complementing the process of *preustroistvo* (Bulgarian for *perestroika*).<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the liberal under-

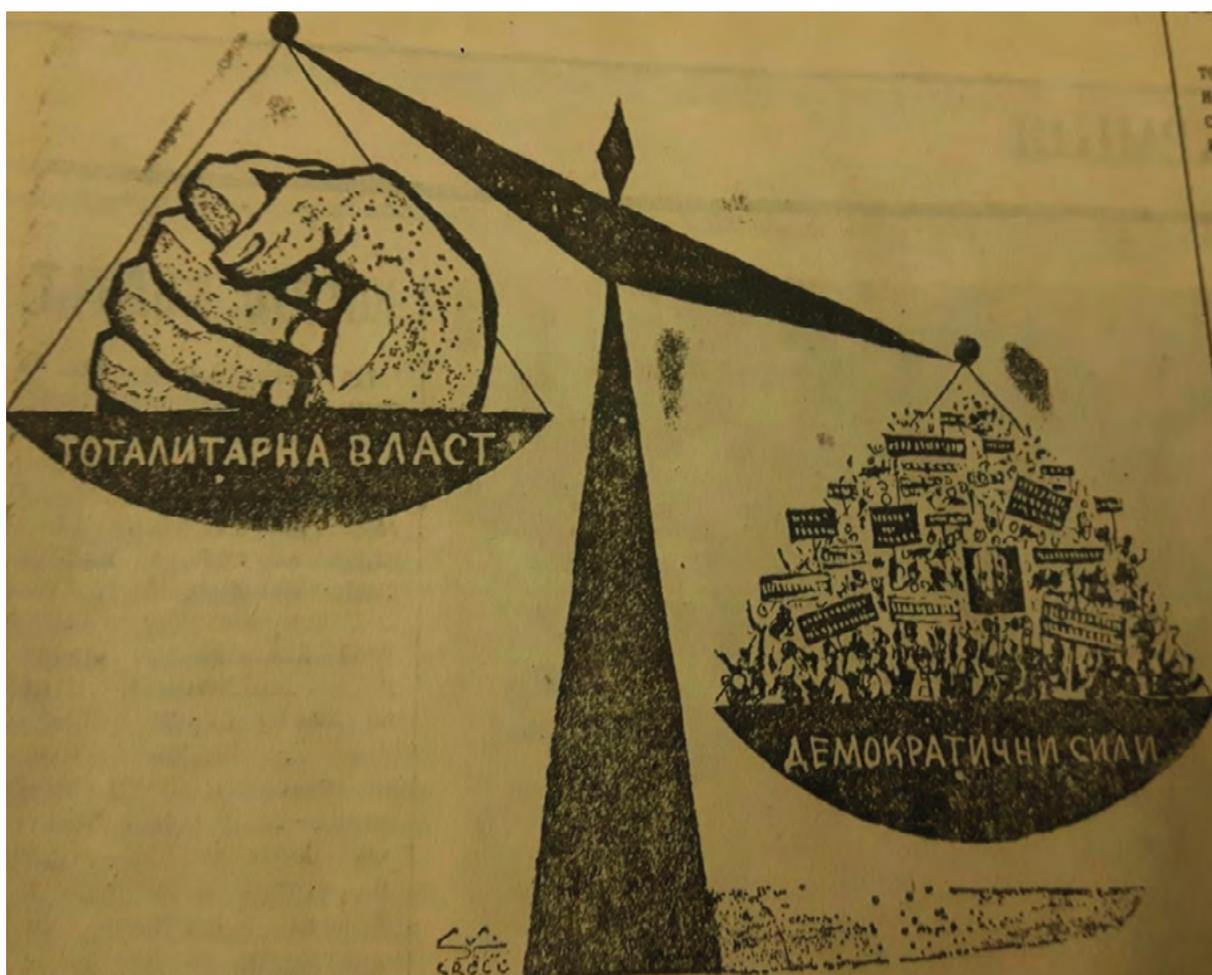
1 Madlen Nikolova, “The Bulgarian ‘creative class’ and the reproduction of neoliberal ideology,” *LeftEast*, March 16, 2014.

2 Zhelyu Zhelev, “The great time of the intelligentsia,” *Kultura*, October 31, 2008 (1988).

3 For example, Kotkin calls the Communist Party elites “uncivil society.” See Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (Modern Library, 2010). As liberal political theorist Madison argued, “[c]ivil society is everything which the totalitarian state is not” in Gary Madison, *The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 12.

4 This is significant in its own right as towards the end of socialism, civil society had not yet assumed its visceral anti-communist form. Far from the enemy of socialist *preustroistvo* (which aimed to merely reform socialism), civil society here was imagined as the sole vehicle for its achievement.

Figure 1: The totalitarian elite vs. the democratic multitude



Sources: Author unknown, *Demokratsia*, February 11, 1990.

standing of “civil society” as a system of needs and particularities (according to Hegel), or free associations of citizens (according to de Tocqueville), Zhelev’s civil society assumes the form of a homogeneous whole that is propelled to action by a single interest that only the intelligentsia is able to express and defend. This is not unlike the dogmatic Bolshevik understanding of the historic role of the Communist Party, leading the unified working masses, only in a very idealistic guise. Sociologist Petya Kabakchieva criticizes Zhelev because in his vision civil society “thickens up” thereby rescinding the classic liberal understanding of civil society as the sphere of competing particularities.<sup>5</sup>

The first issues of the *Demokratsia* newspaper, the organ of the opposition, were very dedicated to the popular mobilizations of that period. Within the visual imagery accompanying the coverage of the mobilizations there emerged the idea of the vast, anonymous multitude which rises up against the to-

talitarian elite. Thus it is telling that in *Figure 1*, the elite is represented by a single fist outweighed by the “democratic forces” of the multitude.<sup>6</sup>

The homology established between “the masses” and “civil society” animated the first efforts to privatize state-owned enterprises too. Anti-communism was taken as a promise of universal prosperity and the speedy elevation of everyone into middle-class status. Workers were invited to participate in the shared, egalitarian ownership of capital. This utopian ideal was so strong that economists wrote “sobering” analyses stating that “mass privatization is a social hypnosis,” and that privatization is nothing but an efficient way to “redistribute” state companies.<sup>7</sup> The desire for universal, affluent middle class status understandably mediated the widespread critique of the perennial consumer goods deficits in the socialist economy. Today this narrative has been abandoned and the masses’ al-

<sup>5</sup> Petya Kabakchieva et al. *Civil Society in Bulgaria: NGOs versus Spontaneous Civic Activism?* (Sofia: Open Society Foundation, 2012), pg. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Author unknown, *Demokratsia*, February 11, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Roumen Avramov, “Mass privatization will be like social hypnosis,” *Capital*, October, 2 1995. See also: Medarov, G. and Tsoneva, J. *Capital Reforms* (Sofia: KOI Books, 2014).

leged consumerism is repudiated. For example, the famous entrepreneur Ivaylo Penchev asserted that the EU is “soaked in socialism,” while the Bulgarian people suffer from an unrealistic sense of entitlement to “the good life” which prevents them from engaging in hard work.<sup>8</sup>

Towards the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the idea of civil society began to shed some of its “mass” and “protest” dimensions, instead becoming equated with a network of professional NGOs and think-tanks. This is related to the stabilization of the liberal consensus in the country through the development of foreign, donor funded civil society. For example, reports that monitor the state of civil society from 2005 and 2011 focus mostly on the status of NGOs.<sup>9</sup> And yet it is important to note that domestically the NGO sector is often admonished for being overly responsive to the needs and agenda of their foreign donors rather than the needs of Bulgarian citizenry.

The most visceral criticism of this type was articulated by intellectuals decrying the “NGOization of civil society,” like a 2010 book by the left-wing political anthropologist Dostena Lavergne,<sup>10</sup> which caused great scandal upon its publication. Among the claims in the book that infuriated the representatives of the NGO sector was that these experts were a vehicle for the transmission of neo-liberal, “Washington Consensus” politics, and were slavishly subservient to their donors. This critique is widely embraced by large segments of the left in Bulgaria and beyond.

For example, Ivancheva and Gagyi’s 2014 report on civil society in Central and East Europe reports that civil society has been hijacked by the “colonial” donor-NGO class. Instead, the authors want to reclaim the term for the purposes of progressive social mobilization. To this end, they argue that “activists should go beyond the traditional forms of civil society, usually conducted from donor centers in the rich countries in the West.”<sup>11</sup> The case studies in their publication overwhelmingly tend to be from social protests and mobilizations, not projects of the NGO sector, thereby wrestling away civil society from the NGO class and rooting it in grassroots mobilizations.

8 Tatiana Dimitrova, “Ivaylo Penchev, ‘Walltopia’: The entire EU is soaked in Socialism, China is the world’s factory,” *Dnevnik*, March 24, 2014.

9 See: Dessislava Kuzdilovski et al., *Index of Civil Society 2008–2010* (Sofia: Open Society Foundation, 2011).

10 Dostena Lavergne, *Eskeprtite na Prehoda* [Experts of the Transition] (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2010).

11 Agnes Gagyi and Mariya Ivancheva, *Civil society in Central and Eastern Europe: what’s left of it?* (European Alternatives, 2014), pg. 4.

The claim that the self-styled representatives of civil society are not democratic enough can only be made from a belief in an authentic or organic civil society which is not donor-driven but of, and for the people. Lavergne, for example, has been a vocal critic of what she calls NGOs’ “distortion of authentic civil society” and experts’ sabotage of its “birth.”<sup>12</sup> This position speaks to the fact that the 1990s theory of civil society as egalitarian and democratic remains relevant even if the mantle of legitimate representation thereof remains contested.

This necessarily cursory historical background of the meandering evolution of the idea of civil society in Bulgaria ought not suggest that there are “in/correct” deployments of the idea. We should not dismiss positions such as Zhelev’s or Lavergne’s merely because they do not echo classical liberal theory. Ideas have acted as weapons mobilized in constant struggles, like taking *perestroika* away from the Communist Party and turning it into a tool of an emerging mass liberal opposition, or taking civil society away from its self-styled spokespeople from the NGOs and turning it against them. The idea of civil society has remained contested throughout, and struggles for re/signification continue still. The 2013 protests mark the latest chapter in this contest.

## From the Anti-Communist Masses to the Communist Multitudes

The changes in the discourse of civil society affected also the ways in which the signifier of “democracy” operates today. The established nexus between civil society and democracy, which dominated much of the post-communist transitional period in Bulgaria, turned out to be in the end rather fragile. After all, the stabilization of the respective components of any discourse is always temporary.<sup>13</sup> But ultimately, the unravelling of the “civil society-democracy” discursive chain resulted from the effects of the popular protests of 2013.

That year saw two waves of intense anti-government protests, in February and June respectively. The winter protests erupted over a surge in utility bill prices; they lasted for several months and in the process over twenty people committed public self-immolations. The summer protests erupted over the controversial appointment of a media oligarch as chief of the National Security Agency. They lasted over a year, with a series of university occu-

12 Dostena Lavergne, “They force us to go round in circles,” *Pogled.info*, July 23, 2013.

13 See: Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York and London: Verso 2000).

pations and significant participation on part of the intellectual class (unlike in winter) from the ranks of the NGO sector, the liberal commentariat, and the universities.

The winter protesters made use of the language of civil society but in their hands the term “civil” was no longer interchangeable with the NGOs. In fact, NGOs, together with political parties, were unapologetically ejected from this version of civil society. The discourse returned to the early 90s vision, albeit without the leading role of any political party, still less the intellectuals, and began to be used interchangeably with “the people,” resulting in the construct of a “people’s civil society.”<sup>14</sup> In this vision, civil society was radically democratic; there were calls for direct democracy to replace representative democracy. It was also totalizing, in that it embedded civil society within the concept of the people and thus included everyone (minus the party and intellectual or policy elites). As the protesters also demanded the nationalization of utility companies and direct citizens control over them, intellectuals labelled the protests as “populist” and denounced their deployment of the notion of civil society as “uneducated.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, when the summer protests broke out later that year, the protesters reclaimed the idea of civil society in a more exclusive sense; tying it up explicitly with the interests of the entrepreneurial and creative classes.

## The Rise of the Bourgeoisie

Activist intellectuals emphatically explained that the summer protests, unlike those in winter, were not concerned with everyday material questions but with ethical politics and European values. Written just two days after the beginning of the summer protest, an article by an IT-expert stated the following:

*I didn't approve of the winter protests. But this [summer] protest is an altogether different thing. It comprises the active part of the population, the young people who work and pay taxes (...) People with a good standard of living. [The] distinction between the two protests [is]: in February people who cannot pay their bills marched. [Marching] now are those who “pay the bills” of the state.*<sup>16</sup>

14 See: Jana Tsoneva, “Real power directly to the people,” in *Left East* (2013).

15 See: Ivaylo Dinev, “Why is civil society not unified?” *Saprotiva*, January 20, 2013.

16 Bozhidar Bozhanov, “The middle class has found itself”, *Blogodariya*, June 16, 2013.

Diana Popova, an art critic, curator, university lecturer, and journalist wrote an article in which she argued that:

*[These are] people of better quality. I saw men in corporate suits, fashionable women and mothers with children, all looking appropriate, normal and peaceful. I didn't see those dirty, shaggy, unable to form a sentence consisting of noun and verb troglodytes who were objectifying their Neanderthal essence through cursing, beer-drinking and creation of chaos (...) There were no inarticulate remarks [as in winter] (...) The June protester is educated, intelligent and knows what bothers him, unlike the February protester whose [demanded] (...) immediate resolution of his daily problems. Indeed, the drive of the [winter] masses was purely everyday-related. [Today's protest] is on a more elevated level. Perhaps the Bulgarians have become mature enough to possess spiritual needs and the consciousness to articulate them.*<sup>17</sup>

We can discern two radically different protester subjectivities from these accounts. The February protester is a crude materialist who only cares about his lowly every day (*bitovi*) needs, such as food and utility bills. In contrast, the June protester is an idealist who puts aside their own self-interest and marches for lofty European values and morality. Similarly, Yavor Gardev, one of Bulgaria’s most successful theatre directors argued that while the February protest was about all things *bitovi*, the June protest represents a “qualitative leap in Bulgarian history”:

*It turned out that Bulgarians don't come out to protest only when push comes to shove in daily life (...) At the beginning of the 90s (...) Bulgaria was full of people who dreamed of a meaningful and free life. A life with dignity. These things are different from the utility bills.*<sup>18</sup>

As judicial expert Christian Takoff explained, the masses do not understand freedom because “it can't be touched nor eaten.”<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that the material is so strongly opposed to the ideal in these discourses. In the 1990s protests – since Gardev makes a strong claim of continuity with these protests and those in 2013 – this opposition

17 Diana Popova, “The rebellion of the masses vs. the rebellion of reason”, *Webcafe*, June 17, 2013.

18 Yavor Gardev, “The rebellion is of the new middle class,” *Trud*, January 1, 2015.

19 Kristian Takoff, “Freedom cannot be touched, nor eaten and the majority doesn't know what to do with it,” *Terminal 3*, November 13, 2016.

did not exist and slogans for democracy and freedom mixed with demands for bread.

The language of quality found its most radical expression in an article by Kalin Yanakiev, a philosopher and theologian passionately devoted to the summer protests. He wrote that “this is the protest of Bulgarian quality against Bulgarian quantity,”<sup>20</sup> echoing a long tradition of conservative detraction of mass society, from Gustave Le Bon to Adolf Hitler.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the February utility protests, he figured in the category of “the quantity” also the pro-government mobilizations which brought a large number of working class, Roma, and Turkish people from the countryside to Sofia. These rallies were depicted by some intellectuals as a “rape” or defiling of the capital city.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the supporters of the 1990 anti-communist mobilizations, who did not shy away from using words like “the masses” or “the people,” one commenter argued that the summer 2013 protests, though populous were not “mass,” as such. Addressing the slogan of the popular Occupy movement (in the U.S.) he argued that “we are not the 99%” but the “30% or 40% of hardworking and responsible citizens whom the [Communists] always try to rob (...) They call us the middle class but there is nothing mediocre/median in us.”<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, Yanakiev argued that the fact that so many people marched in these protests did not turn them into mass manifestations because everyone retained their individuality:

*Despite the fact that the protesters are in the tens of thousands, we don't see the “mass person” raging in them. It is not “the people” [narod] manifesting, but many, many [individual] faces. [The protesters] are witty and have colorful faces, in short, they are diverse because they are citizens.*<sup>24</sup>

A leader of the protest movement, who also heads a local NGO, stated outright that “this is the protest of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie.”<sup>25</sup> He also urged people “with liberal professions” from outside Sofia to

join the marches. Georgi Ganev, chief economic expert of the Center for Liberal Strategies, a Sofia-based think-tank, published a class analysis of the protests in which he stated that the protest was of the “bourgeoisie against the poor,” then adding that the antagonistic parties are not two but three: “The poor are not alone (...) This is about the formation [since 1989] of a coalition between the poor and the oligarchs.”<sup>26</sup> According to Ganev, what holds the coalition of paupers and oligarchs together is the exchange of votes for welfare:

*Against this crystal clear coalition (...) rose up the Bulgarian bourgeoisie. Yes, the bourgeoisie. I shamelessly abandon the euphemism of “the middle class” and still more shamelessly want to rehabilitate the term “bourgeoisie.”*<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the concepts of organized crime and corruption expanded to include the poor and the working classes. In contrast to the individualistic and diverse bourgeois citizen of the summer of 2013, those who opposed the protests were portrayed as an undifferentiated mass; one denied authentic membership in the national community. As Yanakiev said, the summer protesters are of a higher quality not least “because they are citizens.” Meanwhile, the terms “counter-citizens” and “un-citizens” gained popularity to describe “the quantity,” making this vision of civil society self-consciously elitist and proudly minoritarian.

The summer protesters often refer to themselves as “a handful of normal people” amidst “the mass” of ignorance, populism, and communist nostalgia, thereby upending the standard understanding of “normality” as “widespread” and defining it instead as “rarity.” In the 1990s version of the concept though, mass civil society struggled against the party elite (and elites are by definition a minority); after 2013, civil society has instead come to mean a self-styled creative and enlightened elite rising against the coalition between corrupt elites and the communist masses.

## Conclusion

In citizenship theory, scholars differentiate between two modes of belonging to a national community: the bourgeoisie and the *citoyen*. This is necessary in order to expand the early meaning of the citizen

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20 Kalin Yanakiev, “This is the protest of the Bulgarian quality against the Bulgarian quantity,” *Offnews*, September 10, 2013.

21 For example, Hitler argued that “[the Jewry] constantly provokes the revolt of the weak against the strong, of bestiality against intelligence, of quantity against quality.” Quoted in Domenico Losurdo, *War and Revolution: Rethinking the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London and New York: Verso 2015), pg. 196.

22 Milena Yakimova, “Rape vs. consensual sex,” *Dnevnik*, November 23, 2013.

23 Yuri Ivanov, “We are not the 99%,” *e-lect*, June 18, 2013.

24 Kalin Yanakiev, “On the aesthetics of the protests,” *Dnevnik*, September 8, 2013.

25 Personal communication with the author.

.....  
26 Georgi Ganev, “When the foundations of the swamp were being laid,” *24 chasa*, July 8, 2013.

27 Ibid.

as bourgeois, or an urban dweller, which eventually started to mean bourgeois in the sense of belonging to the class of the bourgeoisie. Modern democratic states confer citizenship not only to property owners within their borders, but also – after long and bloody struggles – to the workers, to former slaves, to former colonial subjects, to women etc. Scholars on the left have criticized the universalistic pretensions of the abstract category of *citoyen* and have shown how it privileges, in practice, the white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, and property owning. Thus struggles to expand citizenship and civil rights remain current.

But if social movements merely strive to expand the limits of “normality,” only to enter the mainstream, we reduce these manifestations to status-seeking agitation, thereby denying (the supposedly communistic and populist) masses their transformative potential. This has a stultifying effect on the very idea of citizenship and civil society. For instance, the Bulgarian Constitution grants citizenship to every person born in Bulgaria to at least one Bulgarian parent. The protest in-

tellectuals, however, offer a vision of citizenship that breaks with this principle. Instead, in the new bourgeois, activist vision, citizenship is a function of “virtue” (or virtuous activity in the public sphere, such as participation in the anti-communist protests).

Thus, formal equality, wherein the concept of “one person = one vote,” regardless class, gender, or any other qualifier, is slowly being replaced by a citizenship premised on one’s quality; the quality of being or aspiring to be of the economically active entrepreneurial-creative class, who possess superior knowledge and agency, and cannot be seduced by vulgar populism and communism. This is a historic upending of the old 1990s ideological chain linking communism and scarcity on the one hand, and capitalism with (mass) civil society, democracy, and abundance, on the other. As a result, the universalistic and egalitarian ideals of liberal democracy have given way to a society where social class and the possession of “informed” liberal political convictions confers authentic membership within the political community.

# Breeding Grounds for Croatia's Conservative Social Movements

Dario Čepo

Conservative social movements in Croatia arose as a response to societal liberalization and political modernization in the post-war period. Two factors were especially important catalysts: the EU negotiation process and left of centre parties winning power. Structurally, the conservative movement draws strength from two interconnected actors, with implicit support from a third. These are Croatia's right and radical right political parties, the diaspora-returnees community, and the dominant social role of the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, these right wing movements have an implicit populist disposition. In contrast to broadly liberal democratic norms, those advocating for open and pluralist conceptions of society, with a focus on solving and reforming social issues and problems, populism insists on closed collective identities, perpetually searching enemies to eradicate or otherwise exclude.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, this chapter will show that the rise of conservative social movements in Croatia was directly connected to the broader rise of populist politics both within and outside the country's political establishment. And secondly, that this right populist surge was especially prevalent in periods in which the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) was the official government opposition, and that these movements then acted as de facto proxies and surrogates of the HDZ.

In the end, I show that the most successful conservative social movement so far (Željka Markić's "In the Name of the Family" initiative) succeeded

because of two primary factors. One, they were helped by tacit and open support from the HDZ. But more importantly, they were assisted by the powerful diaspora and returnees' communities and the vast network of support built and maintained by the Catholic Church. In the process, this initiative emerged as a genuine competitor to HDZ's claim on conservative leadership in Croatia, especially among youth, and this became a formative political and social factor in the country's contemporary politics.

## Historical Overview

At the onset of the post-war transition in Croatia, many of the leading political actors in the country were in reality more like loosely assembled movements than political parties. The HDZ too started as a movement but in a short amount of time morphed into a political party by using one of the most potent unifying ideological forces in any society: nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the overt democratic deficit of the 1990s era HDZ regime was not only due to the "Homeland War" but also the result of a deliberate embrace of authoritarian and ethno-nationalist politics by the party's leaders.<sup>3</sup>

Elements of this deficit could be seen in the historically low percentages of women elected to the Croatian parliament during the initial tenure of

1 Berto Šalaj, "Jesu li Hrvatski laburisti populistni i je li populizam nužno loš?" *Političke analize* 13 (2013), pg. 19.

2 Branka Galić, "Politička kultura 'novih demokracija,'" *Revija za sociologiju* 31 (2000), pg. 200–201.

3 Albert Bing, "Hrvatska i ljudska prava 1990–1992.," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 1 (2008), pg. 198.

the HDZ. In the three elections since Croatia's independence (1990, 1992, and 1995), the number of female parliamentarians never crossed 7 per cent; a clear reflection of the party's "re-traditionalization" of Croatian society.<sup>4</sup> This process included trumpeting religious values, a "traditional" way of life, railing against individualism, discouraging women's emancipation (as women were primarily to be mothers) etc.<sup>5</sup> In other words, there was a clear link between the conservative movement's development in Croatia and the HDZ's stress on religion, the politics of "firm hand" leadership, authoritarianism, and general advocacy for explicitly right wing political causes (in both institutional and extra-institutional sense).<sup>6</sup> Especially important in this process, of course, was the leadership (and near cult of leadership) of the HDZ and first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman.

Due to pressure from the EU and other Western states, the then right wing government initiated some limited reforms, including the Gender Equality Act and Anti-Discrimination Act, both of which were vehemently opposed by the Catholic Church and organizations linked to it.<sup>7</sup> Parliament nevertheless adopted them but this opposition continued and is most visible in Church's tacit support for the same-sex marriage referendum in 2013; that is the Church's active campaign against same sex marriage in Croatia. Indeed, human rights have become a matter of contention ever since HDZ strengthened their grip on power in the early 1990s, and even two decades later the question of rights – to whom they apply and in what fashion – is one of the central ideological cleavages between the respective political actors, and the citizenry as a whole, in Croatia.<sup>8</sup> In this we can see a source for today's conservative social movement efforts challenging the idea of universal human rights and their opposition to the liberal ideal of individualism as a whole.

This period of latent isolation and anti-modernization ended with the death of Franjo Tuđman in 1999 and the election of opposition-

backed Stipe Mesić in 2000. His two terms in office were marked by both political modernization and broader social liberalization but also by economic crisis, HDZ-dominance at the legislative level, and the rise of right populism. Indeed, Mesić himself was a quintessential populist, a classic "man of the people," and supposedly "not in the pocket" of any interest, foreign or domestic. His populist rhetoric was greatly helped by his insistence that direct elections gave him a popular mandate, stronger than the one enjoyed by the government, that is, the legislature.<sup>9</sup>

## The Contemporary Situation in Croatia

Arguably, the most common observation concerning Croatia's parliamentary system is that because no far right parties have won seats (at least in any significant numbers)<sup>10</sup> Croatia has no radical or far right populist representatives and/or movements.<sup>11</sup> In reality, the overt absence of the far right is a result of the HDZ having soaked up virtually the entirety of this fringe vote. In the meantime, radical and populist forces do exist, are active, even dominant, in Croatia but they are situated outside of formal parliamentary institutions. Instead, they are concentrated in extremist wings of the Catholic Church, popular football firms, conservative segments of civil society, veteran's associations, and on the margins of various political parties.

Moreover, there is an obvious link between populism and the strengthening of conservative and radical right forces and movements.<sup>12</sup> Hence we need to examine how populist sentiment helped the rise of the broader conservative movement in Croatia. The elections in 2015 showed, for instance, that citizens have become alienated from mainstream political parties and party elites and have become willing to cast their votes to relatively unknown populist political actors.<sup>13</sup> The rise of anti-establishment sentiment in Croatia since the end of the transition period but especially since the economic crisis of 2008 is logical if one takes into account that the purchasing power of Croatian citizens is

4 Ivana Dobrotić, Teo Matković and Siniša Zrinščak, "Gender Equality Policies and Practices in Croatia: The Interplay of Transition and Late Europeanization," *Social Policy & Administration* 47 (2013), pg. 232.

5 Cf. in Branka Galić, "Politička kultura 'novih demokracija'" *Revija za sociologiju* 31 (2000), pg. 207.

6 Diana Čorkalo, Željka Kamenov and Meri Tadinac-Babić, "Autoritarnost, stav prema stanju demokracije i percepcija razvojnih ciljeva Hrvatske," *Društvena istraživanja* 10 (2001), pg. 1174.

7 Ivana Dobrotić, Teo Matković and Siniša Zrinščak, "Gender Equality Policies and Practices in Croatia – The Interplay of Transition and Late Europeanization," *Social Policy & Administration* 47 (2013), pg. 226.

8 Albert Bing, "Hrvatska i ljudska prava 1990–1992.," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 1 (2008), pg. 200.

9 Mirjana Kasapović, "Odlazak velikog populista i reforma Ustava," *Političke analize* 1 (2010), pg. 15.

10 Vedran Obućina, *Right-Wing Extremism in Croatia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), pg. 2.

11 See: Marija Matic, "Ima li populizma u hrvatskoj politici? Analiza političkog djelovanja Milana Bandića i Željka Keruma," *Polemos* 17 (2014), pg. 167–181.

12 Cf. in Berto Šalaj, "Što je populizam?," *Političke analize* 11 (2012), pg. 55–56.

13 Višeslav Raos, "Prijelomi i trendovi: predsjednički izbori u Hrvatskoj," *Političke analize* 21 (2015), pg. 33.

very low, despite the nominal Euro values of their salaries being one of the highest in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the new political actors – both individuals and political parties – arose from loose assemblies of disgruntled citizens focused precisely on such economic concerns. They organized many different actions, from Facebook protests in 2011 to disrupting eviction actions.<sup>15</sup> Since 2000 almost all of the social movements and new political forces have been overtly anti-establishment and populist in nature. Many of these, like Ivan Grubišić's party-movement,<sup>16</sup> the Croatian Labour Party, Human Shield, and Milan Bandić<sup>17</sup> and Željko Kerum's respective parties have adopted or mimicked social movement and broadly populist aesthetics, tactics, and rhetoric. This points at both a lack of trust in establishment parties and explains to a great extent the adoption of these tactics, especially direct actions by citizens, by conservative and right wing movements in Croatia. Even establishment politicians, who have been at the pinnacle of Croatia's political system for decades, have moved towards the populist right by blaming abstract "power centres" and "anti-national" elites for all that is wrong in society.

Traditionally, left and liberal actors have dominated Croatian civil society since its inception in the early 1990s.<sup>18</sup> The civil society sphere was mostly seen as a refuge of liberal, secular, modernist, and democratically inclined individuals, who stood directly against the HDZ and its radical right proxies.<sup>19</sup> Few believed that civil society could take an essentially antagonistic or, rather, reactionary position as concerned the ideal of expanding citizen's voices. Hence, few saw civil society as anything other than the most inherently liberal, open, and tolerant sector of the society. A rupture was imminent. Stjepo Bartulica, a prominent figure in the new Croatian right, alluded to as much when he stated that it would be wrong to assume that civil society ought to be simply given over to liberal and secular actors.

14 Josip Tica, "Križa 2008–20XY: Populizam i puna zaposlenost kao sukobljeni ciljevi," *Serijski članak u nastajaju Ekonomski fakultet* No. 11-05 (2011), pg. 5.

15 Višeslav Raos, "Prijelomi i trendovi: predsjednički izbori u Hrvatskoj," *Političke analize* 21 (2015), pg. 37.

16 Milan Matić, "Grubišićev 'duhovni kapitalizam'," *Političke analize* 14 (2013), pg. 32.

17 Nenad Zakošek, "Zauzdani populizam: fenomen Milana Bandića," *Političke analize* 1 (2010), pg. 6–10.

18 Antonija Petričušić, "Religiopolitics through Law: Use of Legal Norms and Institutions by the Croatian Conservative Social Movement," (MA thesis, Central European University, 2015).

19 Vedran Obućina, *Right-Wing Extremism in Croatia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), pg. 9.

That explains why the appearance of "In the Name of the Family" caught almost all traditional, liberal civil society organizations off guard.

Similar to many European populist movements – focused on criticism of the dominant liberal democratic system and ideology and on the "dangerous others"<sup>20</sup> – "In the Name of the Family" based its activities on opposing liberal tendencies in Croatian society. They especially focused on the question of family and marriage laws, sex and health education, and civic education in public schools, and by focusing on strengthening the rights of their so-called "moral majority." Antonija Petričušić<sup>21</sup> has demonstrated the interconnectedness of many of these new right civic organisations: Family Centre, The Voice of Parents for Children, The Association for Comprehensive Sex Education, Reform, Vigilare, the Centre for Renewal of Culture, Alliance for Life, Mary's Meals etc.; political parties like Croatian Growth and individuals like Željka Markić, Ladislav Ilčić, Damir Stojić, Vice John Batarelo, and Stjepo Bartulica.

This new conservative movement is composed of dozens of conservative civil society organizations that came into existence over the course of the last decade. They promote traditional or Catholic values, advocate for active citizen participation in the society and politics, pursue pro-life activism and vehemently oppose abortion and related pro-choice options. They assert that the right to marry and form families should be strictly limited to heteronormative relationships between men and women, and negate the authority of the state to prescribe educational curricula dealing with "sensitive issues" like contraception, gender, homosexuality, etc.<sup>22</sup>

We see then that the contemporary conservative social movements in Croatia adopted several elements from radical right political parties and actors active during the 1990s and early 2000s. In particular, they have continued to depict "others" (currently, the LGBT community) as natural enemies of the Croatian nation's survival. Meanwhile, they continue to pursue an assortment of ultra-conservative domestic policies, a generally isolationist foreign policy, with an emphasis on opposing further European or international integration.<sup>23</sup> And

20 Berto Šalaj, "Što je populizam?," *Političke analize* 11 (2012), pg. 59.

21 Antonija Petričušić, "Religiopolitics through Law: Use of Legal Norms and Institutions by the Croatian Conservative Social Movement," (MA thesis, Central European University, 2015).

22 Ibid.

23 Vedran Obućina, *Right-Wing Extremism in Croatia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), pg. 3.

like other recent far right manifestations, they also deploy strident critiques of the media mainstream, “globalism,” and postmodern relativism.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

In a survey done by the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb in 2012, 52 per cent of respondents said that democracy is the best way of organizing a political system, but only 3 per cent said that Croatia’s democracy is functioning properly.<sup>25</sup> This gap is significant because many conservative social movement actors seized this opportunity to criticize representative (that is, liberal) democratic arrangements, promoting instead a vision of “direct democracy.” This shift was most evident in the actions of “In the Name of the Family” and their allies. Due to the general discontent with status quo politics and politicians, Croatian youth are quite prone to accepting populist messages and supporting conservative social movements and civil society organizations. This is also a result of their (familiar) embrace of broadly anti-elite, anti-systemic attitudes, as well as latent authoritarian currents in Croatian society (i. e., the continued cult of “strong leadership”).<sup>26</sup> Croatian youth lack trust in the government, media, even civil society, and think that a turn towards “direct democracy” would be preferable.<sup>27</sup> These attitudes also explain why a significant number of the supporters, volunteers, and advocates of “In the Name of the Family” and its different campaigns were themselves youth. Especially popular among these new right youth is the general perception of these contemporary conservative social movements as representing the interests and perspectives of established, well-to-do, urban, educated professionals; broadly appealing social markers to which they too aspire.<sup>28</sup>

According to Šalaj, the growing instances of protests, civil disobedience, and extra-political mobilizations may be the beginning of a new social cleavage in post-war Croatian society; one that pits members and supporters of political establishment

24 Vedran Obućina, “Konzervativizam Matice hrvatske,” *Političke analize* 7(2011), pg. 41.

25 Berto Šalaj, “Suvremeni populizam,” *Analiza Hrvatskog politološkog društva* (2012), pg. 34.

26 Augustin Derado, Vanja Dergić, and Vanja Međugorac, “Croatian Youth and Populism: A Mixed Methods Analysis of the Populism ‘Breeding Ground’ among the Youth in the City of Zagreb,” *Revija za sociologiju* 46 (2016), pg. 141.

27 Ibid., pg. 165.

28 Antonija Petričušić, “Religiopolitics through Law: Use of Legal Norms and Institutions by the Croatian Conservative Social Movement,” (MA thesis, Central European University, 2015).

against populists, who view this establishment as an enemy of “the people.”<sup>29</sup> If this is the case, policy-makers need to find a way of safeguarding the democratic integrity of constitutional government while simultaneously providing greater opportunities for citizens to be engaged in decision-making process and not only establishment-validating rituals.

Relatedly, why have left social movements failed to attract similarly large followings and why is there no real policy evidence that their assorted actions have had a major impact on the Croatian public? First of all, there have been a handful of important actions initiated by various left and liberal social movements, in particular between 2003 and 2011, that is, during the succession of HDZ-led governments. Most of these were local efforts but had national repercussions. There was, for instance, the “Srd Is Ours” citizens’ initiative which aimed to stop the building of luxury apartments on the Srd plateau above the city of Dubrovnik. Then there were the “Right to the City” protests, which focused on defending public areas in Varšavska Street and Cvjetno Square in Zagreb. The various outcomes of these two platforms show the critical role that official political support for grassroots actions plays in determining their success.<sup>30</sup> Especially as compared to the success of “In the Name of the Family’s” marriage referendum, social movements need support from powerful elements within the political establishment, as well as the full strength of the law, to have any chance of succeeding in advancing their agenda.

Accordingly, democracy promoters should heed this fact: by helping to connect representatives of social movements with corresponding legal activists and experts, as well as by facilitating links among ideologically similar social movements, interest groups, and political parties or individual actors, they help building support from within the system for the reformist activities of social movements. With the role civil society plays in strengthening democratic life as such, and general aim carving out a more tolerant, inclusive, and cooperative society, democracy promoters should work on capacity building among those social movements and civil society actors that are

29 Berto Šalaj, “Jesu li Hrvatski laburisti populist i je li populizam nužno loš?” *Političke analize* 13 (2013), pg. 21.

30 Despite similar degrees of popular support from local citizens, “Srd Is Ours” succeeded in stopping the development project in question, while “Right to the City” failed. Although neither movement enjoyed any support from local or national politician, “Srd Is Ours” used made use of institutional tools (i. e. local referendums), while “Right to the City” focused mostly on civil disobedience, protests, and sit-ins.

focused on those particular values. They should especially help in guarding the rights of marginalized, disenfranchised, and vulnerable groups, which are so often the primary targets of conservative social movements.

Finally, democracy promoters should focus on local and regional levels of activity, moving away from the capital, because a large amount of the democratic action is occurring at the periphery but is not visible; nor are local activists always strong enough to safeguard liberal democratic values on their own. This is especially important because conservative social movements can count on the help of conservative political and social institutions, in particular, the Catholic Church, which is strong especially in rural and peripheral communities.



# Social Movements and Democratization in Serbia since Milošević

Marko Kmezić

At the end of the 1980s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed that Western ideals of democracy, rule of law, and individual rights would spread, undisturbed, throughout the world and thus lead to “the end of history,”<sup>1</sup> as famously suggested by the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama. However, an array of nationalist conflicts, economic crises, persistent authoritarian rule, endless democratic transition, and the lack of a credible EU perspective soon dissolved such triumphalist confidence in Serbia and much of the Western Balkans.

Today, Serbia finds itself excluded from the EU with no foreseeable accession date in sight. Furthermore, state dissolution and the legacy of violent conflict shaped the country’s transformation, which included the need for a long period of reconstruction of both the state and economy, and even more problematically, reconciliation between peoples. In addition to the dual political and economic transformation from communist rule and planned economics to democracy and market liberalism, Serbia is a weak state with dysfunctional institutions,<sup>2</sup> and high numbers of formal and informal “gate keeper” elites that continue to control the state in an effort to preserve their private economic interests and their grip on political power.<sup>3</sup>

This is precisely why civil society has played and continues to serve a pivotal role in Serbia’s

democratization processes. The following chapter briefly outlines the role of various social movements in democratizing a country faced with extraordinary challenges; wars, post-authoritarian transition, approximation with the EU, and the persistent threat of renewed illiberalism if not outright authoritarianism. Finally, I conclude with the importance of local and international support for the broader (and still emerging) coalition of civil society countervailing forces against the still powerful constellation of anti-reform elements in Serbian society.

## Nonviolent Peace Action, 1990–1995

Peace actions in Serbia emerged as a result of growing dissatisfaction with the rule of the then President Slobodan Milošević in the early 1990s; an administration that launched three major wars (Croatia 1991–1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992–1995, and Kosovo 1998–1999) and caused the NATO-led international military intervention in Serbia in 1999. These protests were further fueled by the general hardship of living under an UN-imposed economic embargo, pervasive anxiety of a spillover of hostilities into Serbia proper, and Milošević’s authoritarian rule in the country.

The period of nonviolent peace action between 1990 and 1995 consisted of a broad movement “from below” that brought together student protesters, draft dodgers, women’s movements anti-war movements, and independent intellectuals, gathering mostly around organizations such as the Civic Resistance Movement, the Centre for Antiwar Action, the United Trade Unions – “Inde-

1 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

2 Keil, S., Arkan. Z. (eds.): *The EU and Member State Building: European Foreign Policy in the Western Balkans* (Routledge: New York, 2015).

3 Marko Kmezić “Overcoming the Crisis of Enlargement,” *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, Volume 1.1 (2014).

pendence" syndicate, the Belgrade Circle, Women in Black, and others. Sharing the same platform of "establishing a permanent peace on the territory of former Yugoslavia,"<sup>4</sup> these organizations coordinated domestic events like the 1991 Peace Caravan, a series of concerts for peace, protest meetings but also international cooperation with established human rights groups.<sup>5</sup> Although anti-war activism failed in establishing peace, its determined efforts articulated a broader quest for political freedom and set the ground for more active citizens' participation in the political processes in Serbia in the next half decade.

### Anti-Milošević Movements, 1996–2000

After the end of the armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, parts of the anti-war movement joined mainstream opposition political parties challenging Milošević's Socialists, demanding free and fair elections, and a general quest for greater political and human rights and freedoms. Still others, like Vesna Pešić, one of the leaders of the Centre for Antiwar Action, established the socio-liberal Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS), which was the first time that a grassroots initiative entered the formal political arena in Serbia as a party.

However, despite the initial success of these new Serbian leaders, particularly at the 1996 local election, it soon became clear that the fragmented and weak opposition could not successfully challenge Milošević, whose grip on power had only become more oppressive and authoritarian. In response to increased state repression, manifested most clearly in the 1998 laws restricting free media and dissenting opinions on university campuses, as well as systematic police brutality against the regime's political opponents, a small group of activists of various NGOs and students from the University of Belgrade began a civic protest group called "Otpor!" (Resistance!).

Founded as an organization employing non-violent struggle as a course of action against the Milošević-controlled Serbian authorities, this bottom-up, grassroots-led organization grew into a broad civic movement attracting more than 70,000 activists, whose activities culminated on October

5, 2000 with Milošević's ouster. With the actual political opposition in Serbia in disarray, Otpor members made a decision to continue on with a leaderless grassroots movement rather than a traditional NGO or political party. After Milošević's overthrow, Otpor effectively served, for brief period at least, as a political watchdog of the reform processes, pressing for a consistently more thorough democratic transformation of Serbian society. Finally, in 2003, long after the movement had peaked in popularity, Otpor became a political party that soon dissolved following a debacle at the next parliamentary elections.

### Pro-EU Movements, 2000–2008

The democratic changes in 2000 opened up the country's EU membership perspective which profoundly affected the political opportunity structures among existing social movements in Serbia. The arrival of the EU on the stage primarily created increased financial and political support for local NGOs, increasing their capacity to become recognized as relevant players in the policymaking process. Second, it enabled local NGOs to bypass state-level actors and to exercise indirect pressure on domestic policymakers via EU officials. The mobilization of financial and political resources provided by the EU allowed a coalition of expert NGOs to successfully "upload" some of their key demands into the EU's conditionality demands during various stages of Serbia's subsequent accession process.<sup>6</sup>

However, the new circumstances also produced two unintended externalities. First, most of the traditional NGOs developed clientelistic relationships with state institutions, and secondly, they became over-reliant on EU assistance in their domestic mobilization efforts.<sup>7</sup> Finally, as seen in post-accession Croatia, following the closure of membership negotiations, the EU's interest in critical input from expert NGOs fades, which only underlines the "important temporal and substantial limits"<sup>8</sup> of such EU supported bottom up initiatives in the first place.

4 D. Matic, "Serbia, Antiwar Activity, 1991–1994," in Powers, R.S. and Voegelé, W.B. (eds.), *Protest, Power, and Change* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pg. 465.

5 P. Simić, *Crisis and Reform: State and Civil Society in Transition* (Zug-Belgrade: Peace and Crisis Management Foundation, 1994).

6 N. Wunsch, "Beyond instrumentalisation: NGO monitoring coalitions in Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia," *East European Politics*, 31:4 (2015).

7 J. Ker-Lindsay, "Conclusion," *Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans*, edited by Vesna Bojčić-Dzelilović, James Ker-Lindsay, and Denisa Kostovicova: 257–264. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

8 N. Wunsch, "Coming full circle? Differential empowerment in Croatia's EU accession process," *Journal of European Public Policy* (2016).

## New Grassroots Movements, 2012–2016

Despite its evident progress in EU membership negotiations, serious backsliding in terms of democratization can be observed in Serbia over the past eight years.<sup>9</sup> Yet the EU, Serbian state institutions, as well as the majority of traditional NGOs have remained largely silent concerning these developments, even when confronted with concrete evidence as in the case of the April 2016 (illegal) demolitions of several sites on the Belgrade riverbank in the Savamala district's Hercegovačka Street.<sup>10</sup> This feigned ignorance has, in turn, opened up a path for emerging grassroots initiatives which demand responsibility from political elites, while focusing on issues of local importance. These are perhaps best exemplified in the initiative "Ne Da(vi)mo Beograd" (literally, "Let's not drown Belgrade" but also a play on "We will not give up on Belgrade") which has concentrated on numerous issues and controversies in the ongoing "Belgrade Waterfront" redevelopment project.

However, it was not before the events in Hercegovačka, which included a failure of the state to protect constitutionally guaranteed rights of its citizens, a media cover-up of the incident, threats against independent state institutions, and finally, even the mocking of protestors by certain public officials, that the initiative saw its first major success. Namely, the "Ne Da(vi)mo Beograd" staged several massive rallies in Belgrade under the title "The Masks have Fallen," demanding the resignations of a number of state officials in response to the preceding activities. But more importantly, the protestors publically revealed the dominant top-down power structures in Serbian politics, whereby the government seems to be at liberty to influence reforms through a set of clientelistic networks, informal practices and/or methods of more or less open pressure against opponents and critics. At the same time, by gathering more people at the political protests than any opposition party in the last ten years, the protestors sent a strong message to the opposition that it is no longer the only credible contender for political power, at least in Belgrade.

A powerful message was also sent to the EU. With its traditional focus on the "smart" design of formal institutions and capacity building of expert NGOs, in a sense the EU had for years observed

the trees and not the whole forest with regards to structural concerns with the rule of law and democracy development in Serbia. Most importantly, the echo of the Belgrade protests resonated across in Serbia, like in Novi Sad, where 5,000 citizens gathered protesting the politically orchestrated staff dismissal at the Radio-Television Vojvodina station, a provincial public broadcaster; but also in Kraljevo and Mladenovac where the homegrown grassroots movements "Lokalni front" and "Beli – samo jako" have won seats in local municipal assemblies. And Beli, a satirical candidate who has nevertheless harnessed latent frustrations with pervasive corruption in Serbia, came in third at the 2017 presidential elections, winning nearly 10 per cent of the vote.

## Conclusions

The role of democracy promoters has been critical in each phase of democracy development in Serbia. Nevertheless, the response of key international democracy promoters has traditionally been more reactive than proactive and has often neglected to take into account local needs and expertise. As a result, Serbian democracy remains fragile and exposed to the corrosive influences of the country's traditional top-down, illiberal power structures that have refused to cede their claims to govern through patrimonialism and with impunity. In this respect, the still recent conviction of the Croatia's former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader for corruption serves as the most striking example of the threatening effects of genuine democratization and reform for the rent-seeking interests of the ruling elites in Serbia and the region as a whole. Under such circumstances, it is clear why emerging social movements' voices are largely marginalized. In short, they represent a threat to the status quo in Serbia and the Western Balkans more broadly.

It is therefore vital that international democracy promoters maintain their support for the inclusion of civil society and social movements in Serbia, in an effort to create pressure on existing elites to govern in line with the norms of the rule of law, democratic transparency, and accountability. The main goal of this exercise is to transform existing top-down networks so as to increase the influence of horizontally structured "agents of change" on policymaking (i.e. NGOs, civil society organizations, investigative journalists, independent state institutions, local business communities etc.).

9 Freedom House, "Serbia Country Report," Nations in Transit 2016 (2016); Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Serbia Country Report," Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (2016).

10 M. Kmezić, "The Masks have Fallen in Serbian House of Cards," *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, May 30, 2016.

Additionally, efforts should be made to support constructive (local) grassroots initiatives. Civil society empowerment should strengthen expertise, capacities, and technical organization and provide for regional and international networking possibilities (e.g. a regional ombudsperson network, regional media outlets such as N1 TV which broadcasts simultaneously in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina etc.). It is equally significant that the EU continues to use local expertise, wherein the collaboration with credible civil society organizations should be further institutionalized via regular channels of communication, through commissioning of regular "shadow" reports on the state of democracy, the rule of law, and government accountability.

# Towards a De-Ethnicized Politics: Protests and Plenums in Bosnia and Herzegovina

*Emin Eminagić*

With the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina was re-constituted as a consociational democracy.<sup>1</sup> This governance model is based on power-sharing between different ethnic and/or cultural groups. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, these groups are formulated exclusively as ethnic “constitutive” peoples: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. The basic flaw of constituting the state in this way can be seen in the fact that all other minorities in the country fall under the category of so-called “Others,” who, as recent events have shown, are almost completely deprived of any sort of political agency in the country.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as Donald L. Horowitz argues, such a model has the inherent side effect of consistently (re)producing intra-ethnic tensions between the power-sharing groups, thus resulting in constant political deadlock in decision-making procedures.<sup>3</sup> Though this may present an oversimplified explanation, in the current political reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina it is a basic truth, one which was spectacularly illustrated by the government’s botched and incompetent response to the large scale flooding in May 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Through such a state structure, citizens are pre-defined as ethnic subjects, rendering their individual political agency essentially moot. Hence a discourse is created which is anchored in the idea of the impossibility of substantive change or reform; congealing social life into a pervasive, incapacitating sense of a dread concerning new threats of new conflicts. This is best shown by the utter neglect of economic and social issues that have plagued the country for almost two decades since the war in the 1990s. These are reflected in the deeply compromised (and at times, overtly criminal) post-war privatization processes, alongside the adoption of punishing neoliberal labour, industry, and education regimes. One recent event, however, prepared the ground for a fracturing of the ethnic paradigm imposed by the Dayton Peace Accords: the February 2014 protests that began in Tuzla and later spread across the country.

Local and international political elites, as well as local media, attempted to “ethnicize” these protests, emphasizing the lack of communality between Bosnia and Herzegovina’s citizens, and thereby implicitly re-asserting the need for continued mutual suspicions. To wit, this chapter will explore the genesis of these protests, their grassroots tackling of the “national questions” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, in turn, the ethno-nationalist reaction to the protests.

## Peoples vs. People vs. Citizens vs. the Elites

As noted previously, according to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Constitution, the country consists of three constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs.

1 Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy” (*World Politics* 21: 2, 1969), pg. 207–225.

2 I am referring to the case of Jakob Finci and Drevo Sejdić. Finci, a Jewish citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sejdić, who is of Roma descent, are constitutionally barred from running for office as “Others.” And despite a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in 2009, Bosnian political elites have refused to appropriately amend this flagrantly discriminatory provision within the constitution.

3 Donald L. Horowitz, “Conciliatory Institutions and Constitutional Process in Post-Conflict States,” *William and Mary Law Review*, 49, (2008), pg. 1213–1248.

4 Vuk Baćanović, “Poplave u Regiji: Ekonomske Politike i Prirodne Katastrofe,” *Bilten*, May 24, 2014.

All other minorities fall under the category of “Others,” and this category of citizens is essentially prohibited from holding a number of political offices in the country which are reserved exclusively for members of the constitutive peoples. For instance, Article V of the Constitution reads:

*The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall consist of three Members: one Bosniak and one Croat, each directly elected from the territory of the Federation, and one Serb directly elected from the territory of the Republika Srpska.*<sup>5</sup>

From the onset, the constitution, whilst not only being discriminatory towards different ethnicities, is itself a dividing factor in the country itself. Such a legal frame facilitates a hegemonic nationalist control of the public sphere, thus keeping the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina in fear, perpetuating animosity towards the others both in a strictly legal and broadly sociological sense. This in turn enables the ethno-nationalist political elites in the country to push for self-serving economic regimes (in practice, neoliberal structural reforms imposed by the international community) through crony privatization processes of the country’s industry and infrastructure.

This environment is sutured by I call multicultural apartheid; a regime characterized by formal declarations of diversity, alongside pervasive institutional discrimination. This regime paralyzes the political decision making, as the JMBG protests in 2013 showed clearly,<sup>6</sup> and is also reflected in the so-called “two schools under one roof” phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the problematic arises precisely within the multiculturalist discourse. In theory, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multicultural polity in which democratic practices are embedded in the state’s legal framework. Formally speaking, this account echoes characterizations by scholars like Will Kymlicka and “liberal nationalists” like David Miller.<sup>8</sup> Namely, both advance a similar line of argument regarding peoples’ agency and the nation: that only specific forms of political practice are salient in producing high

levels of trust and loyalty between citizens of a state. While Rousseau’s ideal republic presumes tightly knit, face-to-face relations will enhance the growth of sentiments of loyalty and trust amongst citizens, Miller counters that citizens do not “meet under an oak tree to formulate the laws, they are basically strangers and citizens.”<sup>9</sup> Historically then, the nation and nationalism have bound together large numbers of individuals in a shared a feeling of commonality and solidarity that has, in a sense, artificially stimulated Rousseau’s ideal of the compact republic.

This kind of trust and communality is not present in BiH today. One symptomatic issue is the involvement of international organizations, which often perpetuate ethnic divisions by lending credibility to ethnic oligarchs. By so doing, the international community has (in)directly elevated and cemented the rule of these “ethnic entrepreneurs.” The toleration and rehabilitation of these elites has also been advanced by the hundreds (if not thousands) of NGOs, whose agenda primarily consists of tepid resignation to the status quo, supplemented by marginal criticism (i. e. advocacy for “good governance”). In this respect, Wendy Brown argues that “tolerance” (one of the pillars for this multicultural apartheid model) means not affirming but merely conditionally allowing the problematic other.<sup>10</sup> That is, Brown gestures at the manner in which NGOs and professional civil society dull strident critique of hollow invocations of inter-ethnic cooperation, tolerance, and diversity in a country characterized by structural discrimination. The logic of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s multiculturalism traps individuals in prescribed ethnic categories, within the boundaries of “imagined communities” which obscure actually existing oppression.<sup>11</sup>

## The Rediscovery of Commonality

The protests of February 2014 appeared to be a promising discursive shift from solely ethnic spats to substantive issues of social and political equality. Protests by the workers of Tuzla’s privatized chemical industry that began on February 5<sup>th</sup> were the start of something few expected to see in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were a reaction to the privatization of a number of Tuzla’s large compa-

5 Office of the High Representative, “Annex 4: Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

6 “Bosnia: Facing Political Inertia, #JMBG Protests Call for Civil Disobedience,” *Euronews*, July 1, 2013.

7 Azra Hromadzic, “Bathroom Mixing: Youth Negotiate Democratization in Postconflict Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 34:2 (2011), pg. 268–289.

8 Will Kymlicka, “New Forms of Citizenship” in Courchene, Thomas J., Donald J. Savoie, and Institute for Research on Public Policy, *The Art Of The State: Governance In A World Without Frontiers* (Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2003).

9 David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pg. 87.

10 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

11 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

nies, such as Konjuh, Dita, Resod-Guming, and Polihem, which in the former Yugoslavia, and in the first post-war years (1996–2000), were some of the main sources of income for the city and its region. During their subsequent privatization, many people lost their jobs, while workers lost benefits and had their pensions slashed; others, while formally still employed, had not been paid for more than a year.

This was the first protest of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina and quickly led to the burgeoning of a grassroots democratic movement of workers, students, the unemployed, retirees, and others who felt enraged by the disturbing state of affairs in the country. According to news sources, on the first day of the protests some 3,000 people took to the streets<sup>12</sup> and occupied the two main roads in Tuzla, halting traffic for several hours. Riot police were mobilized to disperse the protests as rocks were thrown at the seat of the Tuzla Canton government. The situation escalated over the next two days, which saw several episodes of state violence directed at citizens by riot-gear clad police.<sup>13</sup> One video widely circulated on the internet showed a police officer entering a university campus and pepper-spraying a student.<sup>14</sup> Then on February 7, over 10,000 people gathered in front of the Cantonal government building, breached the police line, torched the building, after which the protests moved towards the Cantonal court, which was pelted with stones and projectiles for several hours. Afterwards, the crowds moved to the municipal seat, which was also promptly lit up.

Simultaneous solidarity actions took place across the country, marked by the airing of shared frustrations with the pervasive sense of corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In several cities, such as Sarajevo, Zenica, and Bihać, the protests also resulted in the torching of assorted government and political party buildings, which led the partisan (and nationalist) media to portray the protestors as simple criminals or motivated by ethnic intolerance. This was a tactic that had been employed before to ensure that citizens continued to subscribe to the ethno-nationalist imaginary and propaganda of the political elites. These tendencies were and still are present in the public discourse. In reality, ethnic scapegoating of any sort was absent from the demands the workers which instead focused on: owed

wages, healthcare, pensions, and social care, as well as calling for legal reviews of the privatization processes that had destroyed their respective companies. When the protests began to simmer after a few days, so-called “citizens” plenums” began to be held all over the country, further singling a discursive shift away from traditional nationalist politics.

The first official plenum in Tuzla took place on February 9, 2014 with thirty people attending. Two days later, there were more than seven hundred people at the plenum. Other cities in the country (Sarajevo, Travnik, Bugojno, Trebinje etc.) soon followed suit. The fact that attendance at the plenums continued to grow for weeks and even months after the initial protests demonstrated how many people in Bosnia and Herzegovina wanted to genuinely participate in the creation of a better, more just, and common future. The plenum model was important because it allowed ordinary people to talk freely about their concerns and experiences without fear of reprisals or political restrictions. It had the liberating and cathartic effect of providing access to a therapeutic language that people did not generally have access to over the past twenty years. The plenum facilitators invited everyone to join the discussion and maintained its legitimacy through peaceful protests which continued for months after the fact.

In contrast, past protests, such as the JMBG protests and assorted labour actions, were socially decentralized and disconnected from each other. Their messaging appeared to be focused on the exclusive interests of a particular group rather than a shared logic and recognition that “precarity” is an expansive social experience with no borders. This fact points to something more traumatic and traumatized in Bosnian society, which is not only a consequence of the war, but rather the product of ongoing ethno-nationalist manipulation and threats of renewed, all of which not only obscures the country’s real problems but keeps the vast majority of the population mentally and politically trapped in immobilizing fear, suspicion, and paranoia.

### De-Ethnicizing Political Agency

The plenums were a truly novel form of social intervention, especially in the context of a deeply fractured and traumatized society. In this respect, I liken the plenums to sites of learning, in the mould of the “people’s university” as understood by Jacques Derrida.<sup>15</sup> Derrida states that the principle

12 “Protesti u Tuzli: Policija Razbila Demonstracije, Širanović Pušten iz Pritvora!,” *Oслобођење*, February 6, 2014.

13 “Protesti Kroz Objektiv Fotoreportera: Ovako Je Danas Bilo Na Ulicama Širom BiH,” *Klix.ba*, February 2, 2014.

14 “OBRAČUN SPECIJALACA SA STUDENTIMA (6.2.2014),” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgpVrppZWQY> (last accessed: August 31, 2016).

15 Jacques Derrida and Peggy Kamuf, *Without Alibi*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

of “unconditional resistance” lies at the core of the university and principle should always be reflected, invented, and posed within this space of learning. Derrida continues:

*(...) the university might be in advance not just cosmopolitan, but universal, extending beyond (...) economic powers (to corporations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious and cultural powers (...)*<sup>16</sup>

Following this line of argument, both the Bosnian protests and the plenums can be viewed as a kind of university of and for the people: spaces where nothing is beyond questioning, not even the current manifestations of democracy. There is thus a strong emancipatory potential within the plenums, and furthermore the protests are themselves sites of learning, a space of struggle against the oppressive contemporary political hegemony in the country.

The plenums represent a step forward for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they are finally waking up from the “dream” of post-communist transition. I use the term dream here referring to the late comedian George Carlin who said something similar about the proverbial American Dream: namely, “you’d have to be asleep to believe it.” Prior to and after the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the elites promised the people a prosperous life within (ethnically homogenous) democratic societies, promises which have survived serious scrutiny for nearly two decades. But since the 2014 protests, people have begun to rediscover a forgotten or at least neglected sense of class solidarity. Through the plenums, people are finally reclaiming the language that was taken away from them, through which they can articulate their discontent and anger about twenty years of political and economic dispossession. The struggle to fully articulate this still emerging vistas of a new social order in Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued, albeit quietly, since 2014. Antonio Gramsci captures succinctly the post-plenum political (and emancipatory) stalemate in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”<sup>17</sup>

The plenums are now under attack by the same hegemonic forces they emerged to resist and challenge in the first. The weapons the elites use against

the people and plenums are the usual politicking lies, threats of conflict, and ethnic sectarianism. Any analysis of media statements from the national political elites reveals a clear pattern since 2014. For example, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniak political elites, in their national imaginary, will relate the violence that occurred during the protests to the “aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s,” likening the citizens’ efforts to a “Great Serb conspiracy” aimed at undermining Bosniaks and their wartime suffering. This approach is mirrored in Republika Srpska, where anyone who protests the social order is treated as a criminal. The rhetoric from Serb political elites also posits that the protests are a Bosniak conspiracy against Republika Srpska. The politician’s media statements often serve no other purpose than to undermine the whip up sectarian hysterias, such as Republika Srpska Prime Minister Željka Cvijanović’s statement on the third day of the protests that “people in Republika Srpska live well, and Republika Srpska is a mature and well-organized democratic society, whereas the protests can only occur only in the Federation, which is an unorganized, chaotic and undemocratic society.”<sup>18</sup> Such sentiments demonstrate that Bosnia and Herzegovina suffers not from multiple nationalist imaginaries but from one cohesive nationalist paradigm which operates on the basis of the familiar maxim of divide and conquer.

In the wake of the 2014 protests and plenums, however, the citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina have begun to realize that these are empty threats. I believe, and it has been my experience, that after two decades of such treatment, a far more optimistic and common vision of the country and its problems is emerging (despite obvious and persistent political barriers), one rooted in the realization that the only credible way forward is through a general embrace of a politics of equality, social justice, solidarity, and communality.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a structurally divided society. These divisions are officially based on ethnicity but in reality obscure from the public the role such ethno-national narratives divisions and narratives have in their economic and political dispossession. Meanwhile, under the guise of multiculturalism and tolerance, or what I have

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Maja Bjelajac, “Bez protesta u srpskom entitetu u Bosni i Hercegovini?” *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, March 2, 2014.

referred to as “multicultural apartheid,” the structural problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s kleptocratic economy and discriminatory political arrangements are largely ignored, even by nominally progressive or liberal NGOs.

What the 2014 protests demonstrated, however, is that there remains in a Bosnia and Herzegovina a deep-seated ethics and ethos of resistance and protest; and though largely subsumed within the hegemonic ethno-nationalist and neoliberal framework, this latent capacity for revolt can emerge in (and can itself create) moments of rupture. The protests and plenums of 2014 were thus paradigmatic, in that they demonstrated what was still possible in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, the still limitless capacity of authentic civil society to advance a genuinely emancipatory political agenda. It remains to be seen when its next rupture will occur but even this is only a question of time.



# Civil Society Against the Party-State? The Curious Case of Social Movements in Montenegro

*Bojan Baća*

With the exception of the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution (1988–1989) and the Anti-War Movement (1991–1995), virtually no scholarly attention has been paid to social movements, or other forms of contentious politics, in Montenegro’s post-socialist history. The social movement-related literature predominantly focuses on civic engagement among donor-supported NGOs. This perspective, unfortunately, remains blind to progressive – and sometimes contentious – civic actions and popular mobilizations outside the non-profit “third sector.” For that reason, this chapter provides a short overview of social movements that have played an important role in the processes of democratization in contemporary Montenegro.

To understand the nature of social movements in Montenegro, the ways in which they manifested themselves, and their relationship to more formal democracy promoters, key developments in the country’s post-socialist history will be laid out in the first section. The role of popular politics in the process of democratization will be explored in the two subsequent sections: first, by looking at social movements in the pre-independence period (1988–2006), and then contentious politics following independence (2006–present). The final section will assess the current state of autonomous civic activism in Montenegro and provide explanatory remarks for those with a normative interest in democracy promotion in the region.

## Post-Socialist Montenegro: Transformation without Change?

Despite being the only European country not to see regime change through the ballot box since the introduction of multiparty democracy, electoral turnouts in Montenegro have always been high – above 65 per cent.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, instances of articulating and protecting interests “from below”, through (contentious) extra-institutional political action, have been extremely rare, if not the lowest in the post-Yugoslav region.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for this have been ascribed to the country’s historical heritage of authoritarianism and the current patronage system that render its political culture non-participatory, as well as the “non-anonymous” nature of Montenegro’s “micro-society,” characterized by high-degrees of interpersonal relations

- 1 Olivera Komar and Slaven Živković, “Montenegro: A Democracy without Alternations,” *East European Politics and Societies* 30 (2016), pg. 793–794.
- 2 Građanska Alijansa, *Građanska participacija u Crnoj Gori* (Podgorica: Građanska alijansa, 2015), pg. 18–19; Pavle Jovanović and Miloš Marjanović, *Politička kultura u Crnoj Gori* (Podgorica: SoCEN, 2002), pg. 161–172; Olivera Komar, “The Development of Civil Society in Montenegro,” in *The Development of Civil Society in the Countries on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since the 1980s*, Danica Fink-Hafner (ed.) (Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, 2015), pg. 146. For Montenegro in a comparative perspective, see: Miloš Bešić, *Tranzicione traume i promene vrednosnih orijentacija – generacijski pristup: Komparativna empirijska studija vrednosti u zemljama bivše Jugoslavije* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2014), pg. 240–241.

and kinship ties.<sup>3</sup> While the semi-democratic state – reliant on extant patron–client networks – is a constant in Montenegro’s post-socialist transformation,<sup>4</sup> the society itself has gone through a turbulent socio-political transition and an equally disruptive process of socio-economic restructuring that has profoundly shaped how popular grievances are articulated and collective actions enacted in the public space.

The ruling party, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), is a direct successor of the League of Communists, and has been continuously in power since 1945, albeit with internal re-alignments among party elites in both 1989 and 1997. These two dates – alongside the independence referendum of 2006 – represent three critical junctures in the country’s post-socialist history. The role that social movements played in the process of democratization in Montenegro can thus only be understood in the context of the long-term macro-processes and associated structural transformations in the nexus of polity–economy–society (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

## Before Independence: A Social Movement Society?

Montenegro’s contemporary history begins in January 1989, when Communist Party youth rode a wave

of mass street protests underpinning the so-called Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution to replace the old party leadership cadres.<sup>6</sup> In the early years of formal multi-party competition, a nascent (non-institutionalized) civil society gave birth to an anti-regime movement comprised of both formal and informal civic associations, writers’ clubs, independent media outlets, public intellectuals, and some minor parliamentary parties.<sup>7</sup> This loose network of social, political and cultural actors was characterized by limited resources and insufficient organizational capacities, but reflected the genuine sentiments of those parts of the population that were pro-Western and opposed to ethno-nationalism, authoritarianism, and war.<sup>8</sup> Emerging from socialist Yugoslav-era ideals of anti-fascism and internationalism, and promoting civic values – understood broadly as values supportive of ethnic / national tolerance, respect for human dignity, civil and political rights, and universal equality protected by the rule of law – this assemblage had its most distinct and visible manifestation in Montenegro’s Anti-War Movement of the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Another

3 See, for example: Nebojša Čagorović, “Montenegrin Identity: Past, Present and Future,” *Journal of Area Studies* 1 (1993); Pavle Jovanović and Miloš Marjanović, *Politička kultura u Crnoj Gori* (Podgorica: SoCEN, 2002); Olivera Komar, *Birači u Crnoj Gori: Faktori izborne i partijske preferencije* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2013); Klavs Sedlenieks, “Buffer Culture in Montenegro: Bratstvo, Kumstvo and Other Kin-Related Structures,” in *A Life For Tomorrow: Social Transformations in South-East Europe*, Predrag Cvetičanin, Iliana Mangova and Nenad Markovikj (eds.) (Skopje: Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis”).

4 See: Olivera Komar, *Birači u Crnoj Gori: Faktori izborne i partijske preferencije* (Beograd: Čigoja, 2013); Dejan Milovac, “Montenegro: Democratic Deficits Persist Instead of Progressing Euro-Atlantic Integration,” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 56 (2016); Slavica Uzelac, “Corruption in Transition Countries: ‘How to Capture a State’ – The Example of Montenegro,” *South-East Europe Review* 6 (2003). In addition to “buying support” through clientelistic networks, the DPS also systematically uses intimidation/harassment as a tool to influence election outcomes (see Michal Mochťak, “Democratization and Electoral Violence in Post-Communism: A Study of Montenegro,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15 (2015)).

5 The periodization of Montenegrin post-socialist development in this table presented is only a roughly sketched trajectory. For instance, the first political subjects outside the ruling Communist Party began to appear in 1989 but were officially recognized only the following year. The same stands for civil society actors: even though the first law regulating NGOs was passed in 1999, the first NGOs began to emerge several years before. On the other hand, while state independence opened up space for relatively unconstrained neoliberal restructuring, these reforms were intensified after 2008 (e.g. enterprise restructuring, labour legislation, increased precarity, declining manufacturing sector). Nevertheless, the aforementioned critical junctures have set in motion the structural transformations presented in Table 1.

6 There is an extensive body of work on this controversial popular movement in Montenegro, especially on protest events that underpinned it. However, the majority of these are journalistic accounts, impressionistic memoirs, and other non-academic interpretations that tend to neglect the complexity of this socio-political movement and, as such, often engage in conspiratorial explanations that are accommodating to dominant political narratives rather than adhering to scholarly rigor. When it comes to academic accounts of Montenegro’s Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution that escape the traps of ideological mystifications and political oversimplifications in their analysis, solid starting points are: Risto Kilibarda, *Obzorje ili suton nade* (Podgorica: Unireks, 1996); Vladimir Ribić, “Politička mobilizacija crnogorskih komunističara u ‘Antibirokratskoj revoluciji,’” *Etnoantropološki problemi* 7 (2012); Nebojša Vladislavljević, *Serbia’s Antibureaucratic Revolution: Milošević, the Fall of Communism and Nationalist Mobilization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

7 Vladimir Keković, *Grke godine* (Podgorica: Kulturno-prosvjetna zajednica, 2005), pg. 39–48; Stevo Muk, Daliborka Uljarević and Srđan Brajović, *Weak Tradition, Uncertain Future: An Assessment of Montenegrin Civil Society* (Podgorica: Center for Development of Non-Governmental Organizations, 2006), pg. 18; Olivera Komar, “The Development of Civil Society in Montenegro,” in *The Development of Civil Society in the Countries on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since the 1980s*, Danica Fink-Hafner (ed.) (Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, 2015), pg. 149.

8 State-sponsored nationalist revival in post-socialist Montenegro “expressed itself rather as Serbian nationalism than as a distinct Montenegrin nationalism” (Florian Bieber, “Montenegrin Politics since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia,” in *Montenegro in Transition: Problems of Identity and Statehood*, Florian Bieber (ed.) (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003), pg. 12). However, when after 1997 a “distinct Montenegrin nationalism” became a state-sponsored project, it became evident that a significant part of the so-called “civic opposition” was not against the dominant ethno-nationalism because it was nationalism per se, but because it was Serbian nationalism. Put more simply, a proper designation for a considerable part of the “anti-nationalist movement” of the 1990s would be “counter-nationalist movement”.

9 See: Nebojša Nikčević, (ed.) *Antiratni pokret u Crnoj Gori, 1991–1992* (Cetinje: Matica Crnogorska, 2013); Srđa Pavlović and Milica Dragojević, “Peaceniks and Warmongers: Anti-

Table 1: Periodization of Montenegrin post-socialist, (post-)transition development

	1989–1997	1998–2006	2007–present
<b>Polity</b>	Stalled transition characterized by formal political pluralism, but de facto authoritarianism.	Transition to electoral democracy characterized by a move toward the de facto state independence.	State independence (de jure) and backsliding into flawed/ semi-democracy.
<b>Economy</b>	Proprietary and managerial transformation of economy (“ownership transformation” of social property into state property) under international isolation.	Actual but slow privatization process (transformation of state into private capital) in the context of re-entering the international community and global market.	Shift from embedded neoliberalism to neoliberalism proper through the process of “accumulation by dispossession.”
<b>Civil Society</b>	State-sponsored “societal organizations,” independent “citizens’ associations,” relatively influential trade unions, community-based civic participation, and remnants of (pre)socialist associational life.	NGO-ization of associational life (domination of externally-funded, professionalized civil society organizations), emergence of influential independent media, weakening and co-optation of trade unions, and citizens’ initiatives at local level.	Consolidation of donor-supported and professionalized “civil sector,” polarization in mainstream media, gradual emergence of independent trade unions, grassroots mobilizations, and civic activism “from below.”
<b>Lines of Conflict</b>	Various ideological and political disputes between civic-minded, anti-authoritarian and ethnically-defined, illiberal political subjects.	Total polarization of society: political cleavage between “pro-” and “anti-Milošević” forces (1997–2000); ethno-political cleavage between “pro-” and “anti-independence” movements (2001–2006).	Diversification of political disputes ranging from “the big issues” (such as Montenegro’s NATO membership) to “real life problems”: socio-economic, environmental, everyday life issues.

prominent grassroots movements of the period emerged around environmental protection issues, including a citizens’ initiative to protect the river Morača from being exploited for its hydro-electric potential and a struggle of residents from the Zeta region to protect their lands and waters from being polluted by the Podgorica Aluminum Plant.<sup>10</sup> However, it was only in 1996 that progressive actors posed the first real threat to the ruling establishment outside of the dominant party structure. Namely, an emergence of a nationwide socio-political movement for “national reconciliation” – formed by a coalition of Montenegro’s then two strongest opposition parties, under the name “Peoples’ Unity” – placed ethno-political differences to the side to focus instead on growing socio-economic problems as a unifying frame in fighting the DPS’s authoritarian rule.

The internal conflict between DPS elites in 1997 resulted in a political schism that divided the party’s electoral base and eventually polarized Montenegrin society into two hostile camps of roughly equal size: an anti-Milošević coalition, now led by DPS reformists (financially and logistically supported by Western democracies), and a pro-Milošević bloc aligned with the DPS’s conservative wing.<sup>11</sup> The grav-

itational pull of these two poles split Montenegro’s population into two sharply divided halves, leaving no space in-between for a third option. After the fall of Milošević in 2000, and the subsequent centering of the statehood as the main political question, this political polarization was recalibrated as an ethno-political division within the Slavic-Orthodox population. Informed by the political/ideological cleavage of 1997–2000, Montenegro’s citizens were once again clustered into two competing socio-political movements: one pro-independence and the other pro-union.<sup>12</sup> Put simply, “Montenegrin identity” came to be associated with support for state independence, whereas “Serb identity” signaled support for continued union with Serbia.<sup>13</sup> If alliance building with the DPS in 1997 was rationalized by some former opposition parties as choosing the “lesser of two evils,” then the progressive parts of civil so-

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 intellectuals and, most importantly, ethnic minorities (Srđan Darmanović, “Montenegro: The Dilemmas of a Small Republic,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (2003), pg. 148–150; Filip Kovačević, “Montenegro and the Politics of Postcommunist Transition: 1990 to 2006,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18 (2007), pg. 76–77).

12 While analysts characterize the 1997–2000 divisions as essentially political in nature, the ensuing Montenegrin/Serb ethnonational identity divisions were significantly informed by these political – or, more precisely, ideological – differences between “reformists” and “traditionalists.”

13 See, for example: Jelena Džankić, “Reconstructing the Meaning of Being ‘Montenegrin,’” *Slavic Review* 73 (2014); Erin K. Jenne and Florian Bieber, “Situational Nationalism: Nation-Building in the Balkans, Subversive Institutions and the Montenegrin Paradox,” *Ethnopolitics* 13 (2014); Kubo Keiichi, “The Issue of Independence and Ethnic Identity in Montenegro,” *Southeastern Europe* 32 (2007); Siniša Malešević and Gordana Uzelac, “A Nation-State without the Nation? The Trajectories of Nation-Formation in Montenegro,” *Nations and Nationalisms* 13 (2007).

War Activism in Montenegro, 1989–1995,” in *Resisting the Evil: (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Contentions*, Bojan Bilić and Vesna Janković (eds.) (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012).

10 While these movements were built around issues of environmental degradation and protection of natural resources, they were also imbued with strong nationalist and conservative overtones (see, for instance, Komnen Bećirović (ed.) *Odbrana Morače od potopa* (Cetinje: Svetigora, 2002)).

11 When the reformist wing of DPS realized it was losing support among the base, it had to appeal for support from the progressive opposition, civic associations, independent in-

ciety once again sided with the DPS – which now became the de facto leader of the “Movement for Independence” – defending the move with the now infamous slogan: “Independence first, democracy second.”<sup>14</sup> However, after state independence was won in the 2006 referendum, the DPS reframed the successful campaign as solely its own brainchild, using the fact that anti-establishment sentiments are often, though not exclusively, aligned with ethno-national identity to delegitimize critical voices, including former allies in the independence campaign as being “anti-state” and “anti-Montenegro” forces, which aimed to undermine the country’s statehood and stability.

The only emancipatory outcome of these polarizations, which turned Montenegro into a very Balkan version of “social movement society” (to borrow a well-known phrase), was that the anti-Milošević and pro-independence movements managed to (re)articulate Montenegrin national identity as inclusive and, hence, not based on particular ethnic composition or religious belonging.<sup>15</sup> As such, the movement was framed in liberal, “civic” terms, evincing multiethnic, multicultural, and pro-Western priorities by embracing so-called “European values.” While ethno-political divisions tended to create insurmountable differences between “political (pro-independence) Montenegrins” and “political (pro-union) Serbs” until 2006, the case of the nationwide mobilizations in 2004 to protect the Tara Canyon from being exploited for its hydroelectric potential showed how environmental issues had the power to push beyond dominant ethno-political frameworks, mobilizing Montenegro’s citizens across existing socio-political cleavages to protect common resources.

14 Kenneth Morrison, *Montenegro: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pg. 187, 202–203, 225. The slogan is also known as: “First the state, then democracy.”

15 See: Jelena Džankić, “Reconstructing the Meaning of Being ‘Montenegrin’”, *Slavic Review* 73 (2014); Erin K. Jenne and Florian Bieber, “Situational Nationalism: Nation-Building in the Balkans, Subversive Institutions and the Montenegrin Paradox”, *Ethnopolitics* 13 (2014); Siniša Malešević and Gordana Uzelac, “A Nation-State without the Nation? The Trajectories of Nation-Formation in Montenegro”, *Nations and Nationalisms* 13 (2007); Pieter Troch, “From ‘And’ to ‘Either/Or’: Nationhood in Montenegro during the Yugoslav Twentieth Century”, *East European Politics and Societies* 28 (2014). The negative effect was, however, that ethnic Serbs were gradually othered as “political Serbs” – namely, framed by the regime as a clear and present danger to the state and its independence (see: Bojan Baća, “Forging Civic Bonds ‘From Below’: Montenegrin Activist Youth Between Ethnonational Disidentification and Political Subjectivation”, in *Changing Youth Values in Southeast Europe: Beyond Ethnicity*, Tamara Trošt and Danilo Mandić (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2017); Olivera Komar and Slaven Živković, “Montenegro: A Democracy without Alternations”, *East European Politics and Societies* 30 (2016), pg. 790).

## Referendum Aftermath: Building Civil Society beyond the Civil Sector?

One of the key roles in both the anti-Milošević and pro-independence movements was played by externally funded NGOs, which first emerged in the late 1990s. On the positive side, international financial and logistical support fostered organizational capacity building, increased the political capital of civil society, and promoted liberal values of tolerance, human rights, and the rule of law.<sup>16</sup> On the negative side, however, it effectively narrowed the scope of civil society activity to that of a professionalized *civil sector*. As observed in other Central and Eastern European post-socialist and (post-) transition societies, the advent of foreign donor assistance in civil society building pushed NGOs towards practical activities aimed at decision and policymakers (e.g. advocacy, lobbying, expertise) rather than reaching out to a broader layer of citizens and pushing their demands in public spaces.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, foreign assistance has resulted in producing well-developed structures within a non-profit “third sector,” populated mainly by advocacy organizations that are professionally managed and, as such, accountable primarily to their donors, instead of being responsive to the needs of the local population. Therefore, the civil sector associations

16 On the other hand, the long defunct tradition of tribal assemblies was resurrected by the late 1990s, becoming a prominent political organizational platform among more conservative parts of the population (Steven C. Calhoun, “Montenegro’s Tribal Legacy,” *Military Review* 80 (2000):, pg. 33, 37–40).

17 For the negative effects of the NGO-ization of civil society – especially on participation, mobilization, and subversiveness – in the post-socialist space, see: Adam Fagan, “Transnational Aid for Civil Society Development in Post-Socialist Europe: Democratic Consolidation or a New Imperialism?”, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 22 (2006); Tanya Narozhna, “Foreign Aid for a Post-Euphoric Eastern Europe: The Limitations of Western Assistance in Developing Civil Society”, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7 (2004); Paul Stubbs, “Civil Society or *Ubleha*? Reflections on Flexible Concepts, Meta-NGOs and New Social Energy in the Post-Yugoslav Space,” in *Twenty Pieces of Encouragement for Awakening and Change: Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia*, Helena Rill, Tamara Šmidling and Ana Bitoljanu (eds.) (Belgrade: Centre for Nonviolent Action, 2007). For both critiques of the civil sector and research on grassroots mobilizations and popular politics in Central and Eastern Europe, see: Srećko Horvat and Igor Štikis (eds.), *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics After Yugoslavia* (London: Verso, 2015); Kerstin Jacobsson (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Kerstin Jacobsson and Steven Saxonberg (eds.), *Beyond NGO-ization: The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Kerstin Jacobsson and Steven Saxonberg (eds.), *Social Movements in Post-Communist Europe and Russia* (London: Routledge, 2015); Geoffrey Pleyers and Ionel N. Sava (eds.), *Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe: A Renewal of Protests and Democracy* (Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2015).

established in Montenegro were not organizational platforms based on individual participation and mobilization but were instead professional and clientelist in function, with little interest in mobilizing society or challenging dominant power relations (until 2012).<sup>18</sup> As such, the civil sector was there to ensure a smooth political and socio-economic transition to liberal democracy and market economy. The only exception has been a growing wave of mostly wildcat working-class strikes by rank-and-file workers, which have challenged corrupt privatizations and the frequent violations of Montenegrin labor law through militant grassroots actions.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, contrary to expectations that ethno-national identity politics would dissipate once Montenegro became independent, the fusion of political affiliation and ethno-national identification was instead largely consolidated, establishing ethno-politics as the master frame through which the DPS governs.<sup>20</sup> What's more, the DPS has not merely perpetuated these ethnic-cum-political divisions to block oppositional cross-ethnic, civic-based alliance building but has used populism to frame its reign as the *conditio sine qua non* of Montenegrin independence. By continuously representing Montenegro's current statehood (and peaceful cohabitation of diverse ethnic/national groups within it) as precarious and something that can be reversed if the opposition comes to power, it has sought to discredit and incapacitate any popular mobilizations that challenge its rule, even when coming from grassroots civic-minded movements. This was never more evident than in two instances of large-scale, "eventful" anti-regime protests.

In the first half of 2012, civil society organizations, trade unions, and student associations organized a series of street rallies that began as a protest against energy price hikes but eventually turned

into a wider critique of both neoliberal reforms and the semi-authoritarian polity, with demands for accessible education, dignified work, better social security, a review of Montenegro's privatization process, and ultimately calls for the government's resignation.<sup>21</sup> In September 2015, opposition parties organized sit-in protests in front of the National Assembly demanding the creation of a "technical government" that would implement what the opposition claimed could only then be the country's first free and fair elections. However, after a violent police raid on the protest encampment, a network of outraged citizens began mobilizing and self-organizing against this violation of constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties and political rights.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, the government actively worked to delegitimize these protests in the eyes of the local and international public (as nationalistic, anti-systemic, anti-state, anti-European, anti-NATO etc.), largely preventing the spread of these mobilizations beyond their respective core constituencies.

In the post-2006 period, most of the politically consequential grassroots mobilizations were predominantly local in nature and centered on environmental protection and labor rights, several of which served as conduits for broader social and political discontent. Some of the most prominent examples of environmental activism transcending ethno-political lines of conflict include: the civic actions to protect Valdanos Bay from privatization and commercial exploitation (2008–2014); the citizens' initiative to stop building a tunnel in the Gorica urban park in the capital (2012); and the citizen-led mobilization against illegal waste disposal in the village of Beranselo (2010–2014), which grew into a nationwide movement and a symbol of civil resistance against the regime.<sup>23</sup> In recent years, numerous citizens' initiatives and civic actions to protect local natural resources and cultural monuments from neoliberal exploitation have become more prominent on the national level. Similarly, grassroots labor struggles have continued to challenge the terms of restructuring in Montenegro's

18 On several occasions, however, Montenegrin NGOs did serve as brokers between civil society and the state by facilitating inclusion of marginalized voices in public dialogue and decision-making processes, thus temporarily creating channels for ordinary people to influence political process outside party structures.

19 Konstantin Kilibarda, "Mapping Labor Unrest in Montenegro: Working Class Resistances to Neoliberal Restructuring" (paper presented at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Graduate Symposium of The Global Labour Research Centre at York University, Toronto, Canada, October 27–28, 2016).

20 See, for example: Jelena Džankić, "Reconstructing the Meaning of Being 'Montenegrin,'" *Slavic Review* 73 (2014); Kenneth Morrison, "Change, Continuity and Consolidation: Assessing Five Years of Montenegro's Independence," *LSEE Papers on South Eastern Europe* 2 (2011). Despite attempts by NGOs to bring to the forefront issues of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption, citizens were consistently drawn into the gravitational pull of identity politics, with ethno-national identification remaining the key predictor of voter-behaviour (see Olivera Komar, *Birači u Crnoj Gori: Faktori izborne i partijske preferencije* (Beograd: Čigoja, 2013)).

21 Konstantin Kilibarda, "An Anatomy of the Montenegrin Spring: Mobilizing Workers and Civic Networks Against Austerity" (paper presented at 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, Boston, USA, November 21–24, 2013).

22 Bojan Baća, "Forging Civic Bonds 'From Below': Montenegrin Activist Youth Between Ethnonational Disidentification and Political Subjectivation," in *Changing Youth Values in Southeast Europe: Beyond Ethnicity*, Tamara Trošt and Danilo Mandić (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2017).

23 While Montenegro lacks a tradition of urban movements (Branislav Radulović, *Nojeva barka: 70 priča – jedna poruka* (Podgorica: Daily Press, 2016), pg. 205–206), rural areas have continuously proven to be hotbeds of grassroots mobilizations and civil resistance.

manufacturing, mining, and public service sectors, including the use of hunger-strikes, road blocks, and occupations of public spaces and factory yards by rank-and-file workers, not to mention collective protests organized by the country's labor union federations against neoliberal rollbacks of existing labor and social welfare protections.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, since 2011, social media (Facebook, in particular) has served as an important platform for encounters and connections between citizens disenchanted with party politics and disappointed in the oligarchic core of electoral democracy in Montenegro, giving rise to what can be described as a new iteration of the anti-regime movement. That is, essentially a loose network of formal organizations, informal associations, ad hoc groups, and individual activists from both the left and right of the political spectrum. While these dissenting voices existed in the past, social media has amplified their reach, making them more influential in the public sphere.<sup>25</sup> These voices are beginning to articulate political messages that are radically different from mainstream politics, which tend to be oversaturated with the apolitical – or, better yet, depoliticized – liberal consensus among existing elites. In their place, these new actors are introducing to Montenegro genuine concerns with: social justice, military neutrality, left-wing Euroscepticism, alter-globalization, quality of living in urban space along with more reactionary right-wing populism and romanticized traditionalism.

## Conclusion

Since 2006, Montenegro's civil society has become reinvigorated: instead of being limited to a non-profit "third sector," its scope has been broadened as it has become (re)politicized "from below." Thanks to new media technologies, a new space is emerging for more democratic civic actions, producing new political subjectivities in the process. Contrary to the middle-class urbanity and civility, that defined "civicness" in simplistic terms as eth-

no-national tolerance since the late nineties, new civic actors are beginning to redefine the terms of "civic discourse" and "civic participation" on more activist grounds, emphasizing solidarity with the so called "losers of transition" and calls for both environmental and social justice.

Many of these activist groups, civic associations, informal networks, and grassroots movements have emerged in real and virtual public spaces of deliberation and, most importantly, are beginning to formulate new political identities that cannot be reduced to existing ethno-political categories and associated antagonisms. Namely, the injustices they have struggled against are issues that cut across ethno-national communities: systemic corruption, corrupt privatizations, austerity measures, environmental degradation, protection of the commons (e.g. natural resources, public spaces, historic-cultural monuments), unequal access to public services, inequalities in social status, and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the DPS regime. This, in effect, has motivated the creation of new political bonds between multitudes of individuals and collectives that demand proactive involvement in decision-making by renouncing the elites' definition of politics in which the political system is to strictly serve the (economic) interests of the few.

The emergence of grassroots activism, coupled with stark criticism of the oligarchic core of electoral democracy, brings to the fore the question of the quality of externally-sponsored, top-down democratization and associated processes (e.g. privatization, NGO-ization, state-building, Europeanization) that have molded contemporary Montenegro. The overwhelming sentiment among the progressive activists is that three decades of democratization of the Montenegrin polity have been purely cosmetic in nature, since its actual outcome was a total merger of the state apparatus with the ruling party structure (and, more broadly, its clientelistic networks). Moreover, the advent of external funding in the past two decades has created a path dependent development within the civil society, so that the non-profit "third sector" – steered by (young) urban, liberal and middle-class professionals and dominated by a small number of advocacy and service-providing organizations, who are disinterested in participation and mobilization – remains the dominant model of associational life and, is in essence, hostile to those interested in radical change of existing power relations, structural injustices, and patterns of exclusion.

On its fringes, however, "uncivil society" gradually emerges, comprised mostly of the afore-

24 Konstantin Kilibarda, "Mapping Labor Unrest in Montenegro: Working Class Resistances to Neoliberal Restructuring" (paper presented at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Graduate Symposium of The Global Labour Research Centre at York University, Toronto, Canada, October 27–28, 2016).

25 For more than a decade now, the internet has functioned as the most important public space for political debate in Montenegro. Since the early 2000s, for instance, online discussion forums have served as platforms where many ordinary citizens have exercised their "political self" (see, for example, Čarna Brković, "Floating Signifiers: Negotiations of the National on the Internet Forum Café del Montenegro", *Südosteuropa* 57 (2009)).

mentioned “losers of transition,” whose feelings of betrayal by the elites, disillusionment with the local reality of “European integration” and overall sense of powerlessness in changing the status quo through the ballot-box makes their resentment easily manipulated and exploitable by right-wing populism(s).<sup>26</sup> In short, instead of peoples’ desire for radical socio-political change being articulated through progressive left politics, the worsening of their material predicaments in the context of the DPS-induced ethno-national antagonization frequently forces them to the regressive and reactionary right.

Unfortunately, the insistence on “stabilitocracy” (or “stabilocracy”) by the EU is unintentionally accelerating democratic backsliding, not only in Montenegro, but in the region as a whole.<sup>27</sup> The DPS has proven to be exceptionally skilled in capitalizing on interests of the Western powers and ensuring their support simply by being obedient to their demands – at the expense of public interest and common good. As such, the DPS managed to falsely present itself to the international community, regional partners, and the majority of Montenegrin citizens as a *conditio sine qua non* of multi-ethnic cohabitation and political stability, while simultaneously framing (and vilifying) any opposition to its “illiberal” reign as the work of anti-state, anti-democratic, anti-European elements. At the same time, neoliberal privatization and clientelistic mechanisms introduced by the DPS have created socio-economic conditions favorable to the rise of right-wing diagnostics of socio-economic predicaments shared by many and, therefore, opened up a space for ethnonational antagonization. In other words, while the DPS represents itself as a “guarantee of stability,” its policies are actively deepening ethno-political cleavages and socio-economic inequalities and, effectively, increasing popular resentment toward the Europeanization process.

Until democracy promoters start acknowledging and analyzing the actually existing civil society in Montenegro, and the varied reasons assorted civil society actors – such as, trade unions, social movements, citizens’ initiatives, informal civic organizations, political groups, and community associations – have for engaging in extra-institutional, contentious political actions, they will

neglect progressive impulses that come “from below” and, in turn, unintentionally foster conditions conducive to further “uncivil society” building. Therefore, the prevailing top-down “one size fits all” approach to democratization in Montenegro, and the region more generally, ought to be contested in favor of a more nuanced methodology that takes into account the specifics of a country, as well as the interests, grievances, and demands articulated within the society itself. Otherwise, just like Montenegrin elites that placed independence before democracy, the Brussels’ bureaucrats are making the same mistake by putting stability before democracy in the Balkans.

26 For a brief overview of the concept of “uncivil society” in the post-socialist context, see: Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, “Rethinking Civil Society,” *Democratization* 10 (2003).

27 See: Marko Kmezić and Florian Bieber (eds.), *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans: An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion* (Belgrade: European Fund for the Balkans, 2017).



# Vetevendosje and the Democratic Potential for Protest in Kosovo

*Hana Marku*

The Levizja Vetevendosje (the Self Determination Movement) party occupies a unique space in Kosovo's political landscape and arguably the Western Balkans as a whole. Originally, the group was founded in 2004 as an anti-establishment, grassroots protest movement opposed to the UN mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, which they viewed as an illegitimate occupation force. In 2010, Vetevendosje ran in Kosovo's national elections as a political party and won 14 out of 120 seats in parliament. Since then, Vetevendosje has been Kosovo's loudest and largest opposition party in parliament. Vetevendosje positions itself as a political opposition movement engaged in both parliamentary work and street protest, in effect straddling two forums of civic engagement.

Vetevendosje has spearheaded mass protests over traditionally leftist issues such as the privatization of state assets as well as ongoing bilateral processes like the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and Kosovo's border demarcation dispute with Montenegro. The party acts as an anti-government critic and has interrupted the work of parliament through various forms of disruption, from throwing tear gas, unveiling banners, to blowing whistles during parliamentary sessions. While the label of "protest movement" is at the core of the Vetevendosje identity, the use of these protest tactics within parliament has also opened the party up to accusations of reactionary and populist grandstanding.

The party's core goals have been anathema to the international community, particularly Vetevendosje's stated commitment to unify Kosovo with Albania, protecting national industries, and

navigating foreign and internal affairs without the involvement of the international community in Kosovo. I argue that Vetevendosje's resistance and occasional rejection of the international community's agenda (and legitimacy) should not necessarily be seen as a failure of state building but as an act of critical agency, one that can potentially strengthen other emerging social movements in Kosovo and thus, in the long run, the viability of Kosovo as a democratic polity as a whole.

## Vetevendosje in Context

Three forces constitute Kosovo's current opposition and protest politics: Vetevendosje, formal civil society actors (non-profits and civil society organizations), and non-politically aligned youth movements. For the most part, these camps are not imagined as overlapping forces in Kosovo, although occasional convergence does occur. These moments of convergence have emancipatory potency, precisely because they politicize the role of the public, turning citizens into agents of change.<sup>1</sup> The #Protestoj (#IProtest) civic movement, for instance, organized a series of protests in 2016 against widespread cronyism and corruption within Kosovo's government after local media released a series of wiretapped recordings of officials openly

1 Gëzim Visoka, "International Governance and Local Resistance in Kosovo: The Thin Line Between Ethical, Emancipatory and Exclusionary Politics," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* (2011), pp. 99–125.

trading jobs and favors,<sup>2</sup> echoing similar criticisms raised by Vetevendosje MPs in parliament during the “Pronto Affair” two years earlier.<sup>3</sup> As a non-politically aligned protest movement, #Protestoj gave leverage to anti-government lawmakers to address corruption in Kosovo’s government as a non-partisan issue. Similarly, in 2013, feminist activists protested in defence of Nazlie Bala,<sup>4</sup> a Vetevendosje activist who had been assaulted for advocating for legislation sponsored by the party, which legally recognized wartime rape survivors as a distinct category of war victims.

Although Vetevendosje is able to generate widespread support for its protests and marches, it is also a polarizing presence to many Kosovars, who oppose Vetevendosje’s defiance of the international community and its penchant for disruptive confrontation within and outside of parliament. The refusal of Vetevendosje MPs to participate in symbolic acts such as standing for Kosovo’s national anthem,<sup>5</sup> for example, or recognizing Kosovo’s flag,<sup>6</sup> is seen by critics as a failure to recognize Kosovo’s statehood. Vetevendosje, in turn, frames each of these as illegitimate because they are “imposed” by outside actors, that is, the international community as compromise solutions.

On the other hand, Vetevendosje’s party program includes progressive policy positions calling for economic justice, the greater representation of women in public life, universal healthcare, and the equal rights of ethnic and racial minorities.<sup>7</sup> Vetevendosje MPs also have a track record of opposing privatization efforts<sup>8</sup> that lead to mass layoffs<sup>9</sup> and condemning municipal governments that tolerate pollution<sup>10</sup> and environmental degradation.<sup>11</sup> Along similar lines, the party led a national campaign calling on consumers to buy local

products<sup>12</sup> and publicly invited more women to join their ranks.<sup>13</sup> Yet in practice, the party often fails to address the needs of ethnic minorities (i.e. racialized minorities such as the Roma community) and unfailingly supports veterans of the Kosovo Liberation Army,<sup>14</sup> even former veterans who are accused of war crimes.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Vetevendosje’s rhetoric is often rooted in narratives of national martyrdom and betrayal, leading critics to conclude that the party is thus fundamentally nationalist in character.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the party’s lack of mass mobilization on social welfare and civil rights issues such as healthcare, gender inequality, homophobia, and racism (beyond limited statements within its official policy documents) does not resonate well with social movements rooted in the civil society sector and the aforementioned non-politically aligned but progressive youth movements.

In short, the ongoing test for Vetevendosje lies in whether the party can foster protest and social change through an inclusive and socially progressive message and communicate that intent effectively within and beyond Kosovo; or, in turn, whether the party will remain a reactionary rather than a proactive force.

## Kosovo in Protest: A Brief History

When Kosovo’s autonomy was revoked in 1989 and the territory was placed under the direct administration of Serbia, Kosovar Albanians were subject to mass firings, removal from Kosovo’s provincial assembly, high levels of police surveillance, and the closing of Albanian language schools, post-secondary institutions, and cultural institutions. In response, Kosovar Albanians created parallel government structures and initiated a broad constellation of social movements engaged in nonviolent resistance. Researcher Howard Clark describes the 1990s as a decade when several forms social movements emerged in Kosovo with the following overlapping aims: the independence of Kosovo from Serbia and the greater Yugoslav project, the

2 Rron Gjinojci, “‘Pronto!’ Kosovo Protesters Are Calling for An End to Corruption,” *Prishtina Insight*, August 15, 2017.

3 “VV: ‘Pronto,’ Skandali më i madh i kësaj Qeverie,” *Koha.net*, May 27, 2014.

4 Edona Peci, “Kosovo Wartime Rape Controversy Sparks Protest,” *Balkan Insight*, March 29, 2013.

5 “Kosova Shënon 5 Vjetorin, VV Injoron Himnin,” *Radio Victoria*, February 17, 2013.

6 Píl Kolstř (ed.), *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-Building in South Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016).

7 “Parimet dhe Prioritetet Programore te Levizjes Vetevendosje,” *Vetevendosje.org* (accessed April 18, 2017).

8 “Why Should the Privatization of KEDS be Stopped?” *Vetevendosje.org*, October 17, 2012.

9 “Vetevendosje Reagon Kunder Largimit te Punetoreve nga KEDS-I,” *Indeksonline.net*, September 30, 2016.

10 A.M. “Vetevendosja Akuzon Pushtetin Lokal te Drenasit per Keqmenaxhimin e Mbeturinave,” *Press Reader*, May 10, 2013.

11 “Vetevendosje Akuzon Komunen per Deshtim ne Mbrojtje Ambient,” *Koha.net*, April 14, 2017.

12 “Duaje Tenden – Prodhim i Vendit,” *Vetevendosje.org*, September 14, 2011.

13 “Mesazh Drejtuar Grave e Vajzave te Kosoves,” *Vetevendosje.org*, August 29, 2016.

14 “The EULEX Court is Smearing our Struggle for Freedom,” *Vetevendosje.org*, May 27, 2015.

15 “‘Justice’ According to PDK and EULEX,” *Vetevendosje.org*, March 5, 2015.

16 Bilge Yabanci, “Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics in Kosovo: A Case Study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje,” *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 3:2 (2015), pg. 17–43.

rejection of communism in favour of multi-party democracy, and the desire to shed archaic traditions such as the subjugation of women and familial blood feuds.<sup>17</sup> This convergence is best explained under the umbrella of the aforementioned parallel system that emerged in Kosovo, which included a wide array of shadow public services and social movements.

The campaign to reconcile blood feuds amongst Kosovar Albanians was among the first of these movements to take hold in Kosovo, beginning in 1990 and ending in 1992. This movement, led by professor and folklorist Anton Cetta, employed the efforts of approximately five hundred student volunteers. These students, many of them women, systematically visited villages and towns, convincing Kosovar Albanians to forgive families with whom they had become embroiled in generational blood feuds. This effort was framed as part of a bigger initiative to resist the Milošević regime in Kosovo and as part of a broader call for nonviolent resistance and solidarity. Reconciliations took place in public ceremonies organized by the campaign, in which families were invited to shake hands and reconcile. Such gatherings were forbidden by Serbian authorities in 1990 and continued in secret until the campaign came to a close in 1992.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, Kosovar Albanians also galvanized nonviolent resistance by publicizing the human rights violations of the Serbian state in Kosovo. In 1989, Kosovar Albanian activists founded the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, a civic movement that monitored and collected data on police brutality, political persecution, and human rights violations committed against the Albanian population in Kosovo. With sub-councils located throughout towns and villages in Kosovo, the council documented instances of illegal police raids, arbitrary detainment, interrogations, beatings, and killings. The council was the first point of contact for reporting on the human rights situation in Kosovo and distributed its findings and reports to embassies and international human rights organizations around the world.<sup>19</sup> The volume of information collected and distributed by the council required the mass participation of Kosovar Albanians, with reports from towns and villages being documented and sent directly to the main office in Prishtina.<sup>20</sup>

17 Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

18 Ibid.

19 Nazlie Bala, interviewed by the author, Prishtina, June 2013.

20 Zahrije Podrimqaku (with Jeta Rexha), "Interview with Zahrije Podrimqaku," *Oral History Kosovo*, February 15, 2016.

In post-1989 Kosovo, Albanian language education became prohibited or restricted to ethnically segregated schools.<sup>21</sup> Kosovar Albanian teachers and professors were subjected to mass firings, making Albanian language education in Kosovo nearly impossible. Many Kosovar Albanian parents decided to send their children to the aforementioned parallel schools, staffed by these dismissed Albanian teachers and professors. These schools were located in private homes and were funded through a system of voluntary taxation by the parallel government. The nonviolent resistance and parallel society created by Kosovar Albanians during the 1990s provided a sense of solidarity and built good will internationally but became increasingly untenable in the hostile conditions created by Serbian security forces in Kosovo and was further complicated by external factors such as the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, the shadow education system, the pride of Kosovo's parallel institutions, would also prove to be a breeding ground for the more radical student protests of the late 1990s, which signified an ideological break with non-confrontational forms of resistance in Kosovar society more broadly.<sup>22</sup>

In 1996, Kosovar Albanian university students petitioned Kosovo's parallel government to reopen school buildings and recommence Albanian language education, along with demands for free media and greater coordination amongst Albanian political forces in rump Yugoslavia (i. e. Serbia and Montenegro). One year later, in October 1997, the presidency of the Kosovar Albanian student union led a mass political protest demanding the reinstatement of Albanian language education, despite warnings by the parallel government and foreign embassies. Thousands of students went out on the day of the demonstration and faced a cordon of armored vehicles and riot police, which violently dispersed the protest. In 1998, the student union became explicitly political after the Reçak massacre and the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army, calling for an end to the system of parallel governance and nonviolent resistance in favor of a genuine "national liberation" struggle.<sup>23</sup>

The work of the parallel system exemplified a form of nonviolent resistance that not only proved to be a successful and sophisticated convergence of several social movements but also granted dignity under conditions of immense repression. However, by the late 1990s it became clear that nonvio-

21 Denisa Kostovicova, *Kosovo: The politics of Identity and Space* (London: Routledge, 2005).

22 Ibid.

23 Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

lent resistance was no longer enough for Kosovo's youth, who had spent their formative years under conditions of political and cultural siege. While the leaders of the parallel government, particularly the former president Ibrahim Rugova, hoped that the international community would push for a peaceful resolution to the Kosovo crisis, for a growing number of Kosovars no other option apart from direct confrontation with Serbia seemed viable. The ideological rift created by the student movement and the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army continued in the post-war period, creating a clear division in Kosovo between political forces that sought to achieve their aims with the support of the international community and those that aimed to forge an independent political course.

### The Post-War Rise of Opposition

At the end of the Kosovo War in 1999, the UNMIK was tasked with rebuilding and governing Kosovo. UNMIK fostered the creation of the Provisional Institutions of Self Governance (PISG), locally staffed institutions under the supervision of UNMIK, and managed Kosovo's first democratic municipal and national elections. Although Kosovo's elected officials had control over nine ministries with diverse portfolios, UNMIK had the authority to overrule any decision or legislation passed by the PISG. This would lead to a struggle of power between the PISG and UNMIK that would last until Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.<sup>24</sup> While Kosovo's political parties promised the resolution of Kosovo's status and other goals that were beyond their official purview during the PISG period, they were for the most part uninterested in the nuts and bolts of public policy. As a result, Kosovo's poverty, economic stagnation, and ethnic divisions deepened during this period.

In 2005, Vetevendosje burst onto Kosovo's political scene as a grassroots movement that became notorious for vandalizing UNMIK's headquarters in Prishtina with the slogan "no negotiations – self-determination!"<sup>25</sup> Between 2005 and 2010, Vetevendosje demanded a speedy resolution of Kosovo's political status, and firmly opposed the so called "technical dialogue" with Serbia, as well as the Ahtisaari Plan for supervised independence. The party held hundreds of meetings across Kosovo, calling upon the principles of self-

determination and evoking the language of anti-colonialism to demand that decisions of national significance for Kosovo proceed with consensus and public consultation. Vetevendosje criticized UNMIK for its lack of accountability towards Kosovars, and Kosovo's political elite for their subservience and passivity to UNMIK and the Western embassies. To this end, Vetevendosje activists threw rotten eggs at representatives of Serbian parallel structures in Kosovo when they would meet with UNMIK officials in Prishtina,<sup>26</sup> vandalized UN vehicles, and dumped garbage in front of PISG and UNMIK buildings.<sup>27</sup>

In 2007, two unarmed Vetevendosje activists were killed by UNMIK police during a mass demonstration against the Ahtisaari Plan and the technical dialogue.<sup>28</sup> The activists were shot with faulty rubber bullets by two Romanian UNMIK police officers who were repatriated with no further consequences. A special UN investigation established that police forces had used excessive force to manage the protest but still no further action was taken by UNMIK thereafter.<sup>29</sup> Instead, Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti was arrested under charges of three public order offences and spent three months in detention and eight months under house arrest. To many in Kosovo, this incident illustrated the lack of accountability within UNMIK as per Vetevendosje's colonial accusations and moved Vetevendosje positions closer to the political mainstream. Three years later, Vetevendosje ran in Kosovo's first post-independence elections, winning fourteen seats out of 120 in parliament and coming in third behind the country's two leading political blocs.

Political scientist Alma Vardari Kesler has analyzed the discursive shift in Kosovo's political scene since the entry of Vetevendosje in parliament. She argues that the presence of Vetevendosje in parliament has led to increased demands for debate on national issues that would otherwise be closed to the public, such as Kosovo's trade deficit with Serbia, anxieties over the flow of money from the Serbian government to Kosovar Serb municipalities through the Serb Association of Municipalities, and the cronyism and corruption of Kosovo's

<sup>24</sup> Iain King and Whit Mason, *Peace at Any Price: How the World Failed Kosovo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Bujar Aruqaj, "Kosovo's Vetevendosje Keep Faith in Grafitti," *Balkan Insight*, May 1, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> "History of Levizja Vetevendosje," *Vetevendosje.org*, June 12, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Michael J. Totten, "Resisting the United Nations," *Michael-Totten.com*, October 13, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> "Better Late Than Never: Enhancing the Accountability of International Institutions in Kosovo," *Human Rights Watch*, June 2007.

<sup>29</sup> "Kosovo: Mon Balaj and Arben Xheladini, died February 2007 – their families and other victims still wait for justice," *Amnesty International*, February 6, 2014.

political elite.<sup>30</sup> I would add that by criticizing the international presence and political elite in Kosovo from directly within parliament, Vetevendosje's criticisms are imbued with moral and political clout unavailable to them as a grassroots movement.

To this end, Vetevendosje has organized protests both within and outside parliament, with actions organized to block trucks with Serbian imports from entering Kosovo, mass protests against the creation of the Serb Association of Municipalities, the release of tear gas in parliament to protest the contested demarcation of Kosovo's border with Montenegro, to list a handful of recent examples. Each of these instances of protest flew in the face of advice and direction given to Kosovo by the international community, particularly with regards to the need for free trade, the demarcation of the Kosovo-Montenegro border as a prerequisite to EU accession and the need to engage in political dialogue with Serbia. While Vetevendosje's peaceful demonstrations against the government garnered widespread support (73 per cent according to a UNDP poll), Vetevendosje's tear gas attacks in the parliament and the violent actions of some of its protesters (i. e. stone throwing) have also subjected them to widespread public condemnation.

Still, I argue that Vetevendosje has the potential to act as an encouraging presence for other protest movements to directly engage parliament. For example, the head of the women's secretariat of Vetevendosje, Nazlie Bala, received immense civil society support for advocating for the rights of wartime rape survivors in 2013 as previously mentioned. And after Bala was attacked by unknown assailants for pushing this legislation, Kosovo's feminist activists organized a demonstration in front of parliament in her defense. They admonished parliamentarians for neglecting to prioritize the needs of wartime rape survivors and for using sexist and demeaning language to describe wartime rape survivors during parliamentary sessions.<sup>31</sup> More recently, in November 2016, the unsolved death of Vetevendosje activist Astrit Dehari in his jail cell became a cause for Kosovo-wide protest. He had been detained without formal charges for over two months, for allegedly planning an attack on the Kosovo parliament. Prison authorities quickly labeled Dehari's death an overdose, contradicting an official autopsy which stated that he died of suicide by

asphyxiation (while both claims are disputed by his family's defense lawyer).<sup>32</sup> Vetevendosje received an outpouring of support from civil society and youth, with thousands condemning Dehari's death during large scale protests.<sup>33</sup> Although the exact cause of Dehari's death remains in question, four prison officials resigned and the case has continued to receive national media attention. These occasional moments of convergence between Vetevendosje and other social actors provide some evidence of how the two camps can nevertheless cooperate to advance important civil rights causes.

## Conclusions

Vetevendosje is primarily criticized for the illegitimacy of its disruptive acts of protest, like the tear gas attacks in parliament or organizing confrontational public demonstrations in response to specific political demands (such as the dismissal of former Minister for Communities and Returns Aleksandar Jablanovic).<sup>34</sup> By employing these tactics, critics of Vetevendosje argue, the party endangers the democratic process and fails to respect the will of the constituencies of Kosovo's ruling political parties. Concerns about political parties engaging in populist and disruptive tactics of protest are legitimate. After all, in a democratic system, to what extent do opposition parties have the right to obstruct the work of parliament and at what point can they be thrown out of parliament in turn? These are questions that require sober debate within Kosovo amongst Kosovars.

However, the characterization of Vetevendosje's actions as fundamentally dangerous to democracy are also problematic, especially as Kosovo's deeply compromised ruling parties continue to be treated as valued partners by the international community. Many figures from Kosovo's ruling political elite, particularly the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), have been accused of large scale corruption and cronyism.<sup>35</sup> The overt criminality, nepotism, and abuse of power by high level officials as demonstrated by the Pronto Affair reveals the extent to which Kosovo's political elite themselves disregard "playing by the rules" of democracy and the rule of law. If these accusations have not delegitimized

30 Alma Vardari-Kesler, "Statehood Without Sovereignty: Risky Negotiations in Post-Independence Kosovo," in Nikolaos Papakostas and Nikos Pasamitros (eds.), *An Agenda for the Western Balkans: From Elite Politics to Social Sustainability* (Stuttgart: ibidm Press, 2014), pg. 191.

31 Hana Marku, "Shame: Talking About Rape in Kosovo," *Kosovo 2.0*, March 29, 2013.

32 Adea Kondiroli, "Dehari's Death Declared Suicide: Requests for Independent Investigation Continue," *Prishtina Insight*, November 21, 2016.

33 "Silent March for Justice Following Vetevendosje Activist's Death," *Prishtina Insight*, November 11, 2016.

34 Valerie Hopkins, "Fury: The Roots of an Uprising," *Prishtina Insight*, January 29, 2015.

35 Paul Lewis, "Report Identifies Hashim Thaci as 'Big Fish' in Organized Crime," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2011.

Kosovo's ruling political parties in the eyes of the international community, then Vetevendosje's open acts of protest should not preclude them from partnerships with democracy promoters.

To this end, democracy promoters should reflect upon Kosovo's experience with accusations of mass voter fraud in 2010, for instance, which were reported on extensively in local and international media. The government formed in 2010 was Kosovo's first post-independence government and yet may have been formed on the basis of ballot stuffing and voter intimidation. Democracy promoters should also seriously consider the ongoing charges of corruption and illegal activity at within Kosovo's government as per the Pronto Affair,<sup>36</sup> accusations around which have circulated in in the country since the formation of the PISG under UNMIK. Accusations of media intimidation by governmental figures like the Prime Minister and well documented incidents of police brutality against opposition protesters are also important to bear in mind when considering Vetevendosje's democratic and political legitimacy. In this charged and often illiberal political climate, it is understandable that Vetevendosje sees disruptive confrontation as a mode of survival, not just political provocation.

In short, demanding that Vetevendosje soften its tactics must be accompanied with demands for a thorough investigation into accusations of corruption in Kosovo's ruling political parties and ruling establishment. In the spirit of fostering cross-party collaboration, democracy promoters should also insist that Kosovo's establishment parties work with Vetevendosje on policymaking and legislative work, in order to ensure that such efforts represent the will of all of Kosovo's electorate, including those of the opposition. Vetevendosje has already entered the political mainstream – now they must be brought to the negotiating table.

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<sup>36</sup> "Pronto 2: Leaked Wiretaps of Kosovo Ruling Party Officials Scandal Continues," *Prishtina Insight*, August 3, 2016.

# Students in Macedonia: The Road from Apathy to Active Citizenship

*Dona Kosturanova*

Youth in Macedonia have been frequently called apathetic and disinterested in politics. Young people constitute roughly a quarter of the total population of Macedonia, which numbers approximately two million people based on the last census from 2002. Given their numbers and the challenges faced by them, it would not be unreasonable to call youth one of the most marginalized groups in the country. The most prominent issues facing this community are youth unemployment (twice as high as the general Macedonian unemployment rate), and mass economic emigration or brain drain. And though reliable data is unavailable as concerns the latter, it is nevertheless a readily apparent reality in Macedonia society. Furthermore, the lack of integrated education programs represents another significant barrier to the country's youth. In short, young people in Macedonia are marginalized and desperate. And yet, they are also the country's best advocates for substantive reform.

## Youth in Context

The aforementioned sense of marginalization and desperation is accentuated by the significant degree of alienation and polarization that characterizes Macedonia's contemporary politics. A 2011 study, for instance, showed that 45 per cent of high-school students see themselves leaving the country in ten years, while other studies have that figure at more than 50 per cent of youth.<sup>1</sup> A quarter of

high school students label themselves as "socially excluded," believing that there are few opportunities (and that the general socio-political climate is hostile) for their self-realization. The educational system, for example, provides few opportunities for young people to be socially engaged or mobile. Schools do not encourage critical thinking, freedom of expression, and therefore do not bridge the gap between youth and the country's democratic institutions. Students themselves are fundamentally uninformed. For instance, the same study notes that 46 per cent of high school students have never participated in a debate, given a presentation, have visited a public institution through their school, nor could they name single major current event.

In other words, students have limited opportunities to practice the art of existing and succeeding in a democratic and pluralist society because of the rudimentary or otherwise non-existent degree of social (and socializing) education in the country's schools and universities. Another survey of youth sentiments, this one in 2013, showed that the most trusted institutions by Macedonia youth are NATO and the EU, while local governments are most distrusted.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Macedonia youth lack faith in their own society.

In principle, most schools in the country have student associations – school level student organization where elected students represent their peers to the faculty and administration and through which they can practice democratic participation and representation. In practice, however, these as-

1 Jana Korunovska Srbijanko, Neda Korunovska Avramovska, Tanja Maleska, "Capitulation, Confusion, Resistance: Social Capital of Macedonian High-School Students", *Reactor – Research in Action and Youth Educational Forum* (2011).

2 Topuzovska Latkovikj and Borota Popovska et al., *Macedonia Youth Study 2013* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Skopje, 2013).

sociations lack a significant role in the schools and members are generally not permitted to attend (or vote in) the meetings of the schools' actual governing bodies.<sup>3</sup> A general union of student associations at the high school level does not exist, although one briefly cropped up in 2015. At the university level, meanwhile, public universities do have student parliaments, which have the power to participate in decision-making processes and which receive university funding to do so. However, the legitimacy of these student parliaments is often in question. The parliaments' presidents are elected via elections which have no minimum threshold for turnout, while students who not part of the parliamentary establishment are often prevented from even running in these polls. These bodies thus lack transparency and are often little more than surrogates of Macedonia's actual political elites.

The illegitimacy of these nominally student-led bodies has only further eroded the confidence of youth in Macedonia in their ability to and the possibility of genuinely influence decision-making processes in the country and within their own communities. Nevertheless, the fifty or so registered civil society organizations in the country have attempted to pick-up much of this slack, concentrating their efforts, for instance, on the deeply unpopular 2011 Law on Youth. The law, drafted by the previous VMRO-DPMNE led government, was drawn up without input from actual youth groups in the country and proposed to stack newly created "youth organizations" with politically appointed representatives. In another instance, the Youth Educational Forum, collected over 11,000 signatures in support of comprehensive reforms and autonomy of youth governance. The establishment of the self-organized National Youth Council, for instance, significantly furthered this goal; a body created in 2013 through genuine consultations and compromised of over 53 member organizations and youth groups. Still, in Macedonia, such grassroots efforts are the exception rather than the norm.

Meanwhile, since receiving EU candidate status in 2005, Macedonia's accession progress has slowed significantly. The decade of VMRO-DPMNE rule since 2006 has significantly eroded the quality of Macedonia's democracy as shown by Freedom House's yearly reports.<sup>4</sup> It is in this broader climate that youth in Macedonia have emerged a major civil society and political factor, reacting to both popular perceptions of their assumed apathy

and the general crisis of democratic governance. In the process, they have created spaces for free expression and deliberation, and asserted their right to participate and hold accountable the country's ruling regime; itself a transformative feat.

## The Growth of Social Movements in Macedonia

Historically, university students in Macedonia have not been especially politically active as previously noted. After large scale protests in 1997, there were no particularly noticeable youth protest movements in the following decade or so. The 1997 protests, however, were formative and focused on mobilizations against the introduction of Albanian language classes at the Pedagogy Academy.<sup>5</sup> These actions took place in the context of growing ethnic polarization in Macedonia and, arguably, contributed to the country's worsening political situation which culminated in 2001. Moreover, they signified a civil society that was still primarily informed by sectarian and nationalist grievances rather than concerns with democratic legitimacy.

The June 2011 protests against police brutality, however, represented a significant shift within Macedonian civil society. The protests began by with demands for accountability following the beating death of a young man in Skopje at the hands of a police officer; a case on which the government stayed pointedly quiet.<sup>6</sup> The protests lasted for weeks and were organized primarily through social media, through the Twitter hashtag #протестирам (I protest). Unlike the events in 1997, the protests in 2011 explicitly focused on the question of government accountability and saw a significant degree of multi-ethnic participation and organizing.

A similarly unified trend was seen in the emergence the student plenum in 2014. These particular manifestations occurred in the context of Macedonia's wiretap scandal which (in)directly led to the collapse of the Gruevski government three years later. Initially, the protests concerned government-led changes to the Law on Higher Education, which imposed mandatory pre-graduation exams which were to be supervised by government officials rather than by university administrations. The students saw the move as a form of government intimidation and as an attempt to interfere with the

3 Mircevska Danilovski et al., "High School Organizing and Participation," *Youth Educational Forum* (2013).

4 Freedom House, "Macedonia Country Report," *Nations in Transit 2016* (2016).

5 Boris Georgievski, "Ten Years Since the Protests that Changed the Political Ambience," *Utreniski vesnik*, February 16, 2017.

6 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonians Protest Over 'Fatal Police Beating,'" *Balkan Insight*, June 7, 2011.

autonomy of the universities.<sup>7</sup> In response to the proposed changes, students organized plenums (public meetings), and announced three large scale protests in late 2014 which received genuinely widespread support. The rise of the student plenums inspired other social groups to self-organize and take action to advocate for their interests in similar fashion; plenums were formed by “students, professors, part-time workers, journalists, teachers (...) and high-school students” in quick succession.<sup>8</sup> Together, these groups pushed for the scrapping of the proposed changes.

Nevertheless, their demands to the Ministry of Education and Science, the president, and parliament all failed to elicit a response and the proposed changes were signed into law in a late night session of parliament. In response to this, student groups occupied the University of Skopje for three weeks, proclaiming the space an “autonomous territory,” in which they held lectures and workshops on civic resistance, protest organizing, and democracy.<sup>9</sup> Through this sustained pressure, a working group was formed with representatives from the plenum and other institutions to discuss the draft changes in the Law on Higher Education, which led to the legislation being temporarily suspended.

This movement particularly empowered high school students, who adopted the plenum model and loudly voiced their opposition to external testing and graduation exams in their own schools. In response to a lack of acknowledgment from the Ministry of Education, the students occupied a public park across from the Ministry, asking for a hearing with the minister. In response, the students were exposed to malicious media articles, threats, propagandistic and hateful materials spread in their schools by government surrogates. There were even reports of students being locked in their schools by administrators, as an attempt to halt their participation in the protests.<sup>10</sup> The national Ombudsman was forced react to these incidents by urging schools to protect rights of their students to free assembly.<sup>11</sup>

In 2015, the opposition Social Democrats uncovered further wiretap records, with some estimates claiming that some 20,000 citizens were il-

legally recorded by the government. The recordings also showed interference with the electoral process, the judiciary, the media, and other numerous other criminal acts VRMO-DPMNE officials. Next, Zoran Zaev, the then opposition leader, began publishing leaked audio of conversations between government officials.<sup>12</sup> These revelations and tapes deepened the country’s political crisis still further and led to massive anti-government protests in the spring of 2015. Once again, the citizens organized under the banner of #протестирам.

May 5, 2015 was a turning point in the protests and saw the unprecedented use of police brutality against the crowds. Recent recordings had shown that officials had known about and conspired to cover up the murder of the young man, Martin Neshkovski, in 2011.<sup>13</sup> The leak caused a firestorm of outrage and prompted angry crowds to attempt to storm the government complex in the capital. The protests were dispersed by riot police later in the evening, who then pursued the scattering crowds throughout the city, cornering individuals and brutalizing them. The flagrant instances of police brutality prompted Human Rights Watch to state that: “Macedonian authorities should promptly investigate these serious allegations of excessive and unwarranted force and hold police officers responsible.”<sup>14</sup> Despite international and local concern, however, these cases remain unaddressed by the authorities.

On May 10, a shootout in Kumanovo between police forces and a criminal clan, referred to by the authorities as ethnic Albanian militants, resulted in the deaths of eight police officers and ten gunmen.<sup>15</sup> In the ensuing controversy, a number of government ministers resigned, as well as the head of the state intelligence agency.<sup>16</sup> Then on May 17, one of the largest protests in the country’s history occurred as opposition leaders and civil society activists called on the Gruevski government to step down, call for new elections, and resolving the country’s still worsening political crisis. These and similar subsequent efforts eventually resulted in the signing of the Przino Agreement in July, which was brokered by the EU and U.S., and which eventually

7 Erwan Fouéré, “Macedonian Student’s Plenum – A Cry for Respect,” *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, December 15, 2014.

8 Branimir Staletović, “A reflection on the emerging politics of resistance in Macedonia,” *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, February 25, 2015.

9 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, “Macedonia Protesting Students Occupy Faculties,” *Balkan Insight*, February 11, 2015.

10 Filip Stojanovski, “Thousands of High School Students Protest throughout Macedonia,” *Global Voices*, March 22, 2015.

11 National Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia, *Annual Report for 2014*, pg. 14.

12 Andrew MacDowell, “Fears for Macedonia’s fragile democracy amid ‘coup’ and wiretap claims,” *The Guardian*, February 27, 2015.

13 “Zaev’s ‘bomb’: Nikola Gruevski tried to hide the truth about Martin Neshkovski,” *Meta News Agency*, May 5, 2015.

14 “Macedonia: Police Violence at a Protest,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 22, 2015.

15 Sinisa Jakov Marusic and Ervin Qafmolla, “Calm Returns to Devastated Macedonian Town,” *Balkan Insight*, May 11, 2015.

16 Sinisa Jakov Marusic, “Ministers Quit as Macedonia’s Turmoil Deepens,” *Balkan Insight*, May 13, 2015.

led to the resignation of Prime Minister Gruevski,<sup>17</sup> the establishment of a Special Prosecutor, the holding of new elections and, finally, the creation on a new Social Democratic (SDSM) led government.<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately, each of these breakthroughs came on the back of major civil society mobilizations. The refusal of civil society activists persisted even as President Ivanov, a VMRO-DPMNE official, repeatedly attempt to obstruct the work of the Special Prosecutor and the formation of a new government. Daily protests, across Macedonia, maintained pressure on the Gruevski regime and its holdovers, however, and prompted further negotiations and international mediation, which eventually, as noted, led to the collapse of the government. Especially powerful and symbolic in this context was the so called "Colorful Revolution," the activists' response to the VMRO-DPMNE's grotesque re-design of Skopje's downtown core. Reacting to gross misuse of public funds in building baroque facades and towering statues to the tune of hundreds of millions of Euros,<sup>19</sup> the crowds pelted the new government offices and facades with paint-filled balloons.<sup>20</sup> The tactic caught international media attention, dumping more unwanted pressure attention on the scandal plagued government.

## Conclusions

Macedonia's mounting civic engagement emerged at a time when democratic deterioration in the country was at its apex. And despite their instrumental role of civil society in charting a way out of the post-2014 political crisis in Macedonia, activists, in particular students, remain largely shut out of the democratic decision-making process. It remains to be seen whether this fact will change significantly with the formation of a new government in 2017.

17 Aleksandar Dimishkovski, "Macedonian Prime Minister Steps Down, but Tensions Over Vote Linger," *The New York Times*, January 15, 2016.

18 "Agreement in Skopje to overcome political crisis," *European Commission*, July 15, 2016.

19 Kole Casule, "Macedonian president stands by wiretap pardons despite protests," *Reuters*, April 15, 2015.

20 Conor Dillon, "Protesters hit Macedonia's capital with paint balls and soap suds in a 'Colorful Revolution,'" *Deutsche Welle*, April 20, 2015.

Nevertheless, the crisis precipitated by the VMRO-DPMNE has activated the civil consciousness of many in Macedonia and turned civil society into a real thorn in the eye of the former Gruevski government but political elites more generally. Attempts by the Gruevski regime in late 2016, however, to specifically target civil society organization, as supposed "agents" of George Soros,<sup>21</sup> nevertheless had a significant chilling effect on activist groups in the country.<sup>22</sup> Also worrying was the government's attempt to create government-sponsored civil society organizations and protests movements, which claimed to represent the authentic voice of Macedonia's "real" citizens who had been silenced by supposedly Western-funded protest movements.

Each of these attempts, however, has only further crystallized the genuine need for an active and autonomous civil society sector in Macedonia, especially with respect to the pivotal role of youth. While the substantive articulation of a civil society, and mass movement and mass participation, presence in Macedonia occurred within the context of a worsening political and democratic climate, these groups have nevertheless staked out a clear position within the new social terrain in the country. In other words, this genie will not easily return to its bottle.

Still, much work remains to be done and civil society groups have continued to articulate coherent demands of local governments and the constructive role that international actors can also still play in Macedonia. On such document featured detailed proposals for each of these actors and represents a sophisticated analysis of the practical policy measures that are required to return Macedonia to the path of EU integration and democratization more broadly.<sup>23</sup> Even so, the path "back" to normalcy and progress will not be an easy or straight forward one. But civil society – and the leading role of youth therein – have shown that genuine agents of progress still exist in Macedonia.

21 "Macedonia: Ex-PM threatens foreign ambassadors, NGOs," *Deutsche Welle*, December 19, 2016.

22 Ellery Roberts Biddle, "Macedonia's Ruling Party Is Draining Civil Society Groups' Time and Money," *Global Voices AdVox*, February 26, 2016.

23 "Blueprint for Urgent Democratic Reforms," *Balkan Civil Society Development Network*, July 2016.

# Movements and Parties: Trends in Democratic Politics as Challenges for Social Democracy in Southern and Eastern Europe

Tina Olteanu and Dieter Segert

Democracy – or to be more specific, its practice<sup>1</sup> – in Eastern Europe is in crisis. One sign of this is the low satisfaction reported to *Eurobarometer* with the way democratic institutions work among citizens, with most institutions of representative democracy (i.e., political parties, parliaments, and governments) earning low levels of trust. In some, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, approval rates are up yet the general pattern shows that even these countries have been well below the EU average for many years.<sup>2</sup> In short, the results of this declining satisfaction are the crisis of representative governance and the rise in right wing populist parties.

## The Crisis of Representative Democracy in Southern and Eastern Europe

The crisis of representative democracy finds its expression foremost in a steady decline of electoral participation: throughout the region, voter turnout dropped by 10 and 20 per cent between 1989

and 2000.<sup>3</sup> In some countries, less than half of the electorate participates in parliamentary elections.<sup>4</sup> This lack of confidence in institutionalized politics affects not only governing but also opposition parties. The general alienation between politicians and citizens opens up lots of room for maneuver for populist parties, which capitalize on their supposed distinction from what they call “the establishment.”<sup>5</sup> In 2016, populist parties were either very influential

1 Philippe Schmitter argues that it is not the ideal of democracy but its performance that is in the crisis: “A widening of this gap between the real and the ideal characterizes the present crisis – hence the growing pressure not to dismantle or destroy democracy as such, but rather to change the way in which it is being practiced.” Philippe Schmitter, “Crisis and transition, but not decline,” *Journal of Democracy* 26:1 (2015), p. 32.

2 See Graph 1. Also see European Commission, *Eurobarometer* 62, 2004 and European Commission, *Eurobarometer* 83, 2015.

3 These statements refer to the author’s own calculations. Exceptions were only in Poland, Estonia and Hungary, where voting was already relatively low in the 1990s. See: Dieter Segert, “Das Scheitern zweier Utopien im Transformationsprozess Osteuropas,” *Kultursoziologie. Aspekte, Analysen, Argumente* 3 (2015): p. 29.

4 This concerns the following elections to the national parliament (year/s): Albania (2005, 2009), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996), Bulgaria (2013, 2014 – 51 per cent, Poland (all elections except for 1989 about below 50 per cent or even below, extreme: 2005 – 40 per cent), Romania (2008: 39 per cent, 2012: 42 per cent), Slovenia (2014), Ukraine (2014: 52 per cent), Kosovo (all elections were less than 50 per cent, except 2001, extreme: 2007: 40 per cent, 2014: 42 per cent).

5 There are also other surveys confirming these results (for Ukraine, see Dieter Segert, “Political Parties in Ukraine since the Orange Revolution,” in *Ukraine on its Way to Europe*, edited by Susanne Besters-Dilger [Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2009], pg. 50–51). In Bulgaria, half of respondents in 2012 supported the statement “whoever rules the country, nothing will really change”; see: Antoniy Todorov, “Politicheski izbori i demokraciya,” in *Kachestvoto na Demokracyata v Bulgaria*, edited by Dobri Kanev and Antoniy Todorov (Sofia: 2016), p.194. See also the analysis by Seán Hanley (“How the Czech Social Democrats were derailed by a billionaire populist,” Policy Network 2013), who speaks of a victorious advance of a “centrist populism” and “a new generation of protest parties.”

in setting the agenda in the political arena or were in office in a number of countries in the region, as in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. This trend has prevailed mainly since the early 2000s with some variations.

It is not surprising that social democratic parties in Eastern Europe are in deep trouble; while some are still in government, others have lost a great deal of political influence, and some have more or less vanished completely (see *Table 1*). While social democracy also came into crisis in Western Europe, particularly after 2008,<sup>6</sup> the specific reasons for its weakness in Eastern Europe are embedded in the post-socialist transformation.

### Social Justice, Political Equality, Solidarity, and the Populist Momentum

In Southern and Eastern Europe, alienation between citizens and political processes is rooted in a strong sense of injustice as a result of economic (re) development since the end of the Cold War. Some 96 per cent of polled Croatians say that the gap between rich and poor has increased; in 2016, an average of 90 per cent of respondents in the Western Balkans and Moldova agreed that the gap between the rich and the poor would increase further.<sup>7</sup> Perceptions of injustice are evidently dominant, and the perceived winners of the post-socialist transformations since 1989/1991 are politicians and entrepreneurs rather than ordinary people, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2009.<sup>8</sup> The poor reputation of party politics can easily be connected to corruption as well: in a 2013 study by Transparency International, 80 per cent of respondents in Serbia, 77 per cent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 76 per cent in Bulgaria and Romania described parties as “corrupt or extremely corrupt.”<sup>9</sup> Poverty is also one of the central challenges, which is clearly visible in high unemployment rates, especially among youth: about 63 per cent in Bosnia, 60 per cent in Kosovo, 50 per cent in Macedonia and Serbia, 40 per cent in Montenegro and Croatia, and almost 30 per cent in Albania in 2012. Approximately 20 per cent of the population

6 Henning Meyer and Karl-Heinz Spiegel, “What’s next for European social democracy,” *Renewal: A Journal of Social Democracy*, 18:1–2, (2010).

7 Regional Cooperation Council, “Balkan Barometer 2016: Public Opinion Survey” (Sarajevo: 2016), p. 77.

8 Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Two Decades after the Wall’s Fall. End of Communism Cheered But Now With More Reservations,” *Pew Research Center*, 2009, p. 1.

9 This survey was conducted in almost all countries in Eastern Europe except for Poland.

of these countries has difficulty satisfying their basic needs, such as food and clothing.<sup>10</sup>

This level of poverty and the inequality originated in the post-1989 economic transformations and has been shaped by a specific neoliberal mind set. Privatization has created an uneven distribution of wealth, while parties acted as informal privatization agencies and provided their executive staff with large shares of privatized state ownership.<sup>11</sup> The social democratic parties of Eastern Europe participated in government during these decisive years, and in some countries were the largest and most influential government parties. The collapses and loss of trust in the social democrats of Poland (2005), Hungary (2010), and Bulgaria (1997, 2009) were primarily caused by corruption scandals; this was the case for Slovakian and Czech social democratic parties as well.<sup>12</sup>

There is, however, certainly more than one cause for these collapses. Most parties paid lip service to social democratic values<sup>13</sup> but adopted them only superficially. At the same time, a departure from traditional left programs took place in Western Europe with the so called “Third Way,” which arguably moved many social democratic parties significantly to the right. Jean Michel de Waele argues that “the social-democratic software is infected with the neoliberal virus.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, even the basic social democratic motivation – protection of the weak against injustices and the risks of the (capitalist) market<sup>15</sup> – was only a secondary concern for these parties.

Social democratic parties have thus tended to contribute to the reduction of social democratic values, rather than trying to secure them in the

10 Regional Cooperation Council, “Balkan Barometer 2016: Public Opinion Survey” (Sarajevo: 2016), pp. 18, 29, 35.

11 Michael Ehrke, “Social Democratic Parties in Central and Southeast Europe. Organisations Based on Political Convictions or Management Agencies for the Government?” *FES Internationale Politikanalyse* (2010).

12 Milada Vachudova, “The positions and fortunes of social democratic parties in East Central Europe,” in *The Crisis of Social Democracy in Europe*, edited by Michael Keating and David McCrone (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 65.

13 Holmes and Lightfoot state in a more neutral way their concern for European social democracy: “Many of the parties from CEE learned to say the right things, but whether they had genuinely adopted those norms is another matter.” See: Michael Holmes and Simon Lightfoot, “Limited Influence? The Role of the Party of European Socialists in Shaping Social Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Government and Opposition* 46:1 (2011), p. 42.

14 Jean-Michel de Waele, “Conspicuous Absence: Social Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Interview with Aurélie Windels,” *Near Futures Online* (2016).

15 Michael Ehrke, “Social Democratic Parties in Central and Southeast Europe. Organisations Based on Political Convictions or Management Agencies for the Government?” *FES Internationale Politikanalyse* (2010), pp. 5.

course of the transformation. Populist parties in many countries of Eastern Europe filled the ideological void with an exclusivist notion of solidarity, declaring themselves to be the defenders of the interests of the people against the political establishment. However, the category of “the people” here implies only the interests of a nationally and ethnically defined community, not those of immigrants or ethnic minorities. Thus social democratic values are superficially imitated but perverted in practice. In short, the key element of social solidarity is missing.

### Right Wing Populist Parties

A central question of debate among social democrats since the economic crisis in 2008 has been why they did not profit from the failure of neoliberal social policy to respond to the crisis. The answer is as simple as it is frustrating: “Social Democrats had no political alternative to offer when confidence in the neo-liberalism started to wane.”<sup>16</sup> While this analysis refers to the established social democratic parties of the West, it can be easily applied to Eastern Europe as well. However, there was and still is a force that offers an alternative: nationalist-populist parties. They proved themselves capable of turning the financial crisis into political capital. Independent from those parties, the salient issue of social justice was also taken up by various protest movements.

Populist parties were better prepared for post-2008 political developments because they were anchored in society in many ways. The Hungarian Fidesz party had already developed a whole network of citizens’ circles (*Polgári körök*) throughout the country before the 2010 election.<sup>17</sup> Poland’s Law and Justice party (PiS) has close ties to conservative circles of the Catholic Church (Radio Maryja) and local clubs of the “Gazeta Polska,” rather than the elite in the distant capital. Meanwhile, traditional social networks of the social democrats, such as trade unions, were considerably weakened and fragmented after 1989. PiS spoke out in favour of (specific) disadvantaged groups such as working families, the elderly, and women. Fidesz, however, has created a wild mixture of nationalist populist policies aimed at the middle class, not the

poor. Tóth labels this system “selective economic nationalism.”<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, banking taxes, flat taxes, and partial fixed exchange rates for Swiss francs loans are enforced, while social benefits are reduced.<sup>19</sup> These two examples show that right wing parties have developed different strategies to use parts of traditionally social democratic policies by adding a nationalist spin to them. It is likely that more examples like these will emerge in other countries of the region but also in the West in the years to come.

### What Is to Be Done?

Not everything looks unfavorable for social democracy. Southern and Eastern Europe has experienced a wave of demonstrations and protest activities in recent years. Apart from general protests against the political establishment, social demands came up as salient issues. The protests in Bulgaria in 2013 over rising utility prices were motivated by great poverty. In Romania, people demonstrated against the austerity policies of the government in 2012. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the question of ethnic identity usually subsumes almost any public debate, social protests erupted in 2013 and 2014. Both times, reigning ethno-nationalist parties attempted to delegitimize the protests using well-known ethno-national rhetoric but failed. In 2014, the BiH protests were spurred by the shutdown of factories in Tuzla. While there were violent clashes between protesters and the police, genuine attempts were made to transfer this momentum into a sustainable movement for grassroots democracy. Poland’s right-wing populist turn was also accompanied by protests and protest movements, such as the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (*Komitet Obrony Demokracji*), though the Committee is based exclusively on liberal values and excludes social questions. These positive examples demonstrate that there is a willingness on the part of citizens to protest illiberal government policies, social maladministration, or issues with lack of access to proper education or healthcare services.

Yet for all of the reasons mentioned previously, the delegitimized social democratic parties are not considered political allies for most demonstrators in the region. Hesitant and weak linkages

16 Henning Meyer and Karl-Heinz Spiegel, “What’s next for European social democracy,” *Renewal: A Journal of Social Democracy*, 18:1–2 (2010), p. 3.

17 Mateusz Falkowski, “Budapest in Warschau? Regierungsfreundliche Mobilisierung in Polen und in Ungarn,” *Polen Analysen* 174 (2016), pg. 10.

18 András Tóth, “Das Ende der Leidensgeschichte? Der Aufstieg des selektiven Wirtschaftsnationalismus in Ungarn,” in *Spaltende Integration: Der Triumph gescheiterter Ideen in Europa – revisited. Zehn Länderstudien*, Steffen Lehndorf (ed.) (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2014).

19 Joachim Becker, “Der selektive Wirtschaftsnationalismus der Fidesz-Regierung,” *Kurswechsel* 3 (2015).

can be observed in a number of cases. Demos, for example, is a newly established platform in Romania, which lists solidarity, social justice, and equality in its manifesto yet there is no reference to social democracy. In Poland, the new party Razem also demands a far-reaching rethinking; they state that Razem is oriented towards ideas of social democracy and democratic socialism yet there is an evident distance from traditional notions of social democracy.<sup>20</sup>

The social democratic label in this region still seems to be severely damaged by the experience of post-socialist transformation. A well-maintained distance from the mainstream social democratic parties seems unavoidable for protestors, yet a window of opportunity for an alternative policy has slowly begun to emerge after the long neoliberal transformation. A public debate about alternatives is in progress but what is clear is that social democracy is still struggling to renew its contacts with social movements, new left wing actors, and their interests, fears, and struggles.

For their revitalization, the social democratic parties of Southern and Eastern Europe must immerse themselves into debates about alternative political solutions. They must rediscover their so-

cial democratic core and begin to critically reflect on the “dark years” of neoliberalism and their role within them. Only then can the project of political (re)positioning and rebooting succeed. In some countries, there is an independent left wing policy debate, unlike the period in the immediate aftermath of 1989. If it is truly the case that parties that claim to be social democratic in Eastern Europe have only rarely been motivated by genuine social democratic values,<sup>21</sup> then this strategic debate is vital for the broader process of civic education and progressive revitalization.

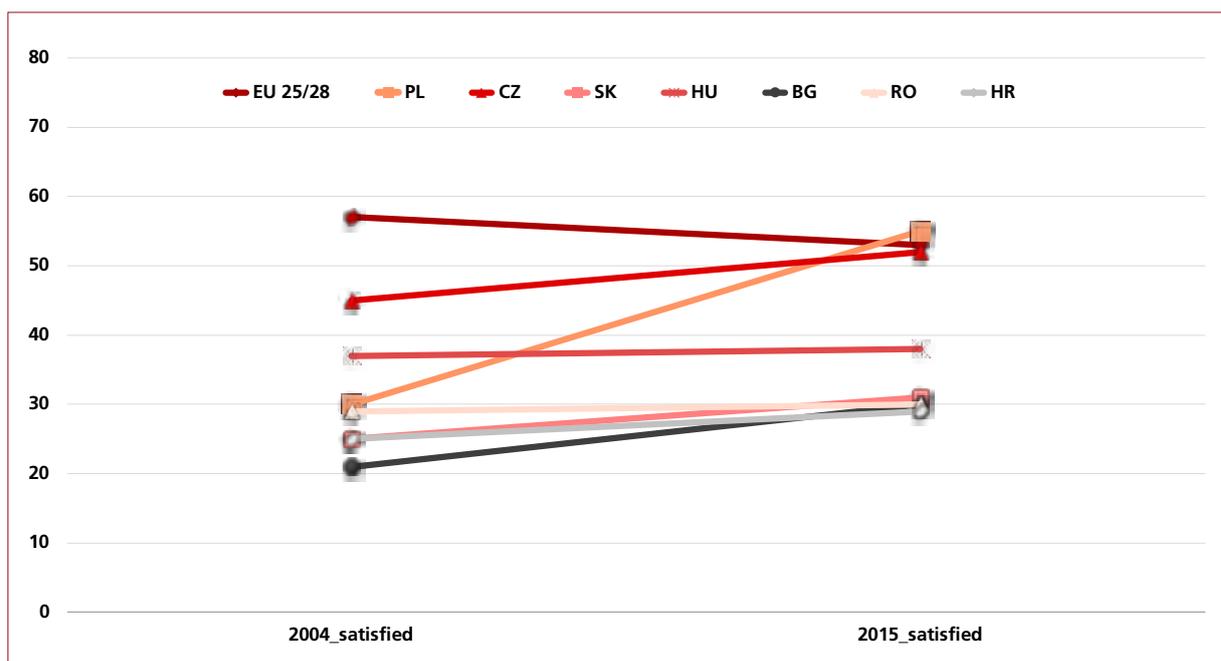
Unlike in the 1990s, however, this process cannot be initiated primarily from the outside, i.e., from the Western European member parties of the PES (Party of European Socialists) that are struggling themselves with their social democratic identity. Only authentic regional actors can make a difference. Still, international partners like the FES can and should contribute by supporting those individuals, organizations, and groups that promote real social democratic values, regardless of their chances of electoral success. Right now, social democracy is in need of rehabilitation – and that is a long term project.

20 Adam Traczyk, “Polens Podemos. Die neue linke Partei Razem will anders sein,” *Kommentar, ipg-Journal* (2016).

21 Michael Ehrke, “Social Democratic Parties in Central and Southeast Europe. Organisations Based on Political Convictions or Management Agencies for the Government?” *FES Internationale Politikanalyse* (2010).

## Annex

Figure 1: Satisfaction with National Democracy



Source: European Commission, *Eurobarometer* 62 (2004) and 83 (2015).

## Movements and Parties: Trends in Democratic Politics as Challenges for Social Democracy

**Table 1: Successes of Social Democratic Parties in Eastern Europe**

Country/Social Democratic party (member of PES)	First participation in government after 1989 (as leading party = PM or in coalition)	Successive participations in government (years)	Breakdown or big loss Year: decline of electorate (earlier results and results in the year of decline in per cent)	Recent situation of the party
Poland/SLD	1995–1997 (PM)	2001–2005 (PM)	Breakdown 2005: 41→11	Insignificant
Slovakia/SDL → SMER-SD	1998–2002 (SDL in coalition)	2006–2010; 2012–recently: PM (SMER-SD)	Breakdown SDL 2002: 15→1 Big loss – SMER 2016: 44→28	Governing
Czechia/ČSSD	1998–2006 PM (minority gov.)	2014–recently: PM	Big loss 2010: 32→22	Governing
Hungary/MSZP	1994–1998 PM	2002–2010 PM	Big loss 41→19	In opposition
Romania/PDSR (...) PSD	1992–1996 PM	2000–2004 PM 2012–2015 PM		Governing
Bulgaria/BSP	1990–1991 PM	1994–1997 PM 2005–2009 PM 2013–2014	Big losses 1997: 44→22 2009: 31→18 2014: 27→15	In opposition
Slovenia/ZLSD (...) SD	1992–2004 (in coalition)	2008–2011 (PM) 2014 (in coalition)	Big losses 2011: 31→11	In opposition
Serbia/DS (associated)	2000–2003 (in coalition)	2007–2008 (PM/in coalition)	Big loss 2012: 38→22	In opposition
Croatia/SDP	2000–2003 PM	2011–2015/16 (PM)	Big loss: 2003: 41→23	In opposition
Bosnia-Herzegovina/SDP	2000–2002 (in coalition/PM)	2011–2015 (PM)	Big losses: 1996: 12→4 2002: 18→10 2014: 17→7	In opposition
Macedonia/SDSM	1992–1998 PM	2002–2006 PM	Big loss 2006: 41→23	In opposition
Albania/PS	1991 PM	1997–2005 PM 2013–present PM	Big losses 1992: 56→26 2005: 42→9	Governing

Source: Parties and Elections in Europe: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/>; own compilation.

**Table 2: Who Benefited from Changes Since 1989/1991?**

Country	Ordinary people	Business owners	Politicians
CZ	53	86	94
PL	42	85	92
RU	21	85	86
SK	21	81	97
HU	17	63	94
BG	11	82	94
UA	10	82	92

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Two Decades after the Wall’s Fall: End of Communism Cheered But Now With More Reservations,” *Pew Research Center* (2009).



# Epilogue: The Policymaker's Takeaway

*Jasmin Mujanović*

In the interest of making this volume a genuinely politically relevant one, I have distilled what I believe to be the policy implications of the previous nine chapters into a brief memorandum. These recommendations should not be taken as a comprehensive review of the texts in question but rather as an attempt to distill their collective policy implications. And in this respect, this account does not necessarily reflect the views of the other contributors to this volume.

## The Key Points

- Civil society is a complex, dynamic, and necessary segment of any democratic polity. It is not limited to donor funded NGOs, however, but also includes local social movements, youth groups, religious associations, and trade unions, many of which have an antagonistic (and even reactionary) stance towards traditional parliamentary regimes.
- Since the end of one party rule, civil society and social movements in Southeastern Europe have largely organized in response to the perceived shallowness and inequity of the broader post-socialist transition. In this respect, they have also deliberately distanced themselves from existing left wing and social democratic parties, which they have seen as complicit in the worst aspects of post-transition governance.
- The left in Southeastern Europe is fragmented and characterized by significant mutual distrust between left and progressive political parties, donor funded or professional NGOs, and the emerging (populist or antagonistic) social movements and civil society in the region. This fragmentation has (in)directly contributed to the overall decline in democratic governance and the ease with which right wing and nationalist actors have navigated the post-2008 period.
- The path towards democratic renewal in the region is necessarily predicated on a rapprochement between these three sides and the development of genuine forums, platforms, and channels for political organizing and mobilizing towards progressive policy objectives.
- Nevertheless, political parties cannot and should not view themselves as the “leaders” of this (re)united left. While the parliamentary and electoral struggle is vital, democratic progress also requires an autonomous civil society. And realistically speaking, since 2008, it has been social movements and civil society that have advanced genuine progressive causes in Southeastern Europe, not the respective party establishments.
- By the same token, activists need to recognize that structural change in their respective societies will be impossible to achieve without them eventually taking their struggle to the realm of electoral politics. This may mean (re)joining existing social democratic parties or it may mean founding their own electoral blocs but the parliament cannot be avoided.

- Finally, international and local actors, policy-makers, and activists alike need to recognize that the current crisis of governance in South-eastern Europe is not unique. Even the most prosperous societies have, in their own time, had prolonged experiences with corruption, clientelism, inequality, and post-conflict and/or post-authoritarian transition. Nevertheless, the way forward will require a two-pronged effort.
- First, as in their own societies, international policymakers will need to work with civil society representatives from Southeastern Europe, including those who currently operate outside of established institutions and organizations. This will also necessarily mean limiting contacts with those political actors – especially those within established institutions – who have (consistently) shown themselves to be corrupt and compromised. In short, if we want new leaders and stakeholders, we need to work to create the conditions for their emergence.
- Second, at the local level, civil society and the parliamentary left will need to work together to build coalitions that can not only win elections but create a durable participatory culture. This, in the long run, is the only guarantee for both the creation of fairer, more tolerant, and peaceful polities in Southeastern Europe and for the re-emergence of a viable and vibrant, progressive left, and social democratic politics.

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- Social Democratic Politics and Values
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