

ANTI-SOROS RALLIES AND BLAZING EU FLAGS

Civil society and social movements between populism and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe

The region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has been seen as a site for permanent, though marginal tensions on the periphery of the European Union. The democratic structures of the states in the region are generally interpreted as lagging behind their Western European counterparts; institutions have remained in a transitory state halfway between authoritarianism and “real” democracy, whatever that concept might mean. Similarly, the movements have been regarded as rudimentary, aiming to fulfil their goal as guardians of the democratic establishment, and counterbalancing rising extremist populist tendencies, in accordance with the dominant visions towards civil society around the transition period. This discourse has been internalized by the movements, too, and the same views emerged on the NGO scene. The movements deliberately and openly aimed to “catch up” with their Western counterparts, and to establish a movement culture similar to that in the US or in Western Europe.

This special issue of *socio.hu* is based on the argument that movements and civil society in the CEE region do not, first of all, follow a linear development path, but have emerged locally, responding to both the local structural, political conditions and global developments. Within this, we can identify a new wave of (predominantly) grassroots movements of the new decade starting with the 2010s. In discussion with our colleagues from CEE, we have found striking similarities among local phenomena throughout the region.² These similarities include dominant narratives and issues of mobilization (such as the anti-Soros rallies, which have brought the masses to the streets in several countries from Hungary, through Slovakia to Macedonia), dominant frames (the symbolism of the EU flag as a division line in societies), or forms of protest, which primarily means the return of the grassroots mobilizations and street demonstrations as a dominant form of protest. We claim that just like the out-of-focus political events and mobilizations, such as the regular protests that took place in Macedonia on a daily basis throughout 2016, or the large anti-corruption mass demonstrations in Romania, to mention a few, and just like the regional parallels between these phenomena, which can be traced back to the structural conditions originating in the post-transitional societies, deserve more attention from the scholarship. This is the main reason why this issue predominantly includes case studies of recent developments in CEE countries. We believe that these protests, rallies, forms of transactional activism, NGO activism and new forms

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of populist actions (among others) communicate to each other at least as much as to transnational movements outside the region.

After a short period following the transitions of 1989, it seemed that civil society has lost its attractiveness for the international social science community in discussing the political phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead, non-profit theory has occupied a central role in the academic discourses, in this region at least, focusing mainly on the different kinds of services provided by non-governmental organizations (see e.g. Glózer 2008). The term *civil society* was mainly used to describe the associational activities assumed to have an impact on politics in the West, especially in the United States.³ If Central and Eastern Europe features in these debates, it does so as a region in which civil society is weak and stagnant (Howard 2003, Ost 2011). Thus it only serves as a special CEE case in a collection of studies, if it is even worthy of examination.

Subsequent to the economic crisis, from the early 2010s on, there has been a new wave of protest and social movements, and renewed public and academic debates about civil society and the role of social movements in both the West and East (della Porta–Mattoni 2014). The Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall street movement, together with the Greek and Spanish Indignants redirected attention to more spontaneous forms of political participation and inspired debates about the role of these movements in the democratization of the exhausted democracies of the Western world (della Porta 2014, 2013, Graeber 2013, Glasius–Pleyers 2013).

Although Central and Eastern Europe was not an exception in terms of political turbulence and intensified protests, its movements have largely been neglected by mainstream social movement studies, and the broader political and social science. CEE countries experienced the largest mobilizations in their contemporary modern history as democratic independent countries during the past few years. The Hungarian protests concerning media freedom, the internet tax, or education, including the series of demonstrations in 2017 in support of the Central European University that has been under attack from the government, brought tens of thousands of people to the streets. In Romania, a wave of protests swept the country, driven by various issues from environment protection (the Rosia Montana gold mine) to anti-austerity protests and new, massive involvement in protest action, as introduced by Gubernat and Rammelt in this issue. Similar protests events occurred throughout the region: the anti-governmental demonstrations in Bulgaria in 2012–2013, discussed in this issue by both Tsoneva and Stoyanov–Sayfutdinova from different perspectives; the Ukrainian Euromaidan in 2013; the protests in Bosnia in 2013–2014; demonstrations against the planned regulations of the Polish government; the recent developments turning Macedonian politics upside down. These demonstrations were significant in terms of their numbers and impacts compared to their Western or Eastern counterparts, which has refuted the traditional understanding of CEE “apathy” (Petrova–Tarrow 2007, Piotrowski 2013).

Even though there have been different structural processes that were dominant within the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the period after the global economic crisis, has brought about a new turn for social movements, even though it did not entail the crisis of the welfare state, as some authors point out (Gagyi 2015, 2017, Stenning–Hörschelmann 2008). Around the time of regime change, human rights and libertarian issues were under focus from civil society and the NGO world (Gagyi–Ivancheva 2013), as was also pointed

³ See the debates about the decline of civil society in response to Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital* (1995).

out by Ondřej Slačálek and Eva Svobodová in this issue. At the same time, economic issues were not directly associated with the movement or civil sector within the literature on social movements. This has changed essentially in the 2010s, when economic issues also emerged among the traditionally articulated political cleavages, and anti-austerity issues attracted masses to the streets in several countries in the region that had been out of sight, from Romania through Bulgaria, to Czechia.

The debates about civil society and social movements also re-appeared in the region, in the scholarly and in public debates (e.g. Antal 2016, Vandor et al. 2017, Shevtsova this issue). Probably the most well-known “example” of public debates and policies is the Putinist government’s attempt to label civil organizations as foreign agents. This might be the most extreme policy action against civil organizations, but it is not the only one in the region. After the Hungarian government carried out several attacks on Hungarian CSOs (Torma 2016), the Hungarian parliament also passed legislation that obliges civil organizations to label themselves as “foreign-funded organizations” if they receive a certain amount of money from foreign sources.⁴ The Polish government initiated the National Freedom Institute, aimed to conduct the distribution of public funds among civil society organizations, controlled by governmental forces.⁵ The infamous anti-Soros campaigns in Hungarian and Macedonian politics (among others) affected not only the Open Society Foundation but organizations supported by them, while anti-immigrant sentiments that infiltrated the region with the migration crisis were also fuelled by the political and media elites, and led to widespread and popular hate campaigns that the traditional political establishment had no responses for (see Slačálek–Svobodová).

These policies highlight the fact that there are certain similarities and striking parallels between policy agendas in the region. Democracy has its problems in the West, as the growing disappointment, lack of representation, the international environment is increasingly harsh towards human rights implementation (Carothers–Brechenmacher 2014, Open Democracy 2016) and nationalist populism is spreading (Mudde 2016), although Western countries are still considered to be stable democracies.

In Central and Eastern Europe, however, after a short period of institutional or procedural democracy, governments are increasingly authoritarian (see Csillag–Szelényi 2015, Varga–Freiberg–Inan 2012, Ágh 2014). However, it is not a unified trend; in some cases, the hopes for democratization appeared just recently. According to Shevtsova or Stipic (this issue), this is the case in Ukraine or in Bosnia Herzegovina. It is as important to emphasize that there are important developments in the social movement sector or in the organized civil society of some countries, and to highlight that even in these cases, countries are fighting with populism, authoritarian traditions, politics and economics wired with interpersonal relations, and are falling into corruption.

The mass movements of the United States and Southern Europe which attracted the attention of scholars were undoubtedly seen as a result of the economic crisis in 2008 (della Porta 2015). As Spöri and Jaitner (this issue) argue, in Central and Eastern Europe, the situation is more complex. Although these new protest waves have some roots in the crises, it seems they are more likely to originate in multiple crises of economics

4 Except for some forms of organizations, such as sport and religious associations and foundations, and except for European Union funds received through the Hungarian governmental institutions.

5 www.hfhr.pl/en/national-freedom-institute-act-helsinki-committee-in-poland-issues-statement

and more importantly, politics. Thus, these movements, while they have claims concerning austerity policies, cannot be interpreted as anti-austerity movements.

As anti-austerity movements, movements in Southern Europe were clearly an expression of the disappointment in the whole political and economic elite. On the one hand, it is true that in CEE countries, disappointment in the elites is even stronger than in other parts of Europe, this disappointment tends to transform into political passivity than into movements (see, e.g. Oross–Róna–Szabó this issue, Grönlund–Setälä 2012). On the other hand, certain groups are ready to act, and when they do, their movements in many cases can be understood only in relation to national politics as having a strong anti-government, or oppositional characteristic. This anti-government characteristic is due to the attempts of close political (and sometimes discursive) opportunity structures by those in power. By closing opportunity structures, politics strengthen the political polarization of these countries. While most of these countries are polarized by “default” (see Stipic, Stoyanov–Sayfutdinova, Tsoneva, this issue) and political elites might only react to this default status, their policies result in further polarization and as such, foster protests, since no official forms of voice are left to the opposition.

The oppositional characteristic and the disappointment in political elites leads to a twofold expectation: local actors always expect (or fear) that protests will affect the voting behaviour of the masses. In some cases (as in Macedonia recently) this might be true, but as Stoyanov and Sayfutdinova show, it is unlikely to be the case. Instead, this expectation turns the core of these movements into political parties, which usually backfires: distrust in politics causes the masses to turn away from the new parties as well, staying passive in party politics or in voting.

The strong involvement of party politics and polarization leads to another feature of these movements: while oppositions try to search for powerful allies, governments present these allies as a threat to national sovereignty. The multi-governmental framework of the European Union serves as an excellent ground to these discourses, which might be why movements frame the European Union as a main reference point and as a potential ally in their fight for democracy.

The interplay between distrust, protest, new party formation and electoral behaviour might contribute to another important aspect of CEE societies: the sharp differentiation of civil and political society. The continuous cycle of distrust (in the old elites), protest, new party formation and distrust (in the new parties) on the one hand gives easy-to-use tools to the elites to discredit any new actor, accusing them of striving for power and maintains this unrealistic expectation of a separated, pure civil society (Gerő–Kopper 2013). Furthermore, some recent conflicts in Bulgaria reflected on the contentious perception of protests within a controversial and politically overheated civil society, but also drew division lines between citizens and anti-citizens, based on their (supposed) attitudes towards democracy, as discussed by Tsoneva in this issue.

This pure civil society, or social movement sector, is often presented as a unified one, which is fighting against authoritarian and populist forces. However, as this issue highlights, this view is far from reality. The once-oppositional forces might be accused of corruption or elitism by the same protesters as before (see Stoyanov–Sayfutdinova); the groups expressing their views through different forms of participation strive for

different values and lifestyles, including non-democratic ones (see Oross–Róna–Szabó or Gubernat–Rammelt for lifestyle mobilizations); donors and their professionalized partner organizations might prevent new actors from strengthening (Shevtsova); political groups continuously fight to create the dominant identity of the nation (Stipic).

Thus, the main problematique is not the weakness, or absence of civil society, as the Western-oriented political science and political sociology put it. The main challenge that civil society and social movements face is that they are caught in between the need for mass mobilization for the sake of democracy (while this mass mobilization is based on an alienation from politics, with anti-elitist attitudes), and national, ethnic identities. Thus, if new actors emerge from the protests and want to widen their opportunities for change, they might turn to (nationalist) populism again. Which might be seen as an adequate choice in the short term, but in the long term, it clearly contradicts the aims formulated by protesters.

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THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?

Protest and crisis-prone development in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989²

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ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, protests against austerity and raising social inequality have increasingly taken place in many regions of the world. Central and Eastern Europe is one of those regions, and has recently experienced several large-scale protest movements. These protests were partially triggered by intensified austerity measures, higher unemployment rates and growing dissatisfaction with democracy. However, the particular reasons to protest are diverse, ranging from environmental to social or anti-corruption issues.

Despite the differences that exist in Central and Eastern Europe countries, we argue that they share a common pattern in terms of the societal environment of protest. As a first step, we will critically assess the forms of protest participation in Central and Eastern Europe and map out common features of the identified crisis-prone development since 1989. In the subsequent part, we will argue that such features as the growing gap between the political elite and citizens, harsh individual economic conditions and a high level of frustrated expectations have become more visible and have heavily contributed to the increasing unrest.

We conclude that the crisis-prone development since 1989 has created an ambivalent ecology of protest in Central and Eastern Europe. The vast majority of citizens face economic hardship and do not have the means to interfere with or participate in democratic processes as effectively as the political and economic elites do. A growing number of citizens, however, appear to be more willing to raise their voices visibly in public. Secondly, the increase in protests indicates a deeper societal crisis. In this sense, Central and Eastern Europe can be understood as a “laboratory” for testing the social conditions of democracy.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe, protest, crisis, transformation

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THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?

Protest and crisis-prone development in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989

PROTEST IN THE PAST YEARS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Since the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, Southern European countries have received substantial scholarly and public attention. However, Central and Eastern Europe³ has been equally affected by the crisis through intensified austerity measures, higher unemployment rates and increasing dissatisfaction with democracy. Similar to Southern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe has experienced several large-scale protest movements in recent years. The reasons for citizens to protest are fairly diverse, ranging from single-issue protests⁴ to broader protest movements against the political establishment.⁵ These – in a long and diverse list of protests – represent the starting point of this article. Although large-scale protests are not a new phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe, they have emerged within a relatively new international constellation: the global economic crisis and a global increase in protest.

At first glance, the protests in the region taking place in times of economic decline seem to share comparable features, such as claiming similar policy changes in favour of democracy, addressing the growing gap between representatives and the people, and experiencing equal reactions from the political elite. However, parallel to such protests, right-wing and anti-pluralistic protests are also growing, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Right-wing protests frame their claims in an allegedly democratic way and demand more citizen participation, although their messages are anti-pluralistic. In the last years, protests in the region have increased and have become more diverse.

The purpose of this paper is to identify a regional pattern of crisis-prone development in Central and Eastern Europe in order to grasp the ecology of protest. We present a theoretical argument, stating that the increase of protest indicates a deeper societal crisis, which is rooted in the development since 1989. We argue that, like a floating iceberg, the growing number of protests is just the visible tip of the crisis-prone development. Recently, the effects of such crisis-prone development have become more visible and have contributed heavily to the increase in the number of protests. We do not seek to study protest movements as such (that is, we don't aim to introduce a new classification of diverse protest movements). Instead, we take the increase in protests as the starting point of our argument and introduce new theoretical stances, such as the concept of "multiple crises," which we argue are not yet sufficiently discussed in the literature.

3 The analysis includes all former socialist countries in Europe, which are currently members of the European Union, i.e. Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

4 E.g. the environmental activism in Romania (2013) or movements against same-sex marriage in Croatia (2014).

5 E.g. in Slovenia (2012–2013), Bulgaria (2013), Poland (2016–17) or Romania (2017).

We start our argument by briefly discussing approaches to protest participation in the region from the literature on political participation in Central and Eastern Europe. Secondly, we assess the crisis-prone development over of the comprehensive transformation after 1989, including the economic crisis, since 2008. The focus thereby is on the crisis-prone development, which has created an ambivalent ecology of protest in Central and Eastern Europe. We examine identity crises in the spheres of politics, the economy and society. In political terms, Central and Eastern Europe has been experiencing a crisis of representation (decreasing turnout, low trust in institutions and the political elite, disenchantment with politics, bad governance, clientelism and corruption) as well as a crisis of liberal democracy (a lack of checks and balances), a decline the in independence of the media and growing authoritarian tendencies.

Concerning the economy, Central and Eastern European economies are “dependent market economies”. Due to the dependency on Western European economies, such peripheral economies are likely to reduce social standards in order to attract foreign direct investments and are more vulnerable to economic crises. Regarding society, the transformation since 1989 has caused a high level of social inequality, mainly due to the reorganisation of the welfare state. Therefore, many citizens face individual economic hardships and have become dissatisfied with the political and economic development since 1989. This in turn makes them likely to follow populist promises or alternative development models such as “illiberal democracy”.

Subsequently, we argue that the increased number of protests indicates a deeper crisis, which has become more visible in recent years. By translating Alex Demirović’s concept of “multiple crises” to Central and Eastern Europe, we stress that protest hints at a deeper, multi-faceted crisis, which threatens the sustainability of democracy in the region. The recent increase in protest is a reaction to the manifold features of the particular crisis-prone development in Central and Eastern Europe.

PROTEST PARTICIPATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Our understanding of protest participation is based on Teorell et al. (2007). Any form of protest is an example of “extra-representational forms” of political participation (i.e. forms of political participation taking place outside of the classical realm of representative democracy). Protest occurs most commonly when a substantial proportion of citizens seek policy change or fundamentally refuses governmental decisions; hence they will support certain interests, which are not sufficiently represented by political parties, or they will not have sufficient trust in them (Braun–Hutter 2014, Chesters–Welsh 2011, Harrebye–Ejrnæs 2015). The underlying assumption is that if citizens disagree with certain policies or the political system as such, they tend to raise their concerns directly and seek to influence political outcomes, representatives, civil society’s stakeholders or like-minded people, which might take place in the streets or online (Norris 2002).

Taking into account the literature on political participation within Central and Eastern Europe, the recent increase in protests might have surprised some observers. Compared to old democracies, political participation in Central and Eastern Europe is portrayed as relatively weak: citizens are less willing to join associations and are more likely to be politically apathetic (Barnes 2006, Kostelka 2014, Letki 2004). Civic traditions are considered “less salient” and civil society is weakly developed (Howard 2002, Janmaat 2006). The dominant explanation for

this weakness tends to stress the heritage of state socialism. The key argument of this approach is that citizens share “a lack of participation due to the long authoritarian experience” (Barnes 2006), which has “caused an attitudinal legacy” that is responsible for citizens’ abstention from participation (Pop-Eleches–Tucker 2013). In this regard, socialisation under an authoritarian regime is crucial when it comes to explaining modern political behaviour (Killingsworth 2012: 142, Naimark–Gibianskii 1997).

Most of the studies arguing about the importance of a strong socialist heritage refer to weak political engagement through representational channels such as participating in elections, parties or other political organizations. When it comes to assessing political participation in Central and Eastern Europe, protest participation is taken less into account, although it has a long and partially disregarded tradition, which heavily shaped the region even before 1989.⁶ In order to fully grasp the development of political participation in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere, it is necessary to include diverse forms of political participation in the assessment.

Over the last years, a growing number of scholars have challenged the dominant explanation for weak political participation, linking it to the socialist heritage by highlighting the striking effects of the transformation starting in 1989. Segert (2013) points out that both the “state socialist legacy” and the “legacy of the radical transformation processes” have had a great impact on the current development of the region. Mishler and Rose (1997: 434) argue that the effects of the latest economic and political performance are at least equally crucial for political participation, as is the socialist past. Tanasoiu (2013: 601–604) highlights the frustration of most citizens which stems from the transformation, along with the increasing disappointment towards the political elite, flourishing corruption or simply from unfulfilled and overly high expectations. Hooghe and Quintelier (2014: 221) even claim that the effects of socialisation under socialism are “rendered non-significant” when it comes to citizens’ current experiences with bad governance, particularly in terms of high levels of corruption.

The transformation since 1989 has heavily shaped the ecology of protest. In this sense, the next part of the paper will highlight the crisis-prone development since 1989. The symptoms of this development have become more visible since the emergence of the economic crisis in 2008. We argue that this crisis-prone development has created a distinct regional pattern of protest.

A REGIONAL PATTERN OF CRISIS-PRONE DEVELOPMENT

In this part of the paper, we seek to determine a common pattern of crisis-prone development in Central and Eastern Europe, which contributes to and reinforces general outcomes of the transformation process. The focus will be on major changes in the spheres of politics, the economy and society. These spheres are interconnected (i.e. the transformation of one sphere affects the others).

Although we acknowledge specific national and sub-regional characteristics and differences, we argue that all respective countries share similar trends stemming from the transformation, which shape their development up to this day. Additionally, we do not argue that we should portray the development of the

⁶ Examples are the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring, Solidarność, the Baltic independent movement and the Monday Demonstrations in the GDR.

region since 1989 in a predominantly negative way. The aim of the paper is not to assess the transformation over recent decades as a whole;⁷ instead, we want to pinpoint certain issues, which have emerged from the transformation process and have resulted in what we call crisis-prone development.⁸ As we do not share the view that there is a linear pathway to democracy, our understanding of the transformation since 1989 deviates from the transition-to-democracy paradigm (Diamond et al. 2014, Elster et al. 1998). Instead, we argue that the region's crisis-prone development has been rooted in the "bumpy road" to a democratic and market economic system over the last two decades. The outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008 reinforced these deep-seated contradictions, and the symptoms of the crisis-prone development have become more visible since then.

CRISIS-PRONE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SPHERE OF POLITICS

one of the greatest challenges at the beginning of the political transformation was to establish democratic institutions such as constitutions, free elections, independent courts of justice, pluralistic party systems and free media: institutions which are clearly linked to the classical criteria of the democratic nation state. Soon, it became apparent that this process did not proceed easily (Kitschelt 1995, Ishiyama 1997).

The end of state socialism triggered a reorganisation of the nation state, which partially questioned the end of multi-ethnic statehood in Central and Eastern Europe. The dissolution of multinational states, such as Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia, was followed by a "great reconfiguration" (Brubaker 2011: 1,786). This meant the formation of nation states with a dominant core nation. The new economic and political elite receives legitimacy by defining themselves as part of the core nation and often also portraying themselves as anti-communist. This, however, does not necessarily include an avowal to democratic values in itself. In order to strengthen and legitimise the new emerging nation states, nationalising discourses and policies were constructed, which often resulted in exclusive politics towards minorities, for example in the Baltic states (ibid: 1,789–1,802) or even war in the case of Yugoslavia. The outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008 and the subsequent implementation of austerity policies has reinforced this development, through nationalizing discourses, increasing social inequality and growing distrust in democratic institutions.

In terms of parties and representatives, the former are not as deeply rooted in society. This in turn causes high voter volatility, low levels of legitimacy and trust in parties (Wessels–Klingemann 2006) and anti-establishment sentiments towards the political elite. Citizens are likely to perceive the political elite as alienated and corrupt (Tanasoiu 2013). Parts of the political elite do not respond effectively to urgent societal problems such as social inequality. Forms of bad governance, clientelistic networks and a high level of corruption created an environment of distrust, frustration and disenchantment with politics, which led to a severe crisis of representation.

7 For a comprehensive and well-balanced overview of the early phases of the transformation, see Kornai (2006).

8 The discussion of issues stemming from the comprehensive transformation started almost parallel to the actual transformation process. In the early 1990s, Offe (1991) highlighted the multiple challenges of the transformation process for the former state-socialist societies by introducing the term "dilemma of simultaneity" to the debate.

CRISIS-PRONE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SPHERE OF THE ECONOMY

one of the major goals of the economic transformation was to catch up with the economic development levels of “Western” market economies. Instead, a process of “peripheralisation” has shaped the development of all former state-socialist countries since the 1990s. From a political economy perspective, the term “peripheralisation” describes an increasing dependency on the countries of the capitalist core in terms of economic relations, such as investment, company ownership, terms of trade and technological know-how. In peripheral economies, it is usually a limited part of the population that exclusively depends on wage incomes (Becker et al. 2010). Therefore, forms of wage labour and multiple subsistence economies are often combined. Active extraversion, a combination of export-orientation and export surplus, is a characteristic feature of dominant economies. Peripheral economies on the other hand, are usually characterized by high import dependence, at least in key areas (intraversion).⁹

Within the region, the degree of peripheralisation differs. The new EU member states, especially the Visegrád group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), were incorporated as “dependent market economies” into the Western industrial production process (Nölke–Vliegenthart 2009). A distinct division of labour has developed between the old and the new EU member states. Know-how, complex production facilities and research and development are concentrated in Western Europe. Production is partly outsourced to the newer members (Popławski 2016).

The Visegrád group and Slovenia can be described as foreign-led economies, with foreign control over leading export industries and most of the public utilities. Moreover, one can observe a high level of foreign dominance in the financial sector, which makes the Central and Eastern European economies extremely vulnerable to external economic shocks (Becker–Jäger 2012, Myant–Drahokoupil 2013). In contrast to the aforementioned countries, a greater level of deindustrialisation and the emergence of a disproportionately large financial sector has marked the development of the remaining former Yugoslav republics, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Baltic states. The “financialisation” of the national economies has made these countries even more vulnerable to external crises (Bērziņš 2014, Galgóczi 2009, Schreiner 2010).

However, peripheralisation should not be reduced to a mere economic process, as it has far-reaching social and political implications. Analysing state strategies in the Visegrád countries since the 2000s, Drahokoupil concludes: *“The dominant state strategies aim at promoting competitiveness by attracting foreign investment”* (2008: 175). Policies are geared towards attracting foreign capital through appropriate economic policies. This creates a lot of pressure on the government to reduce social standards in order to maintain low labour costs or to offer transnational companies tax breaks, which subsequently intensifies the crisis-prone development.

The global economic crisis in 2008 demonstrated again that the development model emerging from the transformation process was highly volatile¹⁰ and vulnerable to external shocks. All Central and Eastern

9 *“Intraverted accumulation is centred on the domestic market, whereas extraversion implies a strong outward orientation of trade as well as flows of productive and money capital. In the case of extraverted accumulation, the direction of extraversion matters a great deal. Even a mixture of some elements of export orientation and import dependence might exist.”* (Becker et al, 2010: 3–7)

10 Namely, a sharp decrease during the crisis, but also higher growth after the crisis.

European countries, with the exception of Poland, are deeply affected by the economic crisis, which leads to a decline in growth (World Bank Databank 2017a). The subsequent economic recession has caused in most of the countries an increase in unemployment (World Bank Databank 2017b) and has fostered social insecurity, distrust in political parties and institutions among many citizens. The neoliberal economic transformation and the peripheralisation of Central and Eastern Europe have jointly increased social inequality, and so created the potential for conflicts and political protest within each country.

CRISIS-PRONE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SPHERE OF SOCIETY

an important outcome of the economic transformation was the rapid increase in social inequality, which has shaped Central and Eastern European societies until this day. Uneven points of departure for different societal groups has caused an unequal distribution of former state property (Szelényi 2008). The first post-state socialist governments were keen to pursue a neoliberal economic policy including the reduction of price controls, liberalisation of foreign trade and the development of a private financial sector (Desai 1997, Roaf et al. 2014). Speaking with the former Russian president Boris Yeltsin, the official goal of the economic policies was to make the reforms “irreversible” (Yeltsin 1994: 235). Therefore, their implementation had to occur as quickly and radically as possible (“shock-therapy”). The privatisation process, partially organized in non-transparent and corrupt procedures, produced a new class of capitalist businesspeople. At the same time, the so-called “shock-therapy” led to a dramatic increase in social inequality (Lane 2011).

A second crucial aspect of the economic transformation process was the reorganisation of the welfare state. Both the education and the welfare sectors were predominantly privatised. Pensions or unemployment benefits were not adjusted according to inflation nor the needs of the population. In fact, one important outcome of the peripheralisation process was that Central and Eastern European countries could not maintain their former level of social spending, which triggered an increase in social inequality.

Against the backdrop of the great expectations which sprouted in the early 1990s, citizens’ disappointment in terms of not benefiting from the transformation led to frustration with politics, demolished support for democracy and has made citizens more prone to following populist politicians (Ulram–Plasser 2003, Voicu et al. 2016). The so-called losers of the transformation such as the elderly, people with lower education and (unskilled) workers have been particularly affected by this development. If the political elite continues to be unable or unwilling to tackle these issues properly, the legitimacy of democracy will continue being undermined, as political participation requires a minimum of social security as regards its citizens (Segert 2010: 32–35). Without a more equal distribution of economic resources organised by a stronger welfare state, social inequality will still increase and therefore, the social basis for democracy in terms of political equality is threatened, which heavily contributes to the often-discussed crisis of representative democracy (ibid: 38–39).

Concerning the general crisis-prone development since 1989, democratisation has remained predominantly restricted to civic rights and the adoption of formal procedures (e.g. elections) and institutions. We argue that economic decline and impoverishment of broad parts of the population have effectively impeded democratic consolidation. Disregarding a policy of social welfare as an integral part of democracy has raised distrust in political and economic elites, and especially institutions in the entire region (Lovell, 2001).

PROTEST AS AN INDICATOR FOR MULTIPLE CRISES?

in the following part, we elaborate more specifically on the connection between protest and crisis-prone development and argue why protest is an indicator for multiple crises. The preceding paragraphs show crises in the spheres of politics, economy and society, which are rooted in the development models emerging from the transformation process. However, so far, the relation between the spheres and protest movements remains rather unclear. In order to elaborate our argument and specify the connection between the spheres of crisis-prone development, we draw upon the concept of “multiple crises”. Demirović et al. (2011) developed this approach in order to grasp the intertwined political, economic and societal changes, which have occurred particularly since the financial and economic crisis in 2008. The strength of the concept of “multiple crises” is that it goes beyond the realm of politics by including the economic and the societal dimension. Demirović et al. seek to contribute to a better understanding of societal development in Western Europe and North America driven by neoliberal policies. According to them, various crisis phenomena are rooted in the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. A recent example would be the implementation of austerity policies, which increase social inequality and poverty. For example, the mandatory retiring age increases, public sector employment is drastically reduced and social standards (pensions, unemployment, the health and education sectors) gradually deteriorate (Demirović, 2013: 197). The deterioration of social standards is presented as a necessary precondition to overcome the economic crisis. At the same time, the well-off part of society is still able to increase their financial benefits. According to Demirović, democracies and their political representatives fail to regulate the financial markets. Austerity policies favour the latter, leading to growing social inequality as well as distrust and dissatisfaction with democratic institutions and procedures. In order to ensure that austerity policies can proceed, technocratic governments increasingly replace democratic procedures and impose strict budgetary controls (ibid: 196). Demirović et al. (2011) claim that the economic crisis is embedded in a broader crisis of societal development and intensifies the already existing political crisis. The declining importance of traditional democratic institutions (parliaments, and their representatives, parties and members of parliament), leads to a crisis of representation. Demirović et al. also describe a more profound erosion of democratic systems due to the gradual cutback of the welfare state; similar to the spheres of the transformation in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989, the crisis in one sphere evolves a special dynamic affecting the other, which increases already existing contradictions (ibid: 11–28).

Regarding Central and Eastern Europe, authors such as Attila Ágh or Dieter Segert link the development since 1989 to crisis-prone development. Ágh frames the development since 1989 as a “triple crisis” (2015). This consists of: (1) the social consequences of the transformation; (2) the subsequent decline in support of democracy by the citizens; (3) and citizens’ disappointment with the EU in terms of improving their individual living conditions. Similar to Ágh, Segert stresses the social costs of the transformation as well as a high level of disappointment. By analysing the effects of the transformation, Segert argues that the region can be understood as a “laboratory” for testing “social resilience” of democracy (Segert 2010). Our argument is in line with authors like Ágh or Segert, but goes beyond their understanding of crisis-prone development, which is predominantly focused on political developments. In the following part, we go through the spheres of crisis-

prone development identified previously, we highlight the latest developments since 2008, and discuss their impact on protests.

The political crisis

the political crisis consists of two interconnected crises: a crisis of representation and a crisis of liberal democracy. Concerning the former, low levels of trust in political parties, representatives and the parliament, a low level of partisanship and a high level of voter volatility characterise the relationship between the political elite and citizens. Studying growing populism in times of economic crisis, Kriesi and Pappas argue that the relationship between the political elite and citizens in Central and Eastern Europe was “estranged” long before the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008, partially due to the high economic costs of the transformation (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015: 3–4). In this sense, the effects of the economic crisis just added to the already existing crisis of representation and the general disenchantment with politics (Enyedi 2015: 236–237, Havlík 2015: 215–216). Bad governance, clientelism or corruption also contributed heavily to this supposed “estrangement”. Since the outbreak of the economic crisis, this development has intensified. It has fostered distrust among the citizens towards democratic institutions and procedures, and increased the alleged gap between the political elite and the citizenry.

In terms of protest, the effects of the crisis of representation are ambivalent. Low trust in the political elite might encourage citizens to raise their voices directly and protest against certain policies or the government as a whole. Since the on-going crisis, protests against corruption and bad governance have been able to mobilise broad parts of the population, and have been especially noticeable in Bulgaria and Romania. At the same time, the high level of disenchantment, alienation and resignation might foster the already high level of political apathy. Citizens might perceive the political system as rather closed without many access points and possibilities to influence the decision-making process. If chances to trigger change through protest are low, the mobilisation of bystanders appears to be an onerous task. In this regard, the question of how the political elite reacts to protest is crucial. As the protest wave in Romania in early 2017 showed, one of the dominant strategies of the political elite to deal with protest is to reject their claims, discredit the protestors as illegitimate or foreign-financed, and try to proceed as planned.

In addition to the crisis of representation, Krastev (2016) states that Central and Eastern Europe deals with a “genuine crisis of liberal democracy”, which is accelerated by the economic crisis and an increase of anti-globalisation and anti-cosmopolitan attitudes. In comparison to older democracies, weaker political institutions in the new democracies make Central and Eastern European countries more vulnerable when it comes to political crises. “Liberalism’s failure to deliver” led many people to perceive the transformation to be a failure and evolved into a so-called “protest-vote democracy”. In the case of Bulgaria, governments are less likely to be re-elected but still, economic policies hardly differ between governments (Krastev 2016: 36–38).

The crisis of liberal democracy contributes to the emergence of populist, nationalist and/or far-right parties and movements. The Polish politician Jarosław Kaczyński explained the success of his right-wing party Law and Justice (PiS) in 2005: “For us the crucial question was who would articulate and use politically the

protest against all the powerful aspects of the economic reform” (cited in Ost 2007: 84). Parties such as PIS in Poland or Fidesz in Hungary share a deep suspicion for liberal democracy and propagate a new development model, “illiberal democracy” (Orbán 2014). This model is targeted at guaranteeing economic and political stability, prosperous development (for their respective national bourgeoisie) and independence from Western/EU dominance. Once in power, they do not hesitate to implement their policies, despite sometimes fierce protests. In order to stabilise economic and political development, the new elected governments in Hungary, Poland and to a lesser degree in Slovakia, centralize substantial resources within the state apparatus and transfer them to the executive branch.¹¹ These steps often include revisions of national constitutions, control over public media and the judiciary (Bayer 2013) and establish an aggressive nationalist discourse against “enemies of the state”. Moreover, they increase social spending for “the nation”, often portrayed as part of the new national project, which is supposed to eventually lead the country into a better future (Szilágyi–Bozóki 2015). In this respect, such governments partly contradict the neoliberal agendas pursued by their predecessors. At the same time, they implement harsh anti-social policies against minorities, especially unemployed or homeless people and ethnic minorities (Muslims, refugees, Sinti and Roma).

Due to its refusal of liberal values such as human rights and liberal economic policies, the illiberal project becomes a real political alternative to liberal democracy. In this sense, the region experiences a crisis of liberal democracy, which is based on the high level of disappointment stemming from the development since 1989, the emergence of an alternative pathway to succeed in the “existing competition between the countries of the world” (Orbán, 2014) and a crisis of norms and values (e.g. the protection of universal human rights) (Dawson & Hanley, 2016).

Regarding protest, the effects of the crisis of liberal democracy are again, ambivalent. Firstly, the incumbent governments in countries such as Hungary or Poland enjoy a certain level of popular support, which led to their election in the first place and which also manifests itself in protest in favour of the government and their policies.¹² Protest against minorities, in particular LGBTI* issues, same-sex marriage or anti-abortion stances have increased over the past years. Anti-pluralism and a narrow understanding of who belongs to the nation appear to gain popular support. The refusal of liberal values¹³ is not only to be observed on the level of the political elite, but also in anti-pluralistic protests. Secondly, the illiberal project and its authoritarian facets are likely to trigger protest. As seen in Poland with the re-election of PIS in 2015 or the various protests against Fidesz over the past years, a certain proportion of citizens are willing to protest against such developments. Those citizens reject the turning away from liberal values and express their discontent with authoritarian tendencies or forms of bad governance, such as corruption.

11 The Orbán government was particularly keen on increasing its influence over the Hungarian central bank (Johnson–Barnes 2015)

12 In terms of mobilising popular support, the level of independence of public and private media outlets from the government matters in particular. Biased or one-sided reporting on governmental activities is likely to increase governmental support (Susánszky et al. 2016).

13 For a detailed discussion on liberal values and regional differences in culture, see Inglehart–Welzel 2010.

The economic crisis and its social consequences

as Krastev states, liberal democracy is in crisis due to its failure to deliver. In particular, the economic crisis in 2008 contributed to this state of crisis. Similar to Southern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe has been severely affected by the economic crisis. The IMF bailed out financialised economies such as Latvia, Hungary and Romania (Kattel 2010, Lütz–Kranke 2014). In exchange, the countries pursued a strict monetarist economic policy. Other countries, such as Slovenia, Slovakia or Croatia, also applied austerity programs in order to counterbalance economic hardship. Like countries within the Eurozone, an austerity policy was presented as the only solution for effective crisis management. As a result, social standards deteriorated even further, deepening economic recession. Even though this development sparked widespread protests, governments in power (regardless of their political orientation) usually proceed with the austerity policies.

Concerning protest, the effects are again ambivalent. Harsh economic conditions and austerity measures foster voices of discontent. At the same time, such conditions hamper political participation, as many citizens face economic hardship. Regarding the former, Jacobsson (2015) argues viewing the latest protests as a cocktail consisting of growing anti-austerity voices against increasing social inequality in many countries all over the world and disenchantment rooted in domestic political crisis and declining satisfaction with parties and politicians. The increasing gap between the system of representative democracy and the daily life of the majority of the population, shaped by a deterioration of social standards, gives room for new protest movements. Musić adds that public outrage is directly linked to more than two decades of neoliberal reforms and failed modernization of the former state-socialist societies through integration the semi-peripheral region into the world market. The subjective feeling of stalemate and increased frustration by citizens and growing deindustrialisation are dominant effects of the crisis in South-East Europe; the latter pushing people into the informal sector (Musić 2013: 322–323, 328). Protests are triggered by the on-going economic crisis and the implemented austerity policy. At the same, they are a reaction to the region's crisis-prone development models.

In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, a lack of social security caused by the transformation since 1989 fosters citizens' retreat from institutionalised politics (i.e. participation in elections and parties), and triggers political apathy (Spöri 2015). Segert and Bos (2008) claim that turnout being in decline, growing political apathy, an increasing gap between the political elite and the people, high voter volatility and emerging populism can be explained by the societal division between winners and losers of the transformation (Segert 2008: 16–23). The pursued neoliberal role model has caused mainly negative effects for the majority of the population in terms of social security and welfare policy. Reducing the state's capacity and its institutions in the 1990s was the main cause of this trend for unregulated capitalism (Bos–Segert 2008: 334). In political terms, a vast number of citizens are economically deprived and do not have the means to interfere and participate in democratic processes as effectively as the political and economic elites. Segert argues that Central and Eastern Europe has served as a "laboratory" for a neoliberal policy agenda, including the recently implemented austerity measures, which has created a hostile environment for citizens to participate in.

Since the ecology of protest in Central and Eastern Europe appears to be ambivalent, we want to summarize why protest is both an expression of and a reaction to multiple crises. Protest is an extra-representational form

of political participation (i.e. a direct expression of citizens' opinions). The existence of protest as such does not automatically indicate crises. We argue that increased protest participation is a reaction to the particular societal development in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. Since the frequency of larger protests has increased over recent years and the issues tackled by the protests are very diverse, ranging from particular policies such as anti-austerity or anti-abortion to general protests against the government or the "corrupt elite", the current development model appears to be contested and in crisis. Protests are a result of a high level of distrust in the political elite, civil unrest in terms of individual economic hardship and disappointment, in terms of what Krastev (2016) called liberalism's failure to deliver. This "cocktail" of disenchantment, frustration and alienation stems from the manifold political, economic and societal changes since 1989, which we describe as "crisis-prone".

OUTLOOK: PROTEST AND CRISIS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The article scrutinizes crisis-prone development in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989 and the increased protest activity since the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008. In this theoretical paper, we stress the relation between structural problems and protest dynamics in the region and its countries. Focusing on the spheres of the economy, politics and society, we determine a common pattern of crisis-prone development models in Central and Eastern Europe. This pattern contributes to and reinforces the general outcomes of the transformation process. In particular, since the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, these manifold outcomes were condensed in "multiple crises" sparking widespread protest throughout the region. Similar to a floating iceberg, we argue that the growing number of protests is just the visible tip of the crisis-prone development. The ecology of protest in the region is ambivalent. Many citizens face economic hardship and/or are politically apathetic and are therefore less likely to protest. Following Segert, we argue that Central and Eastern Europe can be understood as a "laboratory" for testing the "social resilience" of democracy. The pursued neoliberal role model has caused mainly negative effects for the majority of the population in terms of social security and welfare policy, creating a hostile environment for citizens to participate in.

At the same time, a growing number of citizens appear to be more willing to raise their voices directly in public, which is triggered by diverse factors such as the great disenchantment with the performance of the democratic system and manifold disappointments since 1989. In many cases, as a reaction to measures taken by governments to overcome the economic crisis (e.g. austerity policies), widespread and creative protests have emerged. The sheer number of protests flags a deeper, more profound crisis affecting multiple societal spheres (politics, economy, society) within Central and Eastern European societies, which is closely connected to the peripheral development models.

After almost 30 years of transformation, and in particular after the economic crisis severely influenced many people's social security and future perspectives, some citizens appear to be more likely to be mobilised and take part in protests, which tackle the symptoms of the crisis-prone development model. By protesting against diverse issues, involved citizens experience forms of political participation beyond classic representation such as plenary meetings, direct democracy and social movements.

At the same time, we can observe the increasing success of far-right movements. Benefiting from and reinforcing the established nationalising discourses, the increasing social inequality and the distrust in democratic institutions, these movements also have to be analysed as a reaction to the unstable and peripheral development. The future will show the extent to which those protests reshape the way Central and Eastern European societies are currently organised.

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PROFESSIONALISED “CIVIL SOCIETY” VS. GRASSROOTS “UNCIVIL SOCIETY”?

The “Little Czech” 20 years later

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ABSTRACT

The article is an analysis of the five most distinctive public mobilisations in the Czech Republic in the past 20 years. The analysis builds on two key debates regarding post-communist civil society (civil vs. uncivil society and transactional vs. participatory activism) and also on an analysis of Czech nationalism by the anthropologist Ladislav Holý. In the empirical part, it looks at the image of the nation and civil society in the cases of the movement against the opposition agreement (Thank You, Now Go, and Czech Television – A Public Affair), the movement against the American radar base, the anti-austerity protest movement, the anti-Roma protests and the islamophobic movement. The self-conception of the movements is complemented by an analysis of the images of them that were held by their opponents. The article points to the vague and indefinite nature of Czech national identity, and the fact that in the past two decades, it has been markedly connected with the image of the West and a relatively low significance of class. It also shows that “NGO-ised” transactional activism has become the subject of hostile rhetoric which may rely on the legitimacy deficit that this type of activism has. However, it concludes that to a certain extent, it shares this type of deficit with another type of civic activism; in the case of participatory activism, it identifies a dilemma between the polarisation of society and political ineffectiveness.

Keywords: Ladislav Holý, uncivil society, transactional activism, Czech Islamophobia, social movements

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INTRODUCTION

“Civil society” was a concept that was afforded great significance in the initial phases of the post-communist transformation. It played an important role both in political rhetoric and social science analysis. It was meant to be a tool for democratic self-expression and self-cultivation in post-communist societies. The concept was supposed to embody a type of solidarity that helps in practical terms to develop the values of liberal democracy and helps to overcome authoritarian attitudes, including narrow-minded nationalism.

Developments over the past few years, especially the “migration crisis”, may be read as an ironic footnote to such expectations. The repertoires of action, and frequently also the self-confidence of “civil society”, are being taken on by movements that, with their xenophobic attitudes, tendencies towards nationalist isolationism, hate-filled rhetoric and political style, represent the antithesis of what might be thought of as a liberal democratic actor (even though they themselves invoke certain liberal democratic values, as do their self-styled defenders). The irony does not stop there, however. Among the key envisioned enemies (in opposition to which these movements define themselves) are the “non-profits”:² a professionalised version of civil society, concerned with the defence of minorities and liberal values, as well as with internationalisation in professional culture and resources.

Traditional explanations, focusing narrowly on the post-communist context, are not of much help to us in describing the situation. The context of Trump, Brexit, Le Pen and Höfer is not an opportunity to emphasise post-communist exceptionalism. Rather, it is a factor that invites us to re-evaluate some established views that the West represents a “rule”, while the East represents at best a correct and derived “application”, and at worst a deviant “exception”. It was in fact possible for this re-evaluation to occur long ago (cf. Buden 2009, cf. Barša 2013, cf. Gagyí 2015, cf. Spöri 2015).

An approach that emphasises the difference of the post-communist countries also neglects the considerable differences between the post-communist countries themselves. One of the key differences in the case of the Visegrad countries is the fact that in Poland and Hungary, the key political conflict that has emerged is the conservative vs. liberal cleavage (with conservative forces managing, at least rhetorically, to connect anti-liberal values and nationalism with the social solidarity aspect). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, however, the main cleavage has been a socio-economic one (although the left pole of this division has shown itself

² From “neziskovky”, which is an abbreviation of the term “neziskové organizace” (non-profit organisations). The word is often used ironically, given that one of the key ways of attacking NGOs is to point at the financial benefits that their members have from their work.

capable of integrating into its rhetoric a greater degree of nationalism and xenophobia than corresponds to its party affiliations on the European level) (Císař 2017).

In the case of the Czechs, too, we are witnessing the rise of populist forces, nationalist speeches and Islamophobia in public discourse. The Czech president, Miloš Zeman, has long made use of aggressive Islamophobic statements, even delivering a speech at a public Islamophobic demonstration. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in October 2017, government parties (the social democrats, the Christian democrats and the entrepreneurial populists ANO) and opposition parties alike for the most part rejected EU refugee quotas, and made use of anti-refugee and often also anti-EU rhetoric. The 2017 elections were won by the entrepreneurial populists, ANO, led by Andrej Babiš (the second-richest Czech) with a programme that stressed “efficiency” and the need to “manage the state like a company”.

However, there are also differences with Poland and Hungary (and to a lesser extent even Slovakia). There has been public mobilisation against Islam, but it has only partially been connected with the efforts of the political elite. Unlike Polish and Hungarian nationalism, no positive political nationalist project has been formulated. Czech nationalism has not even defined itself as “illiberal”. Indeed, it even casts itself as the protector of liberal values (although this does not change anything in terms of its aggressiveness). It is exactly this difference that is one of our basic research questions.

Our starting point will be, to a large extent, the analyses by anthropologist Ladislav Holý (1996) (see 1.c below). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Holý carried out a thorough reconstruction of the key autostereotype which he calls, with a certain degree of irony, the “Little Czech” (“malý český člověk” in Czech). He framed it in terms of the historic events of the Velvet Revolution and the breakup of Czechoslovakia. Our ambition is to build on Holý’s analysis and to test its validity for the two decades that have passed since his work was published. Building on Holý’s research, which focused inter alia on the demonstrations of 1989, we consider the large public mobilisations that in one way or another invoke the “society” or “nation”, to be a suitable way of indicating which ideas regarding the nation are present in the public imagination.

At the same time, this selection leads to the other questions posed in this text: What role does the *form* of the civic movement take? Previous research into social movements in CEE shows that in a number of cases, the actual social movements do not correspond to classic ideas regarding “civil society”, either in their content or form. There is a paradoxical tension; the movements that correspond, in their values and approaches, to liberal democratic ideas regarding civil society have changed into NGOs, which, as the result of professionalisation, corporate hierarchy and the determinative nature of external funding and competition for grants, end up producing the alienation that civil society should be overcoming. On the other hand, spontaneous popular movements with strong support have often turned *against* liberal democratic values.

The two components of this tension have thus far been the subject of two largely separate academic debates (see sections 1.a and 1.b below). Now, in the context of a movement against “do-gooders” (NGOs, universities, liberals, “neomarxists”...) that is taking place across the West (and to an even greater extent in some Eastern European countries), the components of these tensions have also become a significant theme in the rhetoric of some movements.

In the first part of this paper, we shall present the conceptual starting points of our research: above all the concepts of the “uncivil society”, the debate on “transactional activism” and Czech nationalism, as defined by Holý. In the second part, we will analyse individual public mobilisations.³

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

We have focused on the five most significant mobilisations of the last 20 years. In analysing them, we asked the following questions. What picture of the nation appeared in the movements in question, what was this based on, and to what did it refer? What concept of participation developed during the mobilisations? Did the mobilisations contain an element of self-definition in relation to the elites? How are these elites understood, and what does this reveal about the self-conception of the movements? Building on these questions, we will also focus specifically on the movements’ attitude to political parties and non-governmental organisations. We shall also focus on the main opponents of these movements and the ways in which they have attacked their legitimacy, since this will help us to gain a fuller picture of the nation and participation.

We selected the individual mobilisations on the basis of how long they lasted, how large they were (in terms of the number of demonstration participants and petition signatures) and their social significance (in terms of public discussion and media coverage). Combining these criteria led us to choose the protests against the “opposition agreement”, the demonstrations against the US military radar base, anti-austerity protests, anti-Roma demonstrations and Islamophobic activities.⁴ Our understanding of mobilisation and social movements is, in keeping with Tilly (1985, 1998, 2004), a collection of activities analogical to a campaign, not as a single organisation or group. Where necessary, we will describe the various different currents that participated in a single mobilisation. We shall also follow on from Tilly in our emphasis on the relational character of movements and the need to perceive them in relation to elites or in their interactions with counter-movements. We make use of topoi analysis topoi as part of a critical discourse analysis (Wodak 2015) and analyse socio-cognitive frameworks in research into social movements (Benford–Snow 1988, 2000). Given that we are attempting to cover several themes for five different initiatives however, our goal will be to reconstruct only the most basic and important frameworks. We have emphasised tropes and frameworks that were repeated or notably present, but their reconstruction is nevertheless the result of our interpretational choices.

We look at five key public mobilisations that have taken place in the Czech Republic since the end of the 1990s. We have subjected the last of these, Islamophobic mobilisation during the migration crisis, to

3 We are very grateful to Pavel Barša for many inspirational discussions and stimuli for this text and to Zora Hesová, Tobias Spöri, Jan Charvát and two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

4 We could have included the wave of alter-globalisation mobilisations in 1998–2000, with street parties attended by thousands of people and culminating in the form of protests against the IMF and World Bank, as well as protests against the violent breakup of the Czechtek technoparty in 2005 and the protests against the reform of the healthcare system in 2008. In the first and third cases, in particular, we could have pointed to a similar or larger number of demonstration participants and a similar level of media coverage compared to some of the mobilisations we have chosen. However, we believe that in view of our research questions our choice of mobilisations is legitimate – the character of the alter-globalisation demonstrations meant that no debate developed around them regarding the concept of the people/nation, while in the case of the protests against healthcare reform, the subsequent anti-austerity protests were both analogical (in actors, agenda and style) and more extensive.

deep empirical research (using participatory observation and an analysis of leaders’ speeches).⁵ However, our discussions of previous mobilisations (the movements against corruption and the opposition agreement, the movement against the US radar base, the anti-austerity movement and mobilisations against Roma in northern Bohemia) are based on others’ research, and also on retrospective analyses of their media coverage, websites, video recordings and other remnant material. Given that the Islamophobic movement is our main theme, while the other movements provide more of a framework for comparison, this approach seems to us legitimate.

CONCEPTS AND STARTING POINTS

1.a Citizen participation: Civil or uncivil society?

After the extensive popular mobilisations that overthrew socialist dictatorships (or at the very least formed a colourful background to their overthrow) (cf. Krapfl 2013, cf. Ost 2005), and also, it seems, as a result of the legacy of the “long sixties” and the “world revolution of 1968” (cf. Mazower 2012, cf. Wallerstein 2002), there were very heavily normative ideas regarding the role of social movements, translated into the language of “civil society”. This, in the imagination of many people, needed to become a key part of liberal democracies, their foundation, the guardian of liberal democratic values, a source of new political themes, one of the spaces for the control of power, a source of civic virtues, and so on (see Keane et al. 1988, Znoj 2015). Soon, however, it became apparent that many participatory social movements did not fulfil these roles. Indeed, from the point of view of liberal democratic values, they had more of an opposite effect (for a representative summary of these doubts and reflections on them, see Kopecký–Mudde 2003). In this section, we will discuss the concept of “uncivil society” as an attempt to describe actors who meet the definition of “civic society” in sociological, but not in normative terms. In the debate regarding the concept (largely used as a journalistic label with only a vaguely defined meaning by Kopecký) we build freely on Kopecký and Mudde, who saw the concept as a tool for correcting unrealistic expectations (and connected disappointments) with regard to civil society in the post-communist countries (Kopecký–Mudde 2003). Our summary of their concept may start with the question of what it means to be “civil” in civil society. There are five possible answers.

1. *Civic virtues* and *civic solidarity*, or at the very least loyalty towards other citizens, willingness to *accept limits* on one’s behaviour with regard to these other citizens.
2. The *values* of liberal democracy connected with their (limited, because it does not reflect on its assumptions) *universalism*.
3. Space that is *autonomous* of the state and the market, of the absence of the logic of political

⁵ We used two sources in our analysis. The first involved observation of Islamophobic demonstrations, carried out by one of the authors of this paper between 18 August 2015 and 1 May 2016. The analysis consisted of observing the movement’s demonstrations, carrying out interviews at the demonstrations and carrying out semi-structured interviews with demonstration participants. The observation took place at 14 demonstrations. The number of interviews carried out at the demonstrations was around 50, with a further 11 more extensive semi-structured interviews.

The second source of analysis consisted of articles in *Parlamentní listy* focusing on Islamophobic leaders Martin Konvička and Petr Hampl. *Parlamentní listy* is a tabloid news website that has given a large amount of space and sympathy to Islamophobic mobilisation, and has itself contributed to it considerably, while also profiting from this mobilisation. They are by far “the most visited news website which is not part of any mainstream media conglomerate, and currently occupies the eighth place on the list of the most popular Czech online news servers” (Stětka 2016). We followed both between January 2015 and August 2016.

domination and financial gain.

4. The principle of (civil) *equality* which governs the relationships between the individual participants as part of the organisation of civil society, their democratic internal functioning
5. *Non-violence*: civil society is also a society of unarmed civilians (cf. Elias 1969), who claim their rights and their power by means of the tactics and techniques of non-violent protest. This is partly an idealisation based on an over-generalisation of the non-violent factions of the post-1968 movement and above all of 1989 from the perspective of the regimes which did not react with violence. To question the idea of non-violence as the only means used by civic society, it was not necessary to read more Locke or to remember the American revolution, or to wait for Majdan and the Arab Spring. It was enough to have studied Romania in 1989 or to notice that even legitimate protests sometimes grow into displays of violent resistance (Kopecký–Mudde 2003).

This definition naturally provides an indication of what social movements come under the heading of “uncivil society”. In schematic terms, we may ascribe the following characteristics to them (it is not necessary that they meet all of them). They are those movements which do not consider their activity to be bounded by civic loyalty or the basic rights of other groups of citizens. Their relationship to liberal democracy is either cynical and instrumental or openly antagonistic. They may abuse their role of civic activists in order to push the non-transparent agendas of some groups within the state, or of business groups. Internally, they may function hierarchically, or they may use pressure, abuse of power and so on. They often do not forswear violence; indeed they may fulminate in favour of its necessity, highlighting the seriousness of their cause with dramatic references to the carrying out or preparation of such violence. They make broad use of demonisation and hate speech, which can be perceived as a form of verbal violence.

We may, understandably, criticise this conceptualisation as being a schematic pathologisation that assumes the standards of Western liberal democratic modernity as the norm and underestimates the significance of different social contexts (Gagyí 2015: 24). There are good arguments that this schematisation may (as with the concept of extremism) include a number of various movements and may stigmatise movements that do not belong to liberal democratic “civil society” as a result of their accent on emancipatory values (anarchists, radical environmentalists, alter-globalists). In such a case, it includes both those who cast doubt on the values of freedom and equality (the far right) and those who recognise them more than they would a standard liberal democracy (Piotrowski 2009, 2017).

It may also be perceived as based on overly black-and-white dichotomy that is perhaps only useful only for researching the far right (compare its use for the Russian context by Umland 2007) but which makes it harder to capture borderline cases where there is a clash of two values connected with liberal democracy. It is these cases, however, that are often very important for the political culture – frequently in post-communist countries, but also in Western ones. Anti-communism, the model case for post-communist countries, often in the name of liberal democratic values and universalism (although often in the name of conservative particularism and nationalism, and often in a difficult-to-discern mixture) aims at the total suppression of communists or post-communists (Křeček–Vochocová 2009, Slačálek 2013, Holubec 2015). Some anti-racist and

anti-sexist groups may also, in enforcing key values of liberal democracy (although these are values that are often far from commonplace in the given societies, as indeed in other societies) have tendencies towards total exclusion, demonisation or even the use of vigilante violence (cf. Bastl 2010).

Although we recognise the relevance of these objections, we believe the concept of the “uncivil society” is relevant not just as a source of labelling or as a superfluous designation for the far right. It may contribute to the debate as: 1) a corrective to the exaggeratedly optimistic and one-sided view of civil society that has played a strong role in part of the post-communist ideology and social sciences (a reminder that the sociological definition of civil society should also include actors who are not suitable for the optimistic normative definition of civil society by political theory); and also as 2) an ideal type that describes the essential features and tendencies of a number of social movements.

But we should keep in mind Cas Mudde’s claim in his closing chapter of the key book on “(un)civil society”: *“In many ways [...] ‘uncivil movements’ [...] are more authentic representatives of civil society in post-communist Europe. Not only do they indeed fill the space between the household and the (national) state; they also play an important role in the process of democratisation, be it directly or indirectly (by provoking ‘civil’ movements to respond to their challenge). Moreover, unlike many prominent ‘civil’ organisations in Eastern Europe, which are elite-driven NGOs detached from main parts of society, many ‘uncivil’ organisations are true social movements, i.e. involved in grass-roots supported contentious politics (cf. Tarrow 2002). Like ‘civil’ groups, they can at times be part of ‘advocacy networks’”* (in Kopecký–Mudde 2003: 159). Which brings us to the next section.

1.b Participatory social movements vs. transactional activism

In addition to the dichotomy of civil vs. uncivil society we will also work with the dichotomy of participatory social movements vs. transactional activism. This is to a certain extent a response to researchers’ disappointment at the ebbing of the tide of social movements at the start of the 1990s in the post-communist countries, and at the fact that these movements were gradually replaced by professionalising NGOs dependent on foreign patronage (Fagan 2004, 2005). The result then, are “NGOs without civil society” (Fagan 2005: 528).

This criticism has provoked extensive discussion (for a review of which see Saxonberg–Jacobsson 2013). Tarrow and Petrova (2007) have come up with the concept of “transactional activism”. This term was intended to describe the modus operandi of these NGOs, which do not require the direct participation of a large number of members, but rather relationships with foreign donors, interconnection and influence over local elites. Although the authors are aware that this model brings a number of problems from the viewpoint of the theory of democracy and civic society, they end their text with a certain degree both of insight and cynicism. Given the essentially undemocratic, expert and elite way in which decisions are taken at the level of the EU, this form of activism appears to be the most suitable option in view of the environment in which the given actors function (Petrova–Tarrow 2007: 88).

According to Císař (2008, 2013), in the case of the Czech Republic, it is very much possible to doubt Fagan’s thesis that the squeezing out of participatory activism by transactional activism has deprived ci-

vil society of an essential dimension. Smaller professionalised groups with foreign patronage are capable of defending some minority agendas (Císař gives the example of feminism and Greenpeace’s activities against the US military radar base), and perhaps are able to do so more thoroughly than a movement anchored in local society (with its limitations and prejudices). The results of the activity of advocacy organisations and the agencies that have financed them are, according to Císař, similar in both the post-communist Czech Republic and the US (Císař 2013: 77–79). In the US, too, the result has been a dependency on financing, however local. Císař says that objections to advocacy without participation correspond to the idealisation of civil society and to illusory ideas connected with participatory and radical democracy, rather than corresponding to the reality and theory of liberal democracy.

Nevertheless, there are possible objections to this position. This kind of replacement for “participation” is depoliticising and as a result undemocratic (the agenda is decided by a foreign sponsor, and is not under the control of the local community). As a result, it generates alienation in the broader sections of society, and fulfils only some of the roles of a social movement, while there are others (the socialisation of the broader sections of society into politics and protest action, the signalisation of local social problems) that it is unable to fulfil (Novák 2017, Slačálek–Svobodová 2017). It is certainly possible to claim that “transactional activism” is adequate, given the current democratic deficit of both the EU and national democratic systems. However, this would also mean accepting a situation where the remnants of civil society tend more to deepen this deficit rather than have the capability to correct it.

1.c Czech nationalism (according to Ladislav Holý)

Possibly the best analysis of Czech nationalism comes from anthropologist Ladislav Holý (1996), however good it is to complement it with the historical analyses of Miloš Havelka (1995, 2002, 2005), Jan Tesař (2001), Podiven’s controversial analysis (2003) or the sociological analysis of F. Mayer (2009), as well as some criticisms, such as that of Mills Kelly (1996).⁶ From Ladislav Holý’s analysis we can take (sometimes over and above the author’s interpretation, or even at odds with it, but always in keeping with his method of asking questions) three findings regarding Czech nationalism: three forms of Czech nationalism that overlap each other.

The nationalism present on the level of the predominant discourse is not a strong and proud nationalism, but more a *denial* of such nationalism. Ladislav Holý even claimed (specifically in the context of the breakup of

⁶ We consider Holý’s to be the best account of the subject of Czech national identity, its quality remaining unaffected by his occasional interpretational and factual mistakes and not entirely consummate mastery of the historical debates, which are not the main subject of the book. In some passages, the author is considerably indebted to the courageous and inspirational analyses of Petr Pithart, and at times these “second-hand” parts can result in somewhat grotesque mistakes, such as the labelling of Josef Pekař as a representative of “consciously non-nationalist historiography” (Holy 1996). Although Pekař was a great historian, and some of his interpretations of Czech history were deliberately formulated in the face of the predominant national historical mythology, he was at the same time a markedly conservative nationalist (and also an anti-semite), who, against Masaryk’s attempt to formulate the “idea” of the Czech nation in universalist and humanist terms, defended the thesis that the meaning of national history is the nation itself, which has existed since the 10th century (Havelka 1995, 2002, 2015: 113–141, Havránek 1993, Kučera 2005, Strobach 2010). It is possible to say that Pekař represented an alternative to the dominant current of Czech national history as it was put forward in the 20th century, but Holý’s book itself is the best proof that Pekař’s basic theses became the part of “undercurrent” of Czech national consciousness, despite the fact that on a political level, Pekař’s opponent chalked up a formal win (see below).

Czechoslovakia) that Czech nationalism often displays itself in this very denial. It ascribes the nationalist label to others, as a token of backwardness (to the Slovaks in particular, in the context of Holý’s research, but we could also add the Poles, Hungarians, the Balkan nations and so on) while identifying itself with universalist ideas, progressiveness and the West. It perceives nationalism, and above all some of its accompanying phenomena (national chauvinism and anti-semitism), as essentially backward.

The second thing is that the national identity is the *identity of “little people”*. Ladislav Holý here reconstructs the autostereotype of the “Little Czech” (“malý český člověk” in Czech): someone standing outside “big history” and the world of masters, of whatever type. This stereotype has a long tradition in debates on the “small nation” of the Czechs, on the Czech character and Czech smallness and the figure of the “Čecháček”, which also means “little Czech”, but in a more pejorative sense (see, for example, Havelka 2002). Overall, however, this stereotype tends to be used only in part ironically, since it also contains a feeling that the “small” are morally ascendant over the “big”. According to Holý, a feeling of alienation towards the nobility and the Catholic Church (and, as a result, towards any religion) and a shallow social stratification resulted in an orientation towards practicality and craftsmanship, a plebeian mentality and a certain type of cynicism. The “little Czech” is collectivist and egalitarian, whose nationalism is bedded down into a collection of unreconstructed collectivist ideas, in which there are interesting collisions. Ideas regarding his own superiority (culture, the cleverness of “little Czech hands” – or manual dexterity – combined with technological prowess) collide with self-abasement, and a self-irony connected with the image of the Good Soldier Švejk, are all mixed with the pathos of references to a pantheon of great but empty national figures transformed into symbols. The result is apoliticality, an alienation from the state and political power, and a feeling that there is a division between the “truth” of the nation (which is often connected to the concept of what is “natural”, and overlaps with perceptions of the economic cogency of the market and the moral or custom-based cogency of the traditional gender order) and the “lie” of the state. This also seems to be connected to the shaky foundations of Czech statehood, the partial excising of the 17th and 18th centuries from Czech history, and the frequent perception of Habsburg domination and the Austro-Hungarian state as something foreign and alien (cf. Podiven 2003).

Under the surface of these two discourses is nevertheless a *bottom current* of Czech “patriotism” (as allegedly opposed to the “nationalism” of other nations), essentially a Young Czech⁷ image of history and of Czechs themselves as a blood brotherhood connected by great history. The former two features effectively prevent reflection on this “hard core” of ethnic nationalism, which as Mills Kelly (1996) pointed out in a review

7 The Young Czechs, formally the National Party of Free Thinkers, and then the National Democracy (1918–1934), were a party that combined, following the model of some German movements, economic liberalism, limited progressivism on religious issues, and nationalism, often of a fairly intense type. The party aspired to a leading position in the nation, although it was prevented from attaining one in the 1990s by party differentiation. Alois Jirásek, the nationalist writer described as the “Czech Walter Scott” was a Young Czech and later a National Democrat senator. Jirásek played a key role in the establishment of a particular view of the Czech national past, a view that was largely taken on by the communists. Zdeněk Nejedlý, as the author of the Czech (oslovak) fusion of nationalism and communism, made the mass publication of Jirásek’s historical novels one of the key elements in the establishment of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For a thesis on the strong fusion of nationalism and liberalism – influenced by German development – as a long-term feature of Czech political culture, see Havelka (2015). This thesis runs counter to Holý’s idea of the rivalry between nationalism and pro-western individualism, and seems to be confirmed by the turn by Václav Klaus, the representative of this pro-western individualism, towards unreflected nationalism of a markedly anti-German hue and communist genealogy in the second half of the 1990s at the latest, (although he had used nationalist rhetoric earlier, when, for example, arguing in favour of voucher privatisation).

of Holý, may take on a very demonic form of aggressive nationalism, as shown by anti-semitism during the Polná affair,⁸ and the activities of neo-Nazi skinheads in the 1990s. To this we should add above all the rise of Catholic conservative nationalism during the “Second Republic” when, after the Munich conference, hope died in the unity of Western universalism and the national interest (Rataj 1997, Rataj 2006, Podiven 2003, Pithart 1991, Slačálek 2010, Barša 2016).

2. NATION AND PARTICIPATION IN CZECH PROTEST MOBILISATIONS

We shall present our analysis in short sub-chapters, in which we will first briefly summarise the basic information regarding the particular mobilisation and briefly characterise it, and then show by which frames the image of the nation was displayed in the mobilisation in question and what characteristics this image had, how the movement perceived its own participation, the power elites and civil society. There will then follow a brief summary of which arguments or images were used to cast doubt on and attack the various mobilisations by their most significant opponents.

2.a Mobilisation against the “opposition agreement”

The political compromise which was entered into after the 1998 election by the leaders of the neoliberal ODS, Václav Klaus, and the Czech Social Democratic Party, Miloš Zeman, was referred to by the leaders themselves as the “opposition agreement”. The Social Democrats gained support for their single-party government in exchange for concessions to the ODS. This agreement was often seen as immoral, if not as a direct display of political corruption and as an attack on political competition, the quality of democracy, civil society and also on the position of President Václav Havel. On the tenth anniversary of the revolution of 1989, the former student leaders published a declaration called “*Děkujeme, odejděte!*” (“*Thank You, Now Go!*”), which called on politicians to give up their places to younger people. The appeal had a considerable response, being signed by an alleged 200,000 people; around 50–70,000 people also attended a demonstration in support of the declaration.

A further marked display of antipathy to the opposition agreement came a year after the declaration, in the winter of 2000–2001, when there was a mobilisation against the changes in the management of Czech Television, seen as an attack on the independence of the public TV station and on freedom of speech in general. The protests, known as the “TV crisis”, included an occupation and a strike by Czech TV’s employees with the support of “significant figures” in Czech public life, often former dissidents. There were occupying strikes and parallel broadcasts by the new management and the “rebels”, as well as demonstrations, the largest of which was estimated at around a hundred thousand participants. This mobilisation was successful from the point of view of maintaining Czech Television’s independence, as well as in terms of delegitimising the “opposition agreement” (Dvořáková 2002, Nekvapil 2003, Kunc 2004). These protests, supported by “significant figures in public life”, were followed in spirit by several other protests in the next decades, and focused on corruption.

⁸ In 1899 a Jewish man, Leopold Hilsner, was accused of the murder of Anežka Hružová near the town of Polná. This became an opportunity for an extensive campaign of anti-semitism and accusations of Jews of ritual murder. Hilsner was defended by Tomáš G. Masaryk, later to become president. Masaryk found himself under considerable pressure as a result, being attacked, for example, by fanaticised students.

Continuity with the Velvet Revolution

Something of key importance to the self-conception of participants in the mobilisation against the opposition agreement was an identification with the legacy of the velvet revolution. The authors of the “*Thank You, Now Go!*” declaration were the former student leaders of the 1989 protests, and the text of the declaration itself stressed continuity; it contained an appreciation of the current generation of politicians for their role in the transformation, and also an appeal that they make way for others (Děkujeme, odejděte!, 1999). The appeal “*Communists, stay at home*” on the posters for the main “*Thank You, Now Go!*” (paš, 1999) demonstration made it clear who was not included in the nation as it had been conceived, just as the elites could rule themselves out by reason of their amoral conduct, or because they had stolen the revolution and its results from the people.

During the protests, a direct, indeed personal continuity with November 1989 was often stressed. It was not just about the student leaders who signed the “*Thank You, Now Go!*” appeal. When, during the occupying strike, a rebel journalist was let out, he turned to Jana Bobošíková with the words: “*In ’89, I was freezing on Wenceslas Square, I don’t know about you, Jana.*” (ČT1 – obrazovka ČT, 2013) The actor Ladislav Frej, speaking at a meeting in support of the rebel journalists, said: “*They’ve forgotten one thing. They’re so shameless, they think they can do anything. But the revolution hasn’t ended, it’s still carrying on*” (Bobovize 2000).

The mobilised Czechia vs. the better Czechia (or the better Czechs?)

The movement negotiated its legitimacy in various ways, which correspond to Tilly’s concepts of “worthiness” and “numbers” (Tilly 2004). It was important to the protests that they had mass support, including two occasions on which the symbolic centre of Prague, Wenceslas Square, was filled (3 December, 1999 and 3 January, 2001), signatures under the declaration, and opinion polls, which correspond to numbers. In the same way, however, the movement’s participants, either consciously or subconsciously, formulated their value in society. Continuity with the most important political revolution in the past, together with the exclusion of the communists, made it clear that in this concept of the public, not all voices had the same value. During “*Thank You, Now Go!*”, the role of the former “student leaders” of 1989 was key, and during the Czech Television protest, a key role was played by the support of “personalities” who were frequently connected with culture and/or dissent against the previous regime. The concentrated charisma and moral capital of these personalities stood in opposition to the delegitimised power of the politicians.

Defence of the public interest (= transformation = democracy = integration into Western Europe)

The “*Thank You, Now Go!*” appeal may be a fundamental criticism of the existing political elite, but at the same time it is a recognition of the results of transformation, largely connected with the policies of the “opposition agreement” (above all by the hated ODS). This paradox even found its way into the title of the declaration. The declaration was not a criticism of the system, nor was it a formulation of any sort of concrete alternative within the system. It was more about emphasising “values”, “decency” and “morals”, and later also (in the case of the television crisis) about limiting and controlling political power.

In some cases, these values had a political content, no matter how vaguely formed. Above all, this was the journey to the West (“*a historic chance to return to a place among the advanced states of Europe*”) that in the “*Thank You, Now Go!*” declaration was seen as a key national good, and one that would also verify the democratic qualities of individual Czech politicians. The other was the interests of the “middle entrepreneurial classes” (Děkujeme, odejděte! 1999).

The opponents’ view: Elitists with no mandate

The main opponents of “*Thank You, Now Go!*” and the rebel television journalists were the representatives of the opposition agreement and the journalists who supported them. The basic framework was to connect legitimacy with a strictly-conceived legal positivism: the representatives of the opposition agreement defended their position from criticism by saying that they had received a sufficient mandate from voters, unlike the alleged spokespeople of civil society, who had “not been elected by anyone”. This emphasis on legality strengthened further in the period of the television crisis, when the rebel journalists carried out a de facto occupying strike, compared by Klaus to some elements of the Communist coup d’état in 1948⁹ and prime minister Miloš Zeman talked about a “cultural revolution” (Bobovize 2000, Kopp 2001).

The image of the illegitimate behaviour of people with no mandate was completed by the image of elites who put themselves into a role that was above ordinary people, who wanted to gain more rights and to moralise from some sort of position of superiority. Sometimes an image of non-working artists living to the detriment of the people was also evoked. The lyrics of a song by popular songwriter Ivan Mládek are illustrative: “*The cultural front, the television guys, in favour of permanent gentle revolution [...] looking for a new path for the nation [...] how glad they would be if it all changed round, and truth and love prevailed over work*” (ODS 2001/Britské listy, 2005).¹⁰

2.b The anti-radar movement

Shortly after the 2006 election, the right-wing governing coalition announced that it had started talks on the location of a component in the anti-missile defense system. Opinion polls suggested that the majority of the Czech public were against it. A platform called Ne základnám (No to the Bases) decided to articulate the public’s objections; it consisted of civic activists from the environmental and pacifist movements (the Humanist Party), the radical left (above all the Trotskyists) and others. Over the course of three years, the movement became an adversary to the government, and it maintained opposition to the radar system not just in terms of passive numbers in opinion polls, but also as a political appeal. The main tool was comprised of demonstrations, which drew hundreds or even thousands of people (the largest being around ten thousand); other tools of pressure included the occupation of the place where the radar system was to be located, and a protest hunger strike by several of the movement’s activists (which in the end, after the intervention of the Social Democrat leader, became a chain hunger strike by the movement’s supporters). The movement had a considerable response.

9 In reaction to a statement by President Václav Havel, who in declaring support for the rebels, compared the change in the Czech Television Council (inspired by opposition agreement politicians) to a communist putsch.

10 “*Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred*” is a popular slogan used by Václav Havel in the Velvet Revolution of 1989. At this time, Havel was supporting protest against the opposition agreement.

The Czech debate over the radar system ended in 2009, when Obama withdraw the request for the creation of the base (Novomestská 2012, Navrátil 2017).

“We are the people”/(nation)

In addition to arguments rooted in criticism of US foreign policy and above all George W. Bush’s “war on terror”, and also in addition to those connected with the general theme of peace, the arsenal of arguments that No to the Bases had also included discourses relating to national independence and popular sovereignty. This emphasis on popular sovereignty had a much greater significance. The movement consistently put itself in the role of representative of the majority public opinion, and asked for the majority to be able to decide in a continuously demanded referendum. Together with the representation of the majority opinion went a demand that this opinion be properly represented in the media: the protests were addressed not just to the political elites, but also to the media, in particular Czech Television. The opinion of most citizens, as expressed in opinion polls, gave the movement a specific type of self-confidence in confrontation with the political and media elites.

The movement allowed for a collective membership, and its members included non-government organisations, in whose legitimacy it thus participated. The core of its legitimacy nevertheless lay elsewhere, in its reference to the majority will of the people, which the movement aimed to materialise and bring to the scene with its demand for a referendum.

Will we be betrayed again?

The movement worked much less with nationally-oriented rhetoric, largely in such a way that it implicitly drew a contrast between the little Czech and his little state and nation on one hand, and the great interests of the great powers and their rivalries on the other hand. There were frequent evocations of national traumas, above all the Munich agreement (the slogan “about us without us”, connected with protests against the Munich agreement in 1938, was used in a number of contexts to refer to decisions taken by great powers and politicians alienated from the people) and the 1968 occupation.

The opponents’ view: the demonic people, casting doubt on pro-Western development, Russian agents

The main opponents of the radar opponents were the right-wing liberal government, former president Václav Havel and the pro-American and right-wing part of the media and cultural elites. One of the key images that delegitimised the people, the pacifist movement and Western Europe, was once again Munich (Slačálek 2010), this time in the role of a reference to the appeasement of evil and the taking up of a position that was both morally and practically defective. The fact that a majority of people opposed the radar was merely confirmation that fundamental questions should not be decided by a direct expression of the will of the people, who are not competent to judge and easily fall prey to various demagogues. The radar was declared to be a further logical step in the pro-Western development of Czech society (although this step was rendered slightly less convincing compared to previous ones by the fact that it was a one-sided equation of the West with the US as opposed to the EU, and that it was, moreover, the US of President George W Bush). In this context, an

emphasis was placed on the “extremist” attitudes of some of the left-wing members of No to the Bases (above all the Trotskyists), and the dubious communist past of one significant activist. The opponents of the radar base were also (with no evidence) accused of ties to the Russian secret service (Novomestská 2012).

2.c The anti-austerity movement

When a right-wing government took power in 2010 with an ambitious programme of cuts and neoliberal reforms, a relatively broad movement began to form against it. Initially, it was represented above all by two civic associations of opponents, ProAlt and Alternativa zdola (Grassroots Alternative). Both were coalitions of activists from the radical and liberal left. ProAlt was broader and more liberal, and focused above all on criticism. The Grassroots Alternative, formed around the ambitious left-wing economist Ilona Švihlíková, was more open to that part of the left which held conservative values and it also attempted to formulate alternatives.

The government was gradually faced by a wider spectrum of actors. The most significant in terms of numbers were the unions, who joined together with ProAlt and other groups in a coalition called Stop the Government! Some demonstrations are estimated to have been attended by up to a hundred thousand people, as a result of the union participation. Opposition also came from students and representatives of higher education, who held protests against the government’s proposed reform of higher education, criticised as both neoliberal and incompetent. It also came from populist forces: the Holešov Appeal, a movement that had a programme of nationalism and direct democracy, and called among other things for the abolition of political parties; the right-wing populist Tomio Okamura with his movement Úsvit přímé demokracie (Dawn of Direct Democracy); and the agricultural entrepreneur Andrej Babiš, the second-richest person in the Czech Republic, and his movement ANO, who emphasised the theme of corruption, proposing instead his technocratic “entrepreneurialist populism”. Lastly, there was Miloš Zeman, the former chair of the Social Democrats. It was the populists who managed to make most use of the government’s lack of popularity (it fell in 2013 as the result of a corruption scandal). Tomio Okamura used it to enter parliament with his extreme right-wing party. Andrej Babiš used it for his own election success (his movement came second in the elections 2014 and entered the governing coalition, with Babiš becoming finance minister; in elections 2017 ANO won). Miloš Zeman won the 2013 presidential election.

Frames of the nation: society, colony, educated people, people in struggle

A large part of the anti-austerity movement did not use the rhetoric of the nation; there was more of an emphasis on social solidarity. Even the most liberal movement, ProAlt, emphasised “society” and the defence of solidarity and redistribution as part of this. ProAlt avoided using a national concept of this “society”. It protested against exclusion and divisions in society, and saw nationalist rhetoric as a display of such divisions. Grassroots Alternative was less hesitant to avoid the rhetoric of the nation, as shown by its participation in the Alliance of Work and Solidarity with left-wing nationalists from the Communist Party, and by the fact that economist Ilona Švihlíková stood in the parliamentary elections for President Miloš Zeman’s party (the party did not succeed) and by the movement’s references to the traditions of Czech patriotism. Švihlíková also addressed the national question in her professional work, notably in her book *How We Became a Colony*

(2015), where she presented the outflow of profits and the foreign ownership of Czech companies as a political problem. This problem, most clearly demonstrable in the difference between Czech and German wages (which has subsequently become the subject of a trade union campaign) is connected, according to Švihlíková, with the unwillingness of the Czech elites to behave like representatives of a sovereign state, and their “inability to formulate the national interest and assert it.” An interview with Švihlíková in the left-wing *A2larm* was entitled *We need a new national revival* (Fiala 2015).¹¹ However, these things – the trade union campaign for the “end of cheap labour”, Švihlíková’s book and the formulation of the “national”/colonial question – came after the fall of the Nečas government and with it, the ebbing of the anti-austerity movement.

The university movement also did not address the issue of the nation much, being more concerned with the autonomy of universities and the accessibility of higher education. However, its argumentation did include the image of the educated nation and the tradition of national education, and also the image of education as the basis for the future of a society that was for the most part implicitly identified with the nation. Education was perceived as an economically advantageous alternative for society, one that that would develop it and move it away from “assembly line”-type work with low added value (the “assembly factory”) (cf. Přátel komunistů, 2013).

Unlike these movements, the various populist movements had a strong national element. The colours of the national flag were the Holešov Appeal’s main symbol. The rhetoric of the movement built partially and critically on November 1989, emphasising that Czechs did not deserve such conditions and political elites. Against the politicians, it directly stressed the will of the people, which was to be articulated by means of a referendum and a “National Council”. The Holešov Appeal gradually stressed the theme of the nation more and more, referring also to Czechoslovak, Hussite and Slavonic traditions (Popelka, w.d.). Nevertheless, this language was part of the initiative’s fairly exalted, radical and eccentric rhetoric. Okamura went for a style of nationalism which did not have much positive content, but used a highly aggressive othering of Roma, for example. Babiš, for his part, chose an indefinite idea based above all on the concept of a better future and hard work, thanks to which society would deserve this future. Zeman then used national themes only episodically to begin with, with the playing of the anti-German card in relation to the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans helping him towards election victory.

Movement vs. politicians

The movements criticised the political elite. Although the main focus of the criticism was, especially in the case of ProAlt and Grassroots Alternative, the content of the government’s public policy, the rhetoric of both initiatives also stressed the theme of democracy conceived of as public participation. In this sense, ProAlt defended itself against criticism that it was an “antipolitical” movement – on the contrary, in the words of its spokesperson Tereza Stöckelová, it espoused a wider concept of politics than that usually defended by

¹¹ It would be interesting to compare Švihlíková’s purely economic and related political view of the matter with the way in which the rhetoric of the “colony” is used by Polish-American literary theorist Ewa Thompson and by the authors connected to her, most of whom belong to Poland’s conservative camp. Thompson also addresses poverty, but “colony” is not only an economic metaphor for her; she uses post-colonial theory to describe the state of mind of the post-communist liberal elites (Thompson 2000, 2014, Sowa 2011, Zarycki 2014).

political parties (Tereza Stöckelová, 2011). Either way, the movement for the most part tended to keep itself at a distance from political parties.

The populists, meanwhile, utterly rejected the political elites as criminal. The degree to which they rejected the political elites was a fundamental aspect of their mobilisation, symbolised at one demonstration by a theatrical representation of the execution of three figures labelled as “corrupt politicians”. The people were supposed to act directly: *“We need to express our lack of confidence in this government, if the political parties are unable to.”* (Holešovská výzva, 2012) In addition to attacking the political elites, they also often attacked the media elites, with one of the Holešov Appeal’s demonstrations ending at the Czech Television headquarters. What they did find acceptable was the ethos of expertise. As well as direct democracy, they demanded the creation of a “government of experts”. An important part of the populist ethos was the idea of the new beginning that the movement would bring, whether this concerned the collective and mass refusal of the existing order at demonstrations (Demonstrace Holešovská výzva, 2012), or rhetoric regarding a “new constitution”.

The opponents’ view: legitimate, as long as they’re powerless

The civic initiatives faced criticism above all from that part of the media which supported the neoliberal government and its reforms. The criticisms were a mixture, with some motifs familiar from opponents’ previous discourses: the civic initiatives were perceived as the voice of those who had lost the elections and had no mandate from voters, and thus no legitimacy in their attempt to prevent the government’s steps. The protests against the reforms were perceived as irresponsible, and while they were carried out by smallish groups, they were seen above all as the expression of minority ideologists. When they started to be carried out by more popular actors (unions, populists) they were then again taken as further evidence that the people were not competent enough to understand complicated questions of public policy. However, criticisms of the movement appeared with much less intensity than in the previous cases: they did not aim at overall delegitimation, and they recognised the opposition movement’s right to their own existence (conditional on its practical inability to have a realistic influence on the government’s steps).

2.d Anti-Roma sentiment

From approximately 2008 onwards, there were major mobilisations against Roma people in various towns with a strong socially-excluded population. Starting with the protests on the Janov estate, they mostly followed real, or occasionally fabricated incidents of violent crime. Initially a key role in these was played by the extra-parliamentary and politically-marginal neo-Nazi Workers’ Party (which, after a legal ban, was renewed as the Workers’ Party for Social Justice). During the greatest escalation, in autumn 2011, a role was played by local politicians in established political parties, and above all by the self-organisation of local people. The atmosphere created by the media coverage of the riots in London also played a part. The demonstrations in some towns lasted for several months, and in some places it was only the presence of the police that stopped the events taking on the character of retaliations or pogroms.

Taxes and rules: We are the nation (too)

The evocation of the nation in the anti-Roma meetings had a strong protest character. It was constructed largely on the basis of two elements: taxes and rules. On the basis of references to taxes and rules, “inadaptable” Roma were construed as those who did not belong to the nation, without it even being necessary to talk about race. The references to rules and to the payment of taxes also allowed this mobilisation to formulate its own legitimacy with regard to the state and its elites: the slogan “*you live off our taxes, and on top of that you beat us,*” which the demonstrators often shouted and had printed on T-shirts, could refer either to the “unadaptable” Roma or to the police and, by extension, to the elites (Kolektivně proti kapitálu 2012, Slačálek 2014).

Regional truth: Experience speaks

As well as rules, a key source of legitimacy became the fact of belonging to a region. Political elites and the media, as well as anti-racists (the theme of non-government organisations was present, but had not yet become markedly accentuated) were delegitimised partly because of not being able to get out of their duties, and above all because they did not live in the place in question and had no relevant experience. The label “Prague” or “Brussels” also became a way of denoting the establishment, implying incompetence and an inability to understand the given situation.

Mass participation brings self-confidence and a feeling of joy, as even an anti-racist journalist noticed. “*Two expressions alternated on their faces for periods of several moments: terrible hatred and inexpressible happiness. I have never seen so many smiling and happy faces. People shouting ‘Gypsies to the gas chambers!’ with beatific smiles and eyes full of relief.*” (Brož 2011).

The opponents’ view: Racists or “ordinary people abused by demagogues”

The direct opponents of the protests, who in some cases confronted the demonstrations with counter-demonstrations, were liberals, defenders of human rights and the new left. They often travelled to the places in question from larger towns, above all from Prague, which understandably made them less convincing. Further, some of the larger media and some politicians were also significant critics of the demonstrations.

Racism was declared to be an evil whose unacceptability was shown by the past. As an explanation for racist attitudes, stupidity was accepted, along with a lack of education and poverty. Poverty, in some cases, was seen as the logical result of stupidity, a lack of education and racism, and created a picture of overall inferiority. A frequent reaction on the part of the anti-racists was either condemnatory and confrontational rhetoric, or ridicule, which was meant to underline the intellectual and overall inferiority of the racists.

In general, the basic image of the demonstrations shared by the mainstream media, politicians and many opponents of racism, was an attempt to differentiate the real social problems of local people, for whom understanding was expressed (mostly in a paternalistic way), and racism, which was unacceptable. On one hand, understanding was expressed for the protestors (sometimes even on the part of their opponents, who tried to “redirect the anger” of the protestors away from Roma towards the government and speculators); while on the other hand, fears were expressed that they were being abused by right-wing extremists and

demagogues. An emblematic figure in this latter depiction of the protests was one of their leaders, Lukáš Kohout, who in the past had committed a number of frauds (sve, 2011). However, the fact that opponents of Roma allowed themselves to be led by such a leader was also the source of further ridicule.

2.e Islamophobia

Czech public opinion provided Islamophobic attitudes with fairly fertile ground upon which to grow, above all as a result of the way in which a large section of the media, including the liberal and mainstream media, covered the subject of Islam and above all the cohabitation of Muslim and majority populations in Western Europe. This one-dimensional, stereotyping and securitising view was shared by large sections of the elites and the public. Even before he was elected, Miloš Zeman became famous for remarks of this type: “*There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim, just as there is no such thing as a moderate Nazi.*” (Buchert 2011).

From the 1990s onwards, Czech Islamophobia displayed itself in local protests against the construction of mosques on Czech territory (Vojtíšek 2006), with the first single-issue campaigns starting to appear after 2001. The grouping that met with the greatest reception was a Facebook page entitled *Islám v České republice nechceme* (We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic) or IVČRN. Around this, a group formed that, after the massacre in the Parisian offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, initiated a demonstration calling for Islam to be banned by law as a totalitarian ideology. As a result of the refugee crisis and the discussion of quotas for refugees, the demonstration led to an extensive mobilisation, as well as to differentiation in the movement.

The main current in the movement, led by the entomologist Martin Konvička and the sociologist Petr Hampl, called on the rhetorical level for the protection of liberal freedoms and human rights from an Islamic invasion. At the same time, it contained heavy self-criticism of the liberal society as too soft and incapable of defending itself in the face of danger, alienated from its roots, both economic (the market, the “assembly line” economy tied directly to production) and biological (the “natural” gender order tied to tradition, and even more to sociobiology). This part of the movement created the Blok proti islámu, later the Blok proti islamizaci (Bloc Against Islamisation) and organised a number of demonstrations, one even being supported by Miloš Zeman, who attended and made a speech. The largest of these events in February had around 5,000 participants. This part of the movement eventually broke up into a number of factions trying to establish a Czech version of the Alternative for Germany party.

The more radical faction of the movement was connected with the extreme right, above all with Národní demokracie (National Democracy) and its leader Adam B. Bartoš, who conflated Islamophobia and open racism, anti-semitism and threats of violence (at one demonstration, he threatened the government with a noose). The Islamophobic mobilisation also provoked the establishment of a number of local “home guard” groups, which declared their willingness to defend Czech territory with weapons, and to actively prepare for such defence.

Defence of the Czech nation (and of Europe too...?)

The movement presented itself as the protector of the Czech nation. At demonstrations, as well as placards with crossed-out mosques, participants held Czech flags. The movement was the first nationwide

mobilisation since 1989 (with the exception of the marginal nationalists and communists) to emphasise the positive significance of the state borders, and to call for their thorough protection. In a certain sense, it was an antithesis to “open borders” as one of the emphasised gains of the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

The defence of “our values” became the main part of the programme of the whole movement. When asked what the national values were that they wanted to defend, respondents’ answers tended towards very vague descriptions of school history, significant historical figures or a description of the necessity of protecting national property (or its return to national ownership). Respondents did not, by and large, respond with a positive definition of national values. What was far more fundamental was their self-perception in terms of the way they perceive the rest of Europe. This is perceived as a zone of almost failed states that have been incapable of standing up to “Islamisation”. Such a perception is in direct contrast to the way in which the West (and specifically Western Europe) has been perceived in the quarter-century since the fall of communism. For the first time, there is a mass perception of Western Europe not as a model, but as a warning example. The Czech Republic, with an Islamophobic movement at its head, was to become a messianic defender not only of national values, but European, indeed liberal ones.

In the concept of the movement, however, universal liberal values, valid anywhere in the world, often become more of a distinctive characteristic of the West. In this dichotomy, Islam then stands by its very definition against such values. Liberal Europe clashes with totalitarian Islam, understood as a totalitarian ideology following the model of Nazism. Europe’s overly-liberal nature, meanwhile, paralyses it and makes it soft and effeminate, incapable of defending itself against a foreign invasion. It thus needs the corrective that the Islamophobic movement offers: not only hardness towards Muslims, but also a return to “natural” market values and the gender order. If we want to keep Europe free for the next generation, we have to step down for a moment from our liberal limits and, using a certain allegory of a state of emergency, agree to the overall reconstruction of society and above all the protection of our borders. These borders, meanwhile, are both geographic and cultural. An accent on them can be seen in the most visible Muslim attributes which, in the case of women is a veil covering the hair. This has been described using emotions of fear, signalling an alleged invasion of Europe by Islam: *“Let Muslim women wear veils, in their own countries, but it doesn’t belong here,”* one of the respondents said.

The demonstrators today have a feeling of superiority towards Western Europe, since they believe they know the answers to the problems it is suffering. This is a situation in which they can let Western Europe have back the feeling of humiliation that they felt in the years of post-communist integration. Thus, one of the speakers at the demonstration of 2 June 2016 spoke of the humiliation of a migrant worker from a Central European country, who has had to put up with limitations and long waits, and who now sees the EU opening its arms to immigrants from the third world, who he believes are coming in with no limitations or regulation. The younger brother, previously underestimated and continually lectured to, now finds himself in the role of someone who has grasped the depth of the problem. He may be able to save Western Europe from itself. Or, at any rate, he has a chance to protect himself from the fate into which the Western part of the EU has fallen through its own mistakes, and into which it now wants to drag the Czech Republic through forcing refugee

quotas on it. In this discourse, Czechs appear either as messiahs, offering a lifeline to Europe, or at least in the role of clever little people who have realised something that the large European nations were unable to grasp.

Instead of Western Europe, other models were needed. The US, with President Barack “Hussein” Obama and its interracial tensions, was also unable to fulfil this role (the situation later changed with the coming of Trump, of whom the Islamophobes were explicit fans). Instead, the main models were states that combined well-guarded sovereignty, the presence of authority in the public sphere, a culture of economic performance and, ideally, also direct democracy: Japan and above all Switzerland (Petr Hampl once described it as his goal to “Switzerlandise” the Czech Republic) (Hampl w.d.).

Unnatural elites

The self-concept of the movement in relation to politicians falls into the dichotomy of the people versus the elite. The goal of the movement is then to return power into the hands of ordinary people. This power has, however, been taken from them not only by the political elite, but also by the media (through its limitations on freedom of speech by means of political correctness), the university elites from the humanities fields, and non-government organisations (criticised for their allegedly parasitical behaviour and their indirect, non-political exercise of political influence). The political elite is not described as a clientelist network, but as a hazily-defined group of people, or a minority who are unjustly occupying positions of power. The movement thus becomes a dissident one, defending a truth that everyone is allegedly scared to express. Its rise is a new beginning, the promise of a revolution that will come soon, and which already justifies the movement’s spokesman in warning students not to sign up for humanities subjects and not to think about working for a non-government organisation. To start studying the non-profit sector at university in 2015, he says, would be as unwise as joining the Communist Party in the summer of 1989 (Eurozprávy.cz, 2015).

Mandate of the people vs. parasitic NGOs

During the interviews, it became clear that for most participants, it was their first time at a demonstration. Hitherto, they had not taken much interest in politics, had not signed petitions, had voted only sporadically, and had never been to a local council meeting. The emotions that ran through all the interviews related to the urgent feeling that there was a need to “do something” and a feeling of disappointment in politicians who “don’t do anything”.

Now the demonstrators are in the public arena, they are participating and they also find themselves at the centre of attention. They fill squares and the pages of newspapers. The sin that connects politicians with the other enemies of the movement is that they are acting against the will of the people. Journalists are attacked for not writing the truth, because they are tied by the language of political correctness or dictats from above. The discourse of one member of the movement, who asked at a lecture on Islam why journalists did not write what 99% of people thought, indicates that not even journalists are spared the logic of representing the nation. NGOs are becoming one of the greatest enemies. Initiated by the state or Brussels, and paid for from “our taxes”, NGOs are becoming the opposite pole of the real civil society that can be seen on the squares.

The moderately privileged (NGOs and the students and teachers of humanities subjects) are thus becoming the target instead of the highest placed (the oligarchs). Their *modus operandi* is placed under a microscope, and at the same time becomes the object of stereotypical scandalisation: non-government organisations are accused of leading a parasitical mode of existence (the fact that they live off redistribution leads them to be compared by Petr Hampl, the movement’s ideologue, to Roma living off benefits). They are also accused of becoming the tools of foreign interests as a result of their foreign financing. What the concept of transactional activism has tried to describe in neutral terms using the language of social science (or in Císař’s case even to defend, using the language of liberal political theory) becomes the subject of political accusation. Participation and anti-elite efforts are placed in antithesis to the “false imitation of the people” – so-called civil society, which according to Hampl is “created by the ruling party” (Hampl 2015) – or according to further rhetoric in the movement, is becoming a “new bourgeoisie” (Nová buržoazie, 2016).

The opponents’ view: Racists with no real experience, victims of demagogy, little Czechs without a broader outlook

The opponents of the Islamophobes were once again pro-EU oriented liberals, anti-racists and the new left. In this case, too, there was both mobilisation against racism conceived of as an absolute evil and a display of unacceptable political extremism, and an understanding of the “real fears” (an often shared fear of similarly-essentialised “Islam”) abused by “populists”. Here, too, a key image was the figures of the leaders (above all the Islamophobe leader Martin Konvička) and their lack of credibility. A key difference, however, was the relationship to experience. Participants in anti-Roma demonstrations could invoke their experience of Roma, which the opponents of racism had either to accept or to doubt. However, in the case of fear of Islam, the opponents of the Islamophobes stressed the absence of experience, the lack of Islam in the Czech Republic and the lack of knowledge of the European and world situation (Ostřanský, 2014). Given that the dispute not only concerned the relationship to Islam, but also the European Union, the Islamophobes were often depicted as limited and ignorant, believing unreliable information from the Internet, or conspiracy theories. Once again, the motif of the stupidity and inferiority of racism appears, connected with the stupidity of an inward-looking Czechness, and these characteristics are ascribed in some cases to the lower social strata and older people (see the hip-hop song, PSH – Fuck Off, 2016).

Mobilisation/ issue	Thank You, Now Go! and other mobilisations against the opposition agreement	No to the Bases	Anti-austerity: ProAlt/Grassroot Alternative/populists	Anti-Roma sentiment	Islamophobia
Period	1999–2001, with later link-ups	2006–2009	2010–2013	mainly 2008, 2011	2015–2016
Nation (main images evoked in connection with it)	Memories of the 1989 revolution, middle classes, possibility of return to the West	Small nation against great power politics, sovereignty, historical traumas	Society, solidarity (with no national specification)/colony/ the enslaved nation against the elites	Race, taxes, rules	End of catching up with the West, long-term frustration at being disparaged
Self-concept	Representatives of the “proper” people (shown by continuity with the 1989 revolution, mass support and participation of “personalities”)	Representatives of the people (shown by agreement with the majority position)	Opponents of neoliberalism, representatives of social solidarity, later representatives of critical section of the people (shown by alliance with unions)/ representatives of the people (shown by opposition to the elite)	Representatives of the people (shown by race/ethnicity, observing rules, paying taxes)	Representatives of the nation, feeling of a new historic role in the defence of the Czech Republic and possibly all of Europe
Civil society	Partly self-concept, partly sees civil society as undeveloped – its development is a hope for the future	Partly self-concept, partly distance	Partly self-concept, partly alienation	Alienation, enmity	Synonym for NGOs and other privileged groups, negative connotations
Images of enemies	Politicians who stole the revolution, communists	US elite, George W. Bush, arms companies, Czech Atlanticists	Government, pension funds, tax havens, high finance, defenders of neoliberalism	Roma (or “unadaptable” Roma), the elites who protect them	Islam, EU, NGOs, political elite, “refugee welcomers”
Enemies	Representatives of opposition agreement	Pro-American politicians and journalists, the anti-communist right	Neoliberal politicians and journalists	Liberal journalists, anti-racism activists	Liberal journalists, anti-racists
Most distinctive discourse of opponents	Absence of democratic legitimacy arising from electoral competition, elitism, artists who do not work	The mistaken or demonic people; left-wing extremists, Russian agents	The voice of those who lost the elections, the irresponsible and incompetent people, or social groups; activities that are legitimate, if they are powerless	Racists, stupid, uneducated and poor people; the victims of poverty demagogy and sometimes of extremism; sometimes the bearers of real experience	Racists and sometimes extremists; sometimes the bearers of real fears; absence of real experience; parochial narrow-mindedness, victims of demagogy

CONCLUSIONS

If we wish to build on Holý's reconstruction of the Czech autostereotype, we should recapitulate that the “Little Czech” has behind him over the past two decades a remarkable history of public mobilisations. He has been all sorts of things. Our overview has clearly shown that his participation in public life has not been exhausted by the “transactional activism” of non-government organisations (cf. Saxonberg–Jacobsson 2013). As we have seen, he has had the opportunity to take part in activities that fall under the heading both of “civil” and “uncivil” society, and above all we have seen that the disputes over the classification of these movements (although they are mostly played out using other concepts) are a key part of their struggles for legitimacy.

The mobilisations in question are difficult to compare. Some conclusions are that the comparison offers are foreseeable and banal (it is clear that mobilisations of this type will lay claim to representing “the people”, that they will try to define themselves in opposition to variously-defined elites, that they will have in them an element that is spellbound by its own participation, etc.). Some differences are a fairly logical result of the different political backgrounds and scope of the mobilisations.

However, we believe there is a certain interest when we compare some conclusions concerning the nation and civil society.

As far as the nation is concerned, it seems that Czech national identity may be, if not quite anything it wants to be, certainly very many things. The nation often means a memory of the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It may also mean a collection of roles, the observance of which (together with the “correct” skin colour) gives inhabitants of the periphery the feeling that they are justified in belonging to the same whole as the inhabitants of the centre. The nation may be a subject that is threatened by a “Muslim invasion”, which has to be prevented by thorough defence of the state borders, and a subject (or maybe rather an object) of international economic relations that have made it into a colony, just as it may also be exposed to threats emanating from the geopolitical games of the great powers. Some elements have been more marked than others (such as the “smallness” emphasised by Holý).¹² However, these characteristics, too, have no fixed meaning, and may be used in highly different ways to argue various positions. It seems that the Czech national identity has no clear content, but may be filled with differing meanings, and that for this very reason it is relatively difficult to build a concrete and positive national project around it. With this, we definitely do not mean to say that Czech society

12 Of the 28 countries of the EU, the Czech Republic is eleventh in terms of the number of inhabitants. In the Czech context, however, it is not usual to perceive countries of a comparable size (Belgium, Sweden) or even considerably smaller (Austria, Finland, Ireland) as “small”. The label “small nation”, as well as all the moral mythology that goes with it (the smaller and weaker as the bearers of moral superiority) may be understood above all as the result of the traditional definition of the Czech identity vis-a-vis the German, and also as the result of the concept, discussed above, of the Czech Republic as a land of “little people”, the absence of aristocratic elites. An interesting interpretation of the concept of “small nation” can be found in Milan Kundera's famous essay on central Europe. According to Kundera, “small nation” is a metaphor for “non-self-evident nation” – a small nation may perish at any time, and it knows it. From this point of view, the “small nation” is the paradigmatic state of Central Europe (Kundera illustrates its definition using the words of the Polish hymn “Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła”/“Poland Is Not Yet Lost”), and according to Kundera, with the gradual triumph of the anonymous technological civilisation over concrete culture, the “small nation” will become a paradigm for the existence of any European nation. Without wishing to take issue with the preciseness of these essayist diagnoses, we have to say that in the Czech context, the term “small nation” has a much wider semantic scope. This scope differs considerably in a number of elements from the Polish national identity, which may certainly see its nation as “non-self-evident”, but definitely not as “small” (cf. Tesař 1984a, cf. Kundera 1984, cf. Slačálek 2009, 2010, 2016).

is immune to xenophobia, nationalist isolationism and brutalisation, or that the cleavage between conservative and liberal values is not now being pushed as being of key importance here. We are merely stating that it is an important part of the explanation of the cultural and political *forms* in which the assertion of these phenomena takes place, an important part of the explanation as to why they differ, and probably will continue to differ, from developments in Poland and Hungary.

What does, however, connect all the mobilisations is that a key part of the way in which the nation is seen concerns its *relationship to the West*, although this takes very different forms with the various mobilisations. With the mobilisations of the late 1990s we still see integration into Western structures as the source of the chief hope for society. However, further mobilisations already reflect the consequences of this integration as a fact. In the case of the protests against the radar system, the movement balked at the efforts of its opponents to frame the debate on the US military as a further debate on whether we “belong to the West”, and alongside sovereignty arguments, it also developed arguments relating to the European Union and American opponents of such systems. The protests against neoliberal reforms did not play the national card, at least to start with. They perceived the local application of austerity policies as the local version of neoliberalism. It was only later that the relationship with the West became an important part of the argumentation of some members of the anti-austerity movement, when they began to address the subject of capital outflow and foreign ownership, and some of them started to see the Czech Republic as a colony. For the anti-Roma, protests the West was more of an enemy entity, with “Brussels” becoming in their imagination a place of even greater alienation and of standing up for Roma than “Prague”.

Nevertheless, a total inversion of the relationship with the West comes only with the Islamophobic movement, in which Western Europe is a source of fear and at the same time its elites are one of the main political enemies (if not the main political enemy, since Islam is described more as a depoliticised and dehumanised natural catastrophe than political enemy). This relationship to the West, and the shared stimuli concerning the migration crisis, may be something that brings developments in the individual countries of the V4 closer together.

The memory of the revolution of 1989 is a very important one in the mobilisations, with many of them trying to mimic it in various aspects. The memory of the Velvet Revolution is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is a source of legitimacy and the beginning of the current regime (from which comes both the significance of the memory of the Velvet Revolution, and the variety in the way it is assessed by individual actors). It is also a reminder that fundamental social change came in the past from squares full of people and extensive social mobilisation. Both these factors allow specific games to develop around the memory of the Velvet Revolution, games concerning both the legitimacy of the regime and of the movements that challenge it.

In most of these mobilisations, *class* is not a theme. The exception is the reference to the interest of the “entrepreneurial middle class” in the Thank You, Now Go! declaration. Even the employee representatives in the unions prefer to appear in a coalition, and stress the interest of the whole of society – or the nation. This corresponds to the findings of Kolářová and Vojtíšková (2008) that for most of the post-communist period, the concept of class has been a displaced word, and Drahekoupil’s statement (2015: 577) that “*the only class that*

has consolidated after the end of state socialism was the ‘middle class’.

If class is a theme, then it is above all one in hostile discourse: for the opponents of the movement against the opposition agreement, it is important to declare that the movement’s representatives are elite artists with no real relationship to work (which to a certain extent is only a hostile inversion of their own self-perception as “elites” and “personalities”). The same is true of the ideologues of the Islamophobic movement, when they describe teachers and students of humanities and social sciences, and NGOs. Anti-racists, on the other hand, sometimes give their criticism of racism undertones of a class-shaped view. The bearers of racism are seen as uneducated, poor and unsuccessful. This hostile ascribing of class characteristics has the significance of disqualification, and to a certain extent, functionally corresponds to the declaration that the opponents are “foreign agents” (although there is a different relationship here to their deliberateness and “evil intentions”). Class, here, is above all, other people.

Further significant conclusions concern the concept of civil society and its substitution by NGOs. In the mobilisation against the opposition agreement, “civil society” is used not only as self-identification, but as a source of hope. Many public intellectuals connected with the mobilisation claimed that the country lacked a robust “third sector”, a civil society standing outside the state and the market. Once it had one, they claimed, Czech society would be much better off. The next two mobilisations come from a different political camp than most of the liberal-right opponents of the opposition agreement, and it is likely that they were considered by many of the latter to be illegitimate: part of “uncivil society”. They themselves tended to make only sparing use of the rhetoric of “civil society” (partly because in the Czech public discourse, it was connected with the legacy of the political camp around Václav Havel), but at the same time a reference to this “civil society” formed part of their legitimacy. In the case of the next two mobilisations, we see a shift: “civil society”, embodied by anti-racism activists and non-government organisations, is perceived as the enemy. Indeed, in the case of the Islamophobes it is perceived as a key enemy. This is not merely an evaluation, but also a description: something that for liberal optimists at the end of the 1990s was a counterpart to power, and for the Islamophobe ideologists, a paid tool of the “governing class”.

NGOs are in this view rejected because in the context of the decline of civilisation and its struggle for survival, the principles that they assert, and the money spent on their existence, is a luxury that society cannot afford. Their mode of existence, living off redistribution, is described as something that runs counter to the natural (market) order of the world. Naturalness, according to Islamophobic criticism, also runs counter to their concept of anti-racism and the allegedly excessive degree of solidarity that they promote, something that according to the Islamophobes must, in the face of a crisis, be rejected as soft. This type of criticism of NGOs may be understood as a symptom and display of the way in which the attitudes of the Islamophobic movement essentially correspond to Adorno’s description of the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al, 1950), if, unlike the original authors, we take it more as a cultural and political rather than a psychological type.

This description of the criticism of NGOs is correct, but we believe that it is insufficient. It is not enough to classify criticism of NGOs as an expression of political demagoguery, although it undoubtedly is. It should also be seen that NGOs and civil society as a whole have indeed failed to fulfil, in great part, the expectations and

hopes that had been placed in them. Klaus and Zeman, in stating that civil organisations should create their own political party and try to succeed in elections with it, captured in an aggressively polemical way the fact that displays of civic self-organisation have a problem in demonstrating their own legitimacy. In the case of those that have changed into competitive grant-funded firms, and yet as part of their “aura” have retained an atmosphere of general good, this problem with demonstrating legitimacy becomes even stronger, and for a political demagogue, this tension around legitimacy may become an easy subject of rhetorical attack. This may make use of an interesting paradox (Mudde, 2003 and above): that while “uncivil society” movements frequently function in a way that is internally non-hierarchical, in practice they perform civil equality (corrected by charismatic leadership). The “civil sector”, meanwhile, which was meant to be an alternative to the state and the market, takes on a culture and hierarchical structures from the world of business. Among employers and managers, even in a NGO, there is not much space for civil equality.

On the basis of our research, we find ourselves able to agree with the statement by Fagan and others that the NGO-isation of civil society causes alienation (see below). At the same time, however, we have seen that participatory activism on the level of the large social movements is a source of *hostile and exclusionary rhetoric*, as a rule on both sides – both that of the participatory activists and their critics. If we were to be tempted to ascribe this exclusionary rhetoric to the “immaturity” of post-communist political culture, we could find a number of similar examples from “developed Western democracies”: and we do not even have to recall De Gaulle’s claim that the “German Jew” wished to influence developments in France in 1968. The alternative explanation that offers itself is that the aggressive, hostile and exclusionary rhetoric is in play here as a result of a situation when a participatory movement has the power to influence something (or, as in the case of racism, to cause moral scandal) or at least, the participating actors think so. Where we have identified a fall in the intensity of exclusionary rhetoric and the acceptance of the legitimacy of the experience of protest movements (in the case of the anti-austerity movements), this recognition was connected at the same time to an awareness that these movements were practically unable to influence anything. Once again, this is not a post-communist aberration, but more part of a worldwide trend (cf. Krastev 2014).

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FRIEND OR FOE?

Foreign donors' role in the formation of civil society in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, civil society in independent Ukraine lacked visibility and seemed passive and underdeveloped. Yet lately foreign observers have defined civil society in Ukraine as the richest in the former Soviet Union in terms of the number and variety of organizations. In the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity, as the state institutions are unable to perform their basic functions, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been compelled to take over some of their duties, getting involved into multiple spheres of public life, such as volunteering in the army, crowd-funding for internally displaced people and military needs. They are particularly strong in advocacy for reforms and acting as watchdogs of institutional change. However, while having proven its resilience in crisis, civil society in Ukraine still shows low sustainability and a high level of dependency on foreign donors.

Having acknowledged the positive role of foreign donors in the development of national civil society, the present article goes beyond this one-sided evaluation and answers the following questions: How do foreign donors influence Ukrainian CSOs working with civic participation and human rights advocacy? What are the main obstacles the CSOs face on the way to full independence and sustainability in post-Euromaidan Ukraine in the years 2014–2017? Drawing on the empirical data collected through the analysis of major national media sources and social media, participant observation, and interviews with civil society actors, policy-makers and foreign donors' representatives, this article argues that the role of foreign donors may be more complex than the way it used to be portrayed, as it should be assessed in the context of domestic social and political dynamics. The failure to do so may lead to unintended consequences and render previous achievements null.

Keywords: civil society, Ukraine, foreign aid, civil society organizations

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INTRODUCTION

External observers have recently defined Ukrainian civil society as vibrant and dynamic, experiencing a persistent rise after the so-called “Revolution of dignity” in 2013–2014 (Freedom House 2017). Indeed, Ukrainian society, in the times of antigovernment protest referred to as the “Revolution of Dignity” or “Euromaidan” and its aftermath, has seen the most significant mass mobilization since Ukraine emerged as an independent state in 1991 and the Orange Revolution in 2004. Even before the Euromaidan, Ukraine’s civil society had shown some potential for being a driving force for the country’s social and political transformations. The success of civil society organizations (CSOs) with toppling the corrupt president, Viktor Yanukovich, and forming a new government including leaders who emerged in the times of the protests, attracted the attention of international donors. They have for quite some time been nurturing local CSOs by various grants, exchange and technical support programs mostly coming from the West. In order not to leave Ukraine helpless in facing challenges of post-revolutionary times, bilateral donors such as the USA, the EU, Japan, and many others, as well as numerous international organizations have stepped up assistance, sharply increasing support and allocations (United Nations Ukraine 2017).

The presence of Western support and Western resources, as well as their influence on and importance for Ukrainian civil society organizations are obvious. Apart from the financial support coming to Ukrainian CSOs, a growing number of young Ukrainian politicians are Western educated (in contrast to the older generation educated in the Soviet society), heading to the EU or to the USA to attend schools, workshops, and other educational events, thereby forming a new and “democratic” mindset. In addition, Western countries put direct pressure on the Ukrainian government. Censor.net quotes Ukrainian MP Svitlana Zalishchuk, a young journalist and activist elected to parliament after the Euromaidan, maintaining that *“70 percent of what has been accomplished so far has only been possible thanks to international pressure.”* (Lozovsky 2016). In other words, the positive view on the impact of Western states and international organizations on the general situation in Ukraine and development of local civil society is currently the dominant discourse in the Ukrainian public sphere.

At the same time, over the last couple of years blaming for national problems international organizations that support local non-governmental organizations has turned into a Central and Eastern European trend. Russian President Vladimir Putin was the first to shut down a number of donor organizations labelled as “foreign agents.” This was followed by actions in CEE countries, with the Hungarian Fidesz launching a full-on offensive

against NGOs that received funding through the EEA and Norway Grants program, and later attacking NGOs and Central European University related to George Soros. Similarly, the conservative government in Poland has passed a law to set up a body to control the allocation of foreign funding to NGOs operating in the country (DW 2016). The arguments of the ruling groups to justify restrictive actions targeting foreign donors are usually the threat these organizations allegedly pose for the country's independence and the inadmissibility of other international actors' interference in national politics. Considering that this kind of justification is coming from governments that are becoming more and more authoritarian, their accusations cannot always be seen as reasonable or fair. No scholarly or non-academic literature has suggested any objective evidence for claiming that international organizations and Western countries have a negative impact on democratization processes in third countries or that they pose a threat to these states' independence.

However, it remains to be questioned whether financial and other kinds of support that international organizations provide for CSOs in third countries make a substantive and measurable contribution to the promotion of political and social transformations and to strengthening civil society organizations as democratization agents. There are authors who argue that while foreign donors had a crucial role in the professionalization and institutionalization of CSOs in CEE countries, this influence has not always been accompanied by the de-politicization of these organizations or has even made internationally funded activists more assertive in domestic political conflicts (Ayoub 2013, Cisar 2010, Cisar–Vrablikova 2012). Other scholars, however, challenge the emancipatory potential of democracy assistance (Hearn 2000), claiming that while foreign donors (the EU, in particular) are declaring empowerment and strengthening of civil society as the main purpose of their assistance, in reality the aim is *“to build governance and state capacity”* (Fagan–Ostojic 2008).

The present article examines the role foreign donors have in the development of civil society organizations working with civic participation and advocacy in Ukraine. Focusing particularly on the developments and transformations of CSOs over the last three years (i.e. after the Euromaidan), it aims to answer the question: *How do foreign donors influence Ukrainian CSOs working with civic participation and advocacy, and what are the main obstacles CSOs face on the way to full independence and sustainability?*²

To answer this research question, I use the concept of democratization and Europeanization “from below.” I argue that the issue of democratization from below is more complex than imagined based on positive evaluations and the literature. I claim that while the donors' overall influence may be considered positive, it should be assessed in the context of the political dynamics within Ukrainian civil society. These dynamics include the legal conditions and public opinion as factors contributing to the low sustainability of CSOs. There is a need to adjust the organizational and project structure to Western standards, as at present CSOs are disconnected from the general population. The failure to take these and other factors into consideration may lead to unintended consequences and render previous achievements null.

2 The present article defines a civil society organization (CSO) as any voluntarily union of people and/or legal entities to realize and to protect their rights and freedoms, in particular economic, social, cultural, environmental, and other interests, founded by individuals as defined by the Law of Ukraine “About Civil Groups” (Law # 4572-17 of 22.03.2012). It uses the term CSOs also for the unions legal entities have founded with the same purposes. The term “non-governmental organizations” (NGOs) is used here as a synonym, unless the article talks about foreign NGOs as specified.

This article is structured as follows. First, I introduce the background and theoretical framework applied for my further analysis. I discuss then the current context, elaborating in more detail on the domestic and geopolitical conditions, in which Ukrainian civil society organizations have to act. The article concludes with the discussion of theoretical and policy implications.

METHOD

In the present article, I draw on data collected via interviews, media analysis, and participant observation. During the years 2014–2017, I have conducted more than 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in Kyiv and Brussels with employees of NGOs, representatives of donor organizations from Western European countries and the USA³, political activists and experts. Among interviewees there were several activists, participants of Euromaidan and the Orange Revolution, employees of NGOs in Kyiv working in the area of human rights and democracy promotion, representatives of the EU delegation to Kyiv, and two Ukrainian MPs. The interviews were 40 to 90 minutes long and covered questions concerning political and social changes in Ukraine, the development of Ukrainian civil society, the work of local CSOs and NGOs funded from abroad, and the influence of foreign actors in Ukraine. In parallel, I have conducted content analysis of major Ukrainian online media (such popular sources as Korrespondent.net, Ukrain's'ka Pravda, and Hromadske radio) and the social media of a number of public figures, including Kyiv mayor Vitalii Klychko, and leaders of major political parties. Finally, for more than a year I have been working as a project coordinator for one of the foreign donor organizations in Ukraine, which allowed me to organize participant observation and have access to actors and data required for this study. For the data analysis and explaining outcomes, process tracing has been used to identify the key points (or their absence) in democratic transformations in the country's development and explain the events accompanying them regarding foreign funding and its use by Ukrainian CSOs.

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT: BACKGROUND

Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has benefited from Western states' substantial support, including – but not limited to – financial assistance. While at the beginning of its existence Ukraine declared approximation with the EU among its foreign politics priorities, relations between these two were based on the vague 1998 EU-Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (similar arrangements were offered to all former republics) and the EU did not prioritize Ukraine in its external actions. It was in 2004, after the enlargement round when Ukraine turned into a neighbor country and the Orange Revolution brought to power a seemingly pro-Western, democratic-leaning government that the EU had to devise special policies and instruments for Ukraine (Shumylo–Tapiola 2013). According to foreign experts, over the next decade Ukraine made *“remarkable progress toward [the] creation of democratic institutions and strengthening of democratic procedures.”* (OSCE 2011: 14). For example, already in 2005 Freedom House ranked Ukraine as a “free” country, describing it in 2009 as a *“dynamically developing democracy in the region valuing fundamental human rights and freedoms”* (OSCE 2011: 14).

³ The present article refers to “donors” and “donor organizations” as to foreign states, international organizations, and foreign NGOs that provide Ukrainian CSOs and civil society activists with non-refundable financial and other forms of assistance for different purposes, overall aimed at the democratization and increased well-being of Ukrainian society.

Overall, we can define three main stages in the development of Ukrainian civil society and civil society organizations. The first and largest one covers time from Ukraine's independence to the Orange Revolution in 2004. As the 1990s began, the Ukrainian economy was in deep crisis and citizens found it difficult to be engaged in public activities; therefore, the first waves of political participation did not grow into a stable tradition of civil activism (Bekeshkina–Kaźmierkiewicz 2012: 34). In those circumstances, international foundations played a crucial role in the country, providing financial support to a rather weak civil society, to think tanks, human rights organizations or resource centers for other public organizations.

The beginning of the second period is related to the Orange Revolution, a nationwide protest against the presidential election fraud in 2004. Hundreds of thousands of people took part in the protest action demanding another election round and the cancellation of the falsified results of the previous round. This momentum of mass mobilization was referred to as *"the apogee of activity and force of civil society in Ukraine"* (Bekeshkina–Kaźmierkiewicz 2012: 35) and attracted considerable attention from Western institutions and organizations. The further developments after the victory of the protesters and the coming to power of a pro-EU government were questionable. On the one hand, civil society activists' expectations and hopes for fast democratization, as well as for an improved dialogue between CSOs and state institutions never came true. By the beginning of the next decade, in 2012–2013, Ukraine was in an even deeper economic and political crisis caused, first and foremost, by a highly corrupt governmental structure. At the same time, many foreign donors began to organize their departure from the country or decreased their involvement as the domestic donors activated (Stewart 2009). On the other hand, as noted above, the Orange Revolution made the EU shift the focus of its attention, intensifying its support for the local civil society in Ukraine.

As the approximation between the EU and Ukraine was developing, Russia was increasingly concerned that the political and economic association of Ukraine with the EU would affect Russian economic interests and, perhaps more importantly, the geopolitical balance in the region (DW 2013, Walker 2013). President Yanukovich and his administration ended up in a difficult political situation in the fall of 2013. On the one hand, there was pressure from the Kremlin, while on the other, it seemed impossible for the government to meet certain requirements from the side of the EU. On November 21, 2013, the Ukrainian government issued the decree according to which the preparation for the Association Agreement had to be put on hold. As an almost immediate response, some ten thousand protesters gathered that same day in the central square of Kyiv, which eventually resulted in what is now called "Euromaidan" or the "Revolution of Dignity." As events escalated, the protest camp stayed at Maidan for eight months, during which the Yanukovich regime fell and the former president had to flee the country while the armed conflict erupted in the Eastern part of the country.

Following the events of 2013–2014, foreign donors showed increased interest in supporting democratization processes in Ukraine. Among the most present foreign funders in the country are the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP), the National Endowment for Democracy, Open Society's Ukrainian branch, the International Renaissance Foundation, embassies of EU member states, the UK and Canada, and German political foundations (KAS, FES, Heinrich Böll Foundation). After the change in government in 2014, due to a lack of trust in the "old" civic councils, the most

active civic networks prefer to work independently, building new channels for communication and advocacy at different levels. Some well-known civil society leaders have become members of the National Reforms Council, a consultative body that Petro Poroshenko has introduced to push reforms. Civic experts also populate the Strategic Advisory Groups tasked with helping the government to draw up reformist legislation, strategies, and action plans. A Reform Support Center in the cabinet of ministers has been created to serve as a sustainable connection between the government and civil society initiatives.

After the Euromaidan, new funding programs have been launched to support the democratization efforts in Ukraine. To name a few,⁴ the UK government has channeled £1,630,610 for civil society development in 2016–2018 to “*overcome the impacts of the Russia-backed conflict in the Donbas*”; £240,000 for LGBT-related research and the same amount for anti-corruption programs in 2016–2017; in 2014 the Obama administration allocated USD seven million to human rights organizations in the country as the Euromaidan emerged (in addition to more than USD 120 million security assistance); Japan has allocated around USD one million since 2014 to civil society development and democratization only through the OSCE and the Council of Europe. Ukraine has also increasingly benefited from the new European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) action plan that disposes of a larger budget and places even more emphasis on the need to strengthen the role of civil society as a positive change in the area of human rights and democratization (European Commission 2017).

The legal framework for civil society is mostly open, and the nonprofit status is easy to obtain for CSOs. In March 2017, however, a new law introduced changes into the existing legislation to prevent corruption in Ukraine. The amended Law “About the prevention of corruption” required from people working for CSOs involved in any anti-corruption activity to declare their financial assets the same way the public officials are currently required to. The Law was very vague regarding the definition of organizations whose employees were required to report on their assets and of the conditions under which the declaration was demanded from a CSO. Since 2014, it has been the first obvious barrier the government erected against civil society actions limiting the scope of CSOs’ activities and, in fact, creating grounds for corruption. The law was largely criticized by CSOs, as well as by the international community but was nevertheless implemented (UHHRU 2017).

By 2017, the Ukrainian state has remained in quite a complicated situation. After the escape of Viktor Yanukovich, the Russian government made use of the unstable political regime and economic crisis in the country and annexed the Crimean Peninsula, declaring the Autonomous Republic of Crimea a part of Russia. The interim government and later the elected government of President Petro Poroshenko has had to deal with a huge budget deficit, a general economic crisis, and the separatist rebellion in the eastern part of the country, which is significantly supported by Russia. This is accompanied by an aggressive informational war with Russia, which uses multiple sources to broadcast fake information and support pro-Russian groups in Ukraine and its neighborhood, as well as in EU member states.

4 The numbers can be consulted in detail at the UK government official page (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-programme-assistance-to-ukraine-2016-2017>); the Obama Administration site (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/18/fact-sheet-us-support-ukraine>); USAID official statistics by country (https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/UKR?implementing_agency_id=1); Info on Japan’s assistance to Ukraine since 2014 (http://www.ua.emb-japan.go.jp/jpn/bi_ua/oda/170915_assistance_en.pdf).

The present section has focused on the events accompanying the development of Ukrainian civil society over the past decade. Taking this information into consideration, I will introduce the theoretical framework and continue with the consequences that these changes and developments, particularly, in relation to foreign assistance, have posed for Ukrainian CSOs.

DEMOCRATIZATION FROM BELOW: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Growing interest in the impact of international actors on domestic politics made Risse et al. (1999) develop a theoretical framework to study the casual mechanisms by which global rules and international human rights, in particular, spread. In order to distinguish the conditions that lead to the domestic internalization of the international human rights regime, the authors propose a *“five-phase ‘spiral model’ of human rights change which explains the variation in the extent to which states have internalized these norms”* (1999: 4). The authors argue that a mandatory condition for the adoption of international human rights by national governments would be the establishment of the rule of law and local structural changes. They understand the process of the internalization and domestic implementation of international norms as a process of *“socialization”* and suggest three groups of causal mechanisms that endure it: instrumental adaptation and strategic bargaining, moral consciousness-raising and argumentation, and institutionalization and habitualization. While each of these groups becomes more important under different conditions, at the earlier stages of norms internalization, according to Risse, instrumental adaptation prevails (1999: 6). The authors focus on the important role of Western democracies to promote the international human rights regime to *“Third World countries”* and claim the responsibility Western states have to prevent human rights violation in Africa and Latin America through transnational advocacy networks and to impose and constitute the rule of law in the regions concerned. Though hardly is it possible to disagree with Risse et al.’s statement of the importance of the practical implications of the theoretical model offered for a *“more effective use of the time and resources of transnational human rights networks”*, the work quoted has been fairly criticized for being Eurocentric and overlooking the agency role of the national norm-takers and norm-makers (Acharya 2004).

The actions taken by local actors with the help of EU assistance, such as civil society organizations’ electoral support for pro-European political parties, shaming demonstrations, conferences, and education events, were named as *“Europeanization from below.”* In the literature on norm and policy diffusion, the external support of civil society through financial, technical and political assistance has been defined as the *“capacity building mechanism”* international actors are applying to domestic actors (Börzel–Risse 2012: 7). Börzel and Risse comment that this mechanism presents an additional level of foreign actors influencing change. They claim, however, that in the case of the EU this mechanism would be effective only for the accession candidates combined with European conditionality for the countries aspiring for EU market access. The mechanism is not expected to work effectively in more distant areas where the EU has no strong economic or political interest (2012: 7).

In the literature on Europeanization, capacity building is not usually considered a separate mechanism used by the European Union and is briefly described only by Börzel and Risse (2012). I argue, however, that it is

necessary to distinguish capacity building from other mechanisms most often referred to, namely conditionality and persuasion. First, this mechanism targets different actors and levels of domestic political structures. It is also different from persuasion or socialization as it implies a specific way of interaction and influence exercised upon domestic societies. The local political actors, such as civil society organizations, individual activists, artists, and academics are getting financial resources, technical support, and educational assistance for incentives and events aimed at promoting Western norms and values and building a “democratic” society.

Instead, studying foreign influence on democratization in the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Acharya (2004) suggests a localization framework that presents an explanation for the fact that a state or regional union may accept and adopt one norm while fully rejecting another. According to Acharya, it makes sense to replace the term “norms diffusion” that implies that local norm-takers are passive by the term “norm localization” that implies more dynamism. The contribution of Acharya’s framework consists in turning local actors from passive norm-takers or learners into dynamic agents that carry out *“norm selection, borrowing and modification in accordance with a preexisting normative framework to build congruence between that and emerging global norms”* (2004: 269). It can be further used to specifically explain the behavior of non-Western states that receive norms and their agency role.

Koo and Ramirez (2009) point out the world’s saturation with numerous human rights organizations, treaties, conferences and publications as the main factor positively influencing the adoption rate of human rights standards. This development, according to the authors, is closely related to the *“rise and expansion of the human rights discourse at the national level”* (2009: 1342). However, it is important to make a distinction between the mere adoption of the documents and what the authors define as the national incorporation of international human rights standards (Koo–Ramirez 2009: 1323). Since if a national government ignores global human rights (HR) treaties and regimes, it normally leads to the expression of disgrace and illegitimacy by the world polity, Koo and Ramirez suggest that most states will be more likely to adopt international standards for human rights. However, when it comes to countries with lower democratic profiles and high costs of the implementation of HR regimes, the findings show that these states will be more enthusiastic to implement treaties that carry a symbolic meaning and will try to avoid more demanding protocols with stronger pressure towards compliance. The simple adoption of HR standard does not, therefore, directly facilitate the establishment of a national HR regime and the creation of a more positive human rights record (2009: 1342–43).

The growing presence of the USA and the EU against the backdrop of the conflict with Russia and a deep political and economic crisis has certainly brought additional opportunities for CSOs, including the funding options and, more importantly, the expansion of networking opportunities. Democratization from below, therefore, should not be overlooked when examining transformation in third countries. The developments accompanying the evolution of civil society in CEE countries over the last two decades as well as the interaction between foreign actors and civil society groups there show that foreign donors’ capacity-building approach deserves more attention than it used to get. The empirical and analytical parts of this article aim to address this gap.

BRINGING POSITIVE CHANGE: NEW POLITICAL ACTORS, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

In 2017, Freedom House referred to civil society in Ukraine as to the “*the strongest element in Ukraine’s democratic transition*” (Freedom House 2017: 2). Indeed, mass mobilization during the Revolution of Dignity resulted in the awakening and birth of numerous civil society organizations, which, after the government had changed, turned into a persistent driver of reforms for democratization and social change. The existing legal framework, created in 2012 and improved in 2016, for civil society organizations may, in principle, be characterized as open and supportive, especially compared to other post-Soviet republics like Russia or Belarus. “Open” means that the government does not prevent the establishment of NGOs, apart from a few exceptions does not set obstacles for most of the legitimate NGO events and activities, and it is quite easy for an organization to be registered as non-profit.

This section discusses the most important, argument for the sake of this article, namely the changes related to institutionalized civil society activism in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity, focusing first on the positive transformation and then reflecting more on the challenges NGOs are facing. The concluding section will tackle the role foreign donors play both in the achievements and challenges of Ukrainian civil society, and suggest the possible implications of this impact.

Emergence of new political actors among the protest participants

One of the reasons why the international donor community see the Revolution of Dignity as having positive consequences for empowering of Ukrainian civil society was the emergence of new political actors among the protesters. During the previous two decades, Ukrainian political elites had mainly been representatives of either the older generation who started or made their career during Soviet times, or businessmen who decided to expand their influence into the public sphere. Surveys showed that neither group enjoyed a particularly high level of trust from the side of population (DW 2012). As a result of the government collapse and President Yanukovich’s flight from Ukraine in 2014, several Ukrainian political parties who had been particularly active at Euromaidan or even won the popular vote shared most seats in parliament and government. Among them there were the “Petro Poroshenko Bloc” (Petro Poroshenko became the newly elected president), the “People’s Front” of Arsenii Yatsenyuk, “*Samopomich*” (Self-help) Party, the “Civil Position Party,” headed by the former minister of defense Anatolij Hrytsenko, and the “*Batkyvshchyna*” (Motherland) Party headed by former Ukrainian prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko.

It is particularly relevant that personalities active in the Maidan protests and expressing active pro-Western or pro-EU positions have appeared on the major party lists and in the Cabinet. Among the new generation of Ukrainian politicians and public servants we have, among others, young MPs Serhii Leshchenko and Svitlana Zalizhchuk (both from the Petro Poroshenko Bloc) or Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Anastasiya Deeva. The common characteristic of this new generation of politicians is that they maintain tight links with the West: Western education, active participation in international conferences, workshops, training and various forms of knowledge exchange. Unsurprisingly, these leaders express ideas that tend to be approved

by the international organizations and are positively seen by foreign donors, compared to those of the previous political elites. Among the examples of the “new” political behavior, the support for the Equality March in Kyiv is noteworthy. Svitlana Zalishchuk even appeared in the photos as part of the media-campaign that had the slogan “*It’s always time for human rights*” to support LGBT pride (National LGBT portal of Ukraine 2015). The member of the same party, Serhii Leshchenko, posted on his Facebook page:

Leshchenko is supporting the gay parade. Not any gay parade but the Kyiv Pride. Because these are human rights. And non-discrimination – not only at the domestic level, but legally provided – is a part of mandatory requirements for Ukraine to get a visa-free regime with the EU. Do you want to enter Schengen without a visa? Respect the minorities’ rights, both ethnic and sexual minorities (Leshchenko 2015, the author’s translation).

The emergence of such new political actors turned out to be one of the reasons for *opening space for political participation* for the groups that the wider society had largely overlooked or marginalized before Euromaidan. Among these groups, there are the LGBT community, feminists, environmentalists, urbanists, and others. These, so-called “new social movements” were much less visible in Ukraine before Euromaidan and even less during the first decade of Ukrainian independence. Now, as Ukraine has become more attractive for foreign aid donors in different sectors, such organizations have been receiving funding as well as technical and informational support. It is sufficient to take a look at the projects funded in the last several years by the EIDHR, USAID, donor organizations of EU member-states and others, including LGBT organizations, organizations working for gender equality, the non-government civic open tech sector, independent media, and anti-corruption organizations. Most of them have never enjoyed state support and would be unable to function as professionalized and institutionalized CSOs, which makes foreign donors’ support an important precondition of their work and existence.

The professionalization and institutionalization of Ukrainian civil society can be seen as one of the positive consequences of increased international support. Apart from funding, many donors offer wider support, including various workshops (on writing grant application, advocacy, lobbying, project management, etc.), trainings, study visits abroad, participation in conferences and round tables, integration of external experts (for example, a GIZ expert from Germany has been working for LGBT parents’ organization in Kyiv for two years), leadership development, working groups, online support of experts, and other ways for CSOs in a targeted country. An interviewee, who is a representative of a CSO working in the education reform sector, commented that such kind of help is not less helpful as it raises the quality of a project’s output and leads to a more competent approach to further funding applications. Correspondingly, it is not surprising that the organizations that once received foreign funding and have a positive record of relations with foreign donors benefit from further contributions more frequently and in larger quantities.

International cooperation and transnational activism

Euromaidan and further events provided Ukrainian CSOs with much more opportunities for involvement into international cooperation and transnational activism. As the interest in transformations taking place in Ukraine has been growing, Ukrainian experts and civil society activists have been increasingly invited to a

number of international events adding to the visibility of local CSOs and creating stable transnational links. For example, among others, in the last two years the German-Ukrainian Academic Society and the Munich Kyiv Queer (LGBT network for German and Ukrainian activists) have been founded, while Turkish and Ukrainian civil society groups have organized a number of joint projects for Crimean Tatars. Apart from visibility, this provided Ukrainian CSOs with new tools for promoting transformation and changes in the country appealing to the international community and using international actors such as the EU or its bodies as a point of reference to influence local political actors. For example, as the Ukrainian government faced the need to comply with the conditions of the Visa Liberalization Package in 2014–2016, civil society activists re-framed their demands presenting them as EU requirements that Ukraine has to comply with to be granted a visa-free regime. In some cases, as in the adoption of the anti-discrimination amendment to the Labor Code and the National Strategy for Human Rights including a number of provisions that would have been impossible in Ukraine some years ago (such as, for example, the same sex marriage project proposal), this strategy proved to be quite effective.

The discussion above confirms the argument voiced by social movements and the civil society literature that foreign donors and, particularly, the EU's assistance have some positive effect on strengthening domestic civil society and democratization from below. Having acknowledged all these positive developments and others not listed here, as well as the indirect benefits of foreign funding for CSOs in third countries, this article will not focus on some weaker points in this cooperation and reflect on challenges the civil society organizations in Ukraine are facing. While it would be wrong to claim that there are causal relations between foreign aid and problems of Ukrainian CSOs, I suggest that existing policies and practices do need certain adjustments and improvements, which would positively influence the social and political impact of the CSOs supported by foreign donors.

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TRADEOFFS

In this section of the article, I focus on the so-called tradeoffs coming with foreign assistance. Some of the points I make, like the project culture problem and the disconnectedness of professionalized CSOs from grassroots activists have already been noted in the literature on civil society activism in developing democracies (Kuzmanovic 2010, Cisar–Vrablikova 2012), displaying commonalities of civil society growth and development in the CEE region and European neighborhood. Others, as low sustainability and relations of CSOs with national political parties, are often addressed in the recent scholarly debate and, therefore, may deserve special attention.

Project culture has become an integral part of any professionalized CSO's life practice. To be able to survive and afford to pay full or part-time staff, most organizations have to apply for foreign donors' funding on a regular basis. As donors usually prefer not to cover the full scale of an organization's activity, focusing either on particular projects or paying for particular staff or, sometimes, for office space, it is usually necessary to apply to several organizations at the same time. The increasing competition among the organizations also requires diversification of risks and applications. The first obstacle to the stable functioning of most CSOs is the rather complicated application process. To start with, the applications in most cases should be made in English,

which requires that the organization have advanced speakers of English on their staff. Then, the application procedure follows a particular way, which varies from donor to donor. This phenomenon has been discussed by Kuzmanovic (2010) as “project culture”: the applications for funding by international organizations are to be carried out in the form of projects, which include a detailed conceptual part, budgeting, description of step-by-step actions, staff structure, adjustment of the project description in the correspondence with the CFA requirements, and other technicalities. This is a time and energy-consuming process, which requires certain skills and qualifications. Therefore, as Kuzmanovic points out, some CSOs that can afford it hire a special person whose job is to search for funding opportunities and to write applications for each call. In the interviews I conducted with Ukrainian NGOs and from what I observed working in the area, most organizations successful with obtaining funding on a regular basis had a person dealing particularly with drafting projects and looking for funding opportunities. Commenting on the complexity of the application processes, my interviewees admitted that the next application always requires less effort in the application process and that it is usually easier to obtain funding if you have already carried out and reported on a number of successful ones. As the cost of the project is not usually covered in full by one donor, organizations often have to find their own means to bear the difference. Typically, this is not a problem for bigger organizations with funding from many sources, permanent staff, and office space. However, it seriously limits smaller or younger organizations’ chances of accessing financial resources.

The competition for the recourses as well as some organizations’ repeated success with obtaining funding often seems to lead to a *disconnectedness of professionalized civil society organizations* from those defining themselves as grassroots. This disconnectedness can be observed, for example, in following open debates between activists on different social media platforms or in personal interviews both with the activists and representatives of donors. Obviously, one of the stumbling blocks in the debate is which organizations the donors are ready to fund. However, the disconnection goes further than that and relates to strategic goals, tactics of resistance and methods. One of the examples that provoked hot discussions in Ukrainian civil society was the equality marches for the rights of LGBT people in Kyiv in 2014 and 2015, which were largely criticized by grassroots organizations as neoliberal events sponsored by the West. They also felt that it was imposed at the least appropriate time when the country was in a war conflict with Russia, when additional provocations were counterproductive. The situation can be best illustrated by the quote from an interview I conducted with a representative of the EU delegation to Kyiv (personal communication, August 2014) who said that “the EU does not demand from Ukrainians a pride parade, it is the Ukrainians who ask for it.” This quote seems to describe the general situation in which the ideas and aspirations of professionalized civil society, which is still somewhat elitist in Ukraine, are often generalized as if they reflected the wider public opinion.

Low sustainability

As noted above, professionalized civil society in Ukraine may, to a certain extent, be defined as “imported” or “copied” from the Western model. While there were dissident and feminist movements in the Soviet Ukraine, the institutionalized network of civil society organizations in the country today has been largely influenced by international organizations, donors and partner-NGOs. While this situation can be explained

mostly by the absence of our own previous experience, another more practical explanation of the trend is that foreign donors are the major, if not the unique, source of existence for organizations acting in the area of civic participation and human rights advocacy, transparent governance, open data, and anti-corruption activity. Some authors have widely criticized the high level of dependence of foreign donors in CEE countries (Spina-Raymond 2013) in relation to project culture, as well as due to the allegedly imposed neoliberal values and depoliticization of social movements in third countries.

Some countries have had negative experience with European neighborhood (Russia and Turkey), and even EU member states, such as Poland and Hungary where the governments have developed the politics of securitization aimed at limiting the influence that foreign actors have on domestic politics through financing of NGOs and social movements. Russia is an extreme case, where in 2012 the notorious Foreign Agents Law was implemented, causing the immediate shutdown of 27 NGOs. In 2012-2016, 148 organizations were included in the “foreign agents” list, usually the ones protecting human rights, such as the Open Society Foundation founded by George Soros (Human Rights Watch 2017). Unsurprisingly, these organizations were either critical of the government or supporting activists and citizens suffering from violations of their rights by the Kremlin (Amnesty International 2016). Currently the main concern of Polish NGOs is the intention of the national conservative government to centralize funding through a National Center for Civil Society, subject directly to Prime Minister Beata Szydlo. If this happens as it is promised, it will pose the risk that foreign funds may be directed only to NGOs that demonstrate a pro-governmental position. The current developments may make foreign donors seek new ways of supporting NGOs, as having to deal with public institutions, many Polish organizations currently find it too cumbersome to apply for EU funding. Considering all this, the issue of sustainability emerges as critical for Ukrainian CSOs as well. The current government presents itself as very pro-European and it is highly unlikely that it will soon change its course towards restrictions copying Russian politics. However, the 27-year history of Ukraine is full of ups and downs of democratic transformations. Therefore, some activists consider the importance of being able to survive as an organization without western assistance or with drastically reduced support. One of the ways to solve this issue would be to stimulate donations from the side of the population and increase the share of volunteers’ work. The solution is difficult though, as an additional issue related to NGOs supported by Western funds is that *the population’s awareness of them is highly insufficient*.

The last point, low understanding by average citizens of the work the CSOs are doing can be mostly explained by two factors. First, there is a genuine problem typical of the CEE context that “fake” NGOs are created and registered to be used by corrupt public officials for channelling funds governments obtain for civil society support. As my interviewees from donor organizations explained, these cases were much more popular at the earlier stages of “democracy-building” in Ukraine and are less frequent these days due to an increased level of transparency and accountability from the side of the government, as well as due to donors’ preference for working directly with civil society organizations and activists themselves. Even though the situation has much improved, the population’s general distrust of the corrupt government partially remains associated with the third sector. Second, there is the prevalent discourse in the Ukrainian public sphere that many NGOs supported by the West are nothing but “grant-eaters” distant from the “real world” spending Western money

on their own needs. It is difficult to identify where or who this discourse originated from, but I have regularly heard the term “grant-eater” in the interviews and conversations with people professionally engaged with the third sector in Ukraine. One of the activists with more than 10 years of experience said in her interview:

For example, when my mother who works in the public sphere as a doctor, and earns some 250 Euros a month, hears on TV that people in NGOs receive 3000 dollars...of course, she feels indignation. However, first of all, there are no such salaries, second, you have to compare how much the people who work in this NGO do and what qualifications are required...” (personal communication, Kyiv, 10.05.2017).

Ordinary citizens’ concern about NGOs abusing access to foreign funding and the use of “grant-eater” as a common term were given by numerous interviewees. In turn, interviewees either expressed how insulted they felt by these attitudes or showed some sad irony, as many of them are poorly paid and work long hours for free, donate to the projects themselves, and are far from the virtual image of a rich NGO officer spending vacations abroad.

To summarize, positive results of the presence and support of the foreign donors as described in the previous section confirm the existing literature on Europeanization from below or bottom-up democratization. Indeed, financial and technical support allows CSOs in Ukraine to gain more space for public and political participation, visibility, and, therefore, also popular support. Similarly to Poland described by Ayoub (2013) and the Czech Republic (Cisar 2010), Ukrainian civil society has become more professionalized, involved in transnational activism and cooperation, and has reached a new level of political participation, building alliances with new political actors and groups. At the same time, this section shows that there are certain issues both scholars and foreign donors overlook, such as the disconnectedness from grassroots organizations, low sustainability and the dependency of CSOs on foreign donors. These problems are partly related to the low level of the population’s trust that most CSOs still experience. The fact these problems are frequently ignored can be explained by the donor organizations’ general lack of understanding of the complexity of the domestic environment where they are functioning. This lack of understanding and the reluctance on the part of donor organizations to give up their standard approach to the region leads to an obvious decrease in the efficiency of democracy promotion. In addition, in some cases, it may even produce some unexpected negative outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The present article is engaged with civil society development in post-Euromaidan Ukraine, focusing on civil society organizations engaged with civic participation, democratic governance, and human rights. Civil society, which before Ukraine obtained its independence existed mainly in a highly unstructured underground form, and which was still under-developed in the first two decades of the country’s existence, first gained additional attention from Western states and donor organizations after the so-called Orange Revolution in 2004, and was even more in the limelight after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. The events of Euromaidan demonstrated to the world that Ukraine possesses a very dynamic and vibrant civil society with obvious potential for mobilization, civic participation and civic consciousness. This as well as the worsening situation with the presence of Russia in the region together with the shifting geopolitical power balance prompted Western states to re-distribute their resources, redirecting more to the construction and support of the young

Ukrainian democracy. This article shows how the shift in Western donors' strategies and priorities for Ukraine was taking place as domestic changes were evolving in the country.

The empirical research in Ukraine demonstrates that, in line with the literature, the funds invested into democratization on the level of civil society do bear fruit. Ukrainian civil society organizations demonstrate growing levels of institutionalization and professionalization. As reflected by the European Commission and USAID reports, a growing number of Ukrainians involved in civic activism attend various educational events, travel to the EU and the USA for experience exchange, training sessions with activists, workshops, conferences, and other networking and learning activities (USAID 2016, European Commission 2017a). Also, again in line with the existing literature, my interviews with CSO activists who benefit from Western support have revealed that even the political appeal to the argument of approximation with the European Union and stressing the need to comply with "European values" made a positive difference when lobbying their interests. This became particularly effective when the Revolution of Dignity and mass mobilization opened the space for CSOs' political participation. The temporary lack of strong political groups in power gave civil society the momentum for action and for pushing for change, and even if this was only for a short moment, it made its impact. Moreover, this temporary vacuum, a turbulent political environment with no effective government, allowed new political actors to step up and gain popular support. They were typically younger, had no "communist" or "oligarchic" past, but had a Western education which they had received abroad, and cherished more progressive values. In these circumstances, the foreign support fell on much more fertile ground than any time before, particularly with the Yanukovich regime.

On the other hand, this article shows the problems in the way foreign funding is allocated and foreign donors act in the country, looking for potential beneficiaries of funding, distributing their support and monitoring the projects in process. Among the issues I suggest addressing critically are the so-called project culture and the preference for professionalized over grassroots civil society, in some cases a lack of understanding of domestic dynamics by the persons in charge of control and the monitoring of projects. As a result of these phenomena as well as of the population's persistently low level of trust in civil society organizations, the low sustainability of CSOs also needs attention. This last issue, namely Ukrainian civil society organizations' presently extreme dependency on foreign donors' financial but also political and technical support is seen as the most problematic aspect in need of an immediate solution. This article considers the dependence on foreign donors dangerous for the further development of civil society in Ukraine for two reasons. First, there is a political risk similar to what some other CEE countries are facing where the government has put pressure on civil society, restricting the access CSOs have to foreign funding. This has caused that space for action and political participation has been shrinking. The newly introduced amendment to the "About the Prevention of Corruption Law" is an example of such pressure. While in the present conditions of conflict with Russia the Ukrainian government is highly unlikely to reject Western support, the dependency on funding granted substantially shapes the strategies of civil society organizations in accordance with the priorities international donor organizations set for them. In certain cases, foreign aid may cause such unintended consequences as internal conflicts, hidden agendas and strained relations between civil society groups and organizations, such as inertia or even a backlash against targeted groups. The solution could be to push for the development of

national legislation and more favorable conditions for a national business sector to act as a potential donor for the Ukrainian CSOs, as well as to introduce tax instruments encouraging Ukrainians to relocate part of their taxes to the non-governmental sector.

Are foreign donors friends or foes then? It would be difficult to underestimate the extent and significance of foreign donors' support for the growth, institutionalization and professionalization of civil society in Ukraine. At the same time, the fact that this importance is not decreasing and remains stable both for older and for newly emerging organizations demonstrates Ukrainian civil society's high level of persistent dependency on foreign donors. Not only does such dependency present a potential threat to the long-term potential existence and survival of Ukrainian civil society as a dynamic driver for political and social change, but mostly due to the foreign donors' lack of understanding of the local context, may also lead to unintended consequences worsening the targeted groups' conditions.

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PATTERNS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG POLITICALLY ACTIVE STUDENTS IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to describe common characteristics of politically active college and university students in Hungary and to give an insight into their divergent values, ideologies and motivations. First, we identify their participation in different forms of political action. Then we use a “phenomenological”, intrinsic approach that is able to understand the “voice” of young people based on the suggestions of former research that young people’s political communities influence their willingness to participate. We found that direct forms of participation are the key to understanding the political participation of the university students and we conclude that their political way of thinking and their consequent political action may be determined by three political communities in the long term.

Keywords: political participation, young people, political identities

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PATTERNS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG POLITICALLY ACTIVE STUDENTS IN HUNGARY

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the political activity of Hungarian college and university students. Members of this age cohort are embedded both in the traditional values of their families and in the new ideas of youth organizations, and are therefore very sensitive to societal changes. Students' views on democracy are primarily shaped by the contemporary institutions that play a key role in the political socialization of youth (e.g. family, school, peer groups and the media). In 1989/90, following the democratic transition of the country, these institutions had to face new challenges and play new roles. The specificity of the Hungarian case is that a fragmented, semi-peripheral political socialization became characteristic (Laki–Szabó A. 2014: 40–41) in which the role of these institutions in transferring democratic values to young people is not clarified. Even though the new system is different both institutionally and functionally from the previous one, and despite the current system being the antithesis of the previous system ideologically (Szabó I. 1994: 62–63) institutions within a fragmented, semi-peripheral political socialization are unable to prepare students for the requirements of democratic citizenship; and certain patterns from the former, communist period and of earlier revolute socialization persist.

We aim to explore the motivations of politically active college and university students from two different perspectives. On the one hand, we use the basically normative concept of political participation, which considers participation as a cornerstone of democracy and as such a socially desirable activity. On the other hand, we adopt a phenomenological perspective on politics which allows passivity as a “normal state” for young people and considers political activity as something unusual, which should be understood from the perspective of their actual activities. Former research suggests that although young Hungarians show indifference toward politics,² if they encounter a social problem that closely affects them, they will stand up for their rights. We use two approaches in order to seize the political communities, groups that can mobilize, and articulate the political opinion of young people at the collective level. At the individual level, a participatory approach sets the dimensions along the political activity that can be described within a sample of Hungarian college and university students. The phenomenological approach groups students and explains the collective identities (e.g., passive, active, loyal and rebellious students) along which their activity can be described. By finding those groups that can offer a collective consciousness, or community spirit to active young people, it becomes possible to adequately describe actual processes that characterize the political activity of university students as a distinguished group of Hungarian youth.

² Sociological studies conducted recently in Hungary unanimously suggest that youths' level of political interest strongly shapes their assessment of the political system, their acceptance of political actors, and also the modes with which they become integrated into society. The past 10–15 years of data collection pertaining to political socialization and voter behaviour have also shown a tendency in the population to turn away from politics (Szabó A. 2013: 21–26).

Our paper consists of four main parts. First, we will review the literature of political participation and empirical studies on the political activities of the Hungarian youth. After the main forms of participation have been distinguished, we will go on to investigate the applicability of these forms to the current Hungarian political context. The next step is based on a university and college student survey conducted in 2013, and will include cluster-analyses which will pinpoint the main political community groups of the Hungarian youth. Finally, main findings and consequences will be discussed.

THE LITERATURE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

By using the participation approach, we aim to highlight that within western democracies there is a long tradition of political participation assuming many different forms. While in previous decades there has been a clear decrease in traditional forms of political participation (voting, participation in political organizations, connection to political institutions), in Western Europe, other indicators show an increase in issue-driven civic participation among citizens (Dalton 2008, Inglehart 1997, Norris 2002, Norris–Curtice 2008, Klingemann–Fuchs 1995, Pattie et al. 2004, Kriesi 2008, Dalton 2004, McAdam–McCarthy–Zald 1996). In other words, voting, campaigning, and participation in political parties may have become unpopular, but participation in protests and in citizen lobby groups has clearly become more popular. While some researchers have interpreted these trends as reflecting growing scepticism and apathy (Henn–Weinstein–Wring 2002), others have called attention to the danger inherent in formulating oversimplified claims such as “the youth have become disillusioned with politics” (Zukin et al. 2006: 118–189). It may well be the case that the upcoming generations are simply interested in inventing novel forms of political participation (Phelps 2004).

Twenty-five years ago in Hungary, at the start of democratic transition, there appeared a myriad of new forms of political participation within post-socialist Hungarian society. Concerning East-Central Europe and Hungary, there have been few studies referring to these changes in participation patterns. The most significant Hungarian research program of the last two decades focusing on youth and politics, “Ifjúság” (Youth) repeated every four years,³ concluded that young Hungarians are passive and apolitical, more so than their western European peers (Szabó A.–Bauer–Laki 2002, Bauer–Szabó A. 2005, Bauer–Szabó A. 2009, Oross 2013). However, our approach is similar to the views of Edward Phelps (2004): we need to go beyond investigating young people’s level of participation; there is a need to better understand the reasons for their activity and passivity since, in the 21st century, the validity of the democratic, normative approach has faded away. We think that a “phenomenological” approach is needed: an internal, intrinsic approach that is able to understand the “voice” of young people.

For decades now, Hungarian society—in international comparisons—has been noted for its apathy and low levels of civic participation and activism (Szabó A.–Bauer–Laki 2002, Bauer–Szabó A. 2005, Bauer–Szabó A. 2009, Oross 2013). Regarding the level of formal organization among Hungarian youth, former studies (e.g., the Ifjúság studies) unanimously describe the current youth cohort as a disorganized, fragmented generation. All of the research showed, however, that among the youth, those in university and college form an exception

³ *Ifjúság* is based on a large-scale sample survey conducted in every four years since 2000. (N=8000) (Szabó–Kern 2011, Oross 2013)

to the general rule. They are the ones who are relatively more active, of whom a relatively large proportion (e.g. 55% of those studying at university) have some form of organizational affiliation (Szabó A.–Kern 2011: 69). Recent studies have shown that interest in public life and the willingness to be politically active has grown in certain groups (Szabó–Oross 2012). These groups, however, are not always committed to democratic values, i.e., growing civil society activism is strengthening antidemocratic processes as much as democracy itself (Róna–Sőrés 2012). We examine this dilemma from the approach of youth groups and their unequivocal interest in the far-right, but we also consider another group of active youth as well, who are situated outside the current political palette, have postmodern values, and revere solidarity.

There are moments that call into question the apolitical and passive Hungarian youth. In the fall of 2011, in the winter of 2012, and then in the fall of 2014, university groups mobilized mass demonstrations that took place in Budapest and in the country's major cities—even in western European cities—which radically contradicted the well-known apolitical stereotypical image. However, the impact of these events on Hungarian college and university students cannot be detected by a participation approach, or by the traditional theory of democratic political participation. According to Williams, there is a need for an additional application of a theory and a methodology, which makes it easier to understand the importance of such unique participatory forms. In the United States, much research attention was drawn to culture as an area in which the change of action takes place, and sociologists dealing with protests and movements became interested in the consequences of these changes (Williams 2004). American social scientists started to investigate the recruitment, retainment, motivation and mobilization of members of social movements by using theories of collective identity and the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. The forerunners of US researchers' intellectual movement were authors of the German phenomenological sociology, Alfred Schütz who worked mainly in the 1940s, and the foraging theory of symbolic interactionism (Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel). These researchers dealing with social movements were not simply interested in participation and they not only tested different forms of it, but also considered the broader external, "cultural environment" and the narrower internal "internal" dimensions of movement culture (Williams 1995) that surrounded them. Accordingly, the static structural models were replaced by the investigation of dynamic and interrelated mechanisms and processes when analyzing the transition to the new forms of participation at the millennium. The great researchers of social movements, such as McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly began to increasingly test the processes, the actors/activists and their collective identities (della Porta–Tarrow 2005). The works of Gamson represent a particularly important addition to the participatory approach, highlighting three elements in understanding to the motivation to act: "injustice," "agency" and "identity". These help activists and organizers to understand the problems and dilemmas and to explore the ways in which social grievances trigger actions.

According to Williams (2004), it is important to investigate collective identities of young people, or more properly speaking, to examine their collective political thinking. We claim that the description of different forms of political participation is important and indispensable, but such an analysis has a rather static nature. The dynamic approach in this case means to seek and reveal the collective political communities that offer collective consciousness, identity, attachment, thinking ("collective behaviour") to young people, promoting the formation of political action (participation): those kinds of political actions that are sometimes broken

up with overwhelming force and then fade completely. These one-time events (2011, 2012, 20104) can be considered as momentary rebellions, a point at which the lurking deep dissatisfaction breaks up. It is thus worth addressing the character of the rebellion thoroughly.

When using the term “rebellion,” we first refer to what Antony Downs meant when he used the term “rationality”. Rationality, here, meant that an individual “moves toward his goals in a way which, to the best of his knowledge, uses the least possible input of scarce resources per unit of valued output” (1957). Downs combined the rationality axiom with a self-interest axiom, so that rational behaviour, in his model, indicated “rational behaviour directed primarily toward selfish ends” (1957: 27).

The second part of the term “rebellion” is rooted in the notion of “postmodern riot”. According to Máté Szabó, postmodern riot is—unlike modern protests which were homogeneous, “combined issues”—characterized by one common issue and loose claims; however, participants formulate them along diverse, informal, spontaneous choices. The events have a central spine, but the implementation is much more diverse than it was at any time in history. Moreover, where appropriate, the central claim is carried simultaneously by traditional movements (unions), by new social movements (feminists) and by postmodern movements (such as anarchists) (Szabó M. 2008). The riot can be violent, of course, but violence is not the target; it is not the violence that is a characteristic feature of the term Szabó chooses, but eclecticism, diversity and coexistence are (Szabó M. 2007: 186–187). Connected to an issue (such as the anti-globalization protests in Seattle), activists with different perspectives, religions, ideologies, and languages get together, but it is likely that they never meet each other again. There is a single goal, which young people with different views, ideologies who are choosing a subtopic out of a set of issues and claims sympathetic to them can take up. Once a claim is embraced, they stand up for it in proportion to their self-interest, but they never act together again.

Thirdly, we use the term “rebellion” as a characteristic of young Hungarians’ political behaviour. Although young Hungarians are passive and not interested in politics, if and only if they face a political issue that affects them very much, their most active groups make their voices heard (e.g. at the end of the year 2012 when the government introduced restrictions within the higher education system). Their actions are very diverse and innovative, in some cases even loud and expressive, and they are not anti-democratic. Rebels are basically democratically-minded and approve of the capitalist market-economy, but they are critical (in some cases extremely critical) toward the existing Hungarian versions of those systems. They stand up because of an issue and after doing so, they return to their everyday lives (from which they try to exclude politics as much as possible). Moreover, there are many of them who are just “free-riders” and who think mostly about their own interests. The notion of rebellion explains the attitudes of the Hungarian youth; it puts into context their level of political activity (or rather their lack of it). We call these groups “rational” because their actions are primarily determined by self-interest. “Rebellion” refers to their high degree of dissatisfaction not just with the political elite, but with the political system as well (Szabó A. 2014).

The root of this is basically a passive behaviour originating from socialization mechanisms. In new and re-established democracies, “automatic” transmission of democratic values from one generation to the next cannot be taken for granted (Niemi–Hepburn 1995: 9). In Hungary, neither the most important agent

of socialization, the family, nor the most important institutional agent, school, orient young people toward participation (Csákó 2011). As mentioned above, family members raised during the decades of state socialism learned passive patterns of participation, and apart from a short period of euphoria following transition, the new regime did not require particularly high levels of activity from them either. Families had permanent economic problems: poverty, mass unemployment, social leveling. Compared to these issues, a participation-centric socialization function was not considered important. Nevertheless, the Hungarian school systems still did not manage to teach democratic civic education, and Western European and German solutions remain unadopted. Hungarian schools are still highly hierarchical and conservative. In terms of civic education, the educational system is inconsistent and incomplete. Since the process of the political socialization in Hungary encodes passivity into young Hungarians, political passivity can be considered as the “normal state” for young people: in the last three decades, there has been little change in this field (Csákó 2004: 2011).

Clearly at this point, political activity and passivity, as well as political preferences, can be explained from different aspects and the results can also be different. This chapter first considers the normative political participation approach, then it considers the results from the aspect of the phenomenological approach of rebellion. Finally, we will elaborate on political preferences.

DATA AND METHODS

The emergence of novel forms of participation presents a theoretical challenge, prompting researchers to come up with new concepts and distinctions. One such innovation has been the separation of the “political” and “civic” forms of participation. (Dahlgren 2000, Dalton 2004, de Vreese 2006, Dunleavy 1996, Livingstone–Bober–Helsper 2005, O’Toole et al. 2003, Phelps 2004, Verba et al. 1995). Other salient theoretical attempts include: Banes and Kaase’s (1979) distinction between “traditional” and “non-traditional” forms of participation, Inglehart and Catterberg’s (2002) focus on “elite-driven” and “anti-elitist” mobilization, Norris’ (2002) “citizen-oriented” and “case-oriented” participation, and Dalton’s “responsibility-based” and “commitment-based” participation.

These different attempts at conceptualization have engendered an emerging methodological consensus according to which research focusing on explaining political participation should seek to group different forms of participation into statistical clusters. We draw on this analytical tool, as well as on Verba, Scholzman, and Brady’s advice (1995) to approach the explanation of participation through a focus on resources as key conditions of existence.

Under the term “traditional forms of political participation” we subsumed participation at elections and participation in political organizations (political parties, unions), as well as forms of participation related to these organizations (such as campaigning, participation at meetings, wearing the symbols of these organizations, etc.). Direct forms of political participation comprise forms of participation that require personal involvement but do not require long-term commitment on behalf of the actor. We further distinguish between face-to-face activities that require significant resources and intensive involvement from activities that do not require these. Examples of the former subtype include direct forms of protest such as sit-ins, blockades, expressive and

symbolic acts (such as hunger strikes). Direct forms of political participation that require few resources come with a low risk and require low levels of commitment include the signing of statements, petitions and initiatives. Online participation appeared after the Internet broadened the forms of participation, enabling people to take part in political and public life virtually, in addition to both traditional and collective forms of participation. It became possible to take part in both traditional forms of political participation (e.g. campaigning) and direct forms (e.g. boycotts, petitions) through blogging, posting, and other forms of social-media use. This new form of participation typically requires low levels of commitment and few resources.⁴

The survey was of our own making and was conducted in the spring of 2013 using online and face-to-face interviews with Hungarian university and college students. The survey was conducted with a so-called hybrid technique: 859 persons (66%) filled out the online survey at hwww.aktivfiatalok.hu, while another 441 persons (34%) were asked to answer questions via face-to-face interviews. The online survey was advertised by the universities: each student received an invitation to fill out the questionnaire by mail. Face-to-face interviews took place between 11th and 25th of April 2013 in all major institutions across the country (35 institutions). The sample contains 1,300 university and college students. The distribution of the sample reflects the distribution of the entire student population regarding gender, level of education (B.A. or M.A.), and faculty affiliation.⁵ We have chosen the cluster analysis method.

Why is statistical cluster analysis, based on mathematical foundations, regarded as an internal, inherent method, rather than any other method? This method undoubtedly has a statistical basis, but based on the phenomenological approach, it includes a much wider range of variables than the participation approach. We are looking for “internal” dimensions based on Williams and Gamson approach that can reveal the political community, the collective consciousness that offers identity and bonds for young people, and frame the way in which they think, and promote political participation.

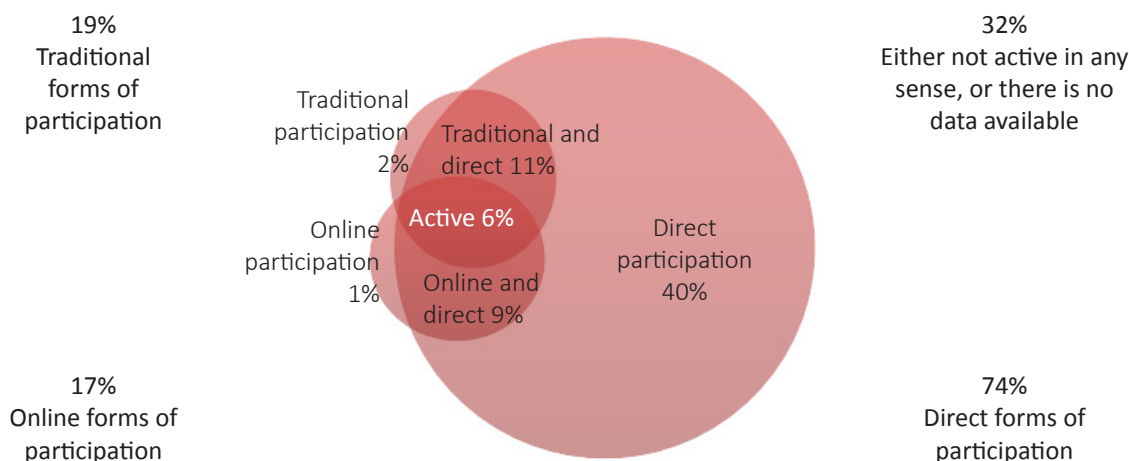
RESULTS: FROM POLITICAL PARTICIPATION TO REBELLION

When examining the connections between different forms of political participation, our results based on the data of *Active Youth Research* in 2013 show (see Figure 1) that direct forms of participation are the most dominant; almost three-quarters of students participated in some form of direct activity. This means that to understand Hungarian college and university students’ participation, it is vital to closely examine these forms of participation; 19% of the students reported participating in traditional forms of political activities, while the ratio of those who claimed to participate in on-line activities was significantly below our expectations. Only 17% claimed to have done so. We summarized our results in an aggregated diagram, which is presented below. It is very rare that students participate in only one form of listed activity (fewer than 10% of all cases). If a student is at least occasionally active in one form of activity, s/he is likely to be active in other forms, too.

4 For definitions of the different forms of political participation are defined in a former publication, see: Szabó Andrea (ed.) *Political Orientations, Values and Activities of Hungarian University and College Students*, p.82, Prague: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2013. www.boell.de/sites/default/files/political_orientations_final.pdf

5 Thus, the face-to-face interviews complemented the online part of the fieldwork. Interviewers visited the faculties and campuses with proportionally fewer online respondents.

Figure 1. Political participation of Hungarian university and college students



Three-quarters of students (74%) took part in direct forms of political participation. The most popular form of direct political participation was boycotting: 36% of students claimed they have boycotted before. About 30% of students participated in protests, and close to the same proportion engaged in some form of petition or political statement signing. Though spontaneous protests are a new form of demonstration in Hungarian society, they have already become the sixth most popular form of demonstration among Hungarian youth (16% of respondents have taken part in spontaneous protests). Those enrolled in the social sciences or arts departments and those in religious studies showed the greatest willingness to partake in direct political activism.

Though the Internet has spread to almost 100% of Hungarian college and university students, contrary to our hypothesis, virtual activism is not as prominent as expected. Virtual participation plays a complementary role and does not substitute for traditional or direct forms of participation. Our 2013 research strengthens our previous claim that virtual participation does not encourage previously passive individuals to partake in public affairs and politics.

The 2012 student protests against the Orbán government’s higher education decisions resulted in an especially interesting overlap between the members of the virtual and direct forms of political participation (9% of the examined population). The correlation between direct participation and virtual participation is strong: the model predicts that an individual participating in one additional type of off-line activity will be on average 1.456 times as likely to have partaken in a form of virtually-organized demonstration. Online activity (news clicks, blogs, page likes) in and of itself is not correlated with participation in virtually-organized protests and demonstrations. The area overlapped by all three forms of political participation (active youth) in our sample consisted of only 6% of respondents. This population represents those youths who actively engage in all three forms of political participation.

32% of the surveyed students distanced themselves from all forms of political activity (or the data on them was not adequate) and were thus passive.⁶

⁶ For a more detailed explanation of the key findings of the different forms of political participation see a former publication: Szabó Andrea (ed.) *Political Orientations, Values and Activities of Hungarian University and College Students*, p82, Prague: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2013. www.boell.de/sites/default/files/political_orientations_final.pdf

The second approach to understanding Hungarian university and college students' participation is the phenomenological approach that analyzes the topic from the perspective of young people. Former research (Utasi 2010) suggests that young people's political communities influence—albeit indirectly—their willingness to participate. In our view, political participation is not a key issue for university and college students, but they are interested in finding out for themselves whether it appeals to them, as part of the broader process of forming their identity and finding community. We intend to identify these political communities because it is believed that these are the groups that form the foundations of their rebellion.

Having discussed participation, we shall now turn to political preferences of the youth. For that, Hungary needs to be put in an international perspective first. Are young citizens over-represented in Europe among the supporters of far-right and green parties, or is it a Hungarian peculiarity?

The result of cluster analyses

In order to identify active and passive university and college students, we ran a K-Means cluster analysis, first with variables that did not include any political parties, but where the activity and ideological character of the young people was clearly identifiable. Then, we performed analysis with the involvement of Hungarian parties. Out of the great number of clusters ran, we have selected two that best fitted the student population. Correlation between the two clusters is high (Cramer's $V = 0.652$). Our present analysis relies on the cluster model in which the parties were also involved.

Via cluster analysis, we analyze political attitudes, ideological orientations of college and university students related to different dimensions of political community. Via cluster analysis, we could identify 7 groups of Hungarian university and college students.

1. *The biggest cluster of college and university students is the cluster of Apolitical, passive (37%) students (see in the middle of Figure 2 and Figure 3). While the other clusters have some political features, some variables that allow for further description, this cluster cannot be well characterized along political dimensions. Those who are in this cluster do not particularly care what kind of political system they live in. Additionally, they are unsure as to whether they want to vote in the upcoming parliamentary election and, if they do want to vote, they are uncertain about which party to vote for. The most important feature of the members of the cluster is therefore political passivity, which is reflected by all forms of their participation and by their relationship toward the parties (mostly by keeping their distance). One element binding those in this cluster together is their loose identification with the label "green". However, since they are completely passive and disinterested in social and political issues, this identification does not mark an ideological commitment to "green politics". It perhaps also marks a loose identification with healthy eating, organic foods, selective waste-management and other superficial elements of the "green consumerist" lifestyle that are in vogue in Budapest. Because of their lack of interest in politics, these students are just drifting along with political events; their political activity is negligible.*

Figure 2. Hungarian university and college students' cluster map on a Left-Right and Moderate–Radical Scale (averages)

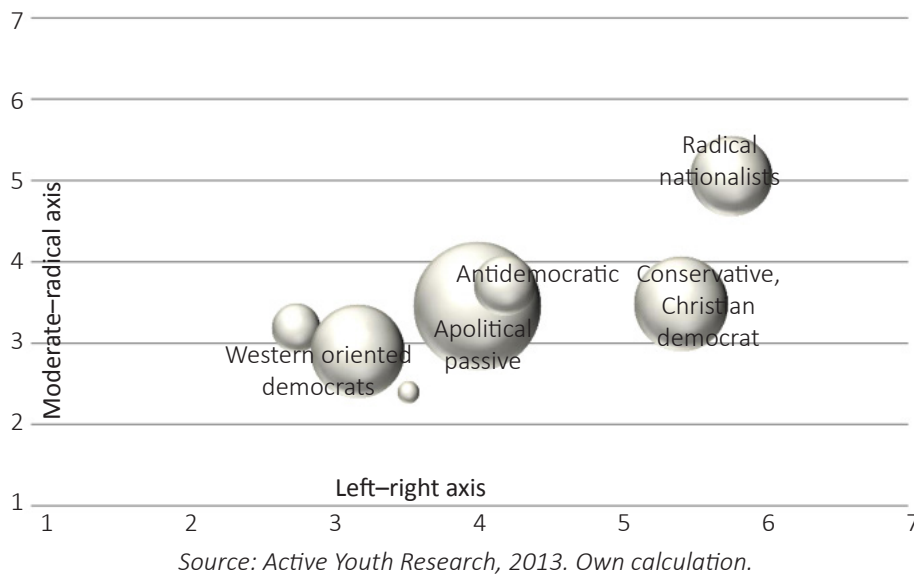
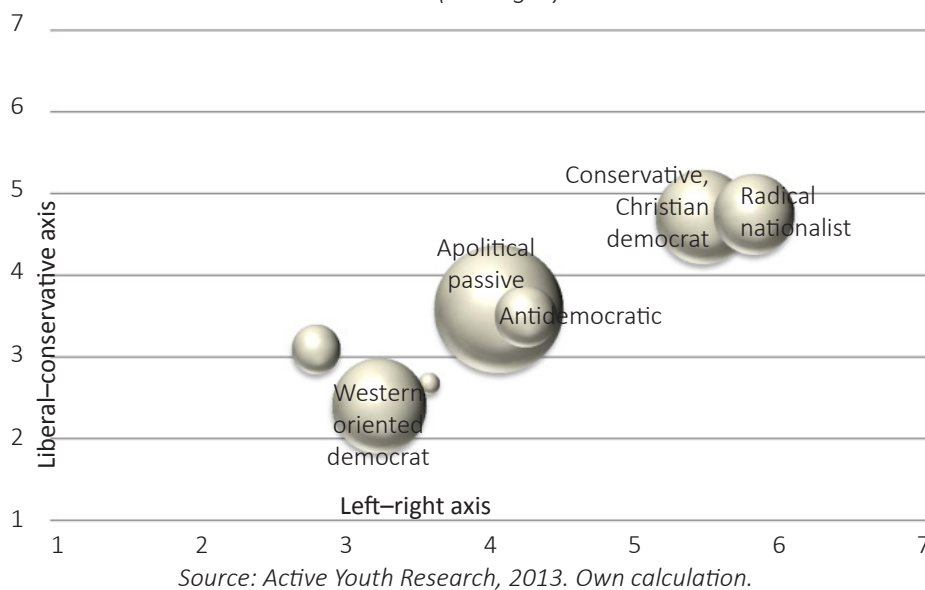


Figure 3. Hungarian university and college students cluster map on a Left-Right and Liberal–Conservative Scale (averages)



2. The members of the cluster called Antidemocratic are in favour of dictatorship (8%), order and stability, but on the other hand they would not take part in an upcoming election this Sunday (see in the middle of Figure 2 and Figure 3). This means that the members of this cluster are very sceptical of the democratic system: they do not accept and do not want to legitimate the frameworks of the democratic system by taking part in elections.
3. The third cluster is the so called Western-oriented democrats (18%) (see in the left corner of Figure 2 and Figure 3). In the question that prompted respondents to choose between Hungarian and Western values, those who ended up in this cluster markedly identified themselves with the latter. They are also strongly in favour of democracy, even though they are sceptical about the current democratic system. Their mindset is liberal and pro-European. They are interested in politics and in

social problems. Based on their fathers' level of education, they can be characterized as coming from highly educated backgrounds, as urban dwellers and as atheists. This group is highly concentrated in Budapest and bigger cities. Their preferred method of political participation is Internet activity. They are overrepresented among students holding Master's and PhD degrees (therefore, among older students) and also among students majoring in the social sciences (economics, political science and the liberal arts).

4. *Another cluster (the fourth) among full-time university students in Hungary is the cluster named Radical nationalists (14%) after the Jobbik party⁷ (see in the right corner of Figure 2 and Figure 3). Members of this group are strongly nationalistic, radical, and denounce all forms of Western ideology. On the left–right scale, they strongly pull to the right. They believe “Gypsy-crime” is a fact and would, under certain circumstances, be willing to trade democracy for authoritarian rule. This is the sole cluster where gender plays an important role, given that the majority of this group consists of males. The cluster is formed by active individuals who make use of both traditional and virtual forms of political participation. They have lower average age: members are overrepresented among students pursuing a degree under the pre-Bologna system, among students pursuing Bachelor's degrees, as well as among those enrolled in computer science, engineering and liberal arts majors. The subjective financial situation of this group is somewhat worse. Most of them stem from families of lower or medium education (secondary or vocational school).*
5. *The fifth cluster has almost the same size as the second, and being a Conservative, Christian Democrat is the best predictor of this group, followed by three equally important traits: religion, being a Fidesz-voter,⁸ and satisfaction with the current democratic system (see in the right corner of Figure 2 and Figure 3). The members of this cluster are conservative, lean right, and are mostly active in traditional forms of political participation. It is important to note regarding this group that while they hold traditional values, they also deem democracy the best type of system. This group is overrepresented among degrees that are not split into undergraduate and master's studies, among them religious studies majors, legal studies majors, national defense majors, education majors and students pursuing advanced theological studies. In our survey, conservative students tended to be wealthier and better-off. Usually, their parents have university (or even doctoral) degrees. They are much more self-confident regarding their professional future and consider their career prospects to be more promising than those of other students.*
6. *The sixth and the seventh clusters are both very small. Both have a mainstream left-wing character, and both are related to Western-oriented democrats in several aspects.*

7 Jobbik (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, Movement for a Better Hungary) is a radical right party, founded in 2003, and entered the Hungarian political mainstream in 2009 when they achieved 15 percent of the votes in the European Parliamentary elections.

8 Fidesz (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, Alliance of Young Democrats) has been the government party of Hungary since 2010, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Fidesz is a conservative party, and a member of the European People's Party.

Three competing political communities among the Hungarian youth

After the above-presented results of cluster analysis, politically active groups become identifiable in an analytical way. In our opinion, out of the seven clusters, three ideal types of young competing groups identity can be pinpointed, which were also described in the academic literature (Szabó A.–Kern 2011, Csözik 2012, Sörös–Róna 2012, Keil 2012, Szabó A. 2014). Thus, these competing political communities—basically subculture groups that provide lifestyle to young people—indirectly encourage participation. These groups have a voice that is understandable to the active sections of youth society. These active political groups are able to affect the entire youth; they can influence, organize and manage them. Two of the three active identity groups explicitly show a “rebellious” character and both these groups define their identity against the group that is currently in power, but from a completely different angle. The third group is also active, but does not take a stance against the government; rather, they support the actual government. However, some signs indicate that in the event of a fall from power of their favourite political party (Fidesz–KDNP), they were the most active, most rebellious group out of the three groups. This third political community is therefore currently not rebellious, but since its members are very active, this justifies the distinction.

The right-wing activists

First, we could distinguish a cluster which is based on the Conservative, Christian Democrat cluster, which we call “right-wing activists” (Szabó A.–Kern 2011, Kmetty 2014).⁹ This orientation consists of believers, because its members are religious, but also because they believe in the omnipotent character of elder members of the party and in their wisdom, almost unquestioningly. They identify themselves with the values of Fidesz without any criticism. This orientation is much more conformist in character than were the founders of the party; members of the cluster follow the road that has been built by the party leaders. In Debrecen,¹⁰ for instance, several participants of our focus group pointed out the overwhelming and one-sided effect they encountered: their teachers, parents, football-coach, priest and friends are all Fidesz voters. The main difference between this group and the green-left and radical rebel groups is that “right-wing activists” cannot be regarded as a movement. Besides the church—which is getting less and less popular among young people—there is no non-political (or half-political) pillar of their orientations. There are no bottom-up popular initiatives or organizations which would enhance the political values of conservatism among youngsters. Fidelitas and other Fidesz-youth platforms are top-down organizations which are not youth-oriented. To measure this empirically, we asked our respondents to describe each political party using the 11 descriptive adjectives and phrases provided. Only 16% of those surveyed (and 47% of Fidesz-voters surveyed) said that Fidesz does a good job in appealing to youth, whereas Jobbik received this compliment from 36% of the respondents (and 67% of the Jobbik voters). This means that even Fidesz-supporter students do not tend to claim that Fidesz’s strong suit is its appeal to youth. For many of the students, Fidesz is “old hat”.

9 The Hungarian name is the “*Tusványos*” group. The authors named this section of the youth after its most important symbol. For them, solidarity with the Transylvanian Hungarians is essential: they are proud that it was the first Orbán government that granted double-citizenship to them. Tusványos is the name of the Transylvanian village where Fidesz organizes summer camps for young people every year and where Viktor Orbán gives a plenary speech about current political challenges facing the Hungarian nation. Mostly because of Orbán’s annual speeches, the events have acquired a symbolic meaning. For instance, Orbán’s (in)famous “illiberal democracy” speech took place at a Tusványos summer camp.

10 A major city in Eastern Hungary.

The Green-left “rebels”

According to surveys conducted in several European countries, both highly qualified people and youths are more prone to support this party family (Dolezal 2010, Oesch–Rennwald 2010, Hooghe et al. 2010). Ecological inferences also confirm this tendency: the strongholds of green parties are in big cities, capitals, and especially downtown areas—places with a high proportion of young and educated inhabitants (Szabó 2013). Thus, university and colleges students are the “typical” supporter of green parties. This social group is too small to be analyzed in most survey samples; nonetheless, there are examples which corroborate this hypothesis (Dolezal 2010).

As for our results, the composition and characteristics of these “Western-oriented democrats” perfectly coincide with the youth group called “*Green-new left rebels*”¹¹ by Szabó and Kern (2011). The characteristic values shared by the members of this group include: environmentalism, post-materialism, and revolt against the established elite. In accordance with European tendencies, the green movement appeals mostly to well-off young people in major cities. Members of the group tend to emanate from the ranks of those who have been called the “winners” of Hungary’s democratic transition. This ideological group is detached from “traditional politics” and its members are searching for new values. According to Inglehart’s framework (1997) these college and university students are characterized by post-materialistic values (Keil 2012). The party preferences of the green-new left rebels—compared with those of the two other groups—is not fully formed. Its members adapt to the ever-changing nature of the Hungarian party structure, when looking for those political elites that are close to them. During our research in 2011/2012, Politics Can Be Different (LMP) was the political party closest to them; in 2013 they preferred Együtt–PM, an alliance including the former prime minister Gordon Bajnai. Thus, members of the green-new left rebels members decided rationally about their party identification.

The rational and heavily Western-oriented nature of their participation is clearly demonstrated in several dimensions. Concerning the political activity of the green-new left rebels, the dominant element is, on the one hand, online participation and, on the other hand, direct forms of participation. It is a characteristic fact that its members were the largest cohort involved in protests that have been organized on the Internet (therefore online and direct forms of participation are linked in their case). Additionally, they get information through online media. It is no coincidence that these young people are the winners of the regime change. They are capable of transferring their advantageous background—a family with high cultural and financial capital—to their own “benefits”. For example, they are those young people who study abroad or work abroad, and have experiences that enables them to work and even to establish themselves in the Western part of the world in the future. Another important aspect of their Western orientation is their ideological character. As noted above, green-new left rebels are ideologically atheist, open-minded, politically left or center-left oriented, with liberal and green ideology. Thus, the green-new left rebels have an anti-establishment nature in the sense that their way of life and thinking can be described with the new green-left ideology. Its members are the most tolerant toward minorities; it is the most inclusive group, having received this mentality either through multi-generational family socialization or during their studies in social sciences or humanities.

¹¹ The Hungarian name is the Critical Mass political community. Critical Mass is the name of an urban bicycle parade that is held on the last Friday of each month worldwide in about 300 cities. In Budapest it is held in April on Earth Day and in September at the European mobility week and car-free Sunday.

The Radical “rebels”

In some countries, young people are more likely to support this party family (Lubbers et al. 2002, Van der Brug et al. 2013: 62–63, Werts et al. 2013), but the correlation is robust only in Austria (Freedom Party of Austria, or FPÖ) and Hungary (Movement for a Better Hungary, Jobbik). Overall, there is no univocal tendency in Europe. As for qualification, according to conventional wisdom, the extreme right is more popular among the lowly educated, poor citizens (“modernization losers”, Betz–Immerfall 1998, Kitschelt–McGann 1995). Recently, however, many scholars have challenged this holding, pointing out that there is no correlation whatsoever between level of education and far-right sympathy (Van der Brug et al. 2013, Bornschier–Kriesi 2013).

The second rebel political community, we call the “Radical rebels,” as defined by Szabó and Kern (2011), since this group is exactly the same as that referred to in our K-Means cluster analysis as “Radical nationalist”.¹² We consider it a special group because the subculture—and based on that, the electorate of the extremist party Jobbik—has a generational background. The Internet and the grassroots level are the two strong strains of the radical subculture: they reach out to most newcomers using these two types of communication and mobilization.

Jobbik is not only popular among the young; according to a national representative sample of the Medián polling company and our university and college student sample, its popularity reaches the highest peaks in the cohort of those who are under 22 years old. The younger a person is, the more likely he/she would support the far-right party (see Rudas 2010, Bíró Nagy–Róna 2011, Kovács 2013). For that, the most compelling explanation is a cultural one (Róna–Sőrés 2012). According to this, students mainly join because they need a community that offers them identity and a distinct world view—and in the circumstances of many, Jobbik supplies these in unique proportion and manner. First of all, young citizens have the most freedom of availability and activity: they are preoccupied by relationships, work, or membership in civic organizations at a much lesser rate than earlier generations. This is, of course, true for all young people, but—according to the data—characterizes Jobbik supporters to a greater extent than those who are of the same age but vote for other parties. Demand meets supply: for those who want to do something there are not many alternatives (mainly in Eastern Hungary) besides the floundering political left and the “old hat”, establishment embodied by Fidesz. Most respondents found Jobbik to be more active in their community than all the leftist parties combined. Jobbik puts considerable effort into addressing the youth: it organizes a variety of camps, professional events, protest and cultural programs prominently supported by “national rock” bands and other elements of the far-right subculture (for instance, organizations of material arts and folk traditionalists). Symbols are very important too: many students wear badges, t-shirts, bells with Árpád-stripes, Turuls,¹³ and maps of Greater Hungary. Internet sources—which are used primarily and most frequently by young people in Hungary—especially sites like kuruc.info, enhance the availability of Jobbik as well. To sum up, Jobbik offers precisely what youth voters need: world interpretation,

¹² The Hungarian name of this group is “Kuruc.info”. Kuruc.info is a news portal operated from the U.S. which provides space for extremist, xenophobic voices. The portal is the most read online news source among supporters of Jobbik. Its reach is broader than the number of regular student readers, extending throughout the far-right subculture. Kuruc.info is the unofficially preferred media outlet of Jobbik; it amplifies every component of the party’s ideology. Many far-right supporters regard it as the only source of the “truth”, which broadcasts “facts” hidden by the liberal and foreign-influenced media.

¹³ The Árpád-stripe is a flag which symbolizes ancient Hungary for radical right voters, but leftist citizens consider this as the symbol of the fascist and Nazi past of Hungary. The Turul (an eagle) similarly divides public opinion.

identity, and a sense of belonging to a community.

Conclusion

In the introduction, we stated that former claims on political participation of young Hungarians are stereotypical, or at least do not hold true for the whole social group. After having carried out our analysis based on two approaches—participatory and phenomenological—the largest group was the group of politically passive students. Nearly 40 percent of students are uninterested in politics, have no political activity, and they find that the world of politics is too complicated. However—and this is the real novelty of our research—we found three demonstrable communities of roughly similar size. These groups show significant differences in political activity compared to the other groups. We consider these communities to be established gradually via socialization mechanisms after the regime change. They are not the results of a given political situation; they are rather “end products” of the transition process that started in 1990.

Our analysis used two different approaches, since we found that former findings based on the participatory approach were not sufficient to describe the political activity of Hungarian college and university students.

The most important results of the normative approach are the following. Studying the three participation forms, one can establish that some of the more important predictors with significant explanatory value in predicting an individual’s probability of lying in the active area include the student’s family’s socio-demographic background, sociocultural background, and certain individual competences. Male master’s and PhD students are more likely to be “active” than their female counterparts. In terms of area of study, those studying social sciences and liberal arts are more likely to be active. The data suggest that the level of activity is partially determined by one’s parents’ own political activity and interest in public affairs/politics. This is shown by the significant correlation between the positive responses to questions related to the prevalence of political discussion with family members and friends and respondents’ own level of political activity.

Politically active university students tend to position themselves at either end of the liberal/conservative and left/right spectrum instead of the middle. Active youth, on average, also tend to be significantly more radical than the rest of the student population. Some of these active youth identify themselves as conservative, strongly patriotic, and Christian Democratic, while others strongly identify with left-radical, Social Democratic, green, and environmentalist labels. Finally, it is important to note that while these active youth have varied party preferences, they—unlike the rest of the student population—have firmly decided whom they support and form part of the stable voting base of their respective political parties.

By using the phenomenological approach, we tried to find active groups of students that have an influence on political thinking and on the mobilization of different youth communities. We could detect seven clusters of students, and out of these, three active groups for analytical scrutiny. In the cluster analysis, we labeled the biggest groups as Western-oriented democrats (18%) and we found another two small clusters (5 and 1%) with less distinct characteristics. An ideal type (green-new left rebels) consists mostly of Western-oriented democrats. We identified the cluster named Radical nationalists (14%), considered to belong to the “Radical

rebel” political community, and we gave a detailed explanation of the characteristics of students belonging to this group. Finally, we identified the cluster of Conservative, Christian Democrats (17%) that belongs to the “Right-wing activists” group. Our results have proved that active university and college students are not only ideologically engaged, but their party preferences are also expressed by their values and political sympathies.

We found that among Hungarian college and university students, there are three different political groups. If a given student is active, individual participation takes place within the framework of these groups. They show the characteristics of different political ideologies and “organize” different forms of political activity.

The group of Conservative, Christian Democrats is active, but it is a currently not a rebellious community, which is due to the fact that at present, their favourite political party is in power in Hungary. However, the other two political communities, the Western-oriented Green-left rebels and Radical rebels, act against the existing political power, and often organize spectacular, expressive activities. We conclude that the political way of thinking and the consequent political action may be determined by these three political communities in the long term. It is obviously important to consider how far these groups can survive in the political subsystem. During the period that has passed since the survey, some of the groups indicated in the text repeatedly made their voices heard in protests of varying size. However, in the absence of data, we cannot foretell whether or not a new, ideologically fragmented political generation is being formed.

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CONSTRUCTING “THE PEOPLE”

Citizen populism against ethnic hegemony in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the light of the 2013–2014 protests

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ABSTRACT

This article, essentially following the contributions of Gramsci and Laclau on hegemony and populism (a non-normative view), analyzes the possibilities for Bosnian-Herzegovinian (BiH) society to challenge its predominantly unaccountable and authoritarian political structures, taking as a point of departure the 2013–2014 outburst of protests and social mobilization. The analysis is situated in a context of specific cultural and social conditions marked by the ideological hegemony of ethnic discourse. In this sense, unprecedented levels of solidarity among BiH ethnic societies by signaling an end to chronic depolitization that had plagued this socio-political space ever since the transition to democracy, served as an opportunity for the construction of a new universal signification that could break with the coherence of the existing discourse and offer an antagonistic frontier different than the one characterized by the ethnic question. This incipient appearance of a social project rivaling deeply entrenched ethnic democracy, appearing in the times of (minor) organic crisis, offered, mainly through the logic of displacement of an already established political frontier, a new perspective on the BiH political scene. This *war of position*, in our view, provides fertile ground for the development of what could be defined as citizen populism. As such, by taking the BiH citizens, the system outcasts *par excellence*, to the center of the political stage, social movements offer a chance to replace the well-established notion of ethnic subjects with that of fully-fledged citizens. Additionally, this article considers the *problematique* of building bonds of equivalences in both socially and ethnically heterogeneous social movements that demand accountability from existing structures, while rejecting its own projection via political society, a *sin qua non* for representation of demands.

Keywords: Bosnia-Herzegovina, hegemony, populism, social movements.

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INTRODUCTION: IDEA, METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION

After decades of political lethargy, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) rose in protests that became known as the most significant uprising in the short independent and democratic history of this country. The uprisings followed no particular stages of development. As such, in a matter of hours after the beginning of country-wide demonstrations, it seemed that BiH was about to go to the streets. This came to be considered as a source of horror for ethno-national elites, exemplified in the destruction of government buildings and people demanding the right to have a future, as it was covered by the media. The prospect of citizen solidarity, seemingly reaching the forgotten unity of three ethnic groups, symbolized a real earthquake to the well-known narrative of the trans-historical and a-historical hatred overseeing the country. At such times, the new narrative entered the political space of the political system, and embodied it, in the view of the political elites. With this in mind, the narrative of people crossing the well-entrenched borders of ethnic hatred brought down the ethnically painted facades of this polis, in which citizens are held as prisoners of the political class.

Moreover, once contextualized in the space of BiH Dayton politics, the issue of narratives and construction of “the people” embodies the most important aspect of the protests. In this sense, the present article, besides explaining the appearance, developments and results of the protests, will have as its main concern the struggle of conflicting narratives over the constitution of the BiH political subject. By analyzing emerging discourses, I aim to expose how the subjectivity or perception of the world can be constructed, maintained or debated in the public space, taking as a case study the 2013–2014 protests in BiH. By analyzing competing discourses, based on ethno-national and citizen concerns, we aim to see how they intend to create a distinct conception of “the people”.

Research was carried out by using methods of on-site participant observation in the cities of Sarajevo and Mostar during the Bebolucija and Tuzla Uprisings. This implied informal talks with participants of the protests, and interviews with activists from Mostar, Banja Luka and Sarajevo. Also, this was complemented with content and discourse analysis of publicly available media and protest material that emerged during the period of social mobilizations.

Additionally, it seems important to think of the BiH case in relation to the larger context of Central and Eastern Europe. The dominant character of what came to be perceived as unsuccessful democratic transitions, resulting in a crisis of institutionalism and rising social inequality, have in some cases opened the doors to

various populist and authoritarian options (in BiH, this happened at the very establishment of democracy) inside mainstream public discourse.

The article is organized as follows. The first part explains the theoretical framework used for the analysis. The second part discusses the construction of ethno-national hegemony in BiH after the end of the civil war in 1995. The ensuing part deals with questions of the rise of a new competing citizen narrative, while also analyzing the resistance of the ethno-national discourse. Finally, there will be attempts to explain the downfall of the protests and the continued dominance of an ethno-national narrative in this polis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is constructed by combining models of discourse theory (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002), hegemony (Gramsci in Bates 1975), and populism (Laclau 2005). First and foremost, discourse theory asserts how social reality is principally constructed through discourses. This socially accepted “reality” is what Laclau defines as objectivity, claiming that *“discourse is the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such”* (ibid: 68). Thus, rather than having social obviousness defined a-priori, social knowledge, beliefs and identities derived from them are fully discursive. Consequently, as the meaning of an imagined whole we usually refer to is “never completed or total” (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 38), “the society” – a primary object of social knowledge and invoked totality – turns into a site of struggles to create and fix meaning. Consequently, contests over names and definitions of totality, such as regional belonging and its limits, identity, class, nation or other demarcations are not necessarily as durable or eternal as some may assert, but belong to unending *“struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe”* (Bourdieu, 1991: 221). Therefore, discourses, due to their ability to make and unmake groups, hold the key to understating the constructed nature of what is understood as a legitimate definition of the social world.

Moreover, the production of identities and the social reality that accompanies them, due to the already mentioned impossible social fullness, requires a radical investment into this specific conceptual creation. Thus, the meaning of totality (i.e. society, people, nation, class) can only be grounded a-posteriori as it is produced by the means of symbols and through rhetoric, articulation and naming around certain nodal points which become *“privileged signs around which a discourse is organized”* (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 27). In this sense, *“symbolic power is a power of constructing reality”* (Bourdieu 1991: 166) as it is “the symbolic framework of a society that sustains a certain regime” (Lefort in Laclau 2005: 166). Thus, “symbols are the instruments *par excellence* of *“social integration: as instruments of knowledge and communication, they make it possible for there to be a consensus on the meaning of the social world, a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order”* (Bourdieu 1991: 166).

Furthermore, these signs, or signifiers, are essentially empty as they have no specific content which is conceptually established and unchangeable. Rather, the meaning of the social established discursively *“can never be ultimately fixed”* (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 24) and it is essentially contingent – possible but not necessary. In this way, signifiers (nodal points, privileged signs), besides being empty, are also floating, implying that the battle over determination of their meaning by various discourses is never finished. Thus, as

social totality remains nothing more than an imagined identity, words given to it, such as “people”, “country”, or “nation”, from being objectified through discourses, represent both empty and floating signifiers, and in this way become sights of political struggle. In this sense, the very act of naming, representing an embodiment of reality, is central for creation of objectivity because it crystalizes the meaning of the unknown and fuzzy world by *“diffusing a state of feeling which had not previously found any form of discursive representation”* (Laclau 2005: 45).

Additionally, the act of naming, or a conceptual grasping of social totality, inevitably involves building a frontier that differentiates imagined totality from something other than itself (Laclau 2005). In other words, to achieve its fullness, an imagined totality has to introduce an excluded element, a “constitutive exteriority” (Staten in Mouffe, 2005), which becomes an element *“that the totality expels from itself in order to constitute itself”* (Laclau, 2005: 70). In this way, totality is established only vis-à-vis an excluded element, as all other differences can only find internal cohesion in their common rejection towards the constitutive exteriority. As Laclau (2005: 70) notes, *“it is through the demonization of a section of the population that a society reaches a sense of its own cohesion”*. In this sense, *“identity is always relationally organized; the subject is something because it is contrasted with something that it is not”* (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 43). This act of creating a frontier between “us” and “them” represents a closure, and it is a *sine qua non* of having totality as such, because otherwise, differences that keep existing inside of this totality would be insurmountable. Essentially, *“without some kind of closure, however precarious it might be, there would be no signification and no identity”* (Laclau 2005: 70). Likewise, the construction of a frontier plays a constitutive role for the ideological makeover of any identity as it reveals how identity is nothing more but an “identification with a subject’s position in a discursive structure” (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 43).

Furthermore, both the temporality and contingency of objectivity are masked through hegemony which arises as *“some fixations of meaning become so conventionalized that we think of them as natural”* (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 26). Simply put, hegemony is related to the creation of social consensus over the meaning, as *“no social fullness is achievable except through hegemony”* (Laclau 2005: 116). As such, arising as a dominant consensual vision and the division of the social world, hegemonic intervention makes subjects, rather than being fragmented between various discourses, over-determined by a particular vision of social reality. The concept of hegemony demonstrates how *“the production of meaning is a key instrument for the stabilization of power relations”* (Laclau–Mouffe in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 32), as it is the over-determination of subjects that makes other possible narratives seem impossible, exactly due to its ability to represent itself in the name of totality. In this sense, Gramsci (in Bates 1975) affirms how the battle in superstructure is basically a battle for the control over civil society – a marketplace of ideas and public opinion, where culture, ideology and symbols play a central role.

Nevertheless, even hegemonic creations suffer from their constitutive and contingent character, which even when hidden for the time being implies a closure that is only temporary and is thus always in danger of being reconstituted and invaded by other discourses. As Laclau (2005: 226) notes, *“history is rather a discontinuous succession of hegemonic formations that cannot be ordered by a script transcending their contingent meaning”*. In this sense, official historiographies, unquestionable at certain periods, can at other

times be contested, allowing for a counter-vision, one that probably had stayed dormant for prolonged period of time, to take its place and gain momentum in the creation of other types of objectivity. Mouffe and Laclau (in Jorgensen–Phillips 2002: 27) denominate these excluded possibilities as the “field of discursivity”, which “is a reservoir for the surplus of meaning”.

This change of narrative, or troubles in superstructure, usually takes place during moments that Gramsci (in Bates 1975) defines as organic crisis. Organic crisis, according to our understanding, appears once a social upheaval pairs with deep economic, social and political issues that overwhelm certain social spaces. When the system encounters troubles in performing its main functions (providing food, security, employment, hope in the future, etc.) people are more likely to reject previous objectivities, abandon dominant parties and thus stop believing in previously unquestionable “truths”. At such times, a systemic dislocation appears, making people, due to the inherent human need for sense of perception of time, space and history, more willing to accept new meanings of the social – which can be delivered by competing discourses able to project a horizon of a new totality. As this happens, there is a radical break from previous formations and an emergence of the new historical period can take place.

Being at the root of any populist, anti-institutional outburst, the resulting chasm between the people (firstly emerging as crowds) and power (political elites and state institutions) opens up a space for both discursive and political alternatives. In this sense, as certain regimes demonstrate themselves unable to contain the excess of demands coming from the people within the existing institutional system, dominant discourses may lose their ability to totalize social reality and the name of “the people”. If this process unfolds, a dialectic vision of a unified history of a historical bloc is unlikely to be maintained, making existing social logics incompatible with previously dominant narratives. For this reason, “people”, as a historical and political subject, may require a new conceptualizing framework. As such an opportunity for politics arises, populist forces – simply meaning those invoking, challenging or creating the name of “the people” (filling its emptiness) – can contest and even subvert previous systems of beliefs, offering alternative discourses by reconstructing the name around a new popular core, thus constructing a new social totality. Therefore, populism, a political logic emerging at times of deep institutional crisis, essentially breaks the coherence of existing discourses as it contends the naming of social totality and consensus over its meaning. Lying at the heart of politics, and being essentially nothing more than a practice of naming and constructing “the people” (answering the essential question “Who are the people?”), populism appears as simply one of the ways of constituting the unity inside of groups (Laclau 2005). In this sense, “constituting ‘the people’ [...] reveals representation for what it is: the primary terrain of constitution of social objectivity” (Laclau 2005: 68).

Nevertheless, new visions of organizing society still have to enter in struggle over the “true” meaning with the old ones. This battle for meaning, a “battle for articulating social majorities around certain discourses” (Hall in Galvan 2011: 130), a battle for constituting objectivity, or a logic of displacement of political frontiers is what Gramsci defines as a “war of position”. As such, the frontiers are never immobile, but are changing in the constant battle over inscription of meaning into the “empty signifiers” and movement of “floating signifiers”. It is here where the political game of constructing “the people” essentially takes place.

In a nutshell, discursive theory affirms that the political field is “the site *par excellence* in which agents seek to form and transform visions of the world and thereby the world itself” (Bourdieu 1991: 26). The political struggle consists of creating knowledge of the social world, entailing a constant process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of categories of perception of our social reality. Therefore, “*political logics are related to the institution of the social*” (Laclau 2005: 117).

HEGEMONY OF ETHNO-NATIONAL DISCOURSE IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

During the organic crisis (i.e. skyrocketing inflation and unemployment) that seriously affected all communist regimes in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavian space entered the process in which previous objectivities ceased to function for most of its citizens. In this ambiance, resulting in fear of both an unstable present and an unpredictable future, ethno-national populists emerged as a political force able to harvest existing uncertainties, crystalizing that fuzzy reality into a discourse which offered a sense of both historical continuity and a better future. As such, ethnic populism essentially signified a “*way to fill the void left behind by the failure, powerlessness and perceived incapability of other ideologies, political projects and programs to fulfill the hopes of the people*” (Hobsbawm 1993: 158). As with any populist creation, it represented a “*utopia of those who lost faith in other programs, or have lost the support of previous political and social stabilities*” (ibid: 158). At such times of crisis, ethno-national populism achieved moral, intellectual and political pre-eminence, converting fragmented subjects into ones over-determined by its specific type of objectivity. Consequently, ever since the early 1990s, BiH citizens had its consensual meaning of the social world discursively created by the means of what can be denominated as ethno-national populism.

In this sense, BiH as we know it today was established in 1995 by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) that ended the three-year-long civil war. Following this, the DPA divided BiH into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH, divided into ten cantons with a Bosniak-Muslim and Croat majority) and the Republic of Srpska (RS, centralized with a Serb majority). Annex four of this agreement, also serving as the constitution, by making constitutive peoples (ethnic groups) into constitutional bearers of the new democratic society, overwhelmingly emphasizes the primacy of the collective (ethnic) over individual rights. As such, by understanding competition between different ethnic groups as the only real embodiment of the BiH political game, the DPA has created a type of citizenship according to which a citizen once stripped of his ethnic identification becomes a concept emptied of meaning and actual political agency. For example, citizens can only elect representatives of their own groups for the offices of the Presidency and the House of Peoples (parliament). Likewise, citizens who identify themselves as something other than constitutive peoples (i.e. Jew, Roma, Slovak, Ukrainian, Bosnian and/or Herzegovinian) cannot run for office. Such an absurdity was denounced by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights which, in the case of *Sejdic-Finci*, ordered (unsuccessfully) this constitutional specificity to be reverted. Correspondingly, in BiH, citizenship, as a link between individuals and the state, is largely understood through the prism of ethnicity (Guzina 2005: 227). As Mujkic (2016) notes, in this situation, a concept of individual citizenry is an abstract and “un-real” notion, merely formal and administrative. Thus, in BiH, the failure to develop a universalistic and republican notion of citizenship, and its complete subordination to the nationalist notion, makes citizenship itself into some pre-

political fact unaffected by the formation of political opinion and will of the citizens themselves (Habermas, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, the frontier to be built by ethno-populist discourse in the post-Yugoslav space of BiH, on which a whole ideological content of identity depends, made strict and insurmountable lines of particular homogenous ethno-religious communities. This type of frontier, due to its exclusivity, resulted in an authoritarian and anti-pluralist character. Following this, in celebration of the particularism of a supposed national culture, one to be principally defined by religion, ethno-national populism established strict limits of community and reduced the plurality usually present in populist movements into a singularity of ethnicity. As such, it found its constitutive exteriority in other ethnic groups living in the BiH space, constructing a type of border which at times led to practices of ethnic cleansing or even genocide. This new imagined social totality resulted in subjects defined by a strong nationalism, accompanied by powerful national social majority movements that, as a result of their pursuit of a clean and healthy society, led to the logic of authoritarian collectivism. In this environment, empty signifiers of “nation” or “people”, came to be exclusively related to ethnic identities, disabling the opportunity for them to be extended over inter-ethnic boundaries.

Furthermore, ethno-national discourse, once it had won the contest of being the only legitimate incarnation of BiH social reality, would quickly manage to turn into a hegemonic narrative, creating a particular symbolic framework that would sustain it in this new historical period. In order to ensure the continuous exercise of hegemony, the maintenance of social consensus, and the credibility of ethnic social objectivity, Ethno-Bureaucratic Patrimonialism (EBP)² (Stipic 2017) had to focus on a reproduction of its particular discourse because the “social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it was produced was doomed to die” (Marx in Althusser 1984: 1). This reproduction of conditions of production of such a particular social objectivity was essentially assured by the complete domination of what Althusser (1984) terms “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs: educational, religious, cultural and political institutions) by each ethnic regime inside of BiH.

First and foremost, in BiH, the ISA has ensured, through the complete control it exercises over the educational system, the very first institution a child interacts with, and enormous power over the socialization of its future citizens. Especially in societies that face divisions and inter-group tensions, education is a powerful potential source of both integrationist and dis-integrationist forces. In the case of BiH, all children study under three different educational programs, and if by some “mistake” the school is attended by students from different ethnic groups, these are kept separate from each other in the infamous invention of “two schools under one

² Ethno Bureaucratic Patrimonialism (EBP) is the term I use to define a type of political regime established in BiH during what is normally considered as the second transition to democracy. In this sense, EBP represents a political regime inside of which political behaviour is overdetermined by: 1) the absolute hegemony of ethno-national objectivity of the social world; and 2) absolute patrimonialization of the bureaucratic public office, which is the main employer in the economy. While ethno-national hegemony leads to a conversion of what are supposed to be citizens into politically instrumentalized subjects, ensuring an absolute monopoly of ethno-national parties over political life, patrimonialization of the public office, leading to the patrimonialization of the state itself, has the power to discipline citizens in such a way that it turns an impersonal relationship between independent voters and politicians into a disciplined relationship between patrons and their clients. The exercise of political power, derived nominally from the people, becomes in such environment entirely discretionary, as rules and limits are imposed directly by the political administrators. (Stipic 2017: 102).

roof”.³ Unsurprisingly, the research called “Education in BiH: What do we teach the children?” (Husremović et al. 2017), has demonstrated that the textbooks of the national group of subjects (history, religion, language, geography) are “*equally directed at promoting one people, one part of the country, one religion, one cultural heritage, this being the one to which the majority of population on a particular territory on which the books are used belongs*” (ibid: 178–179). Thus, in BiH, an official history propagated through educational institutions becomes an important disintegrationist mechanism in the hands of the ruling ethno-elites. Besides, an attempt by ethno-linguistic-intellectuals to make the Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian languages (which literally contain fewer differences than various Italian dialects or many versions of Spanish in Latin America) strictly differentiated and quasi unintelligible to one another, clearly demonstrates how “*in the essence of language nationalism we find issues of power, status, politics and ideology, and not of communication or even culture*” (Hobsbawm 1993: 121). Similarly, a large proportion of the print media, controlled to a great extent by the main ethno-national parties, serves the purpose of paying lip service to the defense of ethno-national “truths”, thus leaving little or no space for other interpretations (Perisic 2010). Finally, Catholicism, Islam and Orthodoxy, three dominant monotheistic religions in the country, which are also the main source of differences between existing ethnic groups and a “hallmark of nationhood in the Balkans” (Perica 2002), are quite successfully misused (due to their possession of universal truths and monopoly on morality), with or without the approval of the religious leaders, to emphasize the clear borders and “enormous” differences that exist between Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs (Abazovic 2006).

Besides, BiH political elites are involved, through public discourses, in maintaining “civil wars of memory” (Kuljic, 2005). By making the word “threat” into the most significant embodiment of BiH reality, ethno-politicians foster an environment in which constant dangers to and conspiracies against “our” survival become the main news of the day. To that end, the empty signifier of “vital national interest”, (mis)used for any type of manipulation, converts every political game in BiH into a zero-sum game between existing ethnic groups. This leads to what Mujkic (2006: 66) defines as ethnopolitics that in the case of BiH, represents a “*political context in which citizenship of a person is predisposed by his or her kinship, his or her belonging to this or that group of common, or more explicitly by his or her blood origin*”. In this sense, ethnopolitics and the hegemony of the ethnic, by superimposing the notion of particularism of cultural community, bound together by origin and fate over the notion of universalism present in an egalitarian legal community (Habermas, 1996), effectively empties the BiH state of its citizens.

CONTEXTUALIZING PROTESTS

BiH society was never characterized by a serious protest culture. Due to the specific type of historically structured learning (O’Donnell, 1994), it passed from the Middle Ages into the Ottoman period, later to the Kingdom and Federation of Yugoslavia, to finally transition to democracy through the act of war fought for nationalistic and not democratic ideals. It lacks any kind of enlightenment period in its history. In this sense, its

³ “Two schools under one roof” represents a particular BiH invention in which students of various ethnic groups that live together in a certain area come to be physically segregated into different classrooms and timeslots of the same school building they share, all with the aim that their interaction is maximally reduced.

recent transition towards democracy is stripped of any kind of deeper sense of democratic ideals and culture, being rather dominated by the ghosts of an authoritarian past (and present). Thus, in the first 15 years of Dayton, few progressive protests took the streets. Among the few that appeared, it would be important to take into account the 2008 protest in Sarajevo against street violence (after the murder of a teenager), the 2009 protest of Tuzla University students (after a corrupted process of scholarship selection), and the 2012 Save Picin Park (Park je nas) protest in Banja Luka (after plans for the construction of a mall in a popular park). In this sense, instead of appearing as organized social movements, demonstrations of dissatisfaction tend to arise for ad-hoc reasons, exploding almost out of nowhere and tending to build themselves from scratch.

In 2013 and 2014, it was barely different. As such, *Bebolucija* itself was completely free of any serious organizational maneuvering and rather exemplified yet another (the most massive up to date) spontaneous outburst of dissent. In this sense, *Bebolucija* effectively started when one activist made a post on Facebook (on June 5, 2013) in which he declared his outrage with the failure of MPs to pass a law allowing newborns to obtain their citizen identification number (JMBG).⁴ The parliamentary procedure was stalled when the Serb representatives demanded a clear differentiation in ID numbering between respective BiH entities, refusing to proceed with the law they denounced as threatening their “vital national interest”. As Zoran Ivancic (2013), an activist who started the protest, claimed: *“First to respond to my post was a friend of Belmina’s parents [...] Once I got back at 11am and checked Facebook, there were several people who contacted some more people and arranged a plan among each other. We met at 12:45pm close to the parliament building [...] The next morning, more people who found additional information on another Facebook group (organized by desperate parents) came and joined us.”* This unexpected citizen action achieved its apogee on the night between 6th and 7th of June as protesters encircled parliament, blocking MPs and foreign investors from freely exiting. In the following days, according to most media outlets, the size of the crowd in Sarajevo reached 10,000, while other cities from both entities like Mostar, Zenica and Banja Luka joined in protest. Thus, *Bebolucija* was born as a spontaneous outrage and not as an organized action. At first, protesters only demanded the JMBG issue to be resolved, but in a matter of days, due to the troubling social and economic state of BiH, the protest turned into a spectrum of social demands, the main one being the demand for the resignation of all ministers on cantonal, entity and state levels (symbolized by an action on July 1, 2013 called OTKAZ (Come out and fire them). Even though the protest managed to mobilize many thousands during the first weeks (especially after the JMBG law was adopted) they eventually died out at the beginning of July.

Likewise, the Tuzla uprisings broke out once the wider population decided to join the month-long and fruitless demands of factory workers requesting a resolution of the corrupt post-war privatization that had left many either out of work or without regular (in most cases any) paychecks.⁵ As was the case with *Bebolucija*, the second uprising erupted out of the blue once Aldin Siranovic, an unemployed citizen of Tuzla, created a Facebook group on February 5 called “50.000 people on the streets for the better future”. On the February

4 The demands were particularly relevant bearing in mind the case of Belmina, a little girl that needed JMBG in order to travel abroad for medical treatment and who became the main symbol of the protests. Sadly, she passed away during the protests.

5 Tuzla was the most important industrial centre in BiH during communist Yugoslavia. Even if the post-war privatization process had affected it, factories left from the communist period still offer the main source of employment in this city.

6, there were around 6,000 people on the streets and on the 7th, with around 10,000 people taking over Tuzla, the unseen destructiveness was witnessed in the city and around the country in ad-hoc protests that arose not only to support Tuzla workers but to denounce a completely dysfunctional state. In such a state of absolute rage, the buildings of cantonal governments in Tuzla, Zenica, Sarajevo, Bihac and Mostar went down in flames. Similarly, in the town of Mostar, two buildings belonging to the main ethno-national parties, SDA (Bosniak) and HDZ (Croat), were put on fire. Also, in the town of Bihac, demonstrators surrounded the house of the cantonal minister, demanding an immediate resignation. The main demand of the protesters – the resignation of ministers on all levels – was partially fulfilled when four cantonal governments were brought down (Tuzla, Sarajevo, Bihac, Zenica). The protests, involving 28 cities, were the biggest to have ever occurred in BiH, appearing in areas dominated by both Bosniaks (Tesanj, Srebrenik, Gorazde, Bugojno etc.), Croats (Orasje, Livno etc.), and also in the mixed areas of Mostar, Travnik, Brcko Distrikt and Jajce. Due to both police and societal pressure, there were no major protests in RS, but some groups from this entity started collaborating with their counterparts from FBiH during and after uprisings (i.e. in Banja Luka and Prijedor).

Furthermore, after several weeks, protesters directed their energy from the streets towards the organization of *plenum* (citizen assembly), which can be understood as the third step of this two-year-long social mobilization. *Plenum*, organized in 22 cities around the country, with the idea of serving as some kind of an instrument of direct democracy, functions as a social institution in which citizens can hear each other, discuss political matters, exercise pressure on and monitor the work of elected officials, and commonly elaborate demands which are to be directed towards authorities. The general rule of the *plenum* is one person one voice, giving everyone the right to speak, and each proposal is decided upon at the end of each session by majority vote. Thus, the *plenum* emerged as a way for citizenry to enter the space completely occupied by the political elites, attempting to exert influence over political action. Overall, during the plena, citizens elaborated demands that dealt with issues prevalent in BiH democracy: widespread corruption, disrespect of human rights, high wages in the political-administrative sector, bad conditions in health care and education, and high unemployment. Even though the *plenum* did not develop in RS due to both state and societal pressures, it was nevertheless marked by a multi-ethnic character. For example, in Mostar, participants demanded the constitutionality of Serb (and any other) minority in the HN Canton (which has been rejected by both the Bosniak and Croat elites). Also, groups from some cities in RS became informally involved (such as Social Justice in Prijedor and the Banja Luka Social Center) and started cooperating (and still do so) with their counterparts in FBiH (Radovic, 2016). Likewise, in multi-ethnic cities in FBiH, a *plenum* has been organized by participants coming from all three ethnic groups. In the town of Travnik, the *plenum* and protests themselves were symbolically initiated by three students, each belonging to different constitutive peoples. Overall, *plenum* phenomenon remained active until mid-May 2014, when it was stopped due to the floods which affected great parts of the country, leaving around 100,000 people temporarily displaced. After this, the practice of *plenum* was only continued in Zenica and Gracanica, while it transformed into informal groups in several cities (Movement for Social Justice in Bihac, Informal Group for Social Justice in Prijedor (RS), Network “5F7” Tuzla) (Milan 2015).

PROTESTS OF 2013–2014: CONSTRUCTING “THE PEOPLE” AS CITIZENS

The protests of 2013–2014, without a question, were the most significant social uprising in the modern history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They were a clear example of the institutional chasm separating people from power (a first precondition for the rise of populism and also a factor leading to some kind of (organic) crisis). Thus, the power to make things done, embodied in political institutions, unable to process rising demands, could no longer be considered in the service of citizens. Institutional unresponsiveness was strikingly clear as, without JMBG, the citizen is unregistered by the state bureaucracy, and as such legally does not exist (Mujkic 2016). More precisely, newborns left without the right to citizenship were concomitantly stripped of any other right (i.e. a passport). As Arendt (1958) states, citizenship is the right to have rights. Consequently, as we could observe during the protests, JMBG or the Tuzla crisis simply pushed the citizens beyond the limit of patience with the existing system, erupting in a country-wide festival of civil disobedience. In both instances, a crisis (crystalizing in JMBG and Tuzla but appearing due to socio-economic conditions) was followed by various protests in both entities (involving war veterans, ecologists, students, pensioners, teachers), as the list of problems to complain about is almost endless in a country in which 60 percent of young people want to migrate (Bljesak 2016), 40 percent lives at or below the poverty line (Slobodna Evropa 2016), the monthly salary of most people moves between 100 and 300 euros (Andrijanic, 2014), most pensions stand below 150 euros (Andrijanic 2014), youth unemployment stands at 57.9 percent (DW, 2014a), corruption reaches the highest levels in Europe, and politicians still make around 2,200 euros per month (DW, 2014a) (way above the regional average, which stands below 1,000 euros). Some of the usual reasons for protests, demonstrating the complete abyss between people and power can be read from the following comments recorded during demonstrations.

“The list of reasons for human rage and frustration is too long” (Ljubanovic 2013); *“I have twenty years, I go to university and hope for nothing”* (Mrkic–Radevic 2014); *“I came here to support people who do not have anything any more, from whom they have taken everything”* (ibid); *“I have two sons waiting for job, I don’t have anything to live for, I just want change”* (Tacno 2014); *“The movement emerged not as the fruit of hope, but of despair”* (Toe 2013).

Thus, the situation created by Tuzla and JMBG served to clearly polarize the public space between citizens and institutions, causing a crisis in a previously dominant type of objectivity.⁶ In this sense, by the simple act of people taking to the streets in protest (creating the appearance of crowds), occupying public spaces, attacking buildings that embody political power and demanding the resignation of those who, for two decades claimed to represent their (ethnic) peoples, the previous narrative that sustained the functioning of an ethno-national regime was challenged, only exacerbating the (minor) organic crisis.⁷

Moreover, an easily understandable and emotional example of abandonment of babies and workers by the state served to clearly demonstrate the standoff between the weakest (babies, workers, and thus ordinary

6 Socio-economic conditions and street demonstrations feed each other in the creation of a crisis. One without the other can’t reach the full circle.

7 A true organic crisis can only be recognized a-posteriori. Even if we understand how this was not an exemplary type of organic crisis, we keep using the term for analytical purposes.

citizens) and the most powerful (the political elites) (Kazaz 2013). Consequently, babies and disenfranchised workers turned into empty signifiers of too many problems affecting the citizens of BiH. Thus, the discourse most elaborated during the protests turned issues of citizenry (due to the clear exemplification of denial of citizenship to babies) into a master signifier of all the issues affecting various sectors of population. In this sense, the JBMG crisis or events that sparked the protests in Tuzla, acquired centrality in public space and their particularities came to signify a total chain of equivalential social demands. Besides, as a heterogeneous mass rose together, it came to embody, by confronting institutions as a unified whole and not as a variety of separate demands, a popular demand. By putting into question well-embedded social objectivities and opening spaces for discourses that up until that point had belonged to the field of discursiveness, and surplus of meaning, protests symbolized a direct announcement of the beginning of politics – that “*denunciation of tacit contract of adherence to the established order*” (Bourdieu 1991: 127).

Furthermore, by strictly differentiating itself from the previous ethno-nationalist notion, one on whose legacy it nevertheless had to operate, the new discourse proclaimed (in a protest organizer’s opening declaration) that the new “people” were to be “*We, the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina*”. On the other hand, the “constitutive other” was to become:

“You, the political elites [...] are to blame for the fact that our babies do not have identification numbers. You are to blame that we do not live but survive [...] You need to be in our service, and not we in yours. We do not care if the baby comes from Banja Luka, Mostar or Sarajevo [indicating cities with different ethnic majorities]. To us, you are all equally responsible and guilty” (Buka, 2013b).

In this sense, the new “people” of more inclusive identity, cutting across the plurality of ethnic identities, grounded its very unity in the rejection of corrupt ethno-national elites, making it into an excluded element for rival hegemonic construction. Thus, the new frontier implied a clear division between corrupt political elites and abandoned citizens. Here, the common denominator of people = citizens exemplified (as no other concept could) the absolute outsiders of the BiH ethno-dominated social reality, the system outcasts *par excellence*, the unrepresented ones, something comparable to Marx’s *lumpenproletariat* or Lacan’s *caput mortuum* (the residue left in a tube after a chemical experiment) (Laclau 2005). Thus, by filling the emptiness of a citizen concept with various diverging social demands, the new discourse cast the citizens of BiH for the first time as relevant historical actors, bringing them to the center of the political stage and constructing a movement that I would term “citizen populism”.

Moreover, by conducting participant observation, informal talks and an analysis of media reports, the trans-ethnic character of the protests was made evident. Thus, during the *Bebolucija* fieldwork in Mostar and Sarajevo, we could see people from the Bosniak-Muslim-dominant areas (Zenica, Srebrenik, Gradacac, Tuzla, Gorazde, etc.), Croat-dominant areas (Capljina, Ljubuski, Siroki Brijeg, Livno, Tomislavgrad, etc.) and also from Serb-dominant areas (Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Trebinje, Prijedor, etc.). Also, we could witness banners stating “Banja Luka for JMBG”, “Banja Luka and Sarajevo: Rise up together”, “Antifascist Banja Luka”, “Capljina, Ljubuski and Siroki Brijeg for JMBG” (Tacno 2013, Buka 2013d). Also, an informal group of citizens organized protests in Banja Luka showing banners that declared that the “*national belonging of our dearest is called a child*” and

(directly responding to Serb politicians who spread misinformation about the occupied parliament), *“Stop bullshitting about how you are in danger and do your work! Banja Luka for JMBG”* (Buka 2013c). Besides, the official format of JMBG protests defined itself as a “citizen initiative, fighting for the basic human rights of all citizens, confronting nationalism and all other types of discrimination, hoping to establish solidarity among different groups” (Buka 2013).

Likewise, the 2014 uprising was also of a clearly citizen and multi-ethnic character, something confirmed during our fieldwork (mostly in Mostar during participant observation and interviews with Abrasevic⁸ related activists). Similarly, a media content analysis pointed in the same direction. For example, the Mostar plenum invited people to participate *“against maintenance of war division lines, and for society based on social justice!”* (Bljesak 2014). Also, graffiti showing *“Death to Nationalism”, “Stop Nationalism”, and “Stop to National Divisions”* covering the walls of a municipal house in Tuzla, burning in flames, or banners appearing in protest around the country stating *“We are hungry in three languages”, “Screw you and your three constitutive people”, “Our Unity = Your Destruction”* clearly defined the identity of those that the protesters were up against.

In this sense, discursive practices of protesters show how citizen populism created a discourse of a country based on the revolutionary-democratic concept of nation, downplaying the previously dominant nationalistic concept. Consequently, the state was to be identified with people as sovereign citizens (Hobsbawm 1993), where all political subjects are to be equal regardless of their ethnicity. Along these lines, denominations given to plenums (*“Plenum of Citizens”*), or that assigned to the day marking the beginning of protests (*“Day of Citizen Courage”*), by strictly avoiding any use of national identification and downplaying those who attempted to do so (like the Anti-Dayton group), tried to open up the horizons of non-ethnic bases of solidarity in BiH society. Therefore, a new discourse focused on building social and class solidarity, one that transcends inter-ethnic lines, announcing what Klix (2016) called *“times when social justice overcame all divisions”*. In this sense, the notion of class division, embodied in an empty signifier of “social justice” turned into one of the nodal points of the new narrative. A frank comment from one protester clearly demonstrates this feeling: *“This is a real chance for people to realize how we are all in deep shit, all of us, Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks. The thing that connects us is that my generation will not even have pensions, nor free education or healthcare, opportunities for employment, whereas the state will serve only the rich”* (Anadolija 2014).

Last but not least, citizen discourse completely changed the meaning of empty signifiers of nation and freedom. In this sense, one of the most visible banners during the protests, stating that *“Freedom is My Nation”* (coming from an informal group of citizens in Mostar) embodies in the best way the change made to these two signifiers. The sign is a challenge to the dominant discourse’s nodal point, *“Ethnicity is my Nation”*, as it replaces the exclusionary notion of ethnicity with freedom – an inclusive category to be claimed by all citizens of the country both on a personal and collective level. In this sense, the wordplay around empty signifiers of freedom and nation introduced a fight over the appropriation of such words by completely different political movements, thus well exemplifying their floating character.

⁸ Abrasevic is a youth educational and cultural center standing at the ex-war division line. It promotes cooperation among young people of different ethnic backgrounds and it served as a place where the Mostar plenum was held.

Finally, it can be argued that the institutionalization of *Plenum* emerged as a case *par excellence* of what could fit into the notion of citizen populism. In this sense, people did effectively, through the very institution of direct democracy, imagine themselves as nothing more than citizens of a particular state. In this way, by creating an institution of egalitarian citizenship, they completely stripped themselves of an ethnic primacy deeply embodied in the primordial character of ethno-national discourse. As such, the mobilization and plenums that followed, for not emerging from any type of protest organized structurally, developed as a radical action of sovereign citizenry, embodying the case in which plebs claimed to become the new populous. Consequently, by becoming a name (citizens) in its absence, the 2013–2014 protests signified the rise of “Citizen Populism” in BiH. In this sense, “Citizen Populism” appears as a type of contextually specific (Dayton BiH) movement phenomenon that: a) embodies a discursive tactic which fills the emptiness of the citizen concept with various issues overwhelming the BiH socio-political space; b) attempts, by constructing “the people” as citizens, to offer a sense of social integration different to the one propagated by an ethno-national project of the social.

THE ETHNO-NATIONAL NARRATIVE FIGHTS BACK

As was noted in the theoretical framework, any discourse that attempts to institute a new social objectivity must reckon with the resistance to hegemonic narratives that occupy a dominant position in the social space at the time. Thus, the citizen discourse had to successfully challenge a deeply embedded ethno-national one, and to weaken its grip on social reality. In this sense, ethno-national elites tried to perpetuate the type of subjectivity able to maintain the continuity of historical unity that served their interests. Here, ethno-national discourse had as its goal – in order to ensure continuity of its historical bloc – the maintenance of dominance over a citizen’s imagination and the perpetuation of ethno-national objectivity.

First of all, ethno-national elites tried to delegitimize the unity of protesters by means of representing them as being in service of the “constitutive other” and thus “against us” – the only true “people”. With this in mind, those proclaiming themselves as representatives of the Serb “people” essentially identified the protests as an attempt by unitarists in Sarajevo (the capital of both the BiH and FBiH where a majority of population is Bosniak-muslim) to overthrow the Republic of Srpska. For example, the president of the RS entity, Milorad Dodik, while commenting on the blockade of parliament, stated how the protests were organized by Bosniak parties, some foreign embassies, and certain NGOs with the aim of threatening the security of Serbian representatives (Buka, 2013e). He added how Serbian and Croat representatives were held as hostages while Bosniaks could leave the parliament as they pleased (a verified lie) (Kresic 2013). Perpetuating a similar narrative, a newspaper in the RS released a piece with the title on its cover page: “*Demonstrators were promised guns for attack on RS!!!*” (Prometej, 2014). Similarly, the Serbian representative in parliament, Aleksandra Petrovic, tweeted during the blockade, “*Protests in front of the Parliament are the idea of Bosniak parties, aimed at lynching us from RS. The building is surrounded and they are calling on us Serbs*” (Bursac 2013). Another representative, Zivkovic, stated how “*parliament is being converted into a camp, and we from the RS are the targets*” (Buka 2013a). Besides, while commenting on protests in an interview given after the end of crisis, President Dodik concludes how “*citizen rights are not an issue, but the real issue is to negate national rights to people that want them*” (Kresic 2013).

Secondly, Croat ethno-national elites and media connected to them followed a similar line of thought. Thus, Nino Raspudic, an academic connected to the regime, proclaimed how “*protest is a Bosniak spring! Croats will not join*” (Prometej 2014). At the same time, Dragan Covic, president of the most important party claiming to represent the interests of the Croat people (HDZ BiH), affirmed how protests represent a “*wish to make a unitary Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina which would finally convert it into an entity of the Bosniak people, just like the RS is an entity of the Serbian people*” (Prometej 2014). The webpage Poskok.info constructed a similar narrative, claiming how protests represent “*Greater-Bosniak politics and as such are a faithful copy of Greater-Serbian politics from the end of 1980s*” (Prometej 2014). At the same time, the newspaper daily *Vecernji List* emphasized how protests and plenums that followed are essentially in the service of Bosniak politics, making an argument that overwhelmingly emphasized setting on fire the government and party buildings situated on the “Croat side” of Mostar.⁹ By choosing to ignore similar damage done to properties belonging to the Bosniak ethno-parties on the “Muslim side” of the city, the newspaper aimed to forge an environment of fear and inter-ethnic conflict, a powerful method in a city that still hadn’t healed its war wounds.

Thirdly, Bosniak representatives have likewise propagated an ethno-national discourse of fear and hate. Thus, SDP proclaimed how protests are “*well-planned operations against the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina, organized by SANU (the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts – in the past connected with propagating ideas of Greater Serbia), and in no way represent protests of socially endangered citizens*” (Prometej 2014). The president of the same party, Zlatko Lagumdžija, claimed how protesters wanted to establish a third entity of Croat people (referring to an idea about the Croatian part of the country that would separate from FBiH) (Prometej 2014). At the same time, the webpage drmaj.ba created an explanation stating how “*considering the Western factor, this smells of pro-Greater-Croatia intervention*” (Prometej 2014).

Therefore, ethno-national elites, frightened by the cracks appearing in the regime they had successfully established by the end of the civil war, tried to divert from the real significance of the protests by propagating the well-embedded notions of fear and hate, thus perpetuating once again the “civil wars of memory” in the hope of maintaining an ethno-national logic as the only relevant embodiment of BiH reality.

PROTESTERS RETREAT, ETHNO-NATIONAL HEGEMONY CONTINUES (BUT CRUMBLING?)

By the late spring of 2014, protests, and the plenums that followed, had lost the energy that had characterized them before. According to our informants, the idea of the *plenum* was partially usurped by agents of the political class and by the fact that *plenum* failed to show any real progress or effects on the political stage. The reasons for failure are many, but most of them lie in the fact that the equivalential chain of demands could not be sufficiently expanded in BiH society at the time, making that necessary critical mass of people, or the fight over social majorities, a failed task of the protesters. In any case, it would be difficult to expect subjectivity in BiH to change so drastically and rather quickly after so many years of absolute hegemony of ethno-national discourse. However, resistance offered by the citizen discourse, coming at times of crisis, still must be rightly characterized as the most important social awakening and challenge to ethno-nationalism in

⁹ Mostar, once a multicultural city with a high rate of inter-ethnic marriages, was effectively divided during the war into Bosniak and Croat sides (a division that has been effectively kept until now).

the short history of an independent and procedurally democratic BiH.

First of all, it cannot be denied that chains of the ethno-national narrative still proved unbreakable to many. Thus, as time progressed, various demonstrations that were happening outside of areas with a Bosniak-Muslim majority found themselves obliged to create a clear distance from anything happening in the so-called political Sarajevo. In this sense, student protesters in Banja Luka (the capital of the RS) made sure to clarify how they were in no way connected to movements happening in other entity. Marking their territory clearly with RS flags, they decided to play on the terrain established by the dominant ethno-national discourse. However, it is important to note how Nikola Dronjak, the leader of the protests, recognized that students avoided identification with the wider BiH protests out of fear that the government would scapegoat them as the enemies of the RS (Bursac 2013a). Nevertheless, Dronjak declared how unemployment, criminality and corruption, together with economic and social misery were the common denominators of all citizens of BiH. Similarly, in the city of Mostar, many of those that otherwise found reasons to announce their dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, did believe in the narrative of the Bosniak spring, only showing themselves reluctant to unite with those who are not “us”. Additionally, the existence of social fear and police repression was another major factor in play. For example, local police strictly prohibited demonstrators from crossing war-separation lines or to enter the “Croat” side of the city, so as to avoid “mixing”.

Secondly, upon explaining anything that goes in BiH, one cannot avoid taking into account that the main engine of the economy and the main employer in this country is public administration, accounting for about 55–65% of total GDP (Zelenika 2014). Out of the total number of about 720,000 people working in BiH, around 240,000 of them are employed in institutions, firms and agencies in state ownership (BHAS 2016). Besides, a striking level of unemployment (around 45%, youth unemployment being at 60%) (UNDP 2016), only exacerbates the power of ethno-national parties that hold the sources of survival. In this sense, a social structure in which a professional middle class hardly exists, and where most jobs are obtained through party membership understandably paves the way for the patrimonialization of relations between those controlling companies (political parties) and their client-employees (the citizens) (Stipic 2017). Pairing this with the fact that BiH can be understood as what Žizek terms a “*society of general permissibility*” (Žizek in Blagovcanin 2013), the arbitrariness that reigns in this polis increases the factor of fear and its influence over social behaviour. This factor can, to a large extent, explain the behaviour of some social groups. By enjoying a certain life stability, the middle-class employed in the public sector preferred not to join the protests, thus accepting the existing institutional framework as being preferable to undertaking actions which it considered threatening for its current standing in society. As Emir Fetahovic, a protester and plenum organizer from Travnik notes, in BiH “*fear is stronger than the desire for a better life [...] as many people are afraid to join the movement because in one way or another, they are somehow dependent on the power structure, fearing that either they or their family member could lose the job and have problems*” (DW 2014).

Moreover, a third major reason that has strongly determined the fate of the movement has been the unwillingness of protesters to connect, cooperate or be associated with any kind of party. In this sense, an official proclamation of JMBG protest organizers stated how “*Politicians and political parties have nothing to*

offer to us” (Buka 2013). Also, one of the main organizers stressed that *“the first imperative of this mobilization was to avoid the interference of any organization or party”* (Toe 2013). Such a decision obviously came about as a result of a citizen character that protesters were aiming to construct, and was likewise most definitely influenced by the disillusionment people felt towards any kind of party or organization. While such an attitude towards politicians and parties that were in office for years and did not do anything is unsurprising and well deserved, this behaviour was no different even towards those parties determined to deconstruct ethno-national narratives and that proclaim themselves as citizen aggrupation. As Denis Gratz of “Nasa Stranka” (Our Party)¹⁰ noted at the time: *“they (the protesters) were obsessed by the fear that some party could exploit them. A naïve, if understandable, position. I have deep respect for citizens who are protesting, but there is one thing that unfortunately they do not understand: putting all parties into the same cauldron is a dangerous game. Most protesters are young people who do not even vote. But the politicians in power in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been there for twenty years, and the only way to send them home is to beat them in the elections”* (Toe 2013). In this sense, protesters, which appear as crowd when taking to the streets can hardly expect to make their voices heard without some kind of more organized movement that could offer them direction and representation at higher levels of political decision making (something that can’t be done by *Plenum*). As Dean (2016: 26) notes, while a *“crowd provides an opportunity for the emergence of a political subject”, the “perspective which gives body to the political subject is the party”* (ibid:149). As political experience shows, radical movements cannot simply avoid the state, because being the alternative to seizing or abandoning the state a false one; the real challenge remains in transforming the state itself (Zizek in Dean 2016: 149–150). In this sense, it is rather naïve that BiH politicians, at least the ones holding power at the moment, will voluntarily and on the advice of citizens, proceed with the recognition of demands as legitimate and change the type of behaviour they have been practising for decades. Thus, as the state presents a barrier to political change, gaining control of the state remains an important goal. It is difficult, at least in terms of current institutional structures of most political regimes that such control could come from any other point than through party politics. It seems to me that the electoral success of parties like Syriza or Podemos, even if certainly not free from deserved criticism and unresolved issues, present a possible direction to take. As Dean (2016: 250) notes, *“anyone who is unwilling to talk about the party should not talk about political transformation”*. Thus, while society and politics in BiH remain separate universes, an idea cherished by some that things will change for good without direct political engagement seems rather delusional.

CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

The present article had as its central interest the struggle over identity formation in present-day BiH and its effects on the creation of a specific political situation in this country. In order to investigate my topic of interest, a theoretical framework was constructed by combining discourse theory with those of hegemony and populism. While discourse theory is chosen as it predominantly can explain the construction of social reality, hegemony serves as an explanation of why a certain social order comes to be considered so natural that it represents a consensus on the meaning of the social. Additionally, populism explains the process of

¹⁰ A party of citizen character, one of the few not to be involved in any cases of corruption.

contestation over the identity of “the people”, whose construction, in being the most invoked subject in the history of modernity, becomes a political operation *par excellence*.

The BiH, ever since the end of the civil war and the beginning of Dayton history dominant ethno-national discourse, resulting from a movement denominated as ethno-national populism, has over-determined subjects in such a way that it has reached the position of a hegemon, effectively closing other possible political and discursive opportunities. As such, it has stabilized power relations around the imagined social totality defined by strong nationalism, authoritarianism and anti-pluralism, converting “the people” into nothing more than instrumentalized ethno subjects, while making ethnic identity the principle political identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, the protests of 2013–2014, serving as a clear example of the institutional chasm separating people from power, led to the movement that we define as “citizen populism”. Appearing at times of a minor organic crisis, citizen populism aimed at creating a new conception of “the people”. As such, it caused a crisis in the type of objectivity propagated and established by the ethno-national narrative, opening a way to struggle over the name of “the people” and announcing the first real beginning of politics in the short history of this country. Here, the protesters, by rejecting the notions of the old and embedded BiH political identities, opened a way towards cognitive subversion and a suspension of adherence to the dominant subjectivity, thus “*announcing the possibility of changing the social world by changing its representation*” (Bourdieu 1991: 128). In this sense, the new “people” – the citizens of BiH – of more inclusive identity, cutting across the plurality of ethnic identities, grounded its very unity in rejection of the corrupt ethno-national elites, bringing the citizens, *system outcasts par excellence* (now destined to form the new people), to the centre of the political stage, thus forging a previously unimaginable interpretation of BiH social reality.

Unfortunately, protests and plenums that followed them in the end somehow deflated and eventually lost the war of position, or the battle over social majorities. As we conclude, the biggest problem resulted from the fact that an equivalential chain of demands could not be sufficiently expanded in BiH society at the time, making the necessary critical mass of people a failed task of the protesters. One of the reasons for people not to join the mobilization was that the chains of the ethno-national narrative still weighed too heavy over many. Besides, patrimonialization of the bureaucratic office, with its enormous power to discipline, had an effect of keeping middle classes away from the protests. Last but not least, protesters made the mistake of rejecting some kind of cooperation with parties that follow similar citizen narratives, forgetting that the state in current institutional arrangement presents a real barrier to political change.

Nevertheless, it is important to note, despite some criticism given, that the social movements of 2013–2014 have signified the single most important political moment in the history of Dayton BiH. As such, once placed in the specific socio-political and historical context of BiH democracy, the importance of trans-ethnic character of these protests cannot be overstated. Thus, the protests, introducing concepts of common purpose and solidarity between ethnic groups and replacing the notion of “vital national interest” with that of “social justice”, have to be praised for even beginning to change the framework of understanding BiH reality. In this sense, the new construction of “the people”, exemplified through the discursive practice of protesters and

by the institutionalization of *Plenum*, represented the most democratizing possible act as it effectively, if only partially and for a brief moment, managed to convert ethno-national subjects into fully-fledged citizens. If nothing else, there is a great hope that the protests can serve as a school for the future.

Finally, it seems indispensable to think about how, taking into account the BiH example and CEE perspectives, *“in a world where barely 10 out of 180 nations can with conviction affirm that their citizens in any kind of real sense belong to one ethnic or language community, nationalism (or nationalist populism) based on creating such homogeneity is not only undesirable, but is to a great extent auto-destructive”* (Hobsbawm 1993: 202). In this sense, other types of more progressive populisms may offer a chance for different political paradigms in times of crisis.

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QUANTITY VS QUALITY

Citizens and anti-citizens in the Bulgarian protests of 2013

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ABSTRACT

Protests are often waged against governments but can end up fighting the constituencies that rush to the defence of embattled governments. The enmity between the protest and the authorities thus bifurcates into an antagonism not only against the government, but also against another protest. This paper focuses on instances of such triangulation of social antagonism, and the effect they have on the discursive constitution of civic identities. More specifically, it traces the delineation of the boundaries of legitimate belonging to civil society and the community of citizens during anti-governmental and so-called counter-protests (or pro-government protests) in Bulgaria in the summer of 2013. Those boundaries were drawn along class, aesthetic, epistemic and ethnic lines.

I treat “civil society” as a contested terrain of competing discourses and show how protesters refocus it – contra Hegel's understanding of civil society as a “system of needs” – into the cultured domain of the greatest distance from material necessity and need. According to the protesters, what made 2013 stand out in the history of protests after 1989 is that people rallied behind immaterial things such as “European values”. However, this strong anti-materialist view does not make the protesters independent from the materiality of class. Rather, one of the main points of these protest discourses was that the protests are the expression of the “new middle class”, embodying civil society, and this was articulated with ruminations on what makes one an authentic citizen.

This self-designated “new middle class” which spoke on behalf of civil society came to imagine itself as the legitimate arbiter of what constitutes the public interest and belongs to the community of citizens, and denied the claims of other “interest groups” to be able to define the common interest. In this paper, I consider the protests and counter-protests as a class conflict unfolding on the terrains of civil society and citizenship, a conflict mediated by new articulations of (middle) class and civic consciousness. I draw on Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism which thematizes the antagonistic constitution of identities. I supplement it with a term of my own – the anti-citizen – against which a vision of the model citizen was discursively articulated by the protesters. The anti-citizen captures the ambivalent position of people who are formally citizens, yet symbolically excluded by the (self-appointed) legitimate representatives of civil society due to their alleged lack of knowledge and misguided political positions.

Keywords: citizenship, civil society, protests and counter-protests, aesthetics, class, anti-citizens.²

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QUANTITY VS QUALITY

Citizens and anti-citizens in the Bulgarian protests of 2013

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Bulgaria saw two large anti-government protest mobilizations – in winter and in summer. The “Winter” or “February” protests, as they came to be known, erupted over electricity price hikes, and resulted in the government’s resignation and snap elections. The “Summer” or “June” protest of the same year broke out over the controversial appointment as a head of National Security of a media corporation owner with suspected ties to organized crime.

The summer protest was met with pro-government rallies that came to be known as “the counter-protests”. Anti-government protesters repeatedly emphasized that those rallies were not authentic expressions of civil society protest because they were either sponsored by the government or in other ways solicited by it.

Utilizing Discourse Theory, I approach the figures of the counter-protest, as articulated by activist-intellectuals of the protests, to analyze the vectors for inclusion and exclusion in the category of the citizen and civil society. I scrutinize what role discourses of class, ethnicity, aesthetics, knowledge and morality play in the construction and maintenance of the boundaries of citizenship. To this end, I draw on media articles and intellectual discussions about the nature of the conflict animating the protests. For example, the antagonism between the protesters and the counter-protesters assumed a sharp aesthetic form: “the beautiful” and “economically self-sufficient” citizens against the “ugly” and the “needy” “anti-” or “counter-citizens”. Meanwhile, claims to superior knowledge on the part of the protesters were used to question the very civic competences, and what amounts to the same thing, the citizenship status, of the counter-protesters.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This paper treats “civil society” not as a social field populated by NGOs or interest clubs but as a *discourse* open to *polemical interpretation* and appropriations by actors locked in a struggle with each other. The same applies to the related notions of “citizen” and social class. I approach them not as tangible phenomena as they are usually treated by unrelated and disparate scholarly areas, such as citizenship studies or civil society theory (which deal with questions of how a state *formally* organizes membership and rights via citizenship laws, or what the material conditions and measurable distributions are of social classes in capitalism). I treat them as **discourses** mobilized by the protesters in the rhetorical constitution of their identity and objectives as a movement. In short, rather than exploring the concepts' long polemical history in academic debates, I will follow a fragment of their turbulent “social life” which does not respect heuristic separations and disciplinary divisions of labour.

In what follows, I will show how the Bulgarian protest wave of 2013 rendered culture and knowledge as the firm foundation upon which “authentic civil society” – and alongside it, “the authentic citizen” – alone can thrive. I detail the rise of what can be called a “neo-Montesqueian” discourse of civil society which complements (or as time will perhaps show, displaces) the dominant liberal Tocquevillian and Habermasian views which define civil society as the sphere of free associations (especially NGOs) and rational deliberation in the public sphere. Since we are in the domain of protest movements, I detail this semantic overwriting from the perspective of Ernesto Laclau's discursive theory of populism (1996, 2005).

Moving away from substantivist theories of populism, which identify and enumerate positive content in order to make sense of populist movements, Ernesto Laclau offers a formalist approach which defines populism as the elementary political gesture; the “us versus them” antagonistic relationship. He is uninterested in the ideological (“ontic”) content of the antagonism. Instead, the “populist subject” emerges out of the specific combination of otherwise divergent demands into a single “chain of equivalence,” whose unity is maintained by them being opposed to a shared enemy (1996, 2005). Thus, the “us vs. them” opposition stabilizes the chain of demands by suppressing, yet not obliterating, their internal differences.

When the chain forms, one of the demands emerges as the “master demand” representing the rest. Laclau calls this demand an “empty signifier” and the plural subject it stands for, the “popular subject”. This popular subject's identity is a function of its opposition to an enemy, i.e. “the people” versus “the government”. Once this antagonism arises, we are in the domain of populism or the political proper.

The political, worthy of this name, is only so when the social splits into Two – a popular subject versus the powers that be – thereby delimiting what Laclau calls “administration”, which is his term for the ordinary operations of the polity when the government is able to satisfy demands when they arise (i.e. *politique vs. la politique* in Ranciere's 1995 terms). In the case of the Bulgarian protests of 2013 (which continue in various forms to this day) demands ranging from “morality in politics” to “judiciary reform” and “decommunization” were articulated around the empty signifier of the “citizens against the Mafia,” as the main slogan of the protests signified.

Despite the widespread scholarly assimilation of populism and nationalism (visible in the “national-populism” misnomer), the Laclauian populist antagonistic bifurcation points to the limit of the official discourse of the nation. Nothing underpins the idea of modern nation more fundamentally than the notion of unity. Despite its internal pluralism and even antagonisms, the nation insists on its One-ness; the nation is the One embodied. It is a One in which the three Hegelian categories of the particular, the singular and the universal co-exist in an uneasy dialectic. Vis-à-vis other nations, and insofar as it asserts its distinction from them, the bounded nation is particularistic – *this language, this particular religion or an assemblage of customs distinguish and delineate it from the rest. Vis-à-vis its internal pluralism and multiplicities, the nation is a singularity: “despite our class, geographic and cultural differences, we are One and Indivisible”* (at least in the Republican versions thereof). It is also the site of a doubly limited universalism – limited by its own boundaries, on the one hand, and by the imperatives of capital accumulation, on the other. This universalism underpins modern citizenship through which the state supposedly recognizes all its citizens – and only them – as equal before the law, and demands

their loyalty to itself. (In practice, various exclusions afflict minorities, working populations, and different “superfluous” populations – from the point of view of capital – such as refugees).

As stated, the One of “normal political times” is equivalent to “administration”: the state neutralizes demands from below by administering them. According to Laclau, the populist moment occurs when any unfulfilled demands articulate together in what he calls a “chain of equivalence” and go beyond a point of satisfaction and neutralization by the authorities, leading to the social splitting in Two: a political antagonism of “us vs them” ensues.

There is, however, a third element in the social antagonism of the Two we need to consider. “The long 2013” (Tsoneva 2017) of year-long protests in Bulgaria, did not direct its ire solely against the oligarchic government, but drew yet another fault line within the national One. This, the “middle class” (or “the authentic citizens”, as the protesters argued) rose both against “the people” and the government. This discursive triangulation of the enmity brings the idea of civil society close to the way in which Montesquieu, long before the birth of anything remotely identifiable as a modern nation, theorized the social order in the French monarchy. Weaponizing “civil society” as an expression of the separation of powers that is most adept at checking absolutist power, Montesquieu grounded it firmly with the estate of the aristocracy, and its elaborate systems of mores and manners (see Richter 1998, Ehrenberg 1999). Norbert Elias's classic study about the gradual “courtisation” of the middle classes by aristocratic manners and ways of conduct in the guise of civility is an obvious point of reference here. “Civil” literally means the top-down process of dissemination of cultivation, culture, and manners from the courts to the lower social orders (Elias 2000). In our case, in describing their battle as the “citizens” or “civil society”, defined as possessing superior knowledge and culture, against the twin enemy of the post-communist political elite and their gullible constituencies, the protesters operate with a Montesquieu-inflected theory of civil society in which the virtuous, cultured, and knowledgeable ersatz-aristocracy of citizens rises to safeguard freedom, morality and European values against encroachments from corrupt elites and welfare-dependent populations.

How does this triple fault-line affect Laclau's theory of populism? Despite his unwillingness to consider determinate ontic elements that make up the chain of equivalence, an examination of the ideological content of the chain yields substantial implications for its form. The Two of “us versus them” of the struggle turns into a Three, and *eo ipso*, accentuates some of the limits of the formalist framework of Laclau's theory (for more on this, see Stavrakakis 2004). So “the us versus them”, or to stay true to the protesters' rhetoric, “the citizens versus the mafia” turns into the “middle class” Citizens versus the Masses versus the Mafia.

As a final theoretical point, I introduce my notion of the “anti-citizen”.³ It captures the effects that triangulating the conflict exerts on the imaginaries of citizenship. Participants in, and intellectuals endorsing, the protests define themselves as “authentic citizens” as opposed to the poor who demand “material” things (as in February 2013 or the counter-protests of the same year). The “anti-citizen” captures the confrontation between the self-described middle class protesters and the working poor as occurred in 2013. We can complicate the classic dyad in citizenship theory of citizens (those who are “in”), and non-citizens (those who are “out”,

³ David Harvey's notion of “anti-value” from his 2017 book provided the immediate inspiration for mine.

i.e. foreigners) with the idea of the “anti-citizens”, meaning those who are formally citizens of the polity but are discursively excluded or symbolically stripped of citizenship because they are not protesting for the “right things”. The anti-citizen is similar to what Marx (1977: 141) called the “class of civil society which is not a class of civil society”, a byword for “the proletariat” but here understood in culturalist terms.

Before I engage with the symbolic demarcation of the boundaries of civil society and citizenship, I will first outline the ways in which the antagonistic relation to the (post)communist elite is articulated by the anti-governmental protesters. I will then explore the critiques voiced by activist-intellectuals during the most acute phase of the protests in order to operationalize the notion of the “anti-citizen”. This phase occurred during the pro-government demonstrations of 2013 which came to be known as “the counter-protests”. Opposition to them culminated in calls for a thorough “cultural revolution” as a badly needed reform of the “gullible masses”.

I draw on a range of articles and discussions by protesters and sympathetic commentators who shall be referred to as activist-intellectuals. Some of them come from elite artistic and scholarly circles, but their elite-ness does not preclude treating them as part of the popular subject of 2013 as they participated in and endorsed the anti-governmental protests in no uncertain terms (while scorning the February protests and the counter-protests). Their interventions were instrumental in lending the 2013 summer protests – an otherwise “motley crew” of all sorts of individuals and groups, as any big protest is – a coherent image and subjectivity as the protest of “the new middle class” (and even bourgeoisie, as per one pronouncement discussed below). The intellectual objectification of the dynamics and relations in the protest, the definitions given by the opinion-makers, were much more important for the constitution of the identity of the protest, than the “actual” or “objective” and diverse class habitus of the participants, which however must be recognized as having supplied the commentators with the original impetus to venture their definitions. In short, the identity of the protest as “bourgeois” does not come solely from any objective distance out of necessity enjoyed by its participants, but by the objectified fantasy of this distance; that is to say, as articulated/objectified by the protesters (and their intellectuals) themselves. While the protest participants are more numerous and irreducible to the amount of public interventions spurred on their behalf by “men of letters,” the identity of the movement nevertheless depends strongly on (mediatized) discourses about its objectives and character, even when members of the movement disagree with their message, as I have witnessed on a number of occasions. However, for the purposes of this paper, I do not focus on internal disagreements but on select examples of articles and interviews which have been instrumental in fixing the boundaries and identity of the protest wave.

THE ONE BECOMES TWO

The next two sections detail how the summer protest activist-intellectuals conceive of their enemy in the face of the government. It is an example of how the One of the nation splits into Two along the antagonistic frontier between “us” and “them”, and the popular subject emerges. The discourses below consider this enmity in very radical terms, almost as species difference.

In a newspaper interview, entitled “the New Middle Class Rebellion”, the renowned Bulgarian theater director-cum-protester Yavor Gardev endorses, and defines the 2013 summer protest as an expression of “civil

society” understood as a community of self-respecting free citizens. Democracy, he says, rests on the free expression of the will of the free citizen. This is profoundly a non-economic and non-materialist mode of being: “*There is a category of citizen who insist on their free will. That is to say, they do not sell their vote.*” For anyone familiar with recent political debates raging in the Bulgarian public sphere, this is an obvious allusion to the question of election rigging and the market in votes, in which Roma voters are the prime suspects. Gardev's interlocutor accepts the premises of the statement and provides a counter-example from the protests: a famous banner of the summer protest stating “*I am not paid. I hate you for free.*” Gardev agrees with the contrast and adds:

Today the most productive and innovating social stratum is not represented in Parliament. It does not recognize itself mentally and culturally in the MPs. [...] I would call these protesters in Sofia an emerging middle class. They hold their destiny in their own hands because they possess the necessary intellectual capabilities to make a living. Maybe it sounds rude and undemocratic but this stratum looks at the people in parliament as if they were monkeys, [...] wild animals [...] It is not politically correct because we are all people but I hear this in the vocabulary of the protesters. This is about a species difference à la Darwin. [...] It is as though the protesting stratum lives in a foreign country. It is reduced to the position of right-less pariahs, while these are precisely the free people. People who have ideas, who are productive because they are moving forward the economy and our social life. (Petkova 2013)

Framing the enemy in civilizational and evolutionary terms, Gardev calls the political elite “another anthropological type” which he admits to detesting. This “type” differs from the protesters in that it is “not intelligent enough” (ibid).

Echoing this, the renowned and widely translated Bulgarian novelist Georgi Gospodinov, whose very first article about the summer protests called the protesters “beautiful” (a descriptor which stuck both with their proponents and detractors) ventures his explanation about the roots of the crisis rattling Bulgarian society, to which the protests are a response:

Underneath the financial crisis lies another crisis, personal, global, and more difficult to see as it cannot be exhausted with bank failures. [...] It's a crisis of morality, cultural crisis and a crisis of the meaning to live here. [...] I have a civilizational problem [with the behavior of politicians]. (Atanasova, 2014)

When asked what can be done about this crisis, Gospodinov states that the solution is to:

inculcate taste through reading. For me, to be a person of taste is also a political problem. The big problem of our politicians is not ideological [...]. The big problem is with the mentality and [lack of] taste. (ibid)

Thus defined, the problem requires intervention right into subjectivity (in addition to pervasive calls for lustration). The crisis cannot be tackled by redistribution, or financial regulation of any similar economic policies because it runs deeper than economics: it is a non-material crisis of taste. Notwithstanding the fact that people like Gospodinov speak about the political elite, the source of the malady is often perceived to originate in the *demos*.

For example, Georgi Ganev, the chief economic expert of the Center for liberal strategies, a Sofia-based think-tank, argued that the antagonistic parties in the 2013 protests are not two but three: “*The poor are not*

alone. [...] This is about the formation for quarter of a century [since 1989] of a coalition between the paupers and the oligarchs.” (Ganev 2013) According to him, what holds the coalition together is the exchange of votes for welfare:

The decades-long [...] coalition between totally dependent paupers and oligarchs has relegated Bulgarian society to the muddy swamp it inhabits today. Against this crystal-clear coalition which tries to secure the eternal reproduction of poverty, welfare handouts and stealing [...] 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” [...]. (ibid)

The deficiencies in the constituencies of the oligarchic elites are thought to be remedied only by the “Cultural revolution,” as the summer protest portents.

Evgenii Daynov, a liberal intellectual and think-tank director, defined the summer protests as a cultural revolution: “[the then PM] and his clique triggered a cultural revolution, at the end of which Bulgarians will stop being peons, moochers and servants” (2013) (presuming this is what they used to be before the 2013 Revolution). In other words, what democracy lacks are democratic subjectivities (i.e. citizens), but the protest will finally produce them. The citizens must replace the docile and dependent “populace” which prevents the completion of the Transition. Further, the Cultural Revolution, according to Daynov, transforms communism into an aesthetic problem:

If your problem [with communism] runs as deep as aesthetics, it means that you are from another culture. Because they reached such a depth in their rejection [of communism], the Poles became the most successful ex-communist nation. [In contrast], no matter how many times Bulgaria declares its “euroatlantic civilizational choice”, it won’t “fix itself” unless the culture of helplessness (of the population) and that of cynicism (of the ruling elite) is replaced by the contemporary culture of the citizen. (2013)

In other words, mere evolutionary change or institutional reforms cannot turn the culture of the citizen into the dominant one. No less than a Cultural Revolution is needed to do that.

To repeat, according to these voices, the (post)communist crisis we have to tackle is not material (utility bills, poverty, inequality, etc.) but cultural/civilizational/moral and aesthetic. These discourses put the whole operation of the production of political distinctions firmly on cultural and aesthetic grounds. This ties to the intellectuals’ understanding of the level of democratic development of the country. The fact that Bulgaria is a liberal democracy and an EU-member state is merely a veneer that covers its opposite. Namely, Bulgaria is only formally a democracy, as its liberal institutions are lacking in substance. This substance is taste, “citizen” culture, love for reading books, beauty, rigor, and as such it is immaterial, spiritual, and sadly lacking in the majority of the population seduced by the “welfare populism” of the oligarchs.

Who are the two sides in Daynov’s “cultural barricade”?

On the one side is the government (and its [...] cliques) which stands for the Asiatic-serfdom culture, characteristic of the space between Brest-Litovsk and Shanghai. On the other side there are the protesters, united by their attachment to the European civic culture. (ibid)

On this understanding, “civic culture” (racially localized in “Europe” as opposed to “despotic Asia”) is supposed to rectify the deficiencies by the allegedly skewed institutionalization of liberal democracy, yet it is also more foundational than the political institution-building. Culture emerges as primary to politics; it is the transcendental ground on which politics itself can function:

the more enlightened part of society [knows] that not all divisions can be submerged in the typical Left-Right divide; there are more fundamental differences which transcend it. Namely, the differences between the civilized and the barbarians. Only civilized people can split into left- and right-wingers, whereas the barbarians should not be let into the quarrel because they will simply beat up and rob the arguing parties. (ibid)

More recently, confusing the Latin etymology of the word “polite” (from Latin *polire*, to polish) with the ancient Greek for citizen (*politēs*, which comes from *pólis*), Daynov (2017) opines that “citizen” literally means “he who is polite” (or cultured), and attributes this definition to Aristotle. In contrast, Aristotle defines “the citizen pure and simple” not at the level of their manners but as somebody who has “the right to participate in judicial functions and in office” (2009: 1274b, also Johnson 1984). Despite the skewed representation of Aristotle, this definition exerts a performative effect in that it is productive of particular civic identities. The indexing of citizenship to “politeness” forms part of the neo-Montesquian vision of civil society, as predicated upon culture and manners, that the activists have engineered in the course of protesting.

In a similar Manichean vein, but with a pronounced medicalized edge, the world-renowned Bulgarian opera singer Alexandrina Pendatchanska, who was an ardent supporter of and participant in the summer protests, stated that:

the carcinogenic formation of oligarchic Octopus [of ex-secret service apparatchiks] has put the body of the state to a terminally ill condition in which the means of democracy cannot maintain it alive, let alone cure it! [...]. What do we do when our body is facing physical disintegration and is dying? Do we care if the right hand or the left hand reaches for the medicine, or do we exert all our strength to take the pill, to swallow it and to overcome the disease? (Pendatchanska 2013)

Words like “disease”, “cancer”, “barbarians” code a Manichean struggle between “Good” and “Evil”, “civilization” and “barbarism” which is a non-dialectizable battle to the death marked by non-resolution (except at the cost of the radical exclusion – nay, incision – of the opposing party). One is not supposed to tolerate a tumor; one operates on it. It is a version of the conservative clash of civilizations theme, only it is localized into the same nation-state torn asunder between two warring camps: civilization (the protest) and anti-civilization (the government).

However, despite the ire directed at the “communist” elite, the criticism of the so-called “facade” democracy comes to express the drive to improve the democratic order by way of elevating, educating or excluding, if need be, the deficient voters. And this happens to be the majority of the population, as philosopher and theologian Kalin Yanakiev asserted, when he bluntly stated that the events of the summer of 2013 represent “*the protests of the Bulgarian quality against the Bulgarian quantity.*” (Offnews 2013e)

The antagonism led some commentators to assert that there are not one but two Bulgarias.

In order to appreciate the comments above, we need to read them together with the larger discursive frame they inhabit. This context is the discourse about the “two Bulgarias”. (By extension “the two Romanias”; see Nastase 2014 for a symptomatic, non-reflexive application of the term). In Bulgaria, this discourse became very salient with the summer protests of 2013, but its roots go deeper. It is outside the scope of this paper to offer a genealogical reconstruction of the discourse which is an offshoot of the symbolic division of the country along the urban-rural axis; the putatively “Balkan” or “Oriental” culture in the countryside vs the “European” mentalities in cities, the “forward” and the “backward”, and so on (see Isin 2002 on the distinction between “European” and “Oriental” identities operative in the production of occidental citizenship).⁴ The discourse's versatile repertoire of bywords about class and class distinctions makes it easy to mobilize by public opinion-makers both during protests and in the staid phases of social confrontation.

It is obvious that in Bulgaria two beginnings are locked in a struggle: the first is of the mass, post-socialist Bulgarian and the other of the less mass, modern Bulgarian [of the protests]. Today we witness the star moment of the mass Bulgarian. (Daynov 2015)

Award-winning literary and cultural critic (and also university professor) Boyko Penchev provides one of the clearest visions about the “two Bulgarias” dichotomy, again in a commentary about the protest year. According to him, while the first Bulgaria understands justice as “full fridges for everyone”, the second Bulgaria defines justice as “to each according to their contribution”, thereby putting the old communist dictum⁵ in a neoliberal, self-responsibility frame. The first Bulgaria, he continues, waits for the politicians to distribute wealth while the second creates it and expects from the politicians to secure the rule of law so that they “won't lose their motivation to create”. The first Bulgaria believes every populist politician who promises welfare handouts; for the second, the ideal politician is a judge imposing the rule of law rather than playing the role of a “warehouse gatekeeper”. They also believe in personal responsibility, whereas the first Bulgaria blames capitalism for its low wages. The attitude to capitalism is in fact crucial: the second Bulgaria “reasons that if capitalism works in Belgium but not in Bulgaria”, it must be because of the way it was implemented in the country by the communists and the secret services (Penchev 2014).

As the opera singer Alexandrina Pendatchanska put it, the summer protest was a “real citizens’ protest, which cannot be reduced to utility bills”, as in February 2013 (2013). On this understanding, the real citizen is a hard-working, ascetic, self-help anti-communist who roots for “values” instead of “material trivialities”. This automatically delegitimizes social discontent with worsening work conditions, wages, public services and suchlike.

We can render this dichotomy as an opposition between the “vulgar materialism” of the masses (“full fridges for everyone”) versus the idealist struggle for the rule of law and the common good of the value-pro-

4 Rural” vs “urban” and “modern” vs “oriental” symbolic divisions similarly underscore the recent protests in Armenia over the acquisition and destruction of Yerevan's Cover Market by an enterprising MP (see Andriaans 2017). Similarly, the Yerevan protesters mobilized the “imaginary threat of ‘oriental’ Yerevan [...] to produce a cross-generational self-reference of urban middle classes as ‘civic Yerevan’ (ibid: 150) in the process of an intense confrontation with the ‘oligarch's constituencies’”, as Andriaans calls the counter-protesters who supported the renovation of the market because they were promised jobs and economic development.

5 “From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs.”

ducing classes in society; between the “lazy masses” expecting the welfare state to take care of them vs. the hard-working, austere, self-reliant, and self-responsible creators; in the final analysis, between a communism that still has not departed and an authentic capitalism that is yet to arrive.

TWO BECOMES THREE: THE CITIZENS VS. THE MASSES AND THE ELITE

Around the 2013 summer protests, the discourse of the “two Bulgarias” burst forward with fresh force. For example, the public intellectual and journalist Tony Nikolov, who regularly contributes to the conservative web-portal “Kultura” opined that the two Bulgarias are less marked by material inequality than by an inequality in the ability to understand and appreciate freedom:

These two Bulgarias do not know how to speak to each other, not because they speak a different tongue or enjoy different material conditions. They differ in their sense of freedom. The first Bulgaria belongs to those who worry about their future, let's call it the free Bulgaria. The other is the feudalized and humiliated Bulgaria, the Bulgaria of the people bussed into protests and counter-protests. The counter-Bulgaria of unfreedom, governed with the medieval methods of coercion. (2014)

Again we have a spiritual and idealist definition of a class of people defined in terms of sensibilities and dispositions to appreciate freedom, as opposed to the poor who protested their inflated utility bills in February or let themselves be bussed around the country.

The process of discursive amalgamation of the corrupt elite with the corrupted voters which marked the triangulation of the political antagonism in the summer of 2013 surfaced most forcefully during the so-called counter-protests in support of the ruling coalition, to which I turn now.

The first of the so-called counter-protests of 2013 was convened in the center of Sofia towards the end of June. Then there was a march in August 2013 and one in November of the same year. The immediate reason was the veto of the then president Rossen Plevneliev on the proposed actualization of the budget for 2013. The PM at the time explained that the state needed to borrow 1 billion BGN in order to meet the payments of indebted state companies, to pay the state debts to private contractors, and also to ensure the planned refurbishment of some hospitals (Money.bg, 2013). Despite the overt emphasis on propping up businesses, the justifications were immediately interpreted by the anti-governmental protesters as intentions to beef up welfare spending in order to buy public approval for the embattled government. This opposition to the budget actualization reached its climax on the 40th day of the anti-governmental protests, when the protesters blocked the Bulgarian Parliament's exits and clashes with the police ensued. The protesters opposed the new budget on the grounds of refusing to pay for debt that would be spent on the poor, turning the protest into a seminal pro-austerity riot. Donatella della Porta (2016: 3) treats the Bulgarian protests as part of the global anti-austerity resistance on a par with movements in Greece, Turkey, Spain, etc. If a social movement occurs in “times of austerity”, this does not necessarily make it anti-austerity. For instance, the 2013 summer ones were not only far from any critique of austerity and neoliberal inequalities, but produced a great deal of their own justifications thereof.

As Laclau was at pains to show, every identity is a chain of equivalence composed of a plurality of non-commensurable and distinct elements whose coherence is ensured and stabilized by the existence of a mutual enemy. In short, every “I” is an un-selfsame assemblage of elements held together by a non-I. Translating this into the imaginaries of citizenship, and turning away from the figuration of the enemy in the government, I show how the discourses surrounding the counter-protests constitute the normal citizenry of the authentic citizens against what I call the “anti-citizen”. I treat those utterances as technologies for determination of the boundaries of “authentic” citizenship and civil society.

DEFINING THE ANTI-CITIZEN

There are several determinate criteria for the delineation of the citizen from the anti-citizen. These criteria appear as dyadic oppositions. One such opposition runs along the axis of “spontaneous vs. organized.” Thus, while the authentic civil society protest was said to be “spontaneous” in the sense of unmediated voluntary gathering of citizens on the street, the counter-protester was recognized as “involuntary” and “organized” from above. One way the anti-government protesters and sympathetic media could discern this was by the presence of buses.

Bus-spotting became a salient activity, propelling the interpretative efforts of the protesters to unmask the authenticity of the counter-protesters. For example, Protest Network, the leaders of the Summer protests of 2013, warned their followers that “the buses are coming”. Unlike the citizens who arrive by bike, in private cars or on foot, the counter-protest makes a conspicuous and thus suspicious announcement.

Atanas Tchobanov, a civic activist who runs the Bulgarian version of Wikileaks, was alarmed that the buses in which the counter-protest participants were driven had parked on disabled badge-holders spots, yet were not fined. Tchobanov speculated that the police were complicit with the counter-protests. The news outlet Offnews echoed his concerned and reproduced his investigation (2013d).

It should be noted that the large pro-democracy protests from the early 1990s in Bulgaria were also “organized” by the anti-communist opposition and unions, and participants from outside Sofia were bussed in; yet, in no way did this engender a sense of inauthenticity. We can treat the rejection of “top-down organization” animating the 2013 anti-government protests as symptomatic for the crisis of representation that has affected liberal democracy. Democratic institutions (especially collective organizations such as political parties or trade unions) seem less able to exert symbolic and representative authority, as revealed by falling electoral turnouts and party/union memberships. Representation's legitimacy falters, visible in the protesters' exclusion of the counter-protesters from the sphere of “authentic protest” because of the way in which they arrived in Sofia to express their support for the government. On the protesters' understanding, the bus is the negation of authentic civic activity, supposedly driven by spontaneous self-organization. This is nowhere manifested more clearly than in this pro-summer protest headline with very suggestive quotation marks: “*Buses drove in 'self-organized' people to the counter-protest.*” (Offnews, 2013a). Today, any top-down organization smacks of communist-era manifestations [*manifestatsii*], as the main organizer of the summer protests, Assen Genov, asserted. Genov assimilated the counter-protests to communism because they remind him of the “servile

sycophancy to those in power". The latter *"waved their hands and received directed congratulations through tasteless, clichéd [and identical] posters"* (ibid).

Not only does the counter-protesters' mode of transport convey a "top-down organization" (as opposed to individual civic spontaneity), but their banners were said to reek of inauthenticity, too. For example, the Bulgarian TV channel bTV finds it noteworthy that "the participants in the demo carried brand new flags of Bulgaria as well as identical banners with identical messages which were moreover industrially made rather than handmade" (bTV, 2013) presuming, therefore, that authentic protest means handmade banners.

In contrast, protesters and sympathetic media repeatedly emphasized that the banners of the summer protest are handmade, individual, creative, witty and well thought out. The question of creativity resurfaced in many other angles throughout the protests, spurring even a definition of the citizen along these lines (discussed below).

Creativity in the production of slogans became a signature of the anti-governmental protests, immortalized in a book dedicated to preserving the diversity and innovation associated with the slogans (Dnevnik 2013). Certain individuals acquired fame for their banners. As one of the reviews of this book states, *"the slogans unmistakably testify to the artistic energy of the street."* (Igov 2014). A review of the book in the *Capital* weekly, Bulgaria's foremost liberal paper, states that the slogans are diverse but *"the common ground between them is their wittiness and the articulation of principled positions, rather than insults"*, emphasizing civility (Mousseva 2013). Yet, one of the widespread slogans in the protests, resurrected from the 1997 anti-communist protests, to be hurled at the 2013 government, was "red scum", and it was included in the volume. Another review of the book tries to excuse the slogan: *"red scum is not an insult but color characteristics"*, and says that *"this is [one] of the many slogans, some of them very witty, smart and expressive"* (Igov 2014).

To conclude this section, while the slogans from the anti-government protests merit book publications, unreflexive social science articles (e.g. Evtimova 2014, Georgieva 2014), and countless media endorsements, those of the counter-protests are described as dull, unimaginative, repetitive and mass-produced, thereby not meriting the effort involved in committing them to memory, nor print.

FACIAL AND RACIAL VISION AND DIVISION

Differences in outward appearance loomed large from the beginning of the 2013 polemics. The manifest poverty, unkempt looks, and "outsiderhood" of the counter-protesters was interpreted even racially. For example, a website which set up operations as an official news outlet for the protests described the counter-protesters in the following terms: *"three strong guys with Turkish features, each holding a plastic cup with mint liquor [...] we hear Turkish speech among the Bulgarian words"* (quoted by Nikolova 2014: 51).

Another large pro-government rally was described by the same media as attended by *"red molluscs, gypsies and Turks"* (using the extremely offensive racist slur *"mangali"*) (quoted by Nikolova 2014: 63). A further example of racialization is found on the website <http://klisheta.com/protest>, which was created by an anti-government protester as a table with the most widespread talking points of the government in one column, and counter-arguments in another column, to be used by the protesters. It features a test with pictures through

which the knowledgeable observer can test their ability to distinguish a protester from a counter-protester. To score 100%, one only needs to designate all the pictures of men and women with a darker complexion and/or poorer teeth and clothes as a “counter-protester”.

A most telling expression of the pervasive racial profiling happened when Assen Genov, one of the leaders of the protests, an online entrepreneur and a foundation co-founder with a long record of reputable civic activism, chased a group of Roma from the counter-protest and recorded everything on camera (Blitz, 2013). A similar incident occurred on the 40th day of the protests, when a Roma boy was racially profiled and protesters chased him in order to capture him. This too, was recorded on camera.

The reduction of the counter-protesters to “Roma” and “Turks” was also enforced by media sympathetic to the protests with online galleries of pictures as well as with video interviews from these rallies featuring overwhelmingly Roma- and poor-looking people (i.e. Offnews, 2013c). For example, the Offnews website shares one of its dispatches from the counter-protests with the following introduction: *“Faces and voices from the counter-protests. Most of the faces are dark [murgavi, a pejorative synonym for ‘dark’ used predominantly to describe the Roma], while most voices are inarticulate”*. The article then informs us that “40% of the participants are Roma and Turks” (Offnews, 2013b) The author of the piece does not take the counter-protest seriously, calls it “comical” and proceeds to interrogate the participants on their reasons for attending.

At some point, his questions make a man visibly uncomfortable so he switches to another participant whom he describes as “murgav” and *“visibly looking like a [member of the Roma] minority”* (Offnews, 2013b). In short, “minority appearance” signals the presence of an anti-citizen. Inasmuch the authentic citizen is imagined by the protesters as someone like them (i.e. protesting, informed, educated, economically independent, and so on), those who fail to sympathize with the protests or question are rendered as anti-citizens.

In addition to appearance, knowledge and reason become prerequisites for the exercise of true citizenship, and by extension, how those who are (perceived to be) lacking in these capacities are considered incapable of exercising proper citizenship. Thus, corresponding to the rise of the knowledge economy emerges the knowledge citizenry.

For example, a widespread opinion about the counter-protests has it that, having been organized or sent by the government, these people did not know what they are actually protesting against/about. (As opposed to the enlightened and informed citizens from the anti-governmental protest.) Quiz-like interviews with counter-protesters, produced both by protesters and journalists, proliferated in order to demonstrate the supposed lack of knowledge on part of the government supporters. A disconcerting way of selecting interviewees through racial profiling was common (though not only “racialized” counter-protesters became objects of vilification).

For example, a journalist from Offnews, which strongly backed the anti-governmental protests, picked his first interviewees via avowed racial profiling: *“we go to one of the few counter-protesters with lighter skin and ask him »why are you here? What do you protest against?«*” The man, who seems unaccustomed to speak on the media, responds that there are more competent people to answer this question. The journalist interprets this as “top-down organization” and proceeds to ask who paid, questioning the motivations of the participants. (Offnews, 2013b).

The media even used dispatches from the counter-protests produced by “citizen-journalists” (OFFnews, 2013b). A video shot by the anti-government protester and social entrepreneur Krasimira Hajiivanova shows her asking from behind the camera two young Roma men from the city of Plovdiv if they had been paid to protest. The men denies receiving any payment but Hajiivanova concludes *“Right, all clear. You got 20 BGN each”*. Then she asks if they were given water and food, which they confirm. Finally, Hajiivanova inquires about their reasons for attending the protest. The hesitation to respond on part of the counter-protesters prompts her to answer instead of them: *“you don't know why you're here”*. She baits them with fake answers only to expose fully what she knew all along: they do not know why they are protesting; they have been organized “from above”, and they were paid, mirroring from “below” the corruption reigning from above (Offnews, 2013b).

Although formally Bulgarian citizens, the counter-protesters, especially those who bore detectible “racially different” marks, were cast outside authentic citizenry because of the perception of them as “organized from above”, or because they did not demonstrate knowledge, had representative spokespersons, and were allegedly even paid to rally behind the government (without solid proof). In short, as simultaneously in- and outside of legitimate citizenship, they are anti-citizens. While even illiterate people can be citizens, the protester discourses point to another understanding of the conditions for citizenship which tie it to knowledge. This, together with the importance accorded to skin colour or facial expression, complements of the process of aestheticization of the protest identity to which I turn next.

AESTHETIC VISION AND DIVISION

In this section I tackle the question of the role of aesthetics in the protests. An aesthetic dimension seems inevitable in social movements and protests. Most recently, the Black Lives Matter movement was captured by a powerful image of an upright black woman facing two heavily armed policemen. The Macedonian anti-governmental protests of 2015 were similarly “summarized” by an image of a young woman using a police shield to apply lipstick.

The Bulgarian protests of 2013 deliberately sought the expressive capacities of art, so much so as to elevate them to the level of the principle that organizes the very identity of the protests. In other words, the protests became known, and distinguished themselves from their twin enemy of “the mafia” and the “anti-citizens” by virtue of being creative and artistic. They also came to be known as the protests of “the smart and the beautiful,” after Gospodinov's influential essay written in the first day since the protests outbreak, entitled “The protester is beautiful” (2013). A white piano together with the distinctive hand-made posters and a real ballerina “embellished” the area in front of parliament, while citizens expressed their distaste at communism with unique hand-made costumes and songs.

A host of performances further reinforced the creative and middle-class character of the protests. For example, the protesters built a symbolic “Berlin wall” out of cardboard boxes, the subsequent destruction of which came to express their firm pro-European geopolitical and “civilizational” orientation.

But as much as activist-intellectuals try to maintain the separation between the low and lofty orders of aesthetic dimensions of the protests, the “lowly” reasserts itself in the final analysis. The only means available

to activist-intellectuals to judge how far (or not) the population has progressed on its cultural elevation, is crudely material. For example, much like the amplification of the significance of “racial” otherness of the Roma, this happens through the objectification of sexualised bodies for the purposes of discerning who belongs to civil society and who does not.

Consider for example, an essay by prof. Kalin Yanakiev’s – who established the opposition between the “quantity and the quality” I referred to earlier – titled *On the aesthetics of the protests*. Yanakiev compares the aesthetic qualities of the protests and counter-protests and more specifically the day (July 14, 2013) when a young female summer protester dressed up as “Liberty” from Delacroix’s painting *Liberty leading the people*.

The same day, a woman from the “counter-protest” ironized the “Liberty” impersonator and also appeared bare-breasted at her rally.

This is how prof. Yanakiev interprets both performances in his essay rich in sexist, ageist and fat-shaming expletives:

[A] most grotesque contrast [emerged] when a voluptuous, fat and vulgar, middle-aged woman showed her breast to the venerable government supporters with which she tried to rebuke the euphoric-celebratory and simultaneously sparkling, joyful-ironic “reenactment” of the famous painting of Delacroix which a group of [anti-government] protesters reproduced not coincidentally on this day,⁶ and with an obvious “wink” to the French ambassador [who endorsed the protests]. Why the counter-protester fury had to execute the striptease in question, what “joke” could have been in it, nobody understood. The only thing that became clear is that the counter-protest is in a grotesque way completely lacking even a modicum of a sense for “performance”, a sense for the artistic enlivening of the open public space, a sense of humor. (Yanakiev, 2013)

For all the emphasis on the immaterial, spiritual and lofty qualities of the protest for European values, it takes a quick look at the shape of a woman's breast to determine who belongs to which side of the divide. In the final analysis, the material vision, in its most vulgar modality (i.e. “sagging” or “pointy” breasts, “fat” or “thin” bodies) reasserts itself in order to stabilize the division between the citizens and the anti-citizens:

For example, look how charmingly (and yes – beautifully, almost erotically) the maidens wrap their bodies with the national flag. The flag is almost blossoming on their bodies. Now compare with the standardized size, the threatening [aggressivity] of the flags, waved like partisan sticks by most of the “counter-protesters”. (ibid, emphasis added)

It is not only aggression but a standardized “communist” aggression. In yet another instance, prof. Yanakiev assimilates the counter-protests to communism:

despite the fact that the [anti-government] protesters are in their tens of thousands, we don't see the “mass person” [chovekat-masa] raging in them. It is not “the people” [narod] manifesting, but many, many faces. In contrast, the counter-protests seem to consist of the descendants of those who, 70 years ago [the beginning of Socialism], called the writers, officers, university lecturers awaiting their trials in the so-called People's Tribunal, “fascists” [...].

⁶The day in question was July 14, 2013. For all of Yanakiev's university titles and cultural erudition, he seems not to know that the painting refers to the July Revolution 41 years after 1789.

Nothing signals individuality more poignantly than the face. In this vision, while the counter-protesters form a grey mass, the protest is the sum of the colourful individual faces that compose it, without ever losing their individuality. The counter-protest dilutes its individual elements into an undifferentiated mass. The protest, in contrast, affirms the individuality of its members. A simple table can illustrate more clearly the binary oppositions the professor operates with.

Protest	Counter-protest
Liberal	Communist ⁷
Individualist	Mass
Creative	Imitative
Knowledgeable	Ignorant
Beautiful	Ugly
Erotic	Vulgar, pornographic
Individual faces	The masses and the people [<i>narod</i>]
Spontaneous	Directed
Disinterested	Interested in things “crude” and “material”
Polite	Rude
Citizens	Anti-citizens

Against the erotic beauty of the protest, Yanakiev pits the threatening ugliness of the counter-protests:

Now compare the faces of the protesters [...]. No matter what angry and radical answers [they] give, they are still smiling, they treat the interviewers amicably and look them in the eye. In contrast, the counter-protesters are rude with the reporters, and look desperately for their “leader” standing close behind them, who hastens to take the floor from them and shoots up the message drafted [by someone above] for today. (Yanakiev, 2013)

Beauty goes hand in hand with knowledge about the protests' objectives and demands. In contrast, ugliness comes with rudeness, dependency on someone higher up the hierarchy to give the “correct answers”, and a lack of knowledge about what the counter-protesters are doing there. Even the anger is different, the difference stemming from the authentic citizenship the protesters enjoy by virtue of their knowledge and culture:

*The [counter-protesters] are singularly angry, when they are in a larger group, or hate organically – when they are on their own – those who are “paid by the West”, because the latter are witty and have colorful faces, in short, are diverse because **they are citizens**. (ibid, emphasis added)*

We can thus speak of the bodies of the citizenry and the anti-citizenry. One of the bodies is the beautiful, playfully erotic body, inhabited by the spirit (of the well-read, self-conscious, cultured, beautiful, rigorous protester). The other body is not taken by, but overtakes and thus destroys the spirit: it is the ugly, twisted, crooked, hungry, racialized, materialist and pornographic body of the counter-protester shamelessly flaunting her saggy breasts.

What bearing any of this has on the imaginaries of citizenship? Let's hear prof. Yanakiev again:

*Naturally, the most basic difference is in the fact that the participants in the Sofia protests are citizens (and I don't put any association with the place of origin or occupation in this term). **And the citizen, by***

⁷ This does not refer to what people attending from the counter-protest actually say about communism or Liberalism, but what Yanakiev thinks their presence signifies.

essence of his [sic] mentality, is spectacular, witty, artistic. It is no coincidence that the revolutions of the past 30 years are “velvet” revolutions – that is to say, revolutions of the moral-aesthetic order, of the logos [slovesnostta], and this is especially important – of the readiness to prevail through self-sacrifice and not via raw power. (Yanakiev, 2013, emphasis added)

We can call Yanakiev's ruminations a “creativity theory of citizenship” because the properties and titles of citizenship derive from “creativity” instead of being automatically assigned to just about anyone at birth, as per the constitution. As the professor emphasizes, he takes citizenship not as contingent upon one's place of residence or occupation but as an innate substance which is moreover unevenly distributed: the mentality of the individual who is immutably creative regardless of whether or not he engages in a particular creative activity. Since it does not derive from activity or practice, this is an essentialist understanding of citizenship. It is citizenship as substance.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) suggests that in distinction inheres an indirect, apolitical form of domination. The aesthetic ruminations of intellectuals demonstrate that domination through taste can be directly political or harnessed for political ends, such as the symbolic roll-back of political equality in modern citizenship and its replacement by a more conservative-aristocratic understanding of political membership as an exclusive category, as the deployment of aesthetic categories for the purposes of defining the identity and citizenship status of the different protests demonstrates.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to scholarly pronouncements that “[t]he value of civil society lies in that it provides a space for alternative views, debate, and dissent” (Amarasuriya, 2015: 55) the anti-government protesters who claim to act and speak on behalf of “civil society” deny the right of pro-government protesters to hold legitimate political opinions because of the way they look (“minority-looking”, “poor”, “uncreative”), because of their ethnicity, because of the nature in which their rally was organized (“bussed in”, “socialist-era manifestation”), and simply because they support – allegedly by being paid or forced to attend the rallies – a government that suffered a radical loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the protesters. “Civil society” for its self-appointed legitimate representatives becomes less of a space for voicing “alternative views, debate, and dissent” than a space for the articulation of a “single” social interest whose only legitimate expression is provided by themselves.

As the case shows, civil society can become the exclusive space for people with knowledge and culture, members of “the new middle class”; in short, for the executors of the new “cultural revolution” tasked with finalizing the incomplete transition to a Western-style democracy and the free market. In that sense, it deploys a Montesquieu-inflected version of civil society as the domain of “gentlemanly” culture, morals and manners, supplemented by beauty – by definition unevenly spread – which alone confer the right to speak in public, as opposed to a nominally inclusive Habermasian public sphere which pretends to not care about social class and demands that everyone be treated as equal for the duration of the deliberation. This neo-Montesquieuan civil society maps the tripartite discursive split of society into the elites, the mobs and the cultured middle classes which my notion of the anti-citizen captured.

I have shown how aesthetics, knowledge and class (in both senses of the term, as in social class and as an attainment of a level of refinement and quality) played a role in the constitution of the identity of the anti-government protesters as a “middle class” vis-a-vis their twin enemies in the guise of the governing elites and their gullible constituencies, and thus radically narrowed the scope of legitimate belonging to civil society and the community of citizens.

The discourses scrutinized are still in the domain of the imaginary, and no-one in Bulgaria has been stripped of citizenship yet for failing to demonstrate civic competence in a newspaper interview, or for taking the bus to attend a protest. However, these exclusionary discourses are symptomatic and pose a danger for democracy should they gain a wider traction. They signal a departure from the more egalitarian visions which animated the early 1990s transition to democracy that pitted the whole of society against the communist *elite*. In contrast, the 2013 revival of the anti-communist opposition entertains self-congratulating visions of itself as the “Bulgarian quality” versus the Bulgarian “quantity” (= the communistic *masses*), lending it a decidedly elitist and post-democratic character.

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PROTEST MOVEMENTS AND THE BULGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2013–2014

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ABSTRACT

In 2013, Bulgaria's political system was shaken to its core by an unprecedented wave of mass protests. The protests, which began with dissatisfaction over the government's policy towards household electricity bills, brought down the government and led to new elections in June 2013. But after the new government was formed, a new wave of protests began. The renewed protest movement demanded transparency and accountability. Under the slogan 'Who?', the movement protested against corruption by the new government, and demanded to know who was governing the country 'behind the scenes'.

Political developments in Europe and beyond have demonstrated links between protests and the rise of populist parties. Yet, the Bulgarian case stands apart from these developments. In Bulgaria, the protest movement and the populist parties remain disconnected from each other; the agenda of populist parties does not correspond with the demands of the protest movement. In this paper, we attempt to investigate why this is the case. We argue that the disjuncture between the protest movement and the populist parties in Bulgaria can be explained by the increasing polarization of Bulgarian society. The protest movement represents the pro-European and pro-democratic part of the electorate; the nationalist populist parties that entered parliament appeal to the euro-sceptic and socially conservative part of society, and ultimately those who hope for a restoration of social order through a 'strong hand' and authoritarian rule. The paper is based on the analysis of secondary qualitative and quantitative materials.

Keywords: Bulgaria, #DANSwithme, political parties, populism, protests

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PROTEST MOVEMENTS AND THE BULGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2013–2014

INTRODUCTION

The year 2013 was a year of protests in Bulgaria. Protests initially began in February with dissatisfaction with the government's policy towards household electricity bills and the state regulation of energy providers. Eventually, the protests brought down the government of the right-wing Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria party (GERB), and led to new elections in May 2013. But two weeks after the new government was formed by the leftist Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the centrist Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), with the support of the nationalist populist party Ataka, a new wave of protests began. The renewed protest movement, which became known as #DANSwithme, demanded transparency and accountability; under the slogan 'Who?', the movement protested against corruption by the new government and demanded to know who was governing the country *“behind-the-scenes [...] where nothing is ever clear”* (Kiossev 2013). Yet the new elections of October 2014 showed that the protests did not bring about the change that was sought after. Voter turnout was the lowest in decades; the new government, led once again by GERB, was formed, but its composition and policies did not differ significantly from the first GERB government of 2009–2013. At the same time, the elections that were held in the course of the protest wave, both at the national and European level (2014), saw a redistribution of votes to the smaller populist parties. In addition to Ataka, which received fewer seats in 2014 than in 2013, two more populist coalitions made it into parliament: the Patriotic Front and Bulgaria without Censorship.

In this study, we thus seek to explore the links between Bulgarian protest movements and voting for right-wing populist political parties in the national elections of 2013–2014. This is an important question, particularly in the context of the recent rise of right-wing populist parties all over Europe. In these and other cases, right-wing populist parties succeeded in engaging with the protest movements, and made significant electoral gains due to their ability to respond to popular demands. In Bulgaria, the relationship between the protest movements of 2013 and the right-wing populist parties remained weak; and the electoral change achieved after a year of protest was rather modest compared to the extent of the movements.

In this paper, we explore the applicability of the contentious politics framework for the understanding of the interaction between the protest movements and institutionalized political actors in Bulgaria. While these links are researched in depth in many Western European contexts, in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) they have on recently received attention. In Bulgaria, the link between collective protest action and right-wing populist parties has not been researched, and thus our study seeks to contribute to this gap in the literature.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the theoretical literature that investigates the links between protest movements and party politics. We then turn to the existing attempts to apply these theories

to protest movements in Eastern Europe and situate the Bulgarian protests of 2013 in this framework. Finally, we discuss the interaction, or lack of it, between the 2013 protest movements and right-wing populist political parties.

CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND ELECTORAL CHANGE

In social movement studies, the interaction with institutionalized political actors is not generally of central concern. According to Della Porta and Diani, political process theories examining how the protest movements which challenge a “given political order [...] interact with actors who enjoy a consolidated position in the polity” (Della Porta–Diani 2006: 16) are only one of four major research directions in the analysis of social movements (ibid: 6). Research in this subfield has been successful in shifting attention towards the interaction between new actors (social movements) and traditional ones (political parties and states), and between less conventional forms of action and institutionalized systems of interests representation (ibid: 17). The contentious politics framework introduced by Charles Tilly (1995) and developed by his associates (Tarrow 1998, McAdam Tarrow–Tilly 2001), has been the most influential approach in the attempts to link protest movements with institutional political process.

Contentious politics can be defined as “*episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of a claim and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claim and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interest of at least one of the claimants*” (ibid: 5). The contentious politics approach sought to connect scholarship on social movements with scholarship on democratization, civil wars and revolutions, and to introduce dynamic, rather than static analysis of the process of interaction between movements and what Tarrow and McAdam referred to as “routine political actors” (McAdam–Tarrow 2010: 532).

In seeking to illuminate the relations between movements and institutionalized political process, McAdam and Tarrow suggest six mechanisms of linkage. These mechanisms include the following.

- Movements introduce new forms of collective action that influence election campaigns.
- Movements join electoral coalitions or, in extreme cases, turn into parties themselves.
- Movements engage in proactive electoral mobilization.
- Movements engage in reactive electoral mobilization.
- Movements polarize political parties internally.
- Shifts in electoral regimes have a long-term impact on mobilization and demobilization.

Few studies have examined the impact that citizen's protest behavior has on electoral outcomes (ibid). Thus in our study, we extrapolate the research on contentious politics in the case of the Bulgarian 2013 protest events, looking for a link between social protests and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties.

McAdam and Tarrow also emphasize the importance of “domestic opportunities and constraints” (McAdam–Tarrow 2010: 531) in the relations between collective protest actions and routine political actors, even for transnational movements which appear to transcend national boundaries. As Jacobsson and Saxonberg (2013: 2) point out, the differing domestic political, legal and economic opportunity structures encourage

social movements to pursue different repertoires of actions in each country. Social movements are flexible, and adapt to changes in domestic opportunity structures (ibid: 18). In cases where policymakers are not responsive and the population is politically passive, it may make sense for social movement organizations to concentrate on economic and legal opportunities (ibid: 3).

Turning to the interaction of movements with political parties, various patterns of interaction have been identified. Generally, movements and parties differ greatly in terms of their organizational principles, with parties presenting more hierarchical structures and movements adopting more flexible and open forms of network (Della Porta–Diani 2006: 25). At the same time, unlike parties which usually have more centrist electoral logics, movements “*tend towards narrow, sometimes extremist views, and uncompromising commitments to single issues*” (McAdam–Tarrow 2010: 535). Unlike parties, movements and other civil society associations do not aim to control public power or the state apparatus (Kopecky 2003: 8) However, in recent decades, movements have “*challenged the centrist electoral logic that defined the parties in the post-war period, injecting extreme partisan ideologies and a concern for single issues into electoral politics*” (McAdam–Tarrow 2010: 535). Movements have been shown to give rise to new political parties or turn into political parties themselves. Thus, in post-communist Eastern Europe, new parties emerged out of revolutionary movements through competition and mobilization for electoral support (Glenn 2003b: 165). In some cases and under specific conditions, some political parties may feel and be recognized by others as part of a movement. However, this is rather unusual, and is largely restricted to parties whose origins lie in social movements. In this situation, a party is part of two different systems of action: the party system and social movement system, where they play different roles (Della Porta–Diani 2006: 25). Furthermore, with the weakening of the identity-building functions of political parties, especially in Europe under the influence of neoliberal consensus, the autonomous role of social movements as “*arenas of public debate on political issues and construction of collective identities*” has been increased (ibid: 87). This emergence of protest as an arena of public debate and the construction of “*protest identity*” was highly visible during the protests of June 2013. Unfortunately, they did not succeed in going further or constructing a viable political alternative, as we will see in the following section.

Movements can also impose various challenges on established political parties, including organizational and electoral challenges, such as giving rise to new party coalitions, or encouraging programmatic changes (Della Porta–Chironi 2015: 65). Della Porta and Chironi (ibid) describe a case when a social movement challenged a political party (the Italian Partito Democratico, or PD) from within, through a protest action called Occupy PD. Movements and political parties also often enter into more or less temporary alliances, when political parties seek electoral support from the movements in return to policy changes. Traditionally, the cooperation of movements with parties has been deepest with the actors on the left of the political spectrum (Della Porta–Chironi 2015, Poguntke 2006, Kriesi et al. 1993). This has been most recently the case in Greece, where the radical left coalition Syriza entered into dialogue with the anti-austerity movement, which allowed it to gain electoral support beyond the radical left.

In the case of Syriza, as well as in the case of Spanish Podemos, the roots of the electoral successes of the challenger parties can be found in the interaction with popular protests which were a response to

the economic crisis (Della Porta–Chironi 2015: 63). Such party-movement alliances have been attributed to the affinity and convergence of the reformist agendas of many social movements and left-wing party politics (ibid), as well as shared values. However, it is also important to note that this cooperation often takes place with smaller, less-known political parties, a kind of political underdog. As parties become larger, they tend to gravitate toward the center and are less open to change (ibid). At the same time, some authors have suggested that scholarship has tended to excessively focus on reformist movements, thus obscuring the interaction between conservative movements and right-wing political parties (Tarrow–McAdam 2010). Recent research points to a similar dynamic of interaction between conservative movements and right-wing political parties (Mudde 2004).

MOVEMENT-PARTY INTERACTION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In the past three decades, Eastern Europe has been a site of mass mobilization at least twice: first, during the collapse of communist regimes and then in the course of “electoral revolutions” in Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia in the early 2000s. In both of these instances, the empirical links between movements and party politics have been both apparent and recognized, although they remain insufficiently researched. Thus, the role of the Solidarity movement in Poland in bringing down the communist regime has become a textbook example of a movement's role in political change (Tarrow 1994). Although less spectacular, the dissident movement in Czechoslovakia also played an important role in bringing down the communist regime (Glenn 2003b). In both of these countries, social movements became the formative sites of political parties that still remain key players in the political process (Glenn 2003a). The dynamic conditions of post-communist change, with their unstable and volatile political identities and economic interests, pushed “leaders of new political parties to act like social movement entrepreneurs, seeking to mobilize potential supporters in light of varying opportunities, resources, and ways of claiming their claims” (Glenn 2003b: 165). In the former Soviet Union, national movements had played a crucial role in undermining the influence of the Communist Party and gave rise to a multitude of political parties in the post-Soviet period (Beissinger 2002).

The interest paid towards protest action in Eastern Europe resurged once again after the so-called electoral revolutions in Serbia (2000), Ukraine (2003) and Georgia (2004) (Kuntz 2013, Nikolayenko 2007, Bunce–Wolchik 2011). Here, the alliance between social movements with oppositional parties led to large-scale mobilizations around stolen elections, which allowed a recount of the results of the elections and eventually brought oppositional parties to power. Although relatively better researched, these events are rarely looked at from the contentious politics perspective (Kuntz 2013, Bunce–Wolchik 2011).

In both of these literatures, Bulgaria protest activities rarely merit significant attention. Although, like elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the fall of the communist regime here was accompanied by mass protests, they were less significant than in Poland or Romania. Bulgaria also had no “electoral revolution” as Serbia had in 2000; however, the protests of 1996 and 1997 not only precipitated electoral change in this country, but also played a role in the diffusion of an electoral model that was implemented in Slovakia in 1998 and Serbia in 2000 (Bunce–Wolchik 2011: 57–58).

In this paper, we focus on the protest episodes of 2013 and suggest some possible linkages between the movements and the electoral outcomes in the ensuing elections. We further indicate some other ways of interaction between the protest movement and the institutionalized political process beyond the elections of 2014. In the next section, we provide a brief descriptive overview of the protests in order to set the context. We then proceed to the tentative analysis of the ways in which the protest movement affected the political parties and the electoral process.

THE BULGARIAN PROTESTS OF 2013

The first wave of protests in February 2013 began with household electricity bills that were higher than expected. In various cities, spontaneous protests erupted in which people burned their electricity bills, claiming that the bills were wrong, and that the electricity distributor was over-charging them (Iakimova 2016). Among political parties, the nationalist-populist Ataka took the most active stance against these companies, even establishing the goal of ridding Bulgaria of “colonizers”, as the distributors were labeled, in its official electoral program of 2013 (“Siderov's plan against the colonial yoke”). The protesters held primarily economic claims, and their main demand was to decrease the price of electricity.

Although the claims of the protest movement at this stage remained overall socio-economic, the issue of the need for a new political party that would represent the interests of the protesters was discussed. However, although a majority of the population said that they supported the economic claims of the protesters, according to a sociological survey, only 14% expressed a wish to vote for a party that would represent these interests. Consequently, the protest party, Democratic Civic Initiative, was established, but received less than 1% in the elections (CEC, 2013). However, a nationalist-populist party, Ataka, was able to make use of the protest sentiments and considerably increased its influence. Its popularity increased from 1.9% in January to 5.5% in March 2013. Another party that gained from the protests was NFSB (National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria) (Alpha Research, March 2013).

After failing to quell the protests, the incumbent government resigned and new elections were held. Following snap elections, a coalition government formed of BSP and DPS was established. However, the new government was extremely unpopular, and its cadre policy raised many questions. In particular, the appointment of DPS MP Delian Peevski, a media tycoon with a questionable reputation, to the position of Head of the State Agency for National Security (DANS), was contested. In fact, it stirred yet another wave of protests, known as #DANSwithme, that began in June 2013. The new wave began in Sofia, and at first the protesters demanded the removal of Peevski from this position. Although Peevski resigned, the protests escalated. The key question of the movement became 'Who?', as the protesters demanded to know who made the decision to appoint Peevski to this key state position. Thus, in contrast with the February events, the new wave of protests of “citizens against the oligarchy” (Dainov 2013) had clear political (rather than economic) claims. As Nikolov (2016) argues, the #DANSwithme protest was a result of social eruption caused by “gradual colonization” of the Bulgarian democratic system by oligarchic elites.

As the government failed to respond to the question of 'who?', the movement's demands changed, and

it began to call for the resignation of the new government. The government itself refused to resign, and instead attempted to demonstrate its popularity and social support (according to a survey conducted by Alpha Research sociological agency cited in Popova, 2016, 50% supported and 43% opposed the demand for resignation) by staging counter-protests, even bringing supporters from the provinces to the capital. Yet, these measures were not convincing for the movement, and by October, yet another stage of protest, an Occupy sit-in began in the University of Sofia, and some other universities in the capital and provincial cities. An activist group by the name of Early-rising Students (*Ranobudnite studenti*) declared that they would protest against “the cynicism, corruption, irresponsibility, and unaccountability in the Bulgarian political class” (Znepolski 2016). However, after several weeks of the Occupy strategy, the protest activities gradually died out, and the aims of the protest movement were not achieved.

THE BULGARIAN PROTEST MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES: IS THERE A CONNECTION?

After a turbulent 2013, new parliamentary elections were held in 2014. At first sight, it appears that the protests that had shaken the country for nearly a year had brought little or no change to the political establishment. Indeed, the new government, which was once again led by GERB, looked similar to the first GERB government of 2009–2013. So did the protest have an impact on the political system of Bulgaria, and what was this impact? In order to answer these questions, we need to take a closer look at the smaller changes that took place in the party composition of the new parliament.

Table 1 presents the party compositions of three consecutive parliaments formed in national elections. As can be seen, there is a decline in votes for GERB in 2013 and 2014, which can partially be attributed to the protests, and particularly the February wave. Being an opposition party in 2009–2013, BSP gained votes in the 2013 election. This was followed by a drastic decline in BSP votes in 2014, which could also be explained with the one year that BSP was in power and the June anti-government protests that led to the delegitimization of BSP as a trustworthy democratic actor. If we pay attention to DPS, we can see that there was a drastic decline in the 2013 results and stabilization in 2014. But as a party with strong ethnic affiliation, DPS had no chance of gaining a majority, and was generally not considered a reliable coalition partner. In Bulgaria as a whole, the party is highly unpopular among all social groups beyond the Bulgarian Turkish community. The fourth major party, the nationalist populist Ataka, also lost votes in both the 2013 and 2014 elections, with 2014 being particularly low.

One populist party, Order, Law and Justice, completely disappeared from the political scene after its unexpected rise in 2009. In the 2013 election, it received only 59,145 votes and did not pass the electoral threshold; in 2014 it did not participate in the election at all. There is also a consistent decline in voter turnout, from 60.20% in 2009 to 51.33% in 2013 and 48.33% in 2014. However, a larger share of voters was represented in parliament in 2014 than in 2009.

But perhaps the most visible change in the 2014 election was the emergence of two new parties/electoral blocs: the coalitions Bulgaria without Censorship and the Patriotic Front. Both are populist coalitions exploiting the usual populist distinction between “the people” and the elite, and making promises of “taking

care” of their voters by addressing their socio-economic needs. The third new party in the parliament is the “Alternative for Bulgarian Revival” or ABV – a splinter group from BSP, headed by former President Georgy Parvanov. These two coalitions and one party received roughly the same number of votes that had been lost by BSP and Ataka. This may indicate a re-distribution of left-wing and populist votes towards the new parties. It is also worth noting that the two populist coalitions exploited the sentiments that had been expressed in the course of the February 2013 protests; they used similar language and addressed claims put forward during that time.

Finally, there is almost no change in the votes for center-right, democratic parties. The so-called Reformers’ Bloc, which is a coalition of center-right parties, has nearly the same number of votes in 2014 as a previous center-right coalition (the Blue Coalition) in 2009. It is worth noting however, that center-right parties have lost votes since 2013, when the parties that make up the Reformers’ Bloc gathered a combined 332,835 votes, but were not able to overcome the electoral threshold of 4% (see Table 2).

Thus, to summarize, the elections that took place in 2013 and 2014 demonstrate an overall decline in turnout, a loss of votes for major political actors and an emergence of new populist parties. This last development can be attributed to the protests of 2013, especially to the first wave of February, which had socio-economic claims. However, it is worth noting that there is no significant gain in populist votes, but rather a redistribution of votes from established parties to new ones. This electoral change appears rather insignificant when compared to the length, breadth and depth of the overall protest movement. It was expected that the movement would bring much more visible changes. The reason that this did not happen is that in fact, the protests of 2013 included not one, but two different movements with different claims. While the socio-economic protest of February 2013 did give rise to new populist parties, it was rather small, hence there was little change. The much longer protest that began in June was decidedly anti-populist; it had no socio-economic claims, it did not seek care from the government, and lacked any attempts at personal or charismatic leadership. As Ivan Krastev remarked, the rejection of political leaders and “not giving birth to new political parties” were simultaneously the strength and the weakness of the second wave of the protest (Krastev 2013). Paradoxically, the movement with openly political demands did not seek political representation, and thus could not give birth to a new political alternative in 2014 (Garnizov 2013, Stoychev 2013, Znepolski 2016).

On this basis, we can conclude that there has been a movement of voters among parties rather than a recruitment of new voters for new parties. The protests of 2013 led to a politicization of society, but did not give rise to the engagement of citizens with political parties. This is in line with the earlier observations that in Eastern and Central Europe, the voices of citizens remain poorly represented in the decision-making process (Petrova–Tarrow 2007: 78). Thus, 2014 saw the lowest turnout in the history of Bulgaria's post-communist democracy. The implications of the June protest could be viewed as part of the sharp decline and delegitimization of BSP as a democratic party. National-populist Ataka is no longer considered to be a viable alternative, but is rather regarded as the party of the status quo. The protests of June 2013 did not lead to an emergence of new parties, but according to some sociologists, this was not the goal of the protesters (Stoychev 2013, Galubov 2013, Kolev 2013).

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE PROTEST-ELECTION DYNAMIC

To conclude, although this was the deepest political crisis in Bulgaria since 1997 and resulted in critically low levels of public trust in political institutions (Znepolski 2016), the protests of 2013 brought about surprisingly little electoral change. Given the mass character of the protests and the broad support of the public, a higher rate of participation in the elections could have been expected. Yet, the turnout was in fact the lowest in the 25 years of post-communist Bulgaria's development. In terms of composition of the 2014 parliament, there was also little change among the main players. However, there was a rise in the number of populist parties, but not in the consolidated populist votes. Thus, it is possible to speak of a redistribution of populist votes from older, established parties (especially BSP and Ataka) to new challenger parties. On the other hand, there is also some consolidation among the centre-right parties that united into the Reformers' Bloc and succeeded in getting representation in parliament. However, in terms of the number of votes, the change was again rather insignificant.

The limited electoral change achieved by the protests can be best explained by the fact that the protest was in fact comprised of two different protest movements, with different participants and different claims. Here, some tentative connections between the trends we have identified and the mechanisms of movement/party interaction that were introduced in the theoretical section can be made. Thus, the first wave of protest that began in February may have contributed to the internal polarization of BSP, and fueled the emergence of new nationalist populist parties. On the other hand, the protest that began in June did not put forward concrete political goals, except for the resignation of the government, but rather rejected the system. Consequently, it contributed to the delegitimization of the existing political system in Bulgaria without offering a convincing program for political change. In the long-term perspective, this delegitimization and a growing cynicism among citizens may have led to a rise in the popularity of populist parties, which attack the democratic system itself.

However, the second wave of protests also gave rise to several small-scale progressive initiatives in the post-election period. In particular, the notion of a referendum on the issue of online voting has been supported by the president, and was realized on October 25, 2015 with moderate success. There is also an ongoing campaign for judiciary reform, which was also initially voiced during the protests. This finding is an example of a social movement pursuing a legal goal in which a political solution is not possible, as described by Jacobsson and Saxonberg (2013).

Finally, the protests gave birth to one political party, the Movement for European Unity and Solidarity (DEOS). This party did not take part in the parliamentary elections of 2013 and 2014, but participated in local elections in 2015 and national elections in 2017, albeit without success. Thus, the protests did not cause significant political changes in the Bulgarian party system, but they may go on to have a longer-term impact on the Bulgarian democratic system.

Thus, the protests may have longer-term impacts on the “electoral regime and patterns of mobilization” (McAdam–Tarrow 2010).

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Table 1. Party representation in the 2009, 2013 and 2014 parliaments

Party/votes	2009	2013	2014
GERB	1,678,641 (39.72%)	1,081,605 (30.535%)	1,072,491 (32.67%)
BSP*	748,147 (17.70%)	942,541 (26.609%)	505,527 (15.40%)
Ataka	395,733 (9.36%)	258,481 (7.297%)	148,262 (4.52%)
DPS	610,521 (14.45%)	400,466 (11.306%)	487,134 (14.84%)
Order, Law and Justice	174,582 (4.13%)		
Blue Coalition**	285,662 (6.76%)		
Reformers' bloc			291806 (8.89%)
The Bulgaria without Censorship coalition***			186,938 (5.69%)
The Alternative for Bulgarian Revival coalition			136,223 (4.15%)
Patriotic Front****			239,101 (7.28%)
Total votes:	3,893,286	2,683,093	3,067,482
Turnout (%):	60.2	51.33	48.66

* Participated in the 2009, 2013 and 2014 EP elections as Coalition for Bulgaria; in 2014 as Coalition Left Bulgaria (BSP).

** The Blue Coalition included SDS and DSB; in 2013, they participated in the elections as parties and did not enter into parliament; in 2014, SDS and DSB became part of the Reformers' Bloc along with BZNS, DBG and NPSD.

*** Bulgaria without Censorship in the 2014 elections also included the Lider party.

**** The Patriotic Front includes NFSB and VMRO.

Table 2: Parties comprising the Reformers' Bloc in the 2013 elections.

Bulgarian Agricultural National Union (BZNS)	7,715	0.218%
The Bulgaria of Citizens movement	115,190	3.252%
The Democrats for Strong Bulgaria coalition and the Bulgarian Democratic Forum (DSB, BDF)	103,638	2.926%
People's Party for Freedom and Dignity (NPSD) (formerly Center for Freedom and Dignity)	57,611	1.626%
Union of Democratic forces (SDS)	48,681	1.374%
Total	332,835	9.396%

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RECREATIVE ACTIVISM IN ROMANIA

How cultural affiliation and lifestyle yield political engagement²

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ABSTRACT

The present article analyzes the new culture of protest in Romania, a type of engagement we define as *recreative activism*. During the past years, young and culturally-inclined citizens started demanding more and more to have a share in the political process. To explain the novelty of this phenomenon, we argue that patterns of cultural consumption in the *scene* contributed to the spiral of ever-increasing participation in protests throughout the past six years, mainly drawing on in-depth interviews with activists and adherents of the Romanian *alternative scene*. This data was further supplemented by inferences derived from participative observation and content analysis. Three main protest waves were analyzed and critically put in context: the Rosia Montana (2013), Colectiv (2015), and OUG 13 (2017) protests.

Our main findings are that *recreative activism* has its roots in the concomitance of cultural consumption and noninstitutionalized political participation, as well as in a certain disenchantment of protest participants with post-communist politics. Further, *recreative activism* is characteristic for nonconventional political involvement, which requires less commitment than classic activism and is less influenced by ideologies.

Keywords: recreative activism, new culture of protests, cultural dimensions of collective action, Romania, Eastern Europe.

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RECREATIVE ACTIVISM IN ROMANIA

How cultural affiliation and lifestyle yield political engagement

INTRODUCTION

At the end of January 2017, mass protests against a government ordinance (OUG13) emerged in Romania and soon became the biggest protest wave the country had seen in over 25 years. Stirred by a generalized sense of dissatisfaction with post-communist politics and its main actors, these protests highlighted a trend of discontent also observable in other Central and Eastern European countries. Starting all the way back in 2011, Romania saw the beginning of a series of protests that culminated in the events of 2017, where young, educated people were the driving force and constituted the critical mass of the protests (Chiş et al. 2017). The first social movement to appear in this period, during the winter of 2011/2012, was widely seen in international media as being triggered by austerity measures (Gubernat–Rammelt 2012) and as the moment of sudden politicization of a new group of protesters. An environmental campaign against the ‘Rosia Montana’ mining project, which made headlines in 2013, generated a feeling of “togetherness” and highlighted the different expectations from politics of participants to the protests, as opposed to the political establishment. It also marked the moment when the collective identity of this group was shaped, a collective identity further strengthened during the protests of November 2015, following a fire that killed 64 people and destroyed the Bucharest alternative concert venue ‘Colectiv’. These events also underlined the perceived distance of this social group from both traditional political actors and mainstream society. This succession of protests shows an escalation, both in numbers and temporal density of rallies, as well as in the nature of participants’ claims.

The mobilization mechanisms, properties and frames we observe for the Romanian case seem to be common for a number of protest waves in Eastern Europe in recent years: the ‘Gorilla’ protests in Slovakia in 2012; the anti-corruption protests in Slovenia in 2012; the Bulgarian protest wave in 2014 or the student protests of the past years in Macedonia. These protests are, for the most part, non-violent and online mobilization plays a key role in them, while offline participation often takes artistic forms. At least for Romania, we hypothesize that recruitment for unconventional political participation takes place through affiliation to an *urban alternative scene*.

As social movement research in Europe remains a quintessentially Western European network (Diani–Cisař 2014), as mechanisms of mobilization are subject to constant change, and as the conditions for unconventional political involvement in Eastern Europe differ from those in Western democracies, the usefulness of concepts, classic and newer, derived from the latter region, is still not demonstrated. In this regard, it was already suggested by Grzegorz and Kubik (1998) to pursue a research agenda that draws on multiple concepts, rather

than relying on a single theoretical framework. Underlining the novelty of the recent protests in Romania and the conceptual challenges arising from it, we believe that it is necessary to comprehend the mechanisms and properties of mobilizations in recent years in this country in other terms than classic activism. Drawing on new conceptual developments within the discipline of social movement studies, we try to build a bridge between considerations on spaces, participation, leisure and classic approaches, in order to explain the recent spiral of mobilization in Romania, where the development of a new culture of protest is observable (Rammelt 2017). Hurd–Anderson (2011:10) define recreation as “an activity that people engage in during their free time, that people enjoy, and that people recognize as having socially redeeming values” and recreational activities “must contribute to society in a way that society deems acceptable”. Since this type of Romanian activism requires less commitment than classic activism, relies on social bonds established and maintained outside the sphere of political involvement and is perceived as an enjoyable activity even though, by its very nature, it is considered tantamount to political change, we propose to define this type of engagement as *recreative activism*.

Similar to the political culture of social movements in other Eastern European countries, which are mainly non-violent and non-confrontational (Jacobsson–Saxonberg 2013: 257), the new culture of protest in Romania is not very conflictual. It also makes use of very up-to-date repertoires of dissent. The discovery of politics and protests as the preferred channel to engage with the political sphere in recent years coincides with current technological developments, enabling leaderless, spontaneous, and all-inclusive cycles of contention. Given the traditionally lower levels of political involvement than in Western European countries, recent forms of collective action in Romania indicate yet another type of engagement: protests are usually taking place outside working hours, require only irregular physical presence, and are profoundly reliant on online mobilization.

We argue that three interdependent elements of *recreative activism* contributed to the spiral of protests and their ever-increasing participant numbers:

1. the accumulation of relational and cognitive social capital during protest participation,
2. the new possibilities of online mobilization provided by Social Networking Services (SNS),
3. patterns of cultural consumption and the role of scenes.

The accumulation of relational and cognitive social capital within the group which was the most influential in terms of protest events, if we take into account the “effects of eventful protests” (della Porta 2008) or the “unintended consequences of social movements” (Giugni 1999), is the main effect of protest participation on subsequent mobilizations. Starting with the Anti-Austerity protests of 2011/2012, it appears reasonable to interpret the succession of events that followed, with the continuous transformation of sympathizers or supporters into active protesters, as a major effect of protests on future protests and protesters. While being engaged in the new environment of protest networks, a “secondary socialization” takes place, in which participants need to adapt to the rules and to act in accordance to certain roles (Cf. Fillieule–Pudal 2010: 176). New participants need to identify with the stated goals of the groups and to engage with the repertoires of action previously used, while also contributing to the dynamic of existing groups, resulting in frame and repertoire expansions. In what concerns the first dimension of *recreative activism* – the accumulation of relational and cognitive social capital – we consider the following outcomes as being the most influential: a) the creation and

maintenance of networks, via an accumulation of contacts during protest participation; b) the creation and strengthening of a collective identity and internal solidarity; c) the accumulation of protest specific knowledge and Know-How. One major result of the continuous accumulation of cultural, political and social capital during the protests in the past six years has been an increased tendency to take disenchantment with political elites to the streets (Rammelt 2017).

Apart from the fact that modern social movements rely even more strongly than before on a constant flux of communication (Castells 2012: 229), the use of social networking services (SNS) altered mechanisms of political engagement. As such, social networks – both offline and online – give activists access to a larger population, which had initially been less active and less mobilized. Online social networks facilitate, in this context, the dynamics and the enlargement of the movement: they offer a political space in which a collective identity can be built by the mere sharing of ideas and opinions (Bakarjieva 2012) and where the need of social valorization of civic activism can be satisfied by an environment which values militant actions (Park–Kee–Valenzuela 2009). This is the result of the function that Bennet attributes to online media, which is the possibility to communicate with broader “lifestyle publics” by the “simplification of the ideological discourse” (Bennett 2003). In a country like Romania, where the protest culture is still emerging, Facebook and, more broadly, the Internet, constitute, then, an essential support for *recreative activism*.

Third, we will focus on the cultural dimensions of this type of activism, the main hypothesis being that “alternative” lifestyles in Romania enabled a larger trend of social and political involvement of younger segments of society. The aim of this article is to shed light on the political ramifications of the affiliation to a cultural scene and its importance for *recreative activism*. The interdependence between cultural socialization and social mobilization, observed in regard to newly emerging actors mobilizing for protests in Romania, appears to be a very suitable starting point for such an endeavor. Mostly leaving aside external factors – e.g. opportunity structure, media – we focus on properties of the social group predominantly participating in protest events and on internal mechanisms of social movements. Therefore, our inquiries into the dynamics of mobilization in Romania have a more ‘fashion’ and ‘alternative culture’-oriented approach. The increased number of participants in political and civic engagement in Romania can best be explained, in our understanding, by one of the main attributes of *scenes*, as described by Hauns and Leach (2007): “because they offer a lifestyle and, at the same time, as part-time communities, require only a relatively low level of commitment, scenes attract a much larger group of participants than the movement does” (p. 79). The Bucharest urban scene and its relationship to recent protests fit these parameters and suit our purposes as a starting point.

2. ACTIVISM IN ROMANIA

Romania is a semi-peripheral country, and its “statehood and modernity were always challenged, leaving deep traces in the collective memory and culture” (Craciun 2017a: 7). This country was, for a long time, considered to be the textbook example of the scarcity of civil society in Eastern Europe (Crowther 2004: 363), having a politically apathetic population (Stan 2010) and a non-participative culture (Voicu–Basina 2005, Uslaner 2004). However, from the years following the regime change until 2002, Romania witnessed relatively strong

mobilizations by labor unions and more industrial conflict than other countries in the region (Varga–Freyberg–Inan 2015: 682). These and other mobilizations continued to take place in the period 2002–2011, but they were mostly limited in scale, sporadic in nature and lacked sustainability. Most protests organized by labor unions during this period were very narrow in their claims, focusing exclusively on the demands of their respective constituencies.

Most recently, in the summer and fall of 2017 Romanian labor unions reclaimed a place in the configuration of actors bringing political pressure to the streets: “Cartel Alfa”, a labor union in the steel and mining sector and several unions active in the health sector, notably “Sindicatul Sanitas” staged protests in front of the Parliament and the Romanian Government, demanding, amongst other things, changes in the pension system, gathering several thousand participants. Arguably, these protests benefited from the mass protests at the beginning of the year, as they contributed to a rapid decline in government legitimacy in broad segments of society. This massive wave of rallies and the associated (international) media coverage plausibly had a stimulating effect on future mobilizations similar to what McAdam called the “*dramatization of a system's vulnerability or illegitimacy*” (McAdam 1996).

However, apart from union activity in the 1990s, since 2012, people aged between 25 and 40, though previously seeming to be discouraged from civic involvement, strongly contributed to the waves of mobilization Romania has witnessed in the past few years (Stoiciu 2012), and new groups of protesters seemed to populate the public sphere (Rammelt 2014).

In a study published soon after the February 2017 protests, Chiş et al. (2017) assess the socio-demographic profile of the protesters, highlighting that they mainly belong to the age cohort 22 to 45 (54%) and that they are highly educated (56% hold a university or a master’s degree). The study also shows the continuity of unconventional political engagement within this group, as more than 70% were previously participating in other protests, notably in the Rosia Montana (2013) and the Colectiv protests (2015).

The demographic characteristics of this social group stimulated a highly energetic debate between analysts and intellectuals in the region. In an interview published by the Budapest Beacon, the Hungarian philosopher G. M. Tamás argues that the 2017 protests in Romania were “*fueled by the contempt of the young liberal middle-class for the poor who are regarded as the electorate of the governing party, the PSD, considered old and decrepit and barbarian*” (Bayer 2017). Romanian analysts assert that the protests have been taken over by the “right-leaning middle-class” (Tichindeleanu 2017), being the culmination of a wave of “middle-class activism” prior to 2017 (Deoancă 2017). This discourse, focusing on the middle-classness of the protests and their participants, is perpetuated by a number of highly visible left-leaning Romanian analysts (Rogozanu 2017, Siulea 2017, Poenaru 2017). In this context, it is plausible to say that the definition of the “middle-class”, describing the social group most visible during the protests, functioned both as a confirmation of their social status and as a labelling mechanism.

Although not as well depicted and discussed, the characteristics of this social group can be retraced for all protest waves that we are analyzing in this article. Abaseaca affirms that both the Colectiv and the Rosia Montana protests “*activated a young generation of urban activists interested in politics*”, which she

calls “the educated pro-west youth, fighting for values and »the moral revolution«” (Abaseaca 2017). Other analysts underline the age component, referring to the protesters as “the young Occidentalists” (Pepine 2013, Ruse 2013), often described as “hipsters” by mainstream media. These descriptions, in terms of age, socio-economic status and education are confirmed by our own long-term observations in the field. In the absence of compelling demographic data, we refrain from describing the protesters as an actual “political generation” (Braungart 2013, Whittier 1997), but we privilege the term “social group”, referring to participants in protest activities.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING THE ROMANIAN CULTURE OF PROTESTS

Parallel to the emergence of this social group as an influential actor in protest waves since 2011, a new type of “grassroots driven [activism] inspired by urban movements” can be observed, not only in Romania, but also in other Eastern European countries (Sava 2015). In Romania, the social group described above engages in a new type of collective action, close to how Pleyers described movements that occurred after the financial crisis (Pleyers 2015). A defining characteristic for these mobilizations is that the participants “are mobilizing around specific projects, connected among each other through informal networks and personal affinities” (Pleyers 2016). It is also remarkable that classic leaders of protests, such as intellectuals and classic organizations, lose their importance due to the spontaneous nature of protests promoted by a rather depoliticized civil society (Larzillière - Petric 2013). Given the new properties of recent waves of protest, highlighted above, traditional analytical models within the discipline appear to become less adequate to the study of new types of mobilization (Pleyers–Capitaine 2017). Drawing on Wieviorka’s (2004) concept of *subjectification*, Pleyers therefore proposes to understand these mobilizations as alter-activism (Pleyers 2017). *Alter-activism* highlights the role of “the relationship to the self [*la relation à soi*], the lived experience and the coherence between practices and values of a movement” for this militant culture (Pleyers–Capitaine 2017: 52).

The emergence and the evolution of social movements and of periodic challenges to power have been explained, for a long time, by changes in opportunity structures (McAdam 1996, Kriesi et al. 1992, Tarrow 1998), both political and cultural. Their capacity to maintain pressure on power holders and authorities was often attributed to efficient resource mobilization and movement entrepreneurs (McCarthy–Zald 2001, McCarthy–Zald 1977, Morris–Staggenborg 2001), efficient framing (Snow et al. 1997, Gamson–Meyer 1996) and the interaction with media (Raschke 1985, Gamson 1992). For the latter, it is frequently argued that it is actually an essential element of the opportunity structures, explaining both the conditions for the emergence of social movements and their effect on the political system (Balme–Chabanet 2008). Cultural dimensions of collective action were regularly discussed within the discipline of social movement studies under the umbrella of the concept of *free spaces* that managed to integrate culture in structural approaches by highlighting the cultural aspects of existing networks (Polletta 1999). The discipline of social movement studies has always been characterized by a relative absence of conceptual dogmatism (Fillieule–Agrikoliansky–Sommier 2010) and theory development has always been strongly informed by empirical work (Klandermans–Staggenborg–Tarrow 2002). Therefore, the changing properties of social and political mobilization over the last decades, notably the impact of online mobilization efforts and virtual repertoires of dissent (Bakardjieva–Svensson–

Skoric 2012, Castells 2012), and the growing discussion on the role of emotions (Goodwin–Jasper 2006, Jasper 2011) and on effects of movement participation on future mobilizations (Willemez 2013, della Porta 2008, Giugni 1999) prompted conceptual innovation. Lifestyle movements (Haenfler–Johnson–Jones 2012) and alter-activism in youth movements (Juris–Pleyers 2009) are such examples that aim at integrating lifestyle or sub-cultural practices in the framework of social movement studies. They underline the importance of emotions, of spaces of socialization, of collective action and of lived experiences for social movements and activism. Recently, proponents of Critical Event Studies (Spracklen–Lamond 2016) formulated a new research program in the study of social movements, suggesting that spaces and activities surrounding social movements are best understood as events, and activism as leisure (Lamond–Spracklen 2015a). The series of protests we are analyzing confirms approaches in the discipline that value the importance of pre-existing networks for social movements (van Stekelenburg– Klandermans 2010, Klandermans–van Stekelenburg–Toorn 2008, Mathieu 2007, Diani– McAdam 2003, Rucht– Neidhard 2001). For these strands, networks, based on pre-existing ties, become quintessential for the recruitment of potential participants (Polletta 1999: 53). Undoubtedly, exhibiting an appropriate level of respect for the role that networks play in mobilization, Haunss and Leach’s (2007) study of the German ‘Autonomen’ movement shows the shortcomings of approaches focused on formal organizations. They emphasize the importance of the *scene* for participation in social movements. Similar to Pleyers’ *spaces of experience* (Pleyers 2010: 39), an essential element of *alter-activism*, the *scene* is understood as “*a network of people who identify as part of a group and share a certain belief system or set of convictions, that is also necessarily centered around a certain location or set of locations where that group is known to congregate*” (Haunss–Leach 2007: 73). As *spaces of experience* are characterized by their distance from capitalist society (Pleyers 2010: 39) and are populated by activists that “intensely live their commitment” (Pleyers 2016: 113) we privilege the *scene*, in its capacity to explain activism in Romania, over *spaces of experience*. Haunss–Leach (2009: 270) argue that the *scene* becomes influential for mobilization because it provides a pool of potential participants.

Social movements in Eastern Europe, as Piotrowski (2015) points out, often have strong links to subcultures or downright countercultures. To understand the cultural dynamics animating recent protests in Romania, we will study how the affiliation to a perceived subculture contributed to a lifestyle – understood as a “*lived culture [...] in which individuals actively express their identities but do so in direct relation to their position as regards the dominant culture*” (Miles 2000:26) – in which being different from the mainstream society and becoming politically active became an important feature. Spaces and locales where such culture can be lived are essential to the cultivation of norms of engagement with society and to the development of a collective identity. Scenes can be understood as places “devoted to practices of meaning making through the pleasures of sociable consumption” (Silver–Clark–Navarro Yanez 2010: 2297). In this same way, the “alternative” scene in Bucharest could be described by its aesthetic distinction mechanisms which bring it closer to Hipster culture, often characterized by its attraction towards an exclusive taste and an ambiguous attitude towards consumption (Ikraht 2013: 6). With their potential to renegotiate conflicted social spaces, a close connection with music and arts becomes a means to distinguish oneself from what adherents of the scene understand as mainstream society, further strengthening group identity. If a scene becomes attractive through its adherents’

unique attitude towards music or new media, and by its call to become active instead of passive, its fascination stems from a relative (temporal) autonomy from other spaces of socialization (Großegger–Heinzlmaier 2004: 8f.). What is further intriguing is the fact that Hipsters manifest their needs and expectations of society through their participation in social and political movements (Victoriano 2014). Through its attraction towards alternative lifestyles and non-establishment activities, combined with the use of current technologies, the Romanian “alternative” scene, without possessing the subversive character of countercultures, still develops its interest in active non-institutionalized politics and shapes the recently evolving culture of protest.

4. METHODOLOGY

In the present article we placed an emphasis on semi-structured interviews with activists and adherents of the “alternative scene” in Bucharest. This data was further supplemented by inferences derived from participative observation and content analysis. Blee and Taylor (2002) argue that studies on social movements based on semi-structured interviews generally rely on a fairly limited number of interviews. We did not seek to cover the entire population relevant to our research, but rather to generate a globally representative sample in terms of visibility and impact of militant work. The interview guide was in line with theoretical reflections, but it did not fully structure the communication, and some questions were adapted to the interviewees' responses and their concerns as suggested by Meuser and Nagel (1991: 449). The interview incorporated the respondent's reactions in order to give him or her the opportunity to express various potentially relevant perceptions, impressions and subjectivities. Given the close relationship between social networks and the patterns of understanding through which (social movement) actors attribute meaning to their environment, be it through social ties and interactions (Diani 2003) or through the density of daily sociability ties (Simeant 2010: 133), we tried to comprehend the interviewee's larger social environment.

In total, we conducted 22 interviews between December 2015 and February 2017, in Romanian and English, with prominent actors located at the fringes of culture (in visual and performance art, music, festival organizing) and political activism. In order to understand the festive character of protest participation and the culturally-stimulated dynamic behind the evolution of the protests, organizers and highly involved participants of two festivals were interviewed: ‘FânFest’, an annual event accompanying the ‘Rosia Montana’ campaign since 2005, and ‘Street Delivery’, a street festival taking place in Romania's capital since 2006. Both festivals appeared around the same time and attract the same type of public, contributing to the creation and maintenance of the scene. Their organizers and highly involved adherents play a key role in recent mobilizations and protests. Even though we argue that, since 2011, protests in Romania should be characterized as leaderless rather than organized, our interviewees hold a high degree of visibility in the scene, which recommends them as “opinion leaders” with regard to the properties of the scene, and of the recent protests. As the more active part of the scene, their experience creating an impact on the broader pool of mobilizable sympathizers or on experienced protest participants is a potentially valuable research tool. We further supplemented the study with a hermeneutic analysis of self-descriptions of cultural venues, as found on their Facebook ‘About’ sections, and third-party interviews (sometimes dating back to before the timeframe of our specific analysis) with club owners and party organizers.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the following section, we will elaborate on the construction of the Bucharest scene, emphasizing the aspects of socialization through cultural consumption that favored social engagement. The main finding is that affiliation to the scene increases people's propensity to transform from non-involved citizens to protest sympathizers or participants.

5.1. The "alternative scene" in Bucharest

The locales that allowed, throughout Bucharest's history of the past decades, the development of "non-mainstream" communities and the emergence of alternative discourses, are not best understood as mere entertainment venues. More than being spaces of sociability characteristic for a consumer society, they became a socialization element, part of a bigger ensemble contributing to the delimitation of critical communities, appropriating and institutionalizing public space as a space for contestation.

Defining the places where one can engage in developing counter-discourses reassures a group of its existence (Polletta 1999: 25). In Communist Romania, in a social environment of repression and censorship, Bucharest simply didn't have the ability to accommodate the entire variety of aesthetic genres and manifestations offered by the local culture. If alternative spaces are placed, symbolically *and* geographically, at the "margins" of a city's life (Chatterton–Hollands 2003: 197), in the case of Bucharest, 'Club A' – an iconic venue during Communism and the 90's – was symbolically placed in the center of the city, but kept its marginal position on the strength of being the sole exponent of such a cultural movement. However, despite its historical importance, 'Club A's' impact on the younger generations decreased in the '90s as a result of the appearance of new, capitalist avenues of consumption. This period was marked by a generalized loss of interest in politics (Pasti–Miroiu–Codita 1997), also due to the fact that the social context of post-Communism wasn't favorable to elaborating "resorts of rebellion", but rather to enhancing consumerist trends.

As subcultures were not sufficiently well-defined and delimited, various forms of "non-mainstream" music – from alternative rock, to urban electro – inhabited the same spaces and often shared a public limited in numbers. In 1996, when 'Web Club' appeared in Bucharest, it was the only club designated for electronic and trash music, seen by the artists performing there as the "cornerstone of urban culture", contributing to consolidate the affectual solidarity of non-conformist parts of society through music: "*We all liked originality and freedom and how arts, and especially music, stimulate critical thinking,*" says the former owner of 'Web Club'. Even though 'Web Club' defined the perimeter and set the standards for what became the urban electronic movement in Bucharest, in its ten years of existence it was a place where the electronic community, the hipster community, but also goa or reggae fans would cross paths.

The opposition between "commercial"/mainstream and "unaccepted" music and places is, for the generation growing up in the years right after the fall of Communism, central to the process of understanding society and one's positioning in it by a constant, however slight, shifting of physical and figurative boundaries. Later on, organizing clandestine parties in private homes, abandoned cinemas or empty factories created the setting – both in terms of atmosphere and clientele – for independent initiatives, awareness, and catalyzed

affinities and behaviors favorable to cultural and political “insubordination”. Venues like ‘Fabrica’, ‘Fire’, ‘B52’, and ‘Control’ – during the 2000s – or ‘Colectiv’ – until the fire of October 2015 – were the new locales where the conversion of urban circles towards an “alternative scene” took place. In an interview with a member of an alternative rock band followed by adherents of this scene, the socially-involved musician emphasizes the special sensitivities of this group: “this active public makes the difference. People who care about the world around them, people who study, people who don’t accept that easily what society gives them”. Cultural consumption within these locales of the alternative scene provided the pool of mobilizable people who are ready to become participants to protests and “newcomers” to civic involvement. Even though the *scene* is both a belief and a lifestyle community (Haunss 2004: 265), affiliation to the Bucharest “alternative scene” seems to depend more on aesthetics than on actual political commitment. Borders of *scenes* are always exclusively determined through “self-identification and mutual recognition” (Haunss–Leach 2009: 259f.) and, in this way, taste becomes an important distinction mechanism. Silver, Clark and Navarro Yanez (2010) described the importance of the aesthetic dimension of belonging to a *scene*: “*What matters are the CDs one listens to [...], the types of foods and restaurants one enjoys [...], the clothes one buys and wears*” (2297). Similarly, the Bucharest scene develops its political potential through the current lifestyle differences between its adherents and mainstream society. Claudiu Craciun sees the changing landscape of the club scene as the result of changing consumption habits within segments of society: “*Quite a few places popped up in Bucharest and other major cities in Romania. Places where you can circulate ideas, where granular, midrange interaction can take place.*”

Given the small proportions of the affiliated communities, strong overlaps of personnel and frames can be observed between Romanian cities. In what concerns the Rosia Montana movement, besides Bucharest, Cluj played a key role in the chain of events due to its geographic proximity to the mining site. In this case, specific locales provided infrastructural support, as one highly involved activist describes it: “*It was a whole different thing. We had a whole network of pubs and clubs helping us. One pub was the space to hold the banners, close to the boulevard where we gathered, we would store them there, another bar held presentations and debates, all bars put banners in front of their doors, others had political theatre evenings, to promote the cause.*”

5.2. Self-identity

A large segment of the public associated with this small range of cultural venues assumed itself the responsibility of transferring its cultural capital into political dispositions. This reflects one of the key aspects of *scenes* — that they usually form around specific recognized locations. The identity of a social group is established in such locales where “*one can often become part of a scene simply by being connected to a group or circle of friends that is itself part of that scene*” (Haunss–Leach 2007: 73). *Scenes* also provide the space for the process of structuring grievances, safeguarded by those involved, as underlined by one cultural activist: “*Then you can bring those ideas to the streets, you cannot find them in the supermarket. After a while, society understands there is a need for change, like in the case of Rosia Montana or Colectiv.*” Without a clear subversive character, the socialization of parts of this generation in the scene opened the path for a dynamic of contention that became manifest with the first waves of social mobilization in Bucharest in 2011/12, and has persisted ever since.

Veda Popovici, one prominent visual artist, left-wing activist, and feminist from Bucharest considers the 'Rosia Montana' and 'Colectiv' movements an integral part of this social group's emergence, linking the culture of protest to a certain idea of consumption, integrating protests into "a lifestyle of consumption". In the past five to six years, the evolution of the culture of protests took place at the intersection between artistic, political and civic actions. This group's identity as "alternative" was, hence, provided by a dominant aspirational component of its discourses and behaviors: *"I am active in this civic field and also in the cultural one, and I think it becomes more and more difficult to separate the two, because networks and groups are overlapping. [...] You could see it in the streets of Bucharest in the last few years, there were tons of protests. So Romanians just took to the streets [...] especially the people that are also culturally and economically active, in their twenties and thirties"*, as argued by Claudiu Craciun, a visible activist and social movement analyst.

The conceptual advantage of the *scene* is that it allows students of social movements and protests to integrate cultural consumption and lifestyle within the framework of collective action (Silver – Clark–Navarro Yanez 2010: 2295). We explain, therefore, the development of this "new" culture of protest in Romania as the emergence of a new generation of post-communist citizens, inhabiting a new social sphere, *consuming* both culture and politics.

The 'Rosia Montana movement' of 2013 was a turning point in the aggregation of this group as a self-identified entity. Its characteristics – a high level of education, literacy and political participation within the group; the fact that its members are highly integrated in society and they achieved in-group and inter-group solidarity; their relatively high level of economic comfort –synonymous with their belonging to the "middle class" – are hence at the core of neoliberal society. The self-definition of this group did not occur by its placing itself outside the norms of society, but rather by embracing what they perceive to be its main values and morals.

If, during the 'Colectiv' protests, the anti-corruption frame was the most salient, it also was an undercurrent of the 'Rosia Montana' campaign, taking the form of claims demanding respect for environmental laws. In the 2017 protests, it became even more visible with its vocal support of anti-corruption efforts and anti-corruption agencies, such as the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA), that was able to garner sympathy with a number of high profile arrests among influential politicians and businessmen. The development of this new frame passes through the critical re-interpretation of a culture of conformity, with "corruption – anti-corruption" as the overarching cleavage in recent years (Craciun 2017b). If a tendency towards law and order became the moral compass of the recent waves of protests, it particularly contributed to the mobilization and involvement of those who were not even convinced that political action is the proper approach for dealing with societal issues. At the same time, the adherents stress their autonomy with respect to the general social structure, allowing them to elaborate alternatives to the mainstream agenda, and, as such, to exert social pressure on institutions. The fire in the alternative club 'Colectiv' was an external catalyst to the pent-up discontent of broad segments of Romanian society with traditional political actors, but it also had a strong influence on the Romanian alternative scene and its adherents. An important locale of the scene burned down and many of its adherents lost their lives, therefore the 'Colectiv' fire left a deep mark on the collective identity and created a demarcation from the mainstream society that represents Romania's traditional political culture

(partisanship aligned behind traditional political actors, apathetic etc.) and which does not share their patterns of cultural consumption. The feeling of belonging to a critical community became stronger and took a clearer shape during the 'Colectiv' protests. Participants in protests and adherents to the alternative scene reach consciousness of its existence by opposition to negative societal characteristics, consolidating this mobilization frame as the predominant motivation for involvement: *"After Colectiv I got so enraged and I could no longer stay aside. Unfortunately, in Romania, the political power cares only about stealing stuff and the majority society is ignorant about what's happening. So these two negative powers produced this tragedy, where I lost many of my friends and I barely escaped with my life. So I said to myself 'wake up, buddy, you cannot live in your perfect little bubble, with nice people, where everything is ok. No, you live in this society where things are not quite going in the right direction'"*, as the lead singer of an alternative rock band and a 'Colectiv' survivor describes his process of politicization.

The 'Colectiv' fire resulted in a (short-term) heightened mobilization of this group, demanding a more responsive polity, more "appropriate" policies and a more visible representation of its demands in the arena of institutionalized politics. The current situation shows how this social group became critical and autonomous through the gradual construction of a unified vision of "evil" in Romanian society. Similar to Polletta's observations on the absence of vertical ties within *free spaces* (Polletta 1999:10), the socialization of this group in the "alternative scene", and the weakness of intersections with mainstream society and power-holders facilitated the construction of a diagnostic frame directed against political elites.

Piotrowski observes for Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary that *"one of the key issues for subcultures is the preservation of the purity of subcultural groups and their members"* (Piotrowski 2013). The present study suggests a different paradigm for Romania. Even if the 'Colectiv' protests of 2015 were mainly driven by a social group that understood itself as part of a subculture, the affiliation was not made merely with a clearly definable subculture, but rather in contradistinction to what was perceived as mainstream culture. Therefore, these events manifested more a *lifestyle* than a *counter-culture* drive, as seen also in Western Europe and other parts of Eastern Europe.

5.3. Festivals

Apart from the locales, festivals also became a key part of the scene. They provided spaces where network connections could be further intensified, in a way similar to Haug's account of *meetings* (Haug 2013). Events that strongly contributed to the expansion of the population willing to take part in protests include festivals such as 'FânFest' and 'Street Delivery', the latter being an event gathering NGOs and independent cultural initiatives on the streets of Bucharest. It was conceived as "a manifesto for reclaiming the streets", as stated by one of its organizers:

"I might be subjective, organizing this street event over the past 10 years, but I actually think that we created this autonomous zone where ordinary rules don't apply. Where people trust each other, know each other, connect and interact with each other. Public space in its true political meaning. So when people started to protest about that mining project in Rosia Montana, in 2013, they already knew each other from a different social context. I really think we created this social glue that pushed protests forward".

'Street Delivery', which takes place in the city center of Bucharest, gained an almost iconic status within the scene. Besides concerts and more consumerist approaches to entertainment, it also featured NGOs, urban lifestyle activities such as bicycle repair stations, and also incorporated workshops on civic involvement. The mere fact that the streets were closed to the traffic, and that music was allowed after ten o'clock created for many adherents of the scene the feeling that the days of the festival were isolated from practices of everyday life. This group's appreciation of street festivals and the festive character of the protests they are spearheading appears to be related to free parties in the rave scene. If such free parties are to be understood as temporary autonomous zones and activities located within these zones are a means of escaping a "restricting and controlling society" (Dowson et al. 2015: 192), the organizers of the festivals in question, even though not as close to free parties as they might believe, understood their activities, for quite some time, in just this way. The long-term effects of festival participation and scene affiliation are, hence, to further underline the differences between this social group and mainstream society, and to consolidate a collective identity and the accumulation of social capital. The strong spillover effects (Meyer–Whittier 1994) between the festivals and the protests are observable in the diversification of approaches. Festival goers contributed more creative approaches to protests and less rigid mobilization frames to the dynamic of the recent cycles of dissent, as a highly involved environmental activist points out. In this way, 'FânFest' – an annual mobilization camp supporting the 'Rosia Montana' campaign that takes place in the mountains close to the actual mining site and offers workshops and roundtables on the subject as well as concerts and various fun activities – was able to attract "newcomers" to environmentalism who were previously not engaged in collective action (Mercea 2014). Their contribution to enhancing the protest experience, also for already-involved activists, by means of a whole range of different artistic activities that ultimately coagulated in the Rosia Montana movement, cannot be overestimated. 'FânFest' strongly contributed to increasing the visibility and the appeal of the campaign for sympathizers. By doing so, it spread further ideas about civic and political involvement and created a gratifying environment for such actions. At the same time, it also contributed to overcoming the isolation of radical activists, as such fulfilling one of the key features of the *scene* of providing a space where activists and adherents can cross paths. Activists and organizers emphasize the "alternative" spirit of the festival, where groups of artists and musicians helped popularize the cause within their active public. The absence of a subversive character is to be noticed, though, as many artists and bands try to distance themselves from a clear political stance, mainly due to the negative associations of the term 'politics', pointing to the pervasive corruption of traditional actors. The members of several alternative rock bands highlight this discursively apolitical stance. As such, even though they participated several times in FânFest, they described it as "social engagement", in order to dissociate their involvement from a potential political association, putting aside the "political" impact on their audience. This positioning is perceived as a lack of awareness on the artists' side by Mihnea Blidariu, one of the organizers of FânFest, a highly involved activist and member of an alternative rock band. He describes the political positioning of many bands featured on FânFest over the years as follows: *"But musicians in Romania are [...] either really naïve, or they do not recognize it. They say 'we are not into politics, we do it for the people, we like Rosia Montana, we like the mountains, we don't want them destroyed, but no politics'. [...] If they are asked to play at FânFest, yes, they'll play, because it's nice there, the mountains and so on, but 'no politics, no politics, sorry'"*.

The entertainment component, combined with a feeling of “making the world a better place”, are essential parts of *recreative activism*. Similar to *alter-activism*, politics often occupies a secondary rank, to the benefit of alternative practices and sociability between activists (Pleyers 2017: 22).

5.4. The festive dimension of protesting

The inclusion of non-activist-network affiliates resulted in the renewal and extension of mobilization frames, and to a “creative” combination of existing demands and the emergence of new ones. For the 2012 protests, Mihailescu (2012) termed this development the “generation of creative revolt”. It also brought about a diversification of repertoires of collective action, often very original and entertaining. Observing offline displays of discontent, we could assert that Romanian protests in recent years appear to conform very well to modern forms of interaction. Many of the slogans and signs resemble Facebook status messages or Tweets, a form of mobilization appropriate to communicate with and within *lifestyle publics*. One sees here a humorous approach to protesting: funny, custom-made posters, video projections on buildings, puppets, innovative use of cell phones very close to performance art, placing more of an emphasis on personal networks than on actual ideology. “*Distractie placuta!*” (“Have a good time”) is frequently exchanged between groups of people passing each other by on their way to and from the protests.

In addition to traditional repertoires, the festive and creative aspects were central to the mobilization process, including waltzing on the streets, public singing, video projections and ‘human flags’. One member of the group of artists using new technology in creative ways during the 2017 protests – projecting protest messages on the buildings surrounding the Romanian government – summarizes the aims and objectives of their involvement: “*We realized that we’re not taking part in a revolution, but it’s a culmination moment of a phenomenon that started some time ago. People took to the streets based on the routes of information that already existed. This is the climax of a critical attitude, that is not about Rosia Montana or OUG 13, but it is about a new way of living, our new way of making things in this society: without theft, without lies, without corruption*”.

5.5. The use of social networks

Enhanced by the use of online social networks, innovative repertoires increase the attractiveness of the cause and offer gratification. Especially for newcomers and already involved participants, this aesthetic approach could generate commitment and contribute to the creation/ maintenance of a collective identity that was only moderately reliant on ideology and political convictions. A second factor contributing to the dynamic of protests in Romania seems to be, hence, the use of modern forms of communication, notably social networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter. This trend has been observed for Romanian protests at least since 2013, when the term “Rosia Montana” became the most salient issue on social networking sites (Branea 2013). Facebook became an efficient vehicle for strengthening the collective identity and the main source of information for protest participants at that time (Mercea 2014). Present in the virtual space and almost absent in the traditional media, “Rosia Montana” activists could distinguish their grassroots approach from the approach of their opponent (RMGC), whose campaign was seen to be the dominant discourse in traditional

media. In 2015, the Facebook page “Coruptia Ucide” appeared during the “Colectiv” protests. The group around “Coruptia Ucide”, led by Florin Badita, a 29-year-old activist and data analyst, contributed to organizing protest events throughout the following two years and played a significant role in the mobilization for the 2017 protests. Hence, even though the discussion on advantages and disadvantages of new communication technologies for social movements has often been quite polarized (Mosca–della Porta 2009) and the benefits of the internet for activism are equally hotly debated (Bakardjieva–Svensson–Skoric 2012), our observations suggest that the use of ICT has played an important role in the spiral of protests and mobilization in Romania since 2011.

6. CONCLUSION

We have argued that, in settings of large waves of protests, especially when very diverse claims mobilize large numbers of participants, students of social movements need to consider more closely the cultural dimensions of collective action. Even more attention should be paid to the networks and interactions that persist between such waves. In the present article, we have demonstrated that, in Romania, patterns of cultural consumption fostered a collective identity that mainly evolved around an anti-mainstream frame. The social group we described as “newcomers to political activism” developed a lifestyle less influenced by a predefined political spectrum, by social classes or by family background. For such groups, scenes are perfect settings to generate social belonging (Silver–Clark–Navarro Yanez 2010). They could integrate in a cognitive and identity frame that was not overloaded with ideological or philosophical argumentations, one of the reasons why we qualify this type of civic engagement as *recreative activism*.

Belonging or affiliation to the group is essentially based on individual affinities, cultural or social, rather than on articulate, thought-out political considerations. The festive dimension of action, the modes of cultural consumption associated with the protests as well as their very moderate ideology, allowed for the emergence of this lifestyle oriented mode of political engagement. Besides the stimulating or sometimes even amplifying role of online social networks, street-level socialization and similar patterns of cultural consumption contributed to the development of a feeling of togetherness and to the adherents’ perception that they are different from – or even opposed to – mainstream society, often associated with traditional political actors, specific political parties, and the main population subgroups who traditionally vote for them.

It stands to reason that the scene we have described for Romania and, in particular, for Bucharest, is very much different from Haunss’ cases of the ‘Autonomen’ and the gay movement in Germany as regards ideological settings, repertoires of contention, and commitment frames. The Romanian alternative scene’s contribution to the dynamic of protests is compatible, however, with Haunss’ analytical framework. As scenes provide an environment in which one can engage in interactions focused around specific topics without structuring the totality of a participant’s everyday life (Haunss–Leach 2007: 72f.), the impact of the alternative scene, not only in Bucharest, although especially there, on the politicization of young, formerly politically inactive newcomers to civic engagement is remarkable. This becomes a factor of particular importance since the individual commitment of *recreative activists* is not proportionate to classic activism.

What we have observed regarding the influence of this scene on the current evolution of a Romanian culture of protest seems to be closely related to Victoriano's analysis of hipsters: "*hipsters are often recognized not for their activism, but for the clothes they wear and the lifestyle choices they make. And yet, we should not discount the fact that these ostensibly apolitical acts can still affect the mainstream in unexpected ways*" (Victoriano 2014). Especially for the social group that has been participating and even critically contributing to protests in Romania at least since 2013, a setting less-overcharged with ideology, but concentrated around music and lifestyle has allowed this group's collective identity to grow. At festivals such as 'FânFest', activists and adherents of the scene were able to intersect. Around locales that tried to defy mainstream taste and lifestyle, the feeling of being different from this mainstream also stimulated the collective identity that defied mainstream approaches to political involvement. Opposed to a society often described as politically passive and low on unconventional political participation, protests became attractive for adherents of the scene by lowering thresholds for involvement. Participation in social mobilization depends on the value society attributes to it (Fillieule–Pudal 2010), mainly because "*collective identities require a sort of ratification or affirmation from outside parties*" (Amenta–Young 1999: 35). The scene, together with social networking services, notably Facebook, provides a social environment that gratifies protest participation. Accumulating cognitive and relational social capital by sharing protest experiences online with the peer group and being part of a group that goes to party in the same clubs stimulates commitment and contributes to a collective identity in which protests became part of the lifestyle. Further, the *scene* provides a sanctuary or a retreat in times of low mobilization (Haunss 2004: 265). Activists and protest participants were able to stay connected and to keep alive their vision of how politics in Romania should be in the periods between big mobilization waves (2011/12, 2013, 2015, 2017).

We characterized the social group as less committed than classic activists, less coherent in their worldviews, and less influenced by ideologies. Further, they rely on gratification within their peer group, have a very aesthetic approach to political involvement, and perceive it as both a duty and a hobby. This type of engagement is close to Pleyers' *alter-activism*, but the weakness of political convictions, the moderate importance of ideology, and the market-capitalist leanings of the participants mark the particularities of the type of activism one can observe in Romania and other countries of the region. If Pleyers (2017) observes that *alter-activism* is a means of resisting the neoliberal invasion of people's lives, quite the contrary seems to hold true for recreative activists in Eastern Europe. Even though the Romanian "alternative" scene perceives itself as being opposed to mainstream society, they embrace guiding principles belonging to this very society. As argued, the cultural dynamic is prior to the political, and, based on interactions and collective identities created in the scene, it gives momentum to the cycles of protest.

In Romania *recreative activism* has its roots in the concomitance of cultural consumption and noninstitutionalized political participation, as well as in a certain disenchantment with post-Communist politics. On a micro and mezzo level, it seems that this type of engagement becomes a way to deal with accumulated frustrations with post-communism, a form of "social therapy". It is mostly non-violent, heterogeneous in its demands, very creative in repertoires of dissent, and is reinforced by online networks. Street festivals, mobilization camps, and non-mainstream cultural consumption within the alternative scene in Romania keep a

lifestyle awake that increases its adherents' propensity towards participating in protests as they gain momentum. Thus, social and political activism become a form of "serious leisure" (Lamond–Spracklen 2015b: 255) and protests become social events.

As most political activism is provoked by external events, the case of Romania suggests that *recreative activism* is exclusively triggered by such events: by the Austerity measures of the Boc government in 2011/12, by attempted ratifications of abusive environmental laws, by controversial government orders relating to the abuse of office, or by the failure of the emergency response system in the case of 'Colectiv'. The capacity to mobilize from within the group of participants and adherents of the scene itself appears limited for the time being.

The effectiveness of this kind of activism, especially long-term, is still unclear. More research on recent protests in Romania (and Eastern Europe) is needed and more creative approaches within the discipline of social movement studies should be deployed to understand the particularities of contemporary collective action in the region.

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