

**DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT
IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE:**

stories to be told

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DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE: STORIES TO BE TOLD

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Title	Democratic Engagement in South East Europe: Stories to be Told
Editors	Srđan Prodanović, Gazela Pudar Draško, Irena Fiket
Publisher	Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory/ Center for Ethics, Law and Applied Philosophy
Layout and design	Tamara Hasičević
Number of Copies	300
Print	Donat Graf
Date of issue	2018
Place of issue	Belgrade



FONDACIJA ZA OTVORENO DRUŠTVO, SRBIJA
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION, SERBIA

Supported by the Fund for Open Society, Serbia

CONTENT

Introduction 6

I THE CITY IS OURS: THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS AN IMPETUS FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Naum Trajanovski
“I love GTC” Citizens’ Initiative: A Happy Ending Story 11

Danica Pavlovska
The Citizens’ Initiative “I Love GTC”: themes, facts, theses, interpretations, work, chronology, effects 20

Marko Gavrilović
The Initiative Save the JNA House, Šabac 30

II FROM CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO REVOLUTION

Milica Antić
Civil Activism as a Result of Insufficient Participation of Citizens in Political Life 35

Miroslav Mijatović
Citizens’ Protests in Loznica (after “October the 5th”) 40

Besjan Pешa
Zharrez 46

Sonja Stojadinovic
Macedonia beyond her Colorful revolution:
Who were the predecessors of the movement? 50

III SOCIAL MEDIA AND (IM)OBLIZATION OF ACTORS

Cristina Matiuta

The role of social networks in shaping public space and electoral behaviour: two case studies from Romania 59

Afrim Krasniqi

The Virtual Protest And The Fragility Of Social Movement: The Case Of Albania 66

IV WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS A FORM OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Bojana Selaković

The Campaign: Law for Mums – The Power Rests with the Citizens 75

Darja Galović

The Initiative Defend the Right to Choice 82

V POSTSOCIALIST VISIONS OF (ANTI)CAPITALISM

Savo Manojlović and Marina Pavlić

Nine Teachings from the Fight for the Freedom of Entrepreneurship 89

Maja Korolija

Forced Evictions and Resistance from Below 96

Introduction

One could argue that in the title of this publication lies a rather revealing paradox. Namely, it suggests that the aim of this publication is to tell stories that are still not told. However, this runs against a common-sense intuition that engagement – especially a democratic one – is a type of action or activity which is by definition expressed loudly, perhaps even vehemently, and therefore heard among fellow citizens. In other words, taken in this abstract manner, social engagement is not something that is “waiting to be told”. And yet, the existence of this collection proves that there is in fact a need for providing a voice of some kind to forms of local social engagement. This is perhaps particularly the case in South East Europe (SEE) were, as we shall see, local engagement remains to a large degree fragmented; those who “are willing to engage social issues” are in some sense “stranded”, that is, not properly connected neither on the national, or regional level.

The 2008 financial crises severely impacted all parts of semi-periphery of global capitalism and countries of the SEE region certainly were not an exception. In the period that ensued, there was a long-term recession, growth of unemployment and an overall decline in living standard. The grave situation was only exacerbated by an already deteriorating trust in political institutions and elites. These structural factors played an important role in relatively numerous instances of social engagement in the region. In Bosnia, people protested and later organized in plenums to articulate their growing dissatisfaction with the political elite; in Belgrade and Skopje people took to the streets to protest usurpation and privatization of public spaces; in Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania the key topic of demonstrations was corruption. Also, people in Croatia protested over an educational reform and in defense of women’s rights proposed by the actual government. These relatively numerous examples of social engagement created pressure on political officials as they gained on importance on the national level. In some sense, these instances of engagement were taken as a symbolic proof that changes in the political system are long overdue. Whatever these changes may turn out to be, one could argue that the participation and engagement on the local level is of key importance if any of the demands for political reform put

forward in larger demonstrations are ever to be truly fulfilled. Group for Social Engagement Studies which functions within the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory has recognized the importance of this aspect of social engagement and wants to provide some systematic insight into it.

The idea for this publication originated from a program called “Open Talks” that was devised by the Group with the intention to investigate larger implications of “local” instances of social engagement. “Open Talks” is a form of decentralized discussion which revolves around the question: “What kind of society do we (in Serbia) want?” This question was asked to every city that the group visited (Bor, Sombor, Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Loznica, Pirot, Kragujevac, Šabac, Loznica, Ivanjica). This general and arguably subversive question was asked with the intention to make people think more abstractly about local issues. It was followed by a particularistic one that could be formulated freely within the local community (i.e. deindustrialization, local media, local public expenditure, etc.). Soon a pattern began to emerge. Namely, our discussants often saw the political sphere as something which is morally tainted and, hence, must be avoided. Their words completely echoes with the results found in the recent study of political orientations of Serbian citizens, which Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory implemented in 2017.¹ The lack of trust in democratic institutions (especially, local forms of government) was also a common theme of “Open Talks”. On the other hand, communication between those groups and individuals who were active in their community was scarce; people who took part in Open Talks often informed us that they do not remember when was the last time that a public debate was organized in their community.

This publication aims to examine to which extent is this the case in other countries in the SEE, as well to provide the general public with an insight into some specificities of regional local engagement. We wanted to avoid an exclusively academic approach to these topics and opted for a more pluralistic outtake offered from scholars, civil society representatives and local activists. The collection as a whole therefore covers a wide array of topics and transcends ideological boundaries.

1 Irena Fiket, Zoran Pavlović, Gazela Pudar Draško 2017. “Političke orijentacije građana Srbije: Kartografija nemoći”. Beograd: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Regarding the structure, the publication is divided into four thematic sections. The first chapter, titled *The city is ours: The right to the city as an impetus for social engagement*, consists of three papers that illustrate the relation between public space and (local) engagement. First two contributions, done by Naum Trajanovski and Danica Pavlovska, examine the ways in which relatively particularistic and concrete claims for democratization of public space might foster larger political implications. Both papers refer to instances of social engagement which aim to preserve modernist architecture of a trade center in Skopje that was built in the socialist era and tries to show how this struggle played a role in galvanizing the public to defend democratic procedures against nationalistic politics of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO). Marko Gavrilović's paper illustrates a similar example from a small city of Šabac where he and group of his colleagues architects have also managed to preserve an abandoned modernist Cultural Center. In the second chapter, *From civic engagement to revolution*, the contributors offer an overview of activism and social engagement in smaller communities. In the first paper, Milica Antić tries to list some of the acute local campaigns – mainly in the domain of ecology and education – that are currently happening in Serbia. In similar vein, Miroslav Mijatović in his contribution focuses his attention on short history of initiatives in his own municipality of Loznica, while Besjan Peshja gives us a case study of ecological engagement in a small village in the south of Albania. Finally, Sonja Stojadivić's paper provides a pre-history of protests and initiatives that culminated in The Colorful Revolution of 2016. In the third chapter, named *Social Media and (Im)obilization of actors* the authors tackle the issue of new modes of organizing protests through social media. In the first paper, Cristina Matiuta investigates the role that social networks played in relatively massive environmentalist demonstrations against Rosia Montana project, as well as 2014 Presidential Elections in Romania. In the second text of this chapter, Afrim Krasniqi compares similarities and differences between various types of social engagement in the post-socialist Albania in order to shed some light on the potential of social media in furthering the democratization of the Albanian society. In the fourth chapter, *Women's rights as form of social engagement*, Bojana Selaković describes how a collaboration between several non-governmental organizations and targeted members of the public managed to

persuade policy makers in Serbia to change the law that regulates maternity leave. On the other hand, Darja Galović in her paper describes the difficulties that pro-choice advocates are facing in their efforts to hinder pro-conservative changes in Croatian legislature. Finally, the last chapter titled *Post-socialist visions of (Anti)capitalism* consists of two relatively opposing views regarding the nature of social problems that are worth to be engaged in post-socialist countries. In the first contribution Savo Manojlović and Marina Pavlić – based on their own initiative to change and deregulate the way in which Serbian Chamber of Commerce charges fees to its members – offer us “nine teachings” that would liberate entrepreneurship in Serbia. Conversely, in her contribution, Maja Korolija analyses the protests against evictions in Serbia and Poland with the aim to illustrate how post-socialist states on the semi-periphery of capitalism are increasingly negating the interests and rights of its poorest citizens, as well as how social engagement might overcome this situation.

Finally, as editors, we hope that this publication will not be the last effort to bring together those who are willing to act and critically reflect on important social issues we face in our everyday life. Even if the contributions that are before you are in many ways heterogonous in style, themes and ideological background, they nonetheless quite demonstrably show that they are in fact a reaction to common social issues (weak democratic institutions, general political apathy, post-socialist transformation) that are shared among all the SEE countries. Therefore, it just confirms our intuition that led us to gather these texts, that open communication about concrete social grievances today might be a truly needed subversive act.

Gazela Pudar Draško, Irena Fiket and Srđan Prodanović



**THE CITY IS OURS:
THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS AN
IMPETUS FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

Naum Trajanovski

"I love GTC" Citizens' Initiative: A Happy Ending Story

Introduction

From October 12 to November 17, 2017, the Viennese Ringturm Galerie hosted an exhibition titled "Skopje – Macedonian architecture in context," part of the Architektur im Ringturm exhibition series. The installment and the monograph, curated and organized by Adolph Stiller (Vienna), Vladimir Deskov, Ana Ivanovska Deskova, and Jovan Ivanovski (Skopje), engaged into presenting several layers of the city's turbulent architectural history and its "various identities" (Architektur im Ringturm 2017). Notwithstanding, the exhibition core was focused on the modernization process and the modernist, pre-"Skopje 2014" city's architecture, which was further accented in the Macedonian media reports on the event (Sakam da kažam 2017). The exhibition thus, can be perceived as a culminating trajectory of a recent peculiar process – namely, the reinvigoration of the thematic scope when discussing the Skopje's architectural appearance in the emerging foreign discourse. On a different note, the mega-constructing, state-sponsored project of "Skopje 2014" is discerned as losing its capacity to dictate the course of the debates. Moreover, the process as such was further instigated by the governmental change from the late 2016 and the landslide victory of the centre-left SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) from the most recent local elections, a political option with an unambiguous critical stance over the "Skopje 2014" project.

One can easily state that the local referendum for the preservation of the City Trade Center (Gradski Trgovski Centar – GTC) from April 2015, was the only and partial opportunity to grasp the individual voices over the infamous project of "Skopje 2014." Initiated by the citizens' initiative of "I love GTC," the referendum was molded around the question whether the city's iconic modernist landmark should be included to the novel, neo-classical reshaping of the urban core as proposed by the then ruling governmental coalition. The initiative's endorsed the modernist, post-earthquake architectural legacy of Skopje, and adhered the openness and functionality of GTC in spite of the proposed conversion into a closed-style mall. Thus, the consortium of multi-vocational and

multicultural actors and agencies under the banner of “I love GTC,” can be approached as an important juncture in the recent history of the Macedonian civil activism. The paper will further discuss the importance of the initiative and will contextualize the civic engagement within the contemporary societal and political context.

“Façade renovations”

The critical juncture in the Macedonian political setting, in terms of profiling the main trigger in the urban and mnemonic landscape shift, was the electoral win of the right-wing coalition in 2006, led by VMRO-DPMNE. VMRO-DPMNE, as suggested in the party’s official name, claims legacy over the “historical” VMRO, namely, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija - VMRO). The Organization was established in November 1893 in Salonika by six members of the Macedonian intelligentsia, who opted for an armed struggle and resistance against the Ottoman rule on the Macedonian territory. What is known as VMRO today is a political organization created in the Macedonian political diaspora, with its main ideological matrix constructed around the anti-regime sentiments of the first generation refugees from the newly established communist rule in the post-WWII Balkans, able to transform their standpoints into an articulated political platform. Herein, the party was recognized as “anti-communist as it is nationalist” in the first years of the Macedonian independence (Poulton 1995: 207).

Even though DPMNE’s agenda from the early 1990s was much clearer on certain historical revisionist issues, it barely translated into a particular memory policy during the first DPMNE governance from 1998 to 2002. On the contrary, the ten-year rule of the reformed and technocratic DPMNE from 2006 to 2016, will be mostly identified with the major takeovers in the cultural and mnemonic spheres. The crucial undertaking in this manner is the constructing project of “Skopje 2014,” consisting over 130 monuments and buildings, mostly located in the city’s “ideological and physical center of ‘Macedonia Square’” (Gori 2014: 302). The modernist architectural heritage of the Macedonian capital can be further juxtaposed to the narrativity of “Skopje 2014” and finally, to the DPMNE’s meta-historical aggregation, stretching from the Macedonian antiquity to the most recent political and historical events. In other

words, while the project's "confusivity" (Muhić and Takovski 2014) and historical "amalgamation" (Marković and Damjanovski 2010) are unambiguous, the city's modernist legacy was approached in a distinctly strict and univocal fashion.

In this regards, the "Skopje 2014" strategy of "façade renovations" (Stefoska and Stojanov 2016), a particular palimpsestic mode of external refurbishing in neo-classical style, was primarily directed towards buildings in the central city's area, built during the Yugoslav period. Herein, the party's anti-communist sentiment was reflected as a strong program of the abovementioned constructing pattern, aiming to both redesign the state's optics on the communist past and communicate as an instrument for daily-political purposes. The first argument, further expressed as an "annihilation of the socialist period" of the Skopje's architecture (Cvitković and Kline 2017), was distinguishable not only as a mode of a complete makeover (Nama Department Store, the Governmental Building of the Republic of Macedonia and the attempt to reshape the GTC), but also, *inter alia*, a general negligence (The Museum of Contemporary Arts and the Goce Delčev Student Dormitory) and an obscure concealment (The Macedonian Opera and Ballet and the Head Office of the Macedonian Postal Service). The latter stance was suggested by one of the authors of the proposed design for the makeover of GTC, articulating the apologetic discourse of the "façade renovations" as reflecting the worldwide trend of "exasperation from the modernism" and "return of the tradition" (Faktor 2014).

"I love GTC" initiative

The GTC, a trade center on the left bank of the river Vardar, was opened for public in 1973, after the international contest from 1967. In the wake of the post-earthquake reconstruction of Skopje, the GTC was imagined as an urban hub for trading and administrative services, hosting as well five residential objects. The public debate for advancing GTC, a team-project led by the award-winning Macedonian architect Živko Popovski, can be traced back from the second decade of the post-communist period. The major rationale for the resuscitation of the object was to increase its competitiveness in regards to the emerging expansion of new shopping malls in the Macedonian capital, as well as to refurbish the damaged and old segments. After few unsuccessful attempts

to select a reconstruction project in the late 2000s and the early 2010s, the GTC governing body came up with a final design of the refurbished structure in 2013 – a baroque-alike construction fitting the surrounding “Skopje 2014” objects (Vaseva and Jovanovski 2015).

It was the very manner of the decision-making and the non-transparency of the procedure which instigated a groupist public reaction to the proposed changes of the GTC. At first, the Macedonian Association of Architects organized a petition against the “change of the appearance of GTC” (Plusinfo 2015), and called for an event to raise awareness and popularize the initiative for protecting the object. Herein, on June 14, 2013, the first happening of the initiative “I love GTC” took place in the Skopje’s city center, in and around the very subject of the initiative – the GTC itself. The massive turnout, the creative actions (“Hug GTC” and the formation of a human-made “shield” around the object), as well as the paroles (“The city is ours!” and “We are not giving away the city!”) and the positive public reaction, were the primary sign of the potential of the proposed initiative. Furthermore, the “I love GTC” managed to gather over 4500 signatures for protection of the authentic appearance of the city trade center. After a year-long series of events, protests, debates and public appearances, the initiative pushed the Municipality of Center to announce a local referendum (Civilmedia 2017).

The plebiscite, which took place on April 28, 2015, even though unsuccessful in terms of its final turnout and legal outcomes, was further interpreted from several stances. Namely, out of the 40,5 percent turnout on the local level of the Municipality of Center (50% plus one vote needed), over 98% of the electorate answered affirmatively to the referendum question – “do you agree on the City Trade Center to preserve its current façade appearance?” A particular breakdown of the referendum results shows that, on one hand, the GTC got more votes for (16844) than any other politician or political subject in the Municipality of Center (the closest being the 2014 Presidential elections and the than-oppositional candidate Stevo Pendarovski with 16452 votes). Moreover, the GTC referendum won more votes for its cause (98%) compared to another referendum from the post-communist Macedonia – the 2004 autonomy referendum on the municipal redistricting (Fokus 2015). The critical voices were highlighting the very formulation of the question, the means of the campaign and the political parties’ interplay as influencing

the final results, while the than-governmental DPMNE was unofficially boycotting the plebiscite, both visible in the pro-DPMNE press and the electoral turnout.

“The city is ours!”

Amidst the referendum results, one can certainly say that the initiative succeeded to obtain its ultimate goal – the preservation of the authentic appearance of the GTC. In April 2017, on the basis of the “I love GTC” initiative’s proposition, the Macedonian Constitutional Court decided with a majority of votes to revisit the particular Article 50 from the Law for Spatial and Urban Planning, designed to allow takeovers of the institutional competences over objects of “special interest” and their further reconstruction. The decision was confirmed in July 2017, thus, disabling the forbye attempts to refurbish more than 100 objects across the country, with GTC being one of the most proponent examples (Civilmedia 2017; Fokus 2017). The statement of the now city mayor, Petre Šilegov, given during the electoral campaign in September 2017 was in the same direction, suggesting that “the will of the citizens will be respected” and “GTC will remain open” (24 vesti 2017).

Notwithstanding, it can be further argued that the very initiative endorsing the authentic appearance of the GTC was the major outcome of the abovementioned legal and political processes in the recent Macedonian context. If the public spaces are to be considered as spheres of contested interests, refraining its conflictual nature and constant processes of negotiation, then the “I love GTC” initiative appeared as an absolute game winner. More precisely, the initiative managed to articulate several stances and occupy certain domains which contributed towards the popularity of the bottom-up movement and the solid plebiscite results. In this manner, three particular points can be identified.

Firstly, one can clearly stress that the “I love GTC” initiative managed to reframe the public debate over the “Skopje 2014” and articulate the resentment to the project. The opposition to the univocal refurbishing of the city’s urban core was clearly defined as a legitimate “right to a city,” thus scapegoating the very procurement of the public spaces. Herein, the initiative have consolidated the previous attempts, civic engagements and groupist responses, over 35 NGOs (Plusinfo 2015), identified

the city's cultural heritage and involved the wider public, constructing the novel point of resistance to the "Skopje 2014" project within the parole "The city is ours!" (Globus 2013). The statement of the artist and activist Ćorĝe Jovanoviċ is significant in this manner, by articulating the goal of the "I love GTC" initiative as "not only a pure defense of one particular building, but the fact that GTC integrated all the struggles we had against the project of 'Skopje 2014'" (Radio MOF 2015).

Secondly, the initiative has radically democratized the expert discourse on the city's architectural legacies. It was the very dissemination of the narrative over GTC which profiled the "I love GTC" initiative as an inclusive movement and not another guild's struggle to defend a modernist object. More precisely, the bridge between the expert and non-expert communities was established in a particularly engaging and elegant manner. On one hand, the aggressive strategy of interaction (memory walks and lectures on GTC organized by students of architecture, the open air happenings as well as the public debates and several publications) have contributed towards a larger participation and popularization of the initiative (according to a recent poll, more than 32,5% of the population of the Municipality of Center participated in at least one event organized by the initiative – Makfaks 2015). On the other hand, it was the very idea to "load" the discourse over GTC with personal memories which further contributed towards positioning the object as a site of memory and an identification marker. The rhetoric as such can be traced in all the public appearances and the social media campaigning.

Finally, the initiative established itself as a platform for civic engagement and memory activism, both during the struggle for GTC and after the legal outcome. The most recent initiatives of "If buildings can talk," a research performance on the local histories in the urban communities, and the involvement in the initiative for preservation of the Army House in Bitola, are to be mentioned as just few examples in the abovementioned context. The "I love GTC" have thus become a significant reference point in any further citizens' response, not only in the capital city of Skopje, but on a national level.

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Danica Pavlovska

The Citizens' Initiative "I Love GTC": themes, facts, theses, interpretations, work, chronology, effects



Introduction

Creativity is the substance of all the pulsations of life. The key trait of our socio-cultural context, which is important for life's practices in general, is the binary correlation creativity-politics, or, more precisely, architectural creativity and the political articulation of the community, although architecture itself is the real reflection of the latter's dynamics and development. The Republic of Macedonia, as a "young" state, fortunately boasts a significant part of the society that has still not joined any political party, which consists of intelligent people who carefully articulate their standpoints and opinions, who speak out individually and usually adhere to the criteria of decency and good manners. The democratic public is demonstrating its potentials and trying to take part in the reformatting of the dominant system, is trying to introduce civic ideas and concepts, to be a corrective, to point out the mindlessness and nebulosity of the project "Skopje 2014", which is a tectonic architectural and urban planning shift that is simultaneously ideological, cultural, identitarian...

Project “Skopje 2014”

The state project “Skopje 2014” is an absurd creation, a materialized architecture of a strange aesthetic, an even stranger message and the strangest possible ideological paradigm – the creating of a fake historical pattern or, in the words of Professor Nebojša Vilić, the instrumentalization of an ideologized memory. This multilayered phenomenon has cost an enormous amount of money, has never been the subject of any official explanation or account, and – it is absolutely clear – is nationalist in its essence and has catastrophic cultural effects, like some bizarre anachronistic show.

In essence, this is the largest architectural project in the centre of Skopje since the 1963 earthquake, but it at the same time demonstrates a profound lack of understanding of democracy and its practicing. The project is regulated through unacceptable quasi-procedures and the negation of existing values, and it therefore presents a classical example of an intrusion into the social system, so that the only adequate name for this project is – the “usurpation of the public space from the position of power”. The Macedonian Association of Architects distances itself, through a declaration, from the project “Skopje 2014” because it completely lacks the geographical, political, economic, cultural and societal context, which means that the project is, from a professional point of view, incapable of anticipating the future.

Unfortunately, this project is part of the miserable reality of Macedonia, so it warrants an in-depth analysis and a serious cultural re-evaluation. The “scars” will remain, that is certain, both on the visual horizon and in the collective memory. The single most sensitive moment in the realization of this evil is the case of the City Trade Center as an “attempted rape” of the city and the urban culture, and an “attempted murder” of tradition and identity.

Trade Centre or the “genius loci”

The City Trade Centre (Gradski trgovački centar, GTC) is the work of a group of architects led by Professor Živko Popovski, developed after the public competition in 1967 and built in 1973, which was awarded the Borba Prize and the most prestigious award in Macedonia – the “October 11th Award”. The announcement of the shameful intervention on the GTC complex came through the (usual) virtual presentation of the model architectural project in the media and it shocked the entire cultural public. The willingness of a great number of Skopje’s residents to help was evident at the time, and about ten non-governmental organizations seemed ready to act. Thus came into existence the Citizens’ Initiative “Go sakam GTC” - “I Love the GTC”, as a platform that protects and nourishes the values it stands for, defends the opinions based on knowledge and confirmed through experience, and nurtures the sentiments based in collective memory. To be sure, the work of the Initiative required a manifest promptness, a high level of the culture of protest, a subtle restraint in the demonstration of the power of urban spirit, and all kinds of peaceful means and tolerance.

Due to its specific complex of values, the GTC has over the past four decades created its own unique “spirit” – genius loci – so that the transformation of its structure and appearance would create a confusion in the minds of all those who love it the way it is. Its present state should thus be jealously conserved for future generations. Scientific arguments point to its great value and special characteristics: authenticity, uniqueness, integrity and definitely its fitting into the spatial and temporal context.

All the professional accounts of the object’s value were followed by the statements of citizens of all ages, marked by unusually strong emotions, and this tension, notwithstanding certain oscillations, still survives today.

Structure of the activist process “I Love the GTC”

The citizens’ initiative “I Love the GTC” was created in May 2013 after the media had presented the architectural plan for the expansion and reshaping of the GTC building, on behalf of the investor – the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. The irresponsible behaviour and the absence of a public debate on a substantial change of character and appearance of an extremely important object in the city centre were the causes for a peaceful protest of like-minded citizens.

On 14. June 2013, from 20:00 to 22:00, a protest with the motto “Let’s Hug the GTC” was organized at the entrance staircase of the GTC. The protest featured several speeches by competent public figures (president of the AAM Danica Pavlovska, Professors Miško Ralev, Martin Guleski, Nebojša Vilić, Nikos Čausidis, Elizabeta Avramovska), after which a petition for preserving the authenticity of the GTC was signed by 4960 people. In a very cheerful atmosphere, about 1600 participants in the protest formed a symbolic protective “hug”, more precisely a circle around the whole complex, a circle of people holding hands. This gesture was a message that the citizens were ready to protect the object with a human wall. It was indeed a moment of strong emotions.





The protest continued until November 2013, in the form of open forums named “I Love the GTC” every Thursday evening next to the GTC, in the park “ŽenaBorac”, and the activity on social networks intensified. On the anniversary of the 1963 earthquake, the slogan “I love the GTC – I love Skopje” was coined and printed on flyers, also in Albanian, as usual. There were various forms of animating the public like, for example, children’s workshops or art installations.

The first half of 2014 was the period of interpreting the value of the GTC, of insisting on starting a dialogue with the officials, and the fight for GTC became a symbol of the fight for the city, for the right to the city.

At the end of 2014, the publication “111 Theses on the GTC” was published in defence of the GTC, which included the theses of around ten prominent Macedonian experts formulated in the discussion titled “We’re Reading Buildings: GTC as a Book”, part of the project “Living Libraries: Archives of Civic Disobedience”.

One among many personal views:

“I love the GTC because it doesn’t have doors that open and close, that are locked and unlocked, it doesn’t have working hours...You can go in and out any time you want, wherever you want. No matter who you are!

From all corners of the City you can sense the inclination to go there, to stop over, to sit down, to walk around, to wander through its alleys or continue in any direction, into the wideness of the Big City.

There you can access all possible mechanics and motorics. Straight, by staircase, through ramps, up or down! Easy and convenient for everybody, alone or in company.

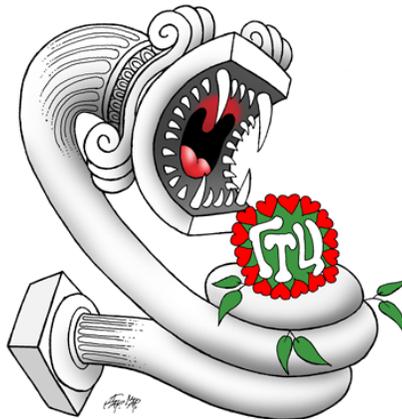
The free air flow is its unique value, it modulates time just like the temporal variations in human life. And, all these possibilities are strongly supported by the simplicity and clarity of the appropriation of space!

That would be the answer to the question: what is a democratic Space? What is a democratic City, democratic Urban Planning?

GTC is, indeed, the ‘Architecture of the City’, a covered ‘Square’, maybe even an ancient Agora, and definitely a Bazaar (Čaršija)!

GTC is a Modern Urban Area, a Landscape that traverses the “city”, that supports and shapes movements into forms of duration and renewal, there is no Facade that displays this or that style, it’s a street, a fluid that endures, a passage, a crossing marked by the interval of footsteps...

GTC is a Place! A Place of identification, of identifying with the city, which creates the awareness of the city! GTC is the Right to the City!”



Danger was in the air, so the Citizens' Initiative organized another protest, more precisely another "Hug" for the GTC, this time a "New Year's Hug" (on 28. December 2014), to demonstrate its presence and its significance within the citizens' lives. An information stand was opened that distributed invitations, stickers, badges, etc, and at which 4560 citizens signed their names in support – each day a different popular public figure from the city was the stand's "host". In the bad weather conditions with low temperatures and heavy snowfall, 1500 people gathered and, at the end of the protest, symbolically "hugged" the GTC - "to make it feel warmer". A wreath of light was blazing around the GTC.



Referendum

The initiative for the organization of a citizens' referendum on the GTC's appearance was the topic of a special meeting of the Council of the Centar(Centre) Municipality on 30. March 2015. At the meeting, the decision to organize the first local referendum in Macedonia and a first one concerning a part of the project "Skopje 2014" was reached with 12 votes in favour, 11 abstaining and zero against. After the vote the date of the referendum was decided – 26. April 2015, from 07:00 to 19:00, as well as the referendum question: "Are you in favour of keeping the authentic appearance of the City Trade Centre?".

Everyone thought that this was the purest and most direct method of civic decision-making, the most efficient form of direct democracy, a corrective for the government's decisions and, most importantly, an occasion for all citizens to unite, regardless of party, ethnic or religious affiliation, an opportunity to restore confidence in the system and its institutions. It seemed that the GTC could be reconstructed and authentically restored as result of the collective will of the citizens, and that it could thereby acquire the status of a cultural monument, a status that was problematized and denied at the time.

The referendum campaign started with the analysis and surveys with excellent results, results that promised the rescuing of the object from disaster, and the third "hug" of the GTC was eagerly awaited. Finally, a culture of protest was being practiced, and the trust in peaceful collective action and loud collective messages was recovered, so the expectations turned out to be justified. 22 non-governmental organizations gave their support and contributed to the campaign through extensive engagement of volunteers. In support of the referendum, on 23. April 2015 the "Hug" turned into an extraordinary cultural event at the entrance of the GTC, into a memorable atmosphere that would be proudly recounted as a celebration of urban culture. A rich and cheerful performance with eight speakers, "spiced up" with a musical programme in which "celebrities" volunteered, the event brought together 3000 participants and lasted until midnight. An impressive living wall around the object, composed of smiling people who held hands, blew whistles and held banners saying "We won't give you up", was recorded and broadcast around the world, as a proof of the citizens' genuine affection for the object.

The referendum was held on 26. April 2015. It was organized by the municipal government in accordance with the existing regulations and the government's capacities, and only minor irregularities were registered. The required turnout of 51% was not reached. However, no one expected a sabotage that included the government's directives to the ruling party members not to vote, intimidation of state employees, even the turning off of elevators on the voting day to prevent people from coming to the polls. The most shameful act was the boycotting of the referendum by the President of the Republic of Macedonia, a resident of the Centar municipality, to whom an open letter of disappointment, bitterness and anger was later sent.

The result of the referendum: of the total number of 43.560 voters, 17.655, or 40,53% voted, out of which 95,36% voted "in favour" of keeping the authentic look of the GTC. Such a result had never been witnessed in any previous vote. Dishonourable political games won, however, and formally the referendum failed.

In the aftermath of the referendum, a period of escalating political crisis began and the protests became more intense, while the government responded with excessive force and arrested protesters. A popular front by the name "Citizens for Macedonia" was formed, issuing a declaration which stated that the civic organizations were forming a coalition with the largest opposition party (SDSM), a coalition which, in the name of the citizenry of Macedonia, organized a mass peaceful protest on 17. May 2015 in front of the Macedonian Government building, which turned into an occupation of the street. This action of occupying space (camping) in front of the Government of Macedonia later morphed into a succession of other protests and manifestations, the most prominent one being the "Colourful Revolution". The flag "I Love GTC" could be seen in the revolution's ranks long thereafter.

Conclusion

What happened to Skopje under the auspices of the authorities was a violation of the citizens' dignity, an insult and arrogant ignoring of the opinion of experts and of all the individual and collective statements made within numerous protests, forums, debates, manifestations, writings... Threats to the authenticity of the City Trade Centre complex have

deeply upset the public, and the Citizens' Initiative "I Love the GTC" has, through various forms of creative expression, public speech and institutional reactions, defended its position in a dignified manner.

The last and most important victory came in July 2017, when, at the request of the Citizens' Initiative "I Love the GTC", the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia withdrew the legal grounds for any future official decision to intervene on locations declared to be "of special interest" (Article 50 of the Law on Spatial and Urban Planning), whereby the discretionary right of any government to make non-transparent decisions based on simulated procedures was abolished. A blatant usurpation of democracy was prevented.

Link for the photos of the June 2013 events:

http://gosakamgtc.blogspot.com/2013/07/blog-post_7408.html

Link for the video: "Into the New Year with the Old GTC!":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEkxMxQnvE0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7RzX5v7r2E>

Link for the photos of 28.12.2014:

<http://okno.mk/node/43425>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fosim/sets/72157647661295103>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDzRctmxydk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMif8AGUtpI>

Recordings of the 2015 events:

<http://okno.mk/>

Marko Gavrilović

The Initiative Save the JNA House, Šabac

Any notable intervention of the representatives of civil society organizations in the public sphere, any counter-actions and resistance that such interventions run up against, can provide an insight into our entire reality: the political, social and economic logic that rules Serbia today. In addition, behind all the big decisions there is a clear ideological framework, all in an era that is supposedly “without an ideology”.

This is the story of an object and the people fighting to preserve it. This is also a story about a totem in a wrong epoch, and the people trying to destroy it.

In 2008, the Serbian Ministry of Defense sells the JNA House (Dom JNA – the local House of the Yugoslav National Army) in Šabac to the Šabac Municipality. The city officials intend to sell the object, although there were, in the meantime, several failed attempts to move the municipal offices into the building.

The building, built between 1961 and 1963 in the style of post-war modernism, was designed by Dr Vladimir Bjelikov, Professor at the Architectural Faculty of Belgrade University, with the aim of creating the “most important cultural institution” in the city, as a newspaper article from that time put it. The House, as one learns from primary sources, has become precisely that. Although primarily devoted to social activities and the training of JNA cadres, the management also supported cultural-artistic events that were so avant-garde for that city and that time, that they could not take place in classical cultural institutions, even in the youth cultural centre that was the first, and often only, option for creative young individuals.

Many people wished that the building once again assume its old function, but, despite the nice wishes, and because of the lack of money and determination, it stood abandoned for years and open for vandals who, little by little, took away the furniture and parts of electric installations.

The story about the Initiative *Save the JNA House* begins in November 2015, when the Facebook page of the Mayor of Šabac announced that the City Assembly had decided to sell the grounds on which the Army House was built, which meant that the building was to be torn down. After seeing this, I felt an urge to react. As an architect, as someone who had

spent some time thinking about this object, about its past, present and possible future, I wrote a lengthy comment on this announcement and got an unexpectedly broad support. I still couldn't imagine that anything bigger would come out of my reaction.

However, the next day a fellow architect contacted me whom I hadn't known before, saying that she heard about my comment (as she wasn't a Facebook user herself), and that she thought we should get organized within our profession and react. Within the course of two or three days we had signatures of thirty colleagues from Šabac, so we sent a letter to the Mayor asking for a meeting.

It's not very difficult (and it's definitely not unpopular) to say that all politicians are the same. Unfortunately, it's also not entirely wrong. However, we must admit that, with certain politicians, it is at least possible to have a reasonable dialogue. To what extent this is a matter of decent upbringing, on the one hand, or of the current constellation of forces, I don't know – both are probably important. It's a fact that Šabac, as an only opposition-governed city in Serbia, feels a duty to present itself as better than it actually is, and the city authorities are trying to listen to their citizens. Not all the time, of course, and not primarily to those who are well-meaning and competent, but primarily to those who represent the opinions of the majority that votes for the ruling party. Luckily, in our case these two groups coincided.

The meeting was scheduled surprisingly quickly, it even seemed that the Mayor had understood us completely, and for a short while we hoped that this would be an easy fight. However, we could conclude from his statements during conversation that the plan was not being given up. Then we turned to the public, through all the means available, including printed and electronic newspapers, social networks, organization of roundtables, collecting of signatures in the street – we were drawing the public's attention to the urgent need for discussing this issue and protecting the JNA House from the destructive tendencies of a senseless time.

In addition, we prepared a well-documented request to the relevant Office for the Protection of Cultural Monuments that the House be put under state's protection as a public cultural good.

In the meantime, we got the support of a number of professional organizations, institutions, groups, including: Do.Co.Mo.Mo Serbia, the national section of an international working group for the documentation

and protection of buildings, locations and complexes of modern architectural design; The Serbian Society of Conservationists; Expedition from Kotor; the Ministry of Space from Belgrade; the Šabac Library; the Šabac Cultural Centre; SEEcult, a cultural portal of Southeast Europe; the association Serbian Independent Cultural Scene; Horkestar; the band Goblini; the magazine Liceulice; the activists of the Colourful Revolution from Skopje and many, many others.

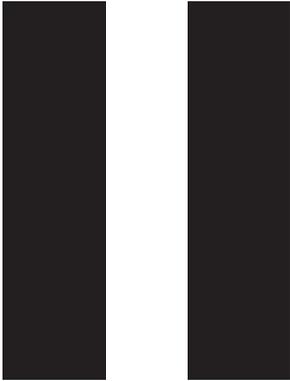
In parallel with our struggle, the campaign was fought in the above mentioned Office which, being financed by the city government of Šabac, was under a lot of pressure to reject our request, or to protract the procedure. And yet, the Office representatives could not ignore the obvious importance of the JNA House for the architectural and urban tissue of our city. They withstood the pressure, and the process of putting the building under protection followed the standard procedure, with minor delays.

It turned out that the combination of all these activities contributed to the citizens' greater awareness of the value of the object, resulted in the greater visibility of the initiative, and influenced the politicians to change their mind. Namely, during one of the city assembly's meetings, the government and the opposition argued about who is more aware of the importance of the JNA House. The same government that had been prepared to tear down the building only a year before, and the same opposition that, until recently, had had nothing against this.

The citizens must constantly improve their relation to the public space and our common life in it. There are always possibilities for action, one just has to reach for them. If you are determined – if you know that history will record your efforts as righteous – success is guaranteed, your action will not be unnoticed, and afterwards there will be many new options for development and progress.

The JNA House building will not be completely protected until it gets a new function. We witness that many objects under state protection are deteriorating. Through a serious study, we have suggested that this space be used and improved by civil society organizations, relying on various funding agencies to gradually reconstruct it and furnish it. This suggestion was not met with understanding. In certain European cities there are hybrid buildings used by both city offices and non-governmental organizations. How far removed that is from our rigid understanding of space.

www.fb.com/domjna



FROM CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO REVOLUTION

Milica Antić

Civil Activism as a Result of Insufficient Participation of Citizens in Political Life

In the media darkness followed by a complete absence of civic participation there are still springs of civic engagement emerging. From the newspaper front pages one can rarely get informed on local initiatives done by media, students, neighbors, parents, traders and other citizens who do not want to be complicit with the situation where lethargy has occupied majority of actors.

Due to the lack of debate and public space for discussion, informal as well as formal groups of citizens are increasingly gathering like-minded individuals and coming out to the public to express their dissatisfaction. Freedom of speech is additionally compromised by the introduction of the “Explore Feed” on Facebook that focuses only on paid ads, so the media has become less able to reach their audience on social networks.

In this text, we will present examples of civic activism that occurred as a result of the lack of space within the public discourse that would allow citizens to express those views which disagree with the policy pursued by the authorities at the local and state level.

Construction of a hydroelectric power station near Trgovište¹ stirred up a village that even formed night watches in the fight against the construction of this facility. For months, the investor was trying to start construction and the locals were on the other hand decisive in their fight against the hydroelectric power plant. Citizens of Trgovište claim that the construction of this facility would block the city’s access to water supply. The municipality granted the investor the permission to build a hydrocentral at the time when there were no houses at these locations, today the topographic situation is different and therefore the citizens didn’t want to sign the contracts with the investor. They believe that construction will reduce water flow in the summer months, while city authorities promise that this construction will not affect their quality of life. However, the locals were well organized and did not wanted to

1 <http://rs.n1info.com/a344543/Vesti/Vesti/Mestani-Radovnice-u-nocnim-strazama-ne-daju-da-izgrade-hidrocentrale.html>

allow the start of the construction. Citizens claim to be pressured by the authorities to end their initiative. “On the one hand, tactical, on the other - legal fight. The municipality gave the permit to the investor according to the cadastral map of small hydropower plants which was prepared in 1987, when there were no houses in the village by the river and the hydro power plant itself.”²

A similar situation occurred in September in the village of Rakita near Babušnica where citizens also opposed the construction of a hydroelectric power plant. While, having all the necessary permits from the Babušnica municipality, the private investor was nonetheless changing the flow of the mountain river away from the village of Rakita for the needs of his hydroelectric power plant “Zvonce”. The residents wrote petitions and asked for protection from the authorities, since they were convinced that the works will leave them without the river and without the only road.³ Investor and the local authorities believed that citizens have no reason to protest and that the new road will be built, however, citizens are not so sure, because the site for this construction is not even marked properly.

Citizens’ mistrust can also be explained if one has in mind previous actions of the authorities that supported the construction of the hydroelectric power plant on the river Lim, which was opposed both by expert public and citizens. “However, this idea of Škundrić (minister in charge 2011 Author’s note) was not approved by the local community, and the Coordination Committee for the Protection and Preservation of Lim was formed – which opposed the construction of any dams on Lim. In June, they even announced that he would sue the former minister, and the case ended up at the head of the OSCE mission in Serbia. “⁴This case has reached the court. “The Serbian Administrative Court annulled a decision on the scope, content, and the assessment of the environmental impact of the hydropower plant construction projects (HPPs) Brodarevo 1 and 2 on the Lim River, which environmental activists and

2 *Ibid.*

3 <http://rs.n1info.com/a316794/Vesti/Vesti/Mestani-sela-Rakita-brane-lokalni-put-i-reku-od-investitora.html>

4 <http://www.istinomer.rs/ocena/1266/Hidrocentrala%20na%20Limu>

NGOs welcomed as a step towards halting the project. “¹

Ecological issues are not the only ones that had stirred up the public. After the Protest Against Dictatorship in the aftermath of the 2017 presidential election, mass protests were organized. Some of these alleged organizers have been arrested and charges against them have been made. The Faculty of Political Science stood behind its students and supported freedom of assembly as a basic human right. “The Faculty cannot and will not turn its head away from the pressure which our students are exposed to, especially because from the description of the allegedly committed violations contained in requests for initiation of misdemeanor proceedings it cannot be concluded that they are the organizers of the informal gatherings, as well as that the requests for initiation of misdemeanor proceedings have been filed more than three months after the informal public assembly took place, that is at the end of July 2017 “²

Numerous professors and representatives of the academic community decided to support students’ efforts and launched The Association of Professors and Researchers who are opposed to new educational reforms and who believe that it is time to bring about changes in society. They are opposed to new educational laws and want to launch a public debate about possible education reforms. They called themselves Association of Professors and Researchers because this was their name during the 1990s. After October the 5th changes, the association stopped working because there was a general feeling that there is no need for such initiatives. Seventeen years later they re-established the association with the same name and similar purpose. So far, their appeal has been signed by 1743 citizens, most of whom are professors from various higher education institutions.³

“The Law on Higher Education drastically reduced the participation of universities in the work of regulatory bodies responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education in favor of the executive branch of the government. With this significant reduction of previously achieved

1 <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/rs/projekat-izgradnje-hidroelektrana-na-limu-pod-znakom-pitanja-posle-odluke-suda/>

2 http://www.danas.rs/drustvo.55.html?news_id=362809&title=FPN+podr%C5%BEao+studente+koji+su+u%C4%8Destvovali+na+protestu

3 <http://www.upi.rs/peticija.php?page=statistike>

standards of autonomy of the university, the direction of higher education development will become the subject of political agreements instead of decisions based on critical dialogue and reflection within the university community. The recently adopted Law in Serbia has significantly derogated the role of the universities, their teachers and students, who in every modern state represent the leading intellectual power in defining the directions of social development. For these reasons, we strongly support the initiative of KONUS, SANU and NSW to obstruct the Law on Higher Education.⁴

The new threat to civil liberties is a recent change in Facebook's business policy, with the EXPLORE Feed introduced in Serbia, as well as in several other countries. This change has drastically affected the media that could only find audience among social network users. Serbia, along with Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Bolivia and Slovakia, is in an experimental group of countries which uses this segment of Facebook. Social networks represent an important mechanism of citizen inclusion, and their reduction reduces the space for political action.

The idea is to divide the news into a separate section that would filter the news that we receive as users from the pages we have liked, while the main section will show the news related to our friends. Facebook wanted to force the websites to pay for the news in order to enter the main section, but this experiment led to even greater marginalization of news and information that is significant for the lives of citizens in Serbia because some types of content cannot be found in the mainstream media. In that regard, often the news that research journalists are concerned about completely end up neglected on the national television, and can only be accessed if the app's user has a special desire to visit the news segment with pages. These changes have seriously contributed to the reduction of visibility, that is, the organic reach of sites that have to pay for the advertisement in order to inform users about their news.

This experiment resulted in petitions of various media associations directed to Facebook. Thus, the editor of KRIK, Stefan Dojčinović, wrote the text⁵ for the NY Times listing the reasons why this practice is bad for freedom of the press in Serbia.

4 <http://www.upi.rs/peticija.php?page=peticija>

5 <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/11/15/opinion/serbia-facebook-ex-plore-feed.html?referer=https://t.co/VoDyQTHaT>

The Media Freedom Group also highlighted its concern about introducing Explore feed. “If we take into the account that in Serbia independent media reaches the audience almost exclusively via Facebook, it’s clear that this move directly affects the audience itself” Gashi said. “Unless the audience does not search for certain information, it will not receive the news. Also, it is worrying and among the six countries where this experiment was introduced, only Slovakia is better ranked by the media freedom index. In all these countries, the problem of media freedom is extremely high. It could change the whole situation in one press of the button. This decision is effectively creating a difference between the media that can pay and those who cannot pay.”¹

Facebook has given back to some users the opportunity to receive news in the main section, although it did not officially comment on the end of the experiment.

When the media and political scene does not leave room for wide discussion and public debate, citizens take things into their own hands and form formal or informal groups of minded people who will fight to achieve their goals. Therefore, we can conclude that the movement against the vaccination of children has so rapidly increased and led to the epidemic of the measles, just because there was a lack of public debate. When citizens do not feel that justice is on their side, they organize themselves to fight for their goals. This is also demonstrated by examples of citizens Cetinjska street who are protesting for days because the street has turned into a party zone², as well as Karaburma residents who cannot sleep from the noise produced by the newly opened shopping center.³

Unless the space for debate and the involvement of citizenship in decision-making processes is not opened, we will witness the situation in which participation will manifest exclusively in the protests of dissatisfied citizens.

1 http://www.danas.rs/drustvo.55.html?news_id=360808&title=Ka-ko+promene+na+Fejsbuku+uti%C4%8Du+na+portale+u+Srbiji%3F

2 http://www.danas.rs/beograd.39.html?news_id=325673&title=San%20o%20mirnom%20snu

5 <http://rs.n1info.com/a343178/Vesti/Vesti/Buka-iz-trznog-centra-seli-gradjanku-inspektori-je-ne-cuju.html>

Miroslav Mijatović

Citizens' Protests in Loznica (after "October the 5th")

The Fight for "Žića's Beach"

After the changes of October the 5th, the first large protest happened in the summer of 2002. Suddenly, machinery for gravel exploitation belonging to the construction company "Stobex" from Loznica appeared on the popular "Žića's Beach". This place is a popular picnic destination at the very bank of Drina, spanning 2 kilometres, with up to 5000 visitors from Loznica region daily during the summer. With the tacit approval of the local authorities, the company "Stobex" entered Žića's Beach with machinery and started gravel exploitation. Without any prior organization and logistics, the dissatisfied citizens, mostly residents of Banja Koviljača, gathered in large numbers on the beach and protected the river bank with their bodies, preventing the company from proceeding with exploitation. The protest was led by an informal group of citizens who enjoyed spending time on Drina and loved "Žića's Beach", around 500 people. The protests and blockade of the company's activities lasted for three days, upon which the local media also joined in, and the company "Stobex", "assisted" by the local authorities, gave up further exploitation. It turned out that the mentioned company had no permission to carry out work on this terrain, and, in the years that followed the change of government in 2004, the local authorities devoted a little more attention to one of the most beautiful beaches in the lower stream of Drina. From then on, Žića's Beach is also advertised through the "Drina Regatta" - an event that takes place every year, with the participation of numerous boats sailing from Zvornik to Žića's Beach. The citizens who revolted at that time did not allow the politicization of their civic protest, and rejected the endorsement of opposition leaders in Loznica.

Protest against the Excessive Presence of Migrants

In 2011, again in Banja Koviljača, a new civic protest took place, this time against the excessive number of asylum seekers at the Asylum Seekers' Centre in Banja Koviljača. Namely, the capacity of the centre was 80 persons, and, according to some estimates, at that moment this tourist town hosted between 2500-3000 asylants, who for the most part stayed in rented houses in "The Beauty of Podrinje". The protest flame was ignited after the arrest of the Afghan national Abdilrashid N, who had, allegedly, raped a woman of British nationality together with a few fellow countrymen. Immediately after this incident, the initial committee of the informal group of citizens "For Banja Koviljača" organized, with the help of the local authorities, a protest in the centre of Banja Koviljača, and banners saying "It's 5 minutes to 12, who is next?" were printed with the black-and-white silhouettes of two juxtaposed faces. On the day of the central protest, more than 2000 citizens gathered in the centre of Banja Koviljača, with members of the informal citizens' association appearing as speakers, alongside with the Professor at the Faculty of Security Studies Zoran Dragišić, whose speech was full of xenophobia and fiery rhetoric.

Two important divisions should be highlighted with regard to this protest. One concerns the city authorities at the time – while the local authorities supported the protests and even (tacitly) helped them logistically, the Serbian government was on the opposite side, in favour of defusing tensions and finding a peaceful solution to the problem. The other division concerned the residents of Banja Koviljača, who were deeply divided at that time. On the one side were the dissatisfied citizens who supported the protests, and on the other the residents who were living off the income generated through trade with migrants: fast-food restaurants, houses for rent, transport, etc. In terms of percentages, the two opposing sides were roughly equal, 50%-50%. The main argument of the protesting citizens was that, with the arrival of asylants, crime rate had risen in this small town, there was fear of infectious disease, and on the day of the protest most children did not attend school. The arguments of the other side rested purely on economic interests, not on humanitarianism, so the outcome of the conflict thus defined was easy to predict. The problem was solved after the reaction of the state authorities, who transferred most of the asylants to other locations in Serbia.

Protest against the Privatization of the Clothing Factory “Moda”

In 2012, on the eve of parliamentary elections, more than 300 disenfranchised and dissatisfied former workers of the once famous clothing factory “Moda” gathered in front of the City Administration in the organization of the “Moda” workers’ union. The secretive process of the privatization of this company had lasted for years, under the supervision of the then URS (United Regions of Serbia, a political party), whose cadres were in the Serbian Agency for Privatization, but also in the Loznica administration. And while the local authorities condemned the protest leaders for politicizing the union and the gathering, the dissatisfied workers stated that the election campaign was an opportunity for them to fight for their rights. The “Moda” company was bought from bankruptcy by the local confectionery producer “Nelly”, known among the locals for its wholehearted support for the promotional activities of URS in many election campaigns. The protests lasted for an entire week in front of the Loznica City Administration, the delegation was met by the mayor himself, but the agreement was not reached. In the end, representatives of the dissatisfied citizens suspended the protest for two days and travelled to Belgrade to meet the relevant Minister, Verica Kalanović, one of the top URS cadres. Promises were given, the protest ended, elections took place, and the dissatisfied workers ended up cheated. And yet, this type of protest never happened again. It is interesting to note that the protesters were, in this case, completely ignored by the local electronic media in Loznica. The only ones reporting on the Loznica protest were correspondents of the public broadcaster Radio Television “Šabac”.

Protest against the creation of a regional sanitary landfill on the “L. Šor” tract

The story of the creation of a Regional sanitary landfill in the area of the City of Loznica dates back to 2010, and remains without a final epilogue as of this day. From the very start, the story was marked by many controversies. The first Decision of the local assembly of Loznica from 22.11.2010 was removed from the assembly’s agenda because of a protest of the residents of Voćnjak and Zajača, the places where, at the

exact location of Vrla strana, the landfill was supposed to be created. The reason for the rebellion was the unwillingness of the local authorities to adequately present the project and communicate with the local residents. About 200 residents of Voćnjak and Zajača blocked the regional road Loznica-Zajača, which was enough of a signal to the local authorities to postpone the final decision about the location. In the meantime, a new location was proposed at “Krivića ada”, only a hundred or so metres from the main river bed of Drina, at Lipnički Šor. Based on false data about the level of subterranean waters in this area, the Institute “Kirilo Savić” from Belgrade produced a positive report and developed the project for the new location, which triggered large protests, not only of the residents of Lipnički Šor, but also of nature lovers and ecologists from the Loznica area.

The second attempt at reaching a decision in the city assembly on 06.09.2011 was also unsuccessful, as it was preceded by a large protest in front of the City Administration, but also on the highway Loznica-Šabac (near Lipnički Šor). However, the local authorities were determined and, facing a protest in front of the very hall of the city assembly, they reached the decision on 09.10.2012 (after the local elections), a decision according to which the location for the Regional sanitary landfill was going to be the tract “Krivića ada”, which caused the dissatisfaction of the majority of residents of Lipnički Šor. The self-organized protests of dissatisfied individuals began to spread, and information about the false data of the Institute KiriloSavić were starting to surface, as well as the fact that the owner of most of the land plots on which the landfill was going to be built was a powerful local, owner of the company “MN” - Marko Nešić. More than 200 residents of L.Šor took part in the frequent protests, as well as some non-governmental organizations, a small number of nature lovers and ecological activists. The local authorities never officially capitulated, although it has now been five consecutive years in which the project of the Regional sanitary landfill is no longer mentioned in the plans of the local authorities, nor in the reporting of the local media. For the whole three years of the fight against the bad project and location for the sanitary landfill, the citizens' protests were ignored by the media.

Protest after the tragic death of Radenko Nikodinović

In early October 2016, Loznica was struck by an affair following the death of a boy, Radenko Nikodinović, from Kozjak near Loznica. The unfortunate boy passed away in Belgrade, at the Institute for Mother and Child, after a seemingly harmless case of a broken arm had resulted in sepsis due to inadequate treatment. After the case had become a national issue, and after the Prime Minister Vučić and the responsible minister Lončar made statements demanding punishments and handing down verdicts without evidence, the boy's parents labeled the local orthopedician Dobrivoj Bojanić as the main culprit and murderer. The campaign against the mentioned doctor was first conducted on social media, asking for blood, after which the local authorities also joined in, renting all billboards in the city and displaying the boy's picture on them, with the promise that the culprits would be brought to justice. Encouraged by such thoughtless acts, the dissatisfied citizens broke the windows of the Orthopedics Department of the Loznica Hospital, and the editorial of the portal "Pakt Info" received death threats for having published the article "Rulja" (Mob) on 14.10.2016 (<http://pakt.org.rs/index.php/sr/2016-05-24-11-41-56/114-rulja>), although the text was not trying to play down doctor Bojanić's guilt, but only drew attention to the fact that the boy would probably had been alive, had the doctors in Belgrade reacted more swiftly. The article was interpreted as an attempt at attenuating the doctor's responsibility, so the relatives of the unfortunate boy stage a protest at the centre of Loznica at the end of October, trying in that way to put pressure on the Prosecutor's Office of the Loznica Magistrate Court. The protest gathered around 500 people, the city centre was blocked for two hours, and, during a peaceful protest walk, the procession of dissatisfied citizens passed by the City Administration, high schools and the main roundabout in Loznica. At the protest there was no violence, and the organizers had the support of all electronic media in the city.

Besjan Pesha

Zharrez

Zharrez is a small village in the south of Albania, next to the Patos Marinza oil field, the largest onshore oilfield in Europe. The oil field has been given in concession to a Canadian Company, Bankers Petroleum, in 2004 and they operate in oil extraction or further explorations. In 2008, BP starts using fracking as a method for oil extraction. As a result the environment suffered a lot. Drinking water is poisoned and cant be used, same for the water used for agriculture and therefore the production was running low since then, but the most devastating outcome is the destruction of the houses where people live due to frequent earthquakes. According to Albanian Institute for Seismology during September-November 2016 there were more than 2700 earthquakes in Zharrez. More than 30 a day. The village practically was living in a big wave and due to that fact houses got cracked, their roofs opened and villagers started to fear for their life. The shakes started only after 2008 after BP started to operate using Frackign methods.¹

Villagers since 2009 have been complaining, but with no results. The government kept promising solutions but will never interfere, and Bankers would continue poisoning land and water and destroy their homes. They asked for our help, NismaThurje a grassroots organization, and we offered to help them organize better.

In December 2017, we organized a hunger strike. The aim was to bring media attention and to have government to talk about Zharrez.²

Media was silent about the hunger strike as it kept silent about the problems in Zharrez. But we were operating on the social media and videos got a good distribution so hundred of thousand of Albanians could follow what was going on.

In parallel with the hunger strike, we organized the villagers to block

1 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/564414657101040/> (a documentary with interviews and footage from the village showcasing the destruction of the houses). Also, <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/535486026660570/> (video showing the school falling apart due to earthquakes)

2 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/536444619898044/> (the moment the hunger strikes begins)

the road that leads to the oil field.¹

On the 8th day of the hunger strike, a group of MPs show up trying to convince the villagers to quit and go home. The villagers kicked them out.²

While the health of the participants in the strike was getting worse every day, the media kept silent about the whole thing. Not a single tv showed what was happening apart from a local small tv in Fier.³

On Septmeber 27, after 10 days of hunger strike, the government decided to form a inter-ministerial group led by the Vice PM witch would evaluate the whole situation and propose solutions to the government within 30 days. The hunger strike was interrupted.⁴

A month passed but nothing happened. The government didn't fulfill any of the duties of the working group. All they tried to do during this period was to silence the organizers of the hunger strike by trying to employ them or threat them in every way possible. They didn't succeed and on February 3d a second hunger strike began.

The media kept silent and so did the government and the political opposition. The only channel to follow the hunger strike was our fb page and other big pages on fb. The online community became very angry with the media keeping silent about it. Especially after the strikers started to suffer from the lack of food and their health conditions worsened. One of the strikes lost his senses while talking to the camera for the online community.⁵

In parallel villagers would go out every day and block the main road for one hour to show solidarity with the hunger strike.⁶

On the other hand, kids started to boycott school to show support for the hunger strike.⁷

1 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/538263463049493/>

2 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/538263463049493/> (MPs visit the hunger strike)

3 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/538403773035462/> (Strikers are taken to hospital)

4 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/538725526336620/>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/557397924469380/>

6 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/559983144210858/>

7 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/561362594072913/>

No matter all the actions taken, the government kept silent and so did the media and the opposition. On the 17 day of the hunger strike we decided to move to a larger action. More than 40 people from Zharrez joined in a walking March towards Tirana 130 km of distance. The aim was to raise more awareness and to resist in front of the Ministry of Energy until 3 requests were delivered from the government: 1. Fracking to be banned as a method with an executive order. 2. Full compensation for the physical damages of the houses. 3 Full rehabilitation of the environment.

The march started on February 22. ⁸People were stopping on the way to congratulate and show solidarity. ⁹The marchers would spend the night outside in tents and people would bring food and water from the nearby cities. The solidarity shown in this march was amazing. ¹⁰Social society activists, actors and professors would join the march for some hours as well and would speak in their Facebook profiles about the problem of Zharrez. ¹¹

After 4 days of march, they made it to Tirana where thousands of people waited for them. ¹²A big protest was held in front of the Ministry of Economy. During the protest police used violence against some of the protesters. One of them was taken to the hospital. ¹³

After the resistance, the government decided to sit on the negotiation table. Negotiations went on for 4 days and marchers were sleeping outside on the open air as the police would not allow the tents. Hundreds would join every day, spend some time with the protesters, bring clothes, food, covers, water or cigarettes and give messages of solidarity. Media started to talk and Zharrez protest became first news everywhere. All the talk shows in the country started to communicate with us to organize talk shows and debates. A first big victory was already achieved. Albanians were hearing what was going on in Zharrez and about the

8 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/563539503855222/>

9 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/563556833853489/>
<https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/563569027185603/>

10 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/563723220503517/>
<https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/564402090435630/>

11 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/564030360472803/>

12 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/564848193724353/>

13 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/564968443712328/>

faults of Bankers Petroleum.

On the 4d day of the resistance the government decided to accept all of our requests. Fracking was banned with an executive order. Full compensation was awarded to the villagers' for the physical damages of the houses with a decision of the Counsel of Ministers as well a full rehabilitation of the area. On the other hand, a process of arbitration was opened with the company to have her accept wrongdoings and pay for everything.¹

1 <https://www.facebook.com/thurje/videos/566663160209523/>

Sonja Stojadinovic

Macedonia beyond her Colorful revolution:
Who were the predecessors of the movement?

Protests 2009-2014

The history of the young Macedonian state took different path when the conservative demo christian political party VMRO-DPMNE won the regular parliamentary elections in June 2006.² In 2008, early parliamentary elections were held in order this government to create stable majority in the parliament. With the local elections in 2009, the government of VMRO-DPMNE in coalition with the Albanian DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) had strengthened their political oversight all levels in the Macedonian institutions.³ Within this position, the project of Skopje 2014 which enormously changed the face of the capital city Skopje in a fake baroque style, has started to be implemented. The rationale and ideology behind for one-way modification of the urban landscape of Skopje was not to create new wave of developing of the city, but complete deleting of the modern face of the city which was created after the earthquake in 1963.

The first step in realization of the above-mentioned project, started in March 2009 with informal announcement that on the central square of Skopje a church will be build. As a reaction of this, 30 people gathered on the central square in Skopje expressing a peaceful protest and demanding the overlay and the original urban design to remain. The group composed young and enthusiastic students of architecture and young architects by expressing their disagreement with the announced project and they called themselves First Archi brigade (Прва Архибригада).⁴ Unfortunately, a second group appeared on the main square, but with opposite intentions. The students were outnumbered and attacked by counter protesters who were waving church flags, shouting “Macedonia” and demand the project for a church to continue. This was the first situation in the period of the ruling of VMRO-DPMNE

2 <http://izbornaarhiva.mk/dokumentacija/.pdf>

3 <http://izbornaarhiva.mk/>

4 http://prvaarhibrigada.blogspot.mk/2010/02/blog-post_23.html

government, when protesters were faced with counter protesters. The attack created reactions of disgust and disbelief in public and asked a question: were those protester a real believers and protectors of the church or party soldiers sent by DPMNE? This question will be answered later in the paper.

This protest was somehow an overtire of the following protests have developed in next 8 years, as citizens answer to the aggressive local and state politics lead by VMRO-DPMNE. The plan for reshaping of Skopje included as well change of the facade of the City mall build in modern style and erecting tens of monuments in the center together with the 23 meters monument of Alexandar the Great. This wasn't simple re-shaping of the city center but a creation of new, invented history and identity of the Macedonian nation that has not any connection with the past and Macedonian tradition. Macedonians were represented as direct descendants of Alexandar the Great, a new identity of so called Antique Macedonians was imposed through those monuments and major changes in the history books were made to backup those false claims.¹ Here, we have to mention announced but not held protests for rebuilding the old Burmali mosque that existed on the main square of Skopje in 15th century.

The following protests by several different reasons but all triggered by harmful political decisions and policies implemented by the government of VMRO-DPMNE were the new face of the Macedonian society. Since the independence in 1992, Macedonian citizens have rarely taken the streets so massively and so persistently in their requirements for change and responsibility from the state institutions. In period 2006-2017 in Macedonia were held 8 election cycles, 4 parliamentary elections, presidential and 2 local elections. On the early parliamentary elections in June 2011, during the celebration of the victory of VMRO-DPMNE, a young boy, Martin Neshkovski, was beaten to death by a police officer and the officials have attempted to hide the case.² This irresponsible behavior has triggered protests for uncovering not only the murderer but the officials who helped him to cover it and escape, as well. Once again,

1 <http://www.dw.com/mk/a-36928817>

2 <http://prizma.mk/ubistvoto-na-martin-neshkoski-bilo-namerno-sokrivano-2/>

the citizens went to the streets united under mutual cause: responsibility of the officials involved in the murder and end of police brutality.³ The protests have resulted with investigation and prosecution of the police officer, but until today no one from the officials has been prosecuted for attempt to hide the murder. Anxious, frightened and angry Macedonian society have started to react with protests on every harmful political decision from the government of VMRO-DPMNE. It is interesting fact that all those decisions like the project Skopje 2014, external testing in both primary and high school education which causes stress and fear among pupils and professors was created by VMRO-DPMNE and their coalitions partners did not have any critic or comment upon it.⁴ They have acted like blind, deaf and completely ignorant partners which primary and only interest is part of the big cake called state budget and business tenders.

In the period between the mass protests against the murder of Martin Neshkovski and students protests in 2014, Macedonian citizens have reacted and protested against other criminal-business oriented governmental decisions. The civil organization AMAN protested against insolent increasing of gas,⁵ electricity and public heating. Citizens in Skopje, Bitola and Tetovo⁶ protested against air pollution which was thousand measure units above allowed limit and was main cause for high number of noted deaths by lung cancer. Citizens went on the streets because the Parliament adopted amendments on the Law on right on abortion which made the access to this right more complicated for women and put their lives in danger⁷ and death of 12 years old girl Tamara Dimovska by complications caused of unwell treatment of scoliosis and rejection of the Ministry of health to pay for her treatment abroad.⁸ Additionally,

3 <http://www.dw.com/mk/a-19211274>

4 http://24vesti.mk/uchenici-deneska-so-protesti-go-slav-at-sv-kiril-i-metodij?page=1&quicktabs_popularna_sodrzina=1

5 <https://goo.gl/cufe3B>

6 <https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/politika/masovni-protesti-vo-tetovo-protiv-zagaduvan-jeto-gragjanite-gi-blokiraa-vlezovite> ¹⁰ <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/25012396.html>

7 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/25012396.html>

8 <https://goo.gl/daGx2c>

the government created a pack of amendments on several laws in area of social insurance that forced people who work on honorarium, to pay medical and pension insurance for themselves.¹ But the top of the almost every day protests was the protest for releasing of the journalist Tomislav Kezarovski who was arrested in March 2013 and sentenced to prison for an article written 4 years earlier.² His arrest came several days after a death in a car crash under suspicious circumstance of the most influential Macedonian journalist, Nikola Mladenov.

Next on the list of decisions that were next trigger for protests was amendment of the Law on high education. These amendments were directly interfering into the autonomy, budgets of the universities in Macedonia and attempt to install some form of external testing for the students. Main reason for those amendments was bigger control of the government over the nursery of intellectuals hidden behind poor explanation to stop corruption among university professors. But the once seen as ignorant, passive and apolitical, the Macedonian students have surprised whole society. More than 4 thousand students went out on the streets protesting and blocking their universities in November 2014.³ In February 2015 the students from several faculties in Skopje have occupied the faculty buildings demanding from the government to withdraw the amendments on the Law on high education. Students organize themselves in Student Plenums who was informal representative body of the protesting students and their demands. In addition, and support of their blockage, the professors from several faculties form their Plenum as well. Main topics were necessary changes not only in the aforementioned Law, but in high education as whole, together with improving the living standard of the students which falls into a second level citizen. The occupation of the faculties lasted 3 weeks and resulted with withdrawing of the amendments.⁴ After these protests and occupations, students were not seen in the society as passive and apolitical

1 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/protesti-u-skoplju-honorarci-protiv-novih-nameta/26848516.html>

2 <https://mk.voanews.com/a/protests-against-journalist-kezarovski-detention/1709995.html>

3 <http://prizma.mk/studentite-protestiraat-vistinata-e-na-nasha-strana/>

4 <http://24vesti.com.mk/prodolzhuva-studentskata-okupacija-na-fakultetite>

but very conscious, critical and citizens with very influential opinion in the society.

Protests 2015

Unwinding the bundle of the Macedonia political an criminal labyrinth have started in March 2015 when the opposition party SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) started to publish wire taped conversations which finally gave proof for all doubts that citizens had for criminal activities of the ruling party. Conversations of approximately 20.000 citizens were wire taped. Politicians, journalists, NGO members, activists, but on the top of the list were all politicians from the VMRO-DPMNE and DUI coalition.⁵ It was obvious that they wire taped themselves in order for bigger control and intimidation. Publishing of selected wire taped conversations have started in March 2015 with uncovering of involvement of highly positioned politicians in fraud of minimum 2 elections cycles, intimidation of voters, money laundering and connection with construction mafia in Skopje. But one conversation was the main trigger for mass protests in Skopje on 5 of May in 2015 which was the starting point for incoming Colorful revolution. The published conversation between now former minister of interior Gordana Jankulovska and the closest cousin of the former prime minister Nikola Gruevski and director of the counter intelligence, Sasho Mijalkov. That conversation has shown to the public their attempts to hide the murder of the young boy Martin Neshkovski in June 2011. Citizens of Skopje the very same day of publishing of that conversation went massively on the streets to protests and ask for justice. Unfortunately, the response of the police was fast and extremely violent. Those protests were not remembered only by the unselected violence of the police towards protester, but towards innocent students who were beaten by the police in the city library. Beaten students did not took participation in the protests and police attacked them under false explanation that they were in search for violent protesters who allegedly hide in the library.⁶¹⁷

5 <http://fokus.mk/video-snimka-od-prislushuvanite-razgovori-na-zaev-jankuloska-stavreski/>

6 <http://www.dw.com/mk/a-38707327>

This bloody afternoon has created informal movement called “I protest” (Протестирам, Protestoj (on albanian)) and their motto was “5 of May until the end”.¹ 18These protests have spread around Macedonia and while they have lasted, almost 30 cities in the state were protesting every day at 6 p.m. In order to decrease the intensity of the protests, the government on 9th of May created a false terrorist attack in Kumanovo (near the border with Serbia) in which actors were special police forces and criminal groups from Kosovo. In this tragic clash, 8 police officers have lost their lives.²19

In opposition of all these protests of ordinary citizens, VMRO-DPMNE have organized counter protests with their members presenting them as revolt towards the existing anti government protests. In comparison of the pictures from the first violent attacks in March 2009 on the central square in Skopje with the pictures of the counter protests, it was very obvious that participants were the same. Members and sympathizers of VMRO-DPMNE.

Abolition and rising of the Colorful revolution

The publishing of the wire taped conversations lead to a political agreement called “The Przhino agreement” among position and opposition under monitoring of international community.³ This agreement lead to creation of Special Prosecutors office responsible for investigation based on the conversations.⁴ The number of suspects started to rise and the list contained known and unknown politicians and businessmen. Under pressure of the VMRO-DPMNE, the president of the country

Georgi Ivanov on 14 of April 2016 have abolished 52 people who were under investigation of the Special Prosecutors office. Previously the image of the president Ivanov was very low due to his blind support of the harmful decisions of VMRO-DPMNE but now his abolition triggered

1 18 <http://protestiram.info/>

2 <http://www.dw.com/mk/a-19243671>

3 <http://faktor.mk/tseliot-dogovor-od-przhino-site-zadovolni-makedonija-pobednik/>

4 <http://www.jonsk.mk/>

protests which ended with burning down his office in the center of Skopje.⁵ After this incident the protests have become more intense, massive and have turn into the legendary Colorful revolution. On the streets of all listed protests since 2009 anybody standing a side was able to see one clear picture: citizens of all ages, nationalities, and economic status united in fight for freedom. The 11 years of DPMNE regime have devastated the state on thousands of levels, but also have created one pillar that was missing among the citizens. The pillar of critical thinking, absence of fear of false authorities and demand for responsibility of the state.

5 [http://novatv.mk/hronologija-protesti-po-odlukata-za-abolitsija /](http://novatv.mk/hronologija-protesti-po-odlukata-za-abolitsija/)



SOCIAL MEDIA AND (IM)OBLIZATION OF ACTORS

Cristina Matiuta

The role of social networks in shaping public space and electoral behaviour: two case studies from Romania

The emergence and development of movements such as Occupy, Anonymous, Arab Spring etc. seem to indicate that the classical representative democracy is outdated and a new form of representation is needed. A central element of the new paradigm of 21st century democracy is the direct and continuous participation of individuals to any decision concerning them, participation possible through the new ICTs. Romania was also affected by this phenomenon, as the case studies briefly exposed in this paper try to emphasize.

United we save Rosia Montana - brief description of a civic protest

In August 28, 2013, a day after the government Ponta adopted a new bill on the exploitation of gold and silver deposits in Rosia Montana perimeter (a mining village in Transylvania known from Roman times, having the Europe's largest opencast gold mine), planning to send it to Parliament, a young environmentalist has bound himself with handcuffs to the government fence, as a sign of protest.¹ The protest's movie, posted on Facebook, gathered soon over ten thousand views. Three days later, after the call to protest on Facebook, several thousand people gathered in Bucharest's University Square, demanding rejection of the law by the Parliament.

The protesters accused that starting of gold mining by *Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC)* company will produce not only an ecological disaster (by the use of cyanide in the extraction process) and the destruction of villages and rich cultural area, but also damage to the Romanian state, which would receive too small royalties fees from this exploitation. Representatives of state institutions and political parties were accused of lack of transparency, incompetence and corruption, favoring a private foreign company. By the end of 2013, being organized on

1 http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/adevarul-despre-noii-revolution-ari-vor-liderii-protestelor-cuprins-romania-1_52b08cc1c7b855ff56c8802b/index.html

social networks, tens of thousands of people protested, almost weekly, in Bucharest and in major cities, making this movement the largest civic protest after the anti-communist protest in Bucharest in 1990.

Who were the participants in these protests? They were people from all social layers, especially young professionals, students, teachers, NGOs activists, artists, engineers, but also retired or unemployed persons. They were united not by a common ideology, but rather by indignation against a style of governing, a way of doing politics, accusing politicians, both those in power and those in opposition they are not acting in the national interest. “USL (The Liberal Social Union) and PDL (The Liberal Democratic Party) are the same misery”- was one of the slogans chanted during protest marches. “We don’t want to sell our country for free to foreigners. We have a corrupted government that is not really listening to our opinions,” said a protestor, during one of the demonstrations in Bucharest. “The government had to make a draft law in order to grant permission to the Canadian company because they couldn’t find any legal way to do it in the last 14 years. What a rough government is this,” said another protester.² Mass-media was also criticized for ignoring the events, being that RMGC paid large sums of money in advertising in Romanian media throughout the years.

One of the characteristics of this movement of protest was its non-hierarchical structure, egalitarian, having no official leaders, being organized through social networks. The protesters were categorized as *hipsters*, old-fashion hippies, unrealistic, starry-eyed, manipulated or even paid by those who have an interest in blocking economic projects.³ Seems to be difficult, for politicians especially, to accept the idea that such actions could be coagulated without hidden reasons and obscure interests, just because people want their voice to be heard and their opinions to be taken into account.

For Rosia Montana protesters communication through social networks was essential. “Do not go to protest without charge your phone before- said one participant. On Facebook you find out how much people

2 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2013/09/romanian-politics>

3 <http://www.gandul.info/puterea-ganduliurosia-montana-lectii-de-la-revolutia-hipsterilor-11289406>

gathered, how many gendarmes are, in what direction protesters take, what avenue will be occupied that evening, who and what was said.... And still there are the attempts to organize future protests and groups of volunteers to go through the neighborhoods and talk to people about the reasons why we continue to go out into the street”.¹

The protests against Rosia Montana project were generally peaceful. Some incidents, as attacking with tomatoes the Ministry of Culture, Mr. Daniel Barbu, who qualified his aggressors as *neo-fascists*, were rather isolated.² Other actions included blocking the traffic on major arteries of circulation in Bucharest, Iasi or Timisoara and the tentative to get into the government headquarters. This occupation of public spaces may symbolize the re-appropriation of citizens on public space that was confiscated by the state.

These protests had both short-term and long-term effects. On the short term, politicians have postponed a decision on the draft law on starting exploitation of gold and silver deposits with cyanide, concluding that they cannot ignore public opinion. The law was rejected by Parliament, not meeting a majority. On the long term, politicians have understood that a new generation has emerged, formed by persons educated in post-communism, apolitical, but focused on political themes, civic involved and aware of its rights and responsibilities. They also realized that these manifestations cross the border of simple protests and express the solidarity of people against the inability of the state institutions to represent and to defend the interests of citizens.

The 2014 Presidential Elections and the Role of Social Networks

”You wrote history! For the first time, the online made the difference”-was the message of Klaus Johannis on his Facebook page, in the night he found that he was elected president of the country. Indeed, the online communication made the difference and the elections’ result have surprised many people for at least two reasons.

Firstly, because Klaus Johannis entered recently in politics at national

1 <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/uniti-salvam>

2 <http://www.digi24.ro/Stiri/Digi24/Actualitate/Stiri/Ministrul+Culturii+Daniel+Barbu+atacat+cu+rosii+la+Cluj>

level and his candidacy was not prepared and announced long before. He was, at the time of his election, the Mayor of Sibiu, at fourth term (elected for the first time in 2000, representing the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, and re-elected in 2004, 2008 and 2012), becoming member of National Liberal Party (PNL) in February 2013 and being elected president of this party, with a large majority of votes (95%) in June 2014. His candidacy at presidency was decided only in August 2014, after an intern competition within the Christian Liberal Alliance (PNL+ PDL). Despite the fact that, in less than two years after he reached PNL, he became its head and candidate to presidency, Iohannis kept rather an outsider image. But this position, that would constitute a handicap for any partisan candidate, turned in fact in his advantage, becoming an option for those dissatisfied with Romanian political leaders and parties on the whole.³ He was perceived by many citizens as a quasi-independent candidate, positioning itself in opposition with president Basescu, with his main rival Victor Ponta, with the entire political class, as a candidate “outside de political games in Bucharest”, as a “man of deeds, not of empty words”.

Secondly, Iohannis’s victory was somewhat surprising because both the surveys’ estimations and the results of the first round seemed to indicate Victor Ponta as a winner. Thus, Iohannis received 30,37% of votes in the first round, Victor Ponta- 40,44%, and the others 12 candidates- under 30% together, at a turnout of 53.18% (9,732,232 millions). What actually happened between the two rounds that this difference, that seemed insurmountable, could be overcome?

The trigger factor was the way in which the Government organized the polling stations in diaspora in the first round of elections. Around four millions of Romanians are living abroad and they formed queues of hundred people at polling stations across European capitals, waiting hours to vote. The mismanagement of the voting process by the Romanian authorities (the insufficient voting booths and stamps and a new procedure to fill in forms which prolonged to much the voting) and especially the refusal to extend the polling stations opening hours, let many people unable to cast their ballot, to exercise this constitutional

3 Alexandru Radu, “A Model of the Romanian Presidential Election Mechanism”, in *SferaPoliticii*, nr. 1 (183)/2015, pp. 6-7.

right, generating indignation and solidarity. For many of them, this was an intentional strategy of Ponta government to exclude Romanians abroad who would have voted against him (in the first round, Iohannis won 46% of votes in diaspora and Ponta only 16%).¹ Sitting for hours in the front of embassies in Paris, London, Wien, Madrid, Munich etc., showing toothbrushes to the cameras to see how long they are prepared to wait to vote, screaming “Down with Ponta government” and promising to return for the second round- all of these have created a strong emotional wave. That followed was a domino effect, the topic being intensely debated in the Romanian media and through the social networks, a series of solidarity protests as sign of support for diaspora taking place, making the Foreign Minister Titus Corlatean to resign.

Between the two rounds, a strong campaign on social platforms, led by young and urban voters and hashtags as #yeslavot (I’m going to vote), #diasporavoteaza (diaspora is voting), #alegeri2014 (elections 2014) raised the importance of going out to vote.² At the same time, the way in which diaspora have communicated with their relatives and friends in the country, their stories about obstructions to vote, have led to greater mobilization to vote for the second round and changed the balance of competition.

As result, the voter turnout rose from 53% in the first round to 64,10% (11 553 152 voters) in the second round and diaspora turnout more than doubled (from 161.000 to 379.000 people). Many voters were still unable to cast their ballot because the electoral legislation did not allow increasing the number of polling stations between the two rounds. This led to violence in cities as Paris, where police used tear gas to disperse the voters left outside the embassy. All these incidents were shared online, irritating and motivating for a higher participation. Suggesting that voters in France should travel from Paris to Nancy to vote, Mr. Teodor Melescanu became the second Foreign minister who resigns within the ten days. So, as Mediafax news agency noted, “the presidential elections

1 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/claudia-ciobanu/romanian-presidential-election-can-you-spot-difference>

2 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/romania/11249449/Romanian-presidential-election-does-Klaus-Iohannis-victory-prove-social-media-can-win-an-election.html>

has been won by patient voters and lost by the authorities”.

It was the largest electoral mobilization in presidential elections since late 90s and the biggest participation difference between the first and second round (almost two millions votes) in electoral history of post-communist Romania. Ten percent plus difference obtained in the first round by Ponta is reversed in the second round in favor of Johannis, who wins elections with 54.43% of the votes.

Conclusions

The case studies briefly presented here demonstrate the great potential of social networks in shaping civic and electoral behavior and even the ability to change the results of elections. In fact, we live a revolution, that of mobile, instant communications, which is completely changing social relationships, from the labor market and how to do business, to interpersonal relations and citizens' relations with political environment and state institutions. “The public space becomes, through social networks, an emotional space. The new emotional space replaces public space and we assist, therefore, to a dramatization of political experience, to a sentimental globalization, especially by psychologize the elements of conflict”³. These case studies support the thesis described in the sociology of communication and show how, through emotions, online environment is transformed into a community of indignation. In this environment, there are no boundaries; the distances disappear, even if very intense emotions are short-lived. People using this medium are more politically sophisticated, their exposure to information as well as their propensity towards civic engagement is greater and their political knowledge increased over time. They must be partners for dialogue and their opinion must be taken into account in order to find the better solutions and to take legitimate decisions.

3 <http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/282/genera-ia-facebook-%C8%99i-convergen%C8%9Ba-media-au-dus-la-victoria-lui-klaus-ihannis>

Afrim Krasniqi

The Virtual Protest And The Fragility Of Social Movement: The Case Of Albania

Introduction

Over the 27 years of transition of Albania from a closed society to an open and democratic country, the nature of protests and social movements has been mostly sporadic, largely dominated by its (bad) political use, and by protests directed against allegedly abusive investment of foreign capital in Albania. The motives behind these particular profiles of protests and civic action are to be sought in the historical tradition and in the particular way in which the Albanian transition unfolded. Differently from most of the former communist countries, Albania did not have political movements in the 1950s, '60s or' 80s, and it also had no significant past tradition of social movements, trade unions, civic protests or a memory of democratic participation mechanisms. In recent years, due to the expansion of social media, the level of social awareness, civic pressure and protest has increased, and social media is effectively seen as the only independent public sphere. Yet in contrast to social and political movements in some Western countries, the Arab Spring, or other countries in the region, such as Romania, etc., the Albania's social or political movements still struggle to become a factor of change and to effectively wield influence on the country's political and public agenda.

Movements And Political System Change

Unlike the other former communist countries in Southeast Europe, the change of Albania's political system in 1990-1991 was initiated by university students. From 8 to 12 December 1990, the students of the University of Tirana held massive political rallies, which paved the way to the advent of political pluralism and parted ways with the one-party system. In the founders' list of the Democratic Party, the first non-communist party in Albania and the first party of the opposition to be established since 1923, 90% of the signatories were students, the rest were

professors and university employees¹. For this reason, the students of those years had a lot of public attention, as they had a real opportunity to play a role in the political developments that followed, and a great many of them went up the ladder of high politics. The explosion of youth in politics was jeopardized by its own success, by their identification with the new political system, and of course by their failures.

The multiparty system was installed in Albania at the same time when the people received the right to be organized in civil society organizations and to develop independent media². A general tendency to enter the political stage, the need for rapid and profound changes, and the prevalence of the political confrontation agendas over all other issues of relevance undermined the efforts for greater investment in civil society. On the other hand, around 80% to 90% of the first wave of the massive migration to Italy, Greece and other countries during 1991 consisted of young people, mainly young people involved in the process of democratic change with a high potential to influence in their local communities. As a consequence, in the period 1992-1996, the public activity of the groups who had a high potential to influence society, especially youth, was limited to the youth forums of political parties, electoral campaigns and other aspects of politics. Other movements towards social, ecological, media or other aspects of civil society were minimal and their result was negligible.

The political and social crisis of 1997 that came over Albania following the bankruptcy of large Ponzi schemes led to the fall of the state, the weakening of public institutions, to protests and to a new migration wave. During the crisis, youth groups from all social extractions were divided between two opposing fronts. Most of them joined the protests and demonstrations, while a minority opposed such protests and the consequences that followed. In the city of Vlora, the centre of the anti-government protest movement, the catalyst for the citizens' mobilization was the initiative of a group of university students who staged a hunger strike with political demands. During 1997-1999, there were other cases of political use of youth groups, especially students,

1 Biberaj, Elez; *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy*, Westview Press, NY, 1999.

2 Krasniqi, Afrim: *Political Parties in Albania 1912-2006*, Tirana, 2006.

with protests or hunger strikes, but in any case without much significant influence. The following years 1999-2002 were characterized by little or no impact of civil society, youth groups and social movements.

The short-lived success of the anti-corruption youth movement

Along with the stabilization of the political and social situation in the country and the shift of political confrontations from the street to the institutions, the Albanian society had to face new challenges such as high levels of corruption, political scandals, and arrogance in governance. These three elements became the main source of inspiration for the youth movements of 2003-2005, which were the first social and civic protests to take place in Albania since 1991. There were 400 to 800 NGOs at that time in Albania. Out of them only some 200 NGOs were active. Of these only 25 dealt with youth groups and their problems. At least two youth organizations, “Mjaft” (Enough) and “CAO- Citizens Advocacy Office”, were identified in the public life for playing an active role and making media headlines with their public initiatives and activities³.

The “Mjaft” organization, strongly supported by international donors, mostly from Scandinavian countries, created an effective network of NGOs, journalists, influential individuals, and held frequent protests against corruption, corrupt politicians, and bad policies. Their initiatives were in high fashion and received considerable support from citizens and positive media coverage. According to their own reports, over 150,000 citizens joined their activities within a single year, making “Mjaft!” Albania’s most successful movement for that period. Its initial impact was positive, but the duration of its success was short, because its leaders aspired to enter politics and consequently pursued a political agenda. As a result, “Mjaft” lost its influence once the political rotation after the general elections of 2005 took place. The leader of “Mjaft”, Erjon Veliaj, became an important politician in the Socialist Party in Albania (starting from 2007), and later (2013-2015) he became a Member of Parliament and Minister. Since 2015, he is the Mayor of Tirana.

The second influential youth organization was “CAO”. It focused on

3 Afrim Krasniqi: *Civil society. The most detained element of Albanian transition, “ILLYRIUS”, nr.1, faqe 163-182, 2014.*

anti-corruption and abuse of power, transparency in political financing and decision-making. In the same way as “Mjaft”, “CAO” established a network of partners with civil society organizations, media and public personalities. It conducted an intense schedule of public activities, including protests with substantial citizen participation, and made headlines on the positive results of its work. Both “Mjaft” and “CAO” received generous financial support from Western diplomatic representations, and maintained political ties with the opposition. “CAO” had the same end as “Mjaft”, - its leaders entered politics. CAO’s Director, Kreshnik Spahiu was appointed as deputy chair of the High Council of Justice, the main governing body of the Albanian judicial system. Once his mandate as deputy chair of the High Council of Justice was over, he founded a nationalist political party, the Red and Black Alliance. His party competed in the parliamentary elections 2013 and again indirectly in 2017, but it failed to secure parliamentary representation.

The period from 2003 to 2005 and especially 2004 marked the culmination of the visibility and public outreach of these organizations in particular and of the youth and civic movement in Albania in general. However, their success came more because of the added political momentum, of the increasing public dissatisfaction with the government and following to frequent political scandals, and first and foremost because of the active promotion of such organizations by the Western diplomatic representations, rather than because of some internal process of self-awareness and revitalization of the civic conscience. It is worth pointing out that despite of all their success, the two highly successful NGOs “Mjaft” and “CAO” pursued a bitter rivalry towards each other and there was not even a single moment of cooperation between them.

Passing from local protests to wide-scale initiatives

After 2007-2008, a new form of protest developed, - small protesters’ groups volunteering to drive initiatives to protect public interest. Most of these activists organised protests outside of and not related to their areas of residence. For example, a protest that lasted for several weeks took place in the city of Vlora, in South-Eastern Albania, against the construction of a large Italian-financed fuel plant. The protests escalated into open confrontation with the government, and the case continued

with court proceedings at all levels. The last resort for protesters in Albania is the referendum, but the latest request for a local referendum against an investment that was deemed as harmful to the environment was rejected by the Central Election Commission and then by the high-level judiciary.

Despite its initial failure, the Albanian ecological protest actions, which latter also turned into a fully-fledged social and political movement, encouraged other environment protection initiatives against arbitrary acts of central and local authorities. A similar effort took place against another Italian-financed project to build a large waste processing plant in the city of Durres, which would process waste imported from Italy. Several protests focused on environmental protection issues took place in this period, with their frequency increasing from 2012 to 2017.

During 2012, several youth and civil rights groups formed networks in reaction against the plans of the right-wing government of Prime Minister Sali Berisha to import urban waste from Italy and process it in Albania. The movement was joined by a large number of organizations and individuals who initiated a collection of signatures for the purpose of holding a national referendum to decide on the issue. With the help of the left-wing opposition, more than 50,000 signatures were gathered that matched the limit required by the Constitution. In March 2013, the President of the Republic accepted the decision of the Court on holding a national referendum and announced the date of the referendum on 22 December 2013. In June 2013 parliamentary elections were held and then the left wing opposition won. The first act of the new government was the suspension of the law on waste imports, making the referendum unnecessary.

Less than a month after the resolution of the waste import crisis, the left wing government of Prime Minister Edi Rama, secretly negotiated to dismantle the chemical weapons identified by the UN in Syria inside the territory of Albania. After the news was made public by Western media, there was an immediate critical reaction against the government's decision in Tirana and in other cities of Albania. Civic groups, young people and especially students started mass protests. The protests organized by "*The Alliance against the Import of Waste*" dominated social networks, print media, televisions and forced the government to officially declare withdrawal from such project within a few days. Given its massiveness,

the civic protest of November 2013 remains the largest youth-based, civic non-political movement in Albania throughout the transition period of the country. Its greatest success was not the prevention of waste imports, because the same left-wing government in 2016 and again in 2017 reinstated and passed laws in the parliament on urban waste imports; the real victory of the protest was the creation of a tradition and belief that through civic reaction objectives of public interest can be achieved.

Based on these experiences, reactions of civic movements have increased over the recent years. For example, there have been about 10 protests with an environmental focus against investments that are considered as damaging to the environment and tourism in the touristic areas of Valbona (Tropoja), Përmet, Skrapar, Devoll, Vlorë, Dibër, Mat, etc. Several protests have been initiated for the protection of cultural heritage in some areas of the country, protests have been held against abusive investments of certain individuals with government backing, other protests have been launched against laws or special acts of central and local government bodies. Different social groups with critical stances on proposed changes in the legislation on higher education, changes in the environmental legislation, legislation on concessions for public utility services, or legislation on other social and administrative issues, have been subject to classical forms of protests by petitions, awareness campaigns with local or national focus, legal initiatives, as well as through lawsuits in courts and denunciations to the prosecutor's office.

Problems and expectations

At the conclusion of this brief analysis on the history and potentials of youth social movements in Albania, it is worth mentioning that over the last 27 years Albania has witnessed two successful models of protests and civic movements: political protests (1990, 1991, 1997, 1998) and protests against abusive investment of foreign capital¹ and foreign interventions (2004, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2017). The focus on other types of protests and especially as far as massive social movements are concerned is still at an early stage. Social media continues to have a motivating role in

¹ Afrim Krasniqi: *Civil society. The most detained element of Albanian transition, "ILLYRIUS", nr.1, faqe 163-182, 2014.*

creating a new model of zealous and hyperactive virtual protester. There are some elements, which have influenced the above mentioned issues.

The first element is related to tradition. The Albanian society has little or no historical tradition of civic protest. The country was subjugated for more than 46 years to a highly repressive Communist regime that banned protest and freedom of speech by virtue of the Constitution of that time. The concept of “*voluntary work and volunteerism*” has been massively misused and abused during the communist regime², mostly for the purpose to ideologically brainwash young people and to use them to do unpaid work; consequently nowadays it continues to remain rather unpopular in Albania. On the other hand the concept of protest in a democratic society has been challenged the substantial lack of public support and by the fragility of civil society³. The agenda of civil society groups continues to be oriented by the international donors, and such orientation often contrasts with the real needs of the country. Other actors, such as academic institutions, religious communities, interest groups etc., have a highly pragmatic behaviour towards governance and are neutral to civil initiatives, including those involving the general public interest.

The second element relates to the overwhelming power of political parties in Albania. Much of the civil society-based protests have failed to achieve positive results largely due to the defects of the representative democratic system in Albania, but also due to the negative role played by political parties⁴. Whenever civic groups gather to protest and there are signs of massiveness that might be triggered by an emerging cause for civic action, opposition parties strive to profit by joining the protest, infiltrate it, and thus compromise its civic cause and drain its strength. On the other hand, the biggest protests over the last two years in Albania have been possible thanks the political engagement of the opposition (in February and May 2017), an indication that in Albania the mobilizing power of political parties is significantly greater than all the civil society groups.

The third element is the bi-partisan nature of state administration

2 Afrim Krasniqi: *Civil Society in Albania*, p.16, Tirana, 2004, re.p.2016.

3 *Partner of Albania*, NGO Directory, Tirana 2006.

4 *Cit. Civil Society in Albania*, Tirana, 2004 and re.p.2016.

and its unchallenged dominance over the Albanian society. In contrast to other countries, including the countries in the region, the real chances of new political movements, new parties including also those with a populist, anti-system, radical or nationalist focus, are minimal. Electoral processes continue to be contested, the electoral system is controlled by the two main parties in all of its elements, and all efforts to set up new political movements have resulted unsuccessful. There is also limited space for local and national referendums, legal initiatives and other forms of civil representation in decision-making.

The fourth element that de-motivates civic action in Albania is the high level public disbelief towards the thesis that action and protest can achieve positive changes. The violent political crises of 1991, 1997, 2011, or the political rotations 2005, 2013, etc., have failed to produce better governing and decision-making models. Local institutions, including the judicial system, are not yet in a position to deliver justice, and that also applies on cases of conflicting interests between state, parties and civil society.

Nonetheless, the perception of the clash between these critical societal elements has produced a positive outcome, - more awareness of the need for change and a renewed focus on the importance of citizen's response. Social media are a major catalyst for this process. The model of virtual protest the massive reaction to social issues over the social media has had a positive effect of liberation, but let on its own devices, it remains insufficient and not fully inclusive. Strengthening horizontal representation mechanisms, especially in relation to the development an active civil society, is a major challenge that loudly calls for support in Tirana. The younger generation now tends to debate topics that used to be simply taboo, such as relationship between individual and state, between state and the EU integration process, between private companies and citizens or between citizens of and the political system. The protracted economic crisis, the frustration over great expectations from the democratic process and the impact of movements in other countries has had a tangible impact on the society that has resulted in an increased sensitivity, but also in an increasingly vocal civic response in Albania.

IV

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS A FORM OF
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

Bojana Selaković

The Campaign: Law¹ for Mums – The Power Rests with the Citizens

The citizens' participation in the area of social policy in Serbia in the past seventeen years has for the most part been reduced to the engagement of a few civil society organizations with expertise in the areas of human rights, protection from discrimination and social inclusion. Bearing in mind the weakness of the institutional frame which regulates the participation of the public in the making of regulations and creation of policies, these organizations mostly participated in the final stages of the process, and the degree of success of their attempts to influence the decision makers varied depending on their capacities and the methods of public representation they used.

The campaign for changing the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children, realized by the associations "Roditelj" (Parent) "Srbija u pokretu" (Serbia in Motion) and "Centar za mame" (Centre for Mums) introduced a different methodology to the attempts at influencing the change of the institutional frame – in addition to expertise in the relevant area, it was also based on direct participation of the target group affected by the changes, as a way of exerting pressure on relevant institutions.

All three of the mentioned associations are registered in Belgrade, but they pursue their aims on the whole territory of the Republic of Serbia. The Association "Roditelj" (Parent)² was founded in 2006 on the basis of an informal group of parents who recognized the lack of systemic support to parenthood in Serbia. It operates as an informal network with 10 branches in different cities across Serbia, through which it influences, by public advocacy, the relevant national and local institutions with the aim of creating policies which will be supportive of families with children. The second domain of the branches' activities concerns the direct support to parents and children with the aim of facilitating

1 The campaign name in Serbian is an untranslatable word play: "P(B)ravo za mame", combining the Serbian word "pravo" (law, right) with the internationalism "bravo" (Bravo for Mums).

2 <http://www.roditelj.org/>

their everyday functioning in various segments. Although the branches are autonomous in their work, a certain number of activities is realized jointly. One of these is “Roditelj Info centar” (Parent Info Centre) – a support service which combines professional and peer support for parents and future parents. The centre provides answers to questions pertaining to social protection, healthcare, legal protection, upbringing and education through direct or telephone contact, and also via e-mail and social networks.

The Citizens’ Association “Srbija u pokretu” (Serbian in Motion)³ was founded in 2009 with the aim of strengthening, motivating and encouraging individuals to actively and jointly participate in improving the quality of life in Serbia. The founders and members of this association, although coming from various professions, believe that every individual has the capacities and resources to improve the quality of his or her life and ask the state institutions for assistance, but also to do something for him(her)self and the state. The association has, since its founding, realized a number of campaigns in different areas, all of which aimed to encourage citizens in effecting social change, involved the direct participation of various social groups depending on the campaign’s theme, and employed the leadership and social organization techniques used by volunteers that are taught at the Harvard Kennedy School – Hauser Center for Non-Profits.⁴

The association “Centar za mame” (Centre for Mums)⁵ has been active since July 2012, and is a completely volunteer-based organization which organizes its activities through networking, without finances, and thanks to resources of a team of like-minded citizens from the entire country. The Centre for Mums has branches in Novi Sad, Niš and Šid. It conducts a number of activities that provide support to mothers and future mothers in Serbia, organizes training courses and stimulates networking within this target group.

Given its direct contact with expectant mothers and women giving birth, as well as their families, the Association “Roditelj” (Parent) has, since its founding, followed the regulations concerning the financial

3 <http://srbijaupokretu.org/>

4 <https://cpl.hks.harvard.edu/hauser-institute>

5 <http://centarzamame.rs/>

help to families with children. During several years of its work, it has mapped the shortcomings of the institutional framework, primarily on the basis of frequent contacts regarding certain problems. One of these concerned the mode of payment of the maternity allowance. The current regulations require that the allowance be paid by the employer, who can then get a refund, through a bureaucratized procedure, from the relevant local authorities. Because of the lack of institutional framework on the one hand, and the reduced capacity of the state inspection agency on the other, in practice a large number of employed women often face month-long waiting for the first (out of twelve) allowance payments, and long stalls between two payments. If the employers are conscientious in following the regulations and are paying the allowances simultaneously with the salaries of other employees, they are facing (because of the inefficiency of the system) long periods of waiting for the refunds, while they at the same time have to provide the means for paying the person who is replacing the mother at work.

Because of all this, a large number of employers are in practice evading the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children, which means that, after paying the allowance for the first month of maternity leave, they don't make the next payment before they get the money from the local authorities. The labour inspection does not react to this automatically, but waits for the complaints of the directly affected women, who rarely dare to use this mechanism for fear of damaging the good relations with the employer. Upon the analysis of these practices, in 2010 the association "Parent" formulated a new solution that should decrease the burden on the employers and establish reliable financial inflows for women during maternity leave, through direct payments of maternity allowances. This model was immediately presented to the responsible Ministry of Work and Social Policy, which rejected the proposal with the explanation that such form of payment would create pressure on the budget of the Republic of Serbia, given that the payment of maternity allowance would be equalized, in the manner of payment, with pensions and other social allowances, and would require clearly defined deadlines for payment on monthly basis.

After the unsuccessful attempt at advocacy at the Ministry, in the second half of 2013 the movement united with "Srbija u pokretu" (Serbia in Motion) and "Centar za mame" (Centre for Mums) to form the informal

initiative “P(b)ravo za mame” (Law for Mums), which had the aim of amending Article 13 of the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children, in order to guarantee direct payment of allowances to employed mothers instead of the previous practice of paying through employers. A joint coordination team was formed, which included the team leader of “Serbia in Motion” and three members from each association. The coordination team presented a strategy after careful planning and analysis, and in the aftermath of a month-long preparatory period, the campaign officially started on 8. March 2014.

The conduct of the campaign was completely based on the method of community organizing developed by the Harvard lecturer Marshall Ganz¹, which was used in the United States several times for solving important societal problems, but also in the first presidential campaign of Barack Obama. “Serbia in Motion” has conducted several campaigns based on this methodology, so the coordination team based its strategy on their previous experience, on the one hand, and on the relevant expertise of the Association “Parent” in the area of social policy and support for parents in Serbia, on the other. The third important resource was a strong network and direct contact with a large number of women and members of their families that the Associations “Parent” and “Centre for Mums” had had. The coordination team specified the internal relations and division of responsibility between all three associations and defined a clear action plan. Its most important segment related to the structure of the campaign team, which, in addition to four members of the coordination team, was to include (following the so-called “snowflake” structure) a total number of 250 women (pregnant women, recent mothers and members of their families), who were all directly affected by the existing method of the payment of maternity allowances. All of the four members of the coordination team had the duty to motivate three more women to participate. The process of forming the “4x4” teams lasted until December 2013. The structure that was formed in that way was supposed to ensure, through the same method, the participation of the targeted number of women. Training in community organization was provided for members of the “4x4” teams, which ensured the strengthening of their capacities in the areas of public appearance,

1 <http://marshallganz.com/>

leadership, motivating of new members, defining the goals and operational methods of conducting the campaign. The training was conducted by the experienced coaches from “Serbia in Motion”, who were educated in this method, but who also possessed direct experience in the realization of campaigns aiming at some form of social change in Serbia.

The second important element of this methodology was leadership based on the responsibility of all team members. Every newly included woman was to assume a part of responsibility for realizing the campaign, which was supposed to ensure the overall success. Also, during the planning of the strategy, the coordination team chose to address the members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia as representatives of legislative authority, instead of the responsible ministry as a branch of executive authority, as previous experience had demonstrated their rigidity in reacting to this initiative. At the operational level, every one of the 250 women included was to conduct a 1:1 conversation with one member of parliament. If the members of parliament accepted to support this initiative, they would be given the opportunity to be photographed with the poster “I Vote for Mums”, which was meant to safeguard their support for the initiative on the voting day.

On 8. March 2014, the start of the campaign with the aim of changing the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children was officially announced.¹ Over the next three months, members of the “4x4” teams recruited a total of 250 women and became leaders of their mini-teams. A clear system of responsibility, information sharing and vertical oversight of the realization of the campaign was established. Every one of the 250 women had the duty to directly contact and talk to one member of parliament and explain the importance of this change based on her own experience. The members of the coordination team had the additional obligation of determining the way in which the proposal would be introduced into the agenda of the National Assembly. The conversations with the members of parliament lasted until the end of summer of 2014, at which point a total of 167 members expressed their support for the proposal.

The campaign attracted a lot of attention in the media and among citizens on social networks, thanks to the strategic planning of public

1 <https://www.bebac.com/vesti/pocela-kampanja-p-b-ravo-za-mame>

relations that was part of the campaign's action plan. The opposition members of parliament accepted the initiative from the start and were photographed with campaign activists, even offering to introduce the proposal into the assembly's agenda themselves. In light of the existing practice in the Parliament, members of the coordination team estimated that this move would be counterproductive, so that, in terms of the formal submission of the initiative, they focused on the largest parliamentary group – that of the Serbian Progressive Party. Its then-president Zoran Babić refused to assume responsibility for the legislative initiative, and directed the members of the coordination team toward the then-minister of finances, Lazar Krstić, and the minister of work and social policy, Aleksandar Vulilin, with the promise that his parliamentary group would certainly support this proposal if it came from the Government. Both ministers expressed their support for the initiative, well aware of the campaign's visibility in the public.²

In September 2014, an inter-ministerial working group for changing the Law on Financial Assistance to Families with Children was formed, which invited representatives of the Associations “Parent”, “Serbia in Motion” and “Centre for Mums”. After a year of work, the working group drafted the amendments to the law, which included the proposal of the campaign “P(b)ravo za mame” (Law for Mums). The legal amendments were debated publicly until January 2015, but have still not reached the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, due to the lack of inter-sectoral coordination regarding other aspects of the law which have in the meantime become subjects of debate. According to the latest available information, adoption of the amendments is expected by the end of 2017.³

Although the initiative “P(B)ravo za mame” has still not been adopted, and hasn't come into force, one could conclude that it presents a successful example of influencing the decision makers through civic activism. Instead of the participation of citizens and civil society in the

2 http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/mame_dobile_podrsku_i_ministara_vulina_i_krstica.55.html?news_id=284650

3 <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/djukic-dejanovic-do-kraja-godine-ce-zakonom-o-finansijskoj-podrsci-porodici-bitikdngq0n>

debate on the already drafted proposal of the Government, the campaign introduced an entirely new mechanism and form of participation, which included the drafting of amendments together with representatives of the state.

What distinguishes this initiative from other ones, that were initiated but never realized, is precisely a combination of the established methods of advocacy within the civil society in Serbia, but also the enabling of the direct participation of the affected target group, which secured additional legitimacy with the decision makers. On the other hand, careful planning, analysis of the situation, of risks, potential allies and opportunists enabled a realistic understanding of the environment and the devising of appropriate strategies. The participation of citizens in the campaign was motivated by the direct distribution of responsibility, which turned out to be an efficient method of leadership. For the whole duration of the campaign, members of the coordination team had a special responsibility for the internal communication between all of the 250 women included, which was a special segment of the strategy. Each conversation with a member of parliament was celebrated, and every woman who told her story was specifically credited for contributing to the campaign. In that way, motivation for participating was preserved to the very end of the campaign, which showed that it is possible to influence decision makers in Serbia through an active and participative process, with a clearly defined goal, careful and comprehensive strategy, the estimation of the varying capacities of different actors included and a changed style of leadership, within which it is the citizens who assume responsibility.

Darja Galović

The Initiative Defend the Right to Choice

In Croatia, the right to abortion has in the past years become a subject of debate and has been challenged. The religious conservative association *U ime obitelji* (In the Name of the Family) has started an initiative for prohibiting abortion, which culminated in October 2016, when the association submitted its Request for the Assessment of the Constitutionality of the 1978 Law on the Right to Abortion. The assessing of constitutionality of the law on abortion was also requested by the association *Hrvatski pokret za život i obitelj* (The Croatian Movement for Life and Family) in 1991. The request from 2016 aimed at declaring the right to abortion unconstitutional, and abortion was supposed to be allowed only in cases of a threat to the life of the mother. The prohibiting of abortion was justified, according to the association *U ime obitelji* (In the Name of the Family), because the unborn child also has a right to life, and the right to life is a fundamental human right. In the association's view, life begins with conception, and woman has the right to decide about her own body as long as she doesn't decide for someone else's body too. On 21. February 2017, the Constitutional Court rejected the proposal for the assessment of constitutionality, and ruled that the Croatian Parliament was to pass a new law within two years which would be congruent with the decision of the Constitutional Court. The association In the Name of the Family organized a gathering named "Hod za život" (Walk for Life), which took place on 21. May 2016 at the King Tomislav Square in Zagreb. This gathering brought together several thousand people opposed to abortion.

The initiative of the association In the Name of the Family was met with a strong reaction of activists, and of all those opposed to the prohibiting of abortion. A few hundred supporters of the right to abortion were gathered by the citizens' initiative *Obrani pravo na izbor* (Defend the Right to Choice), at a gathering organized on the same day as the "Walk for Life" at the adjacent square. The procession of the "Walk for Life" gathering was blockaded by participants of the the right to abortion protest with whistles and drumbeat. There was some jostling, but no one was hurt and there were no major incidents. Two girls standing in front of the "Walk for Life" procession, advocates of the right to abortion,

were arrested and later released. Along the route of the “Walk for Life”, pavement graffiti which read “The Right to Life” appeared, and were attributed to the initiative Defend the Right to Choice. The association Vigilare, one of the associations which advocates for the prohibition of abortion and which supported the “Walk for Life”, reported the graffiti to the police with the explanation that these writings were a blatant provocation of those who would take part in the walk.

The initiative Defend the Right to Choice gathers feminist activists, initiatives and organizations which react to the threats to reproductive rights. This initiative was started by the Women’s Network of Croatia, whose coordinator is Bojana Genov. The initiative fights for the right to a safe, legal and affordable abortion. The activists argue that the prohibition of abortion denies women the right to freely decide about their own life, and that abortion is currently accessible only to some women, those with the financial means to afford it. The initiative does not consider the right to abortion to interfere with the right to motherhood, to public and affordable kindergardens, nor to income that enables a dignified life of the family – on the contrary, all these rights are necessary for a safe and healthy life of the individual, the family and society. They believe that the denying of rights to someone is not the way to guarantee rights to others, and that the attack on the reproductive rights makes the society repressive and exclusionary – they conclude that we should put an end to the criminalization of abortion. Members of the initiative explain that their struggle for the right to decide about one’s own body is a struggle against the infiltration of radical right-wing Christian associations into the agencies and committees that draft laws, a struggle against the harmful practices such as the firing of pregnant women, the adoption of a harmful labour law, the struggle against unemployment and the abolishing of permanent contracts, against the dissolution of social services, the struggle for accessible public healthcare, for public kindergardens, for timely education, for free contraceptives, a struggle for women and for life.

The initiative considers that reproductive health is a social issue which requires publicly accessible healthcare institutions. They stress that unemployed women, students, women without healthcare security, women from rural areas, those who are employed part-time, women without family support and that of the broader community, women

who are victims of violence and asylum seekers, cannot freely decide whether to abort to give birth, because of the lack of financial means which are necessary for freely deciding. Since these women do not have these benefits, they thereby do not have the “right” to safe maternity and parenthood. For this reason, in addition to demanding the right to abortion, the initiative Defend the Right to Choice demands the creation of adequate conditions for planned parenthood and financial independence of women who wish to give birth and raise children. In addition, the initiative demands a publicly available register of doctors who invoke the right to conscientious objection and refuse to perform abortion, with the explanation that they are thus making abortion less accessible, and thereby forcing women to undergo illegal and incompetently performed abortions. They stress that the right to abortion is both a women’s and a class issue, since the “oppression of women has to be reflected upon in the context of the material conditions of production and reproduction of capitalism”.

On 20. May 2017, the gathering “Walk for Life” was organized again, and the procession moved along Ilica toward the main Zagreb square, the Ban Jelačić Square, holding the banner “For a fundamental human right – life”. Activists of the initiative Defend the Right to Choice blocked the procession’s way holding a banner “The Walk for Life tramples women”. They were standing in Ilica with banners saying “115.048 women in Zagreb live without income”, “We won’t give up our bodies”, “The walk for life is our march into darkness”, “Hunt for women’s rights”, and many others, while the procession of the “Walk for Life” was passing by. At the Ban Jelačić Square activists sat down on the sidewalk and halted the procession, with several of them being arrested and released from custody later in the afternoon with misdemeanor charges. In Croatia, Christian believers who oppose abortion have begun gathering in front of hospitals and praying, which is another aggravating circumstance for women who want to have abortion. The “40 Days for Life” campaign is a campaign that wants to discourage women from aborting. Believers in 28 Croatian cities were standing in front of hospitals and praying against abortion as part of the campaign. In addition, this initiative engages in the healing of women who have had abortion, the conversion of the medical staff, and offers spiritual, moral and material assistance to women and men who decide to have abortion. This pro-life prayer initiative

originated in 2004 in Texas, and was initiated by the local Christian communities. It is held in countries around the world, and in 2014 it was held in 251 cities in 11 countries.

Vedrana Bibić from the Platform for Reproductive Rights, an activist of the initiative *Defend the Right to Choice*, has argued that this initiative, and all other actions of the neoconservative groups, are “an imported American campaign that, under the guise of a peaceful gathering, and taking on human rights discourse on the right to express different opinions and the right to peaceful gathering, has been harassing patients in hospitals for years.” She thinks that these actions should be banned because, even if we ignore their contents, they disturb the peace of patients and hospital staff. According to Vedrana Bibić, “the growth of such initiatives in the current socio-economic context should not surprise us - they always appear at a time when, during and after the economic crisis, the loss of material security is recognized by the neoconservatives as an attack on the nuclear family, and they take, as a symbol of that attack, ‘the most unprotected’ link, the embryo.”

The Initiative *Defend the Right to Choice* also stands for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The Istanbul Convention is the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. In Croatia, the convention was signed but not ratified. Conservative associations standing behind the “Walk for Life” have opposed the ratification of this convention with the explanation that it promoted gender ideology. Namely, the Convention requests that violence and discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, skin color, language and religion, should be combated. Sanja Kovačević from the Platform for Reproductive Rights has stated in an interview that she did not consider the neoconservatives the only ones responsible for postponing the ratification. According to her, there is “a justified fear of the obligations that the Convention carries for signatory states as a form of control mechanism.” The Initiative considers that the ratification of the Istanbul Convention would greatly contribute to the better protection of women regarding abortion and the faster and more efficient resolution of the above mentioned issues. The latest protest of the initiative *Defend the Right to Choice* was held on the occasion of the Global Day of Action for Safe and Legal Abortion on 28. September 2017, at Cvjetni Square in Zagreb, and all the initiatives’ requests were

presented at it. Further protests have been announced.

In Croatia, 6,904 abortions were reported in 2016, out of which 2,520 abortions were carried out at a woman's request. Out of the total number of women who have had an abortion, 45.3% of women were married. The number of abortions was significantly lower than in the previous years. Among the women who have requested an abortion, most numerous are those women who have not given birth yet and those with two children. 58 legally conducted abortions of minors (up to 18 years) were recorded in 2016. Croatia belongs to the group of countries with the lowest rate of intentional abortions among girls under 20 years of age. No deaths from abortion were recorded in 2016. Due to complications caused by abortion, 173 women were hospitalized (2.5% of total abortions). The highest rate of abortion per 100,000 fertile women was recorded in Istria County, and the lowest in the County of Dubrovnik-Neretva. The data are taken from the report of the Croatian Institute for Public Health for 2016.



**POSTSOCIALIST VISIONS OF (ANTI)
CAPITALISM**

Savo Manojlović and Marina Pavlić
Nine Teachings from the Fight for the
Freedom of Entrepreneurship

„The “Fight for the Freedom of Entrepreneurship” is a project that began in May 2017, organized by the Association for the Protection of Constitutionality and Legality (UZUZ) together with numerous businessmen who opposed the unconstitutional mandatory membership in the Serbian Chamber of Commerce (CSC), which would cost the Serbian economy 2.15 billion dinars annually. Serbia in Motion, an organization whose expertise lies in organizing the community and empowering all individuals and groups to realize the changes that they wish to see in their environment, provided mentor support for the whole duration of the project.

In the course of the campaign, an initiative to assess the constitutionality of compulsory membership in the CSC was submitted. Support from 47 members of parliament was obtained, after which a process for assessing constitutionality was started, and an arbitration of a plenum of 15 judges of the Constitutional Court was secured, thereby avoiding the possibility that a small council of three judges reject the case.

A large number of businessmen, national economic associations (the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, the Association of Hotels and Restaurants and the Association of Distributors of Beverages), as well as the regional ones (from Zrenjanin (ZREPOK), Užice, Leskovac ...) have supported UZUZ activities.

After a lot of pressure from the press, the Chamber of Commerce abandoned the existing way of calculating the membership fee (according to the number of employees) and moved to the calculation based on the amount of income. Although this change promises significant savings for the Serbian economy, it is still burdensome for many companies.

In March 2017, UZUZ has, together with numerous businessmen and business associations, called all businessmen to join a mass boycott of membership fees. In response to the request of the Progressive Club, the SCC has stated that there is no data on the paid membership fees and that the business entities pay this “obligatory” membership fee at their own discretion, which are clear indicators of a successful boycott that has taken on massive proportions according to all indicators.

These are 9 key pieces of advice to future creators of change from the Fight for the Freedom of Entrepreneurship.

1. Don't Chase The Big Topic, The Big Topic Will Find You

We often try to “forcibly” find a big topic. When people do not follow us, we argue that those same people are lazy, inactive, do not understand the “greatness” of our idea and are not worthy of our struggle for a better society. Essentially, either the idea is not interesting enough, or we are talking to the wrong people, or perhaps we are doing things wrong. In our campaigns, we always take the approach that the problem is in us, because that means that we control the problem and that we can solve it.

Before the “Fight for the freedom of entrepreneurship”, a lot of other ideas were considered. Many of them seemed important to us, but the people they referred to did not want to get actively involved. The issue of the membership fees of the SCC concerned businessmen because of financial losses, but for many of them it was not a matter of money but principles. “The Struggle for the Freedom of Entrepreneurship” began with the businessmen addressing the UZUZ, complaining about the unconstitutionality of compulsory membership fees.

2. Change Means Offering A Solution, not Complaining About The Problem

Many people just criticize the existing situation. Of course, criticism precedes the solution, but change begins only with the vision of reaching the solution. Criticism can accumulate great energy and foment the anger of the people, that itself represents a powerful fuel of change. However, if a certain plan on how to effect change does not materialize, disappointed expectations and wasteful spending of energy replace the fomenting anger with the bitter taste of disappointment and even deeper apathy. The “Fight for the Freedom of Entrepreneurship” offered a solution as to how to abolish the unconstitutional membership fee – through challenging its constitutionality; how to prevent the dismissal of cases by the decision of three judges – with the support of 47 deputies, through which the Constitutional Court is obliged to take over the decision making; how to prevent payment until the decision of the Constitutional Court – by organizing the boycott.

3. The Road to Change is Like Hiking

One reaches the summit of change through the conquest of the previous smaller peaks. Conquering each new peak means being a step closer to the goal, and it actually allows us to move from it to the next level. The reason why the proposal for the assessment of constitutionality with the support of the members of parliament was not immediately submitted, was that its theme was not particularly interesting for political parties. After the UZUZ itself submitted the initiative, and the whole issue attracted public attention and gained the support of businessmen, as well as the wider public, it became obvious that this was a politically attractive topic. Submission of the initiative was a kind of step that allowed us to climb to the next step - the support of the members of parliament. The support of members of parliament and the guarantees that the Constitutional Court would decide allowed us to issue the call for boycott to businessmen.

4. Don't Wait for The Ideal Moment - Begin Now!

During the process of organizing there is no ideal moment, that moment is constantly being sought, but when you see that that moment slowly escapes you or never comes at all if you want change, you simply need to jump into the water and swim.

Waiting the secure the signatures of the members of parliament at one point began to produce great frustration. After the initial euphoria, enthusiasm began to decline. We all know this feeling when it seems to us that some idea or plan can represent a milestone, and then the endless waiting that corrodes our faith in success.

At one point we made the decision. We will submit an initiative, convene a conference and announce the submission of the initiative. We rented a hall at the Media Center, we knew that someone would speak before the UZUZ, we also provided an economic theoretician as a speaker. However, we wanted to be publicly supported by some of the businessmen, despite the fact that people were afraid to participate in such a direct confrontation. Somehow, on the basis of personal contacts, we received the support of a young entrepreneur and successful designer Predrag Sanader, but for such a major initiative we needed a famous

name from the world of economy. A particular encouragement for us was the announcement of the participation of the director of one of the largest Serbian brands MONA. In the last moment, we reached the president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises Milan Knežević, who is extremely well known to the public. When it already seemed that we would not be able to get a confirmation of his participation, he contacted us to confirm participation, as well as to tell us that he read our initiative, adding a comment: “This initiative is the biggest catalyst for social awareness that I’ve experienced in 30 years of business”; a sentence he reiterated at the conference itself and which the media reported. Despite the fact that we were working feverishly to secure a media breakthrough, the night before the conference was marked by fear and bidding. If there are more than 3 media reports, this will be a great success, 2-3 would not be bad, one report - better than nothing. If no journalist comes - a disaster, but we would at least know where we stand and then we will think of a new strategy. The whole conference seemed like a dream. A complete triumph! And after the conference came the invitation to us to take part in the prime time of the daily news of the Radio Television Serbia. The filing of the initiative accumulated great media attention. “The struggle for the freedom of entrepreneurship” had begun. We became visible. Businessmen began to contact us and gave support. The spirit of rebellion came out of the bottle! So far, we have had over 45 media reports.

5. Break Down Every Activity into Smaller Sub-Activities

When considering an activity, we first have a vision of the actual realization and a detailed scenario of events. The more the vision in our minds seems real and the more detailed it is, the greater the chances that it will be realized. “We want the support of business people” is a general formulation that has little meaning. How many business people? What kind of business people? What kind of support? When? How will we get to them? The answers to these questions provide clear outlines to your campaign. Among the most important activities in the campaign “Fight for the Freedom of Entrepreneurship” were contacts with business people. Metaphorically speaking: “Thousands and thousands of coffees and telephone conversations.” Everyone had a list of contacts and a plan when they would call businessmen and have conversations.

6. Do Your Homework!

When doing such numerically demanding activities, it is important to do homework. If you want changes it's worth being a nerd. There are days when we are full of energy and everything works out. There are also days when we are tired, disappointed, and nothing works. The key to success is the work that is done in these other days. In these days, the most important thing is to complete tasks, to do the 10 planned conversations and hold two meetings regardless of bad weather, lack of sleep, our personal problems and the fact that it would not be pleasant for us at all to do all this and get some bad feedback. The task accomplished today means that we start from a better position tomorrow. Regardless of the outcome, the regular performance of tasks brings us a little closer to the goal today than we were yesterday, and a little further away than tomorrow.

7. Learn To Accept No for an Answer

Every change involves attempts to secure support and involve people. That's not always easy. It's not pleasant to be direct and tell people why we are calling them, and for what purpose. The fear of rejection is a fundamental human fear. We have an ideal of what kind of people we want in the team, but this ideal often does not coincide with the people we talk to. Often the conversations end in commonplaces such as "we'll be in touch", "we'll see what comes out of it", "maybe", without a concrete response. Fear of being rejected is unpleasant, but how much time do we waste waiting for a response that we knew from the beginning, somewhere deep inside. Accepting someone's "no" leaves the space for some future "yes". YES IS NOT ALWAYS YES! LEARN TO SAY NO!

People invite us to work with them, they keep talking about how they want change, but whenever they take the responsibility to make the first step, it does not happen. What are we going to do? Let's not waste much time on justifications. People who are truly motivated quickly move into action. Test the motivation of others on small tasks. Sometimes the reason for passivity lies in fear of failure, lack of belief in oneself and in these situations small steps can help overcome fears. On the other hand, there are people who like to talk about a better tomorrow without a specific intention to do something about it. Small tasks allow you to check

the readiness of people and their commitment. In the campaign, we often met with unrealistic promises “Tomorrow, we can bring together 500 businessmen who will support you”, “We want a serious meeting with you about future cooperation”, “I can bring together businessmen, who will finance everything...”. Small requirements test their seriousness. “Schedule us a meeting with 10 business people”. “We are happy to come, as we are a non-profit association, would you cover our gas costs?” “Great. Can you schedule a meeting with two businessmen for us next week?” Always fulfill your part of the arrangement, and the small tasks that others do not complete indicate that you are wasting your time, and at the same time provide a legitimate reason to say “no” to someone. Not because you have something against someone personally, but because they have not complied with the deal. Nothing personal, a matter of principle!

8. Why Sherlock Holmes Needs Doctor Watson?

One of the biggest challenges in leading a campaign is the need to create a good balance between realization, active participation in the first combat ranks, and the bigger picture of that which is aimed. Someone who runs the campaign needs a “view from the balcony”, where the leader of the campaign rises above the situation in which he or she is. The role of the mentor is to bring the leader of the campaign to the balcony through questions, the key instrument of mentoring. The mentor does not provide a solution, but allows the mentored person to arrive at the solution herself through questions. In this process, the leader verbalizes the problems he encounters and in fact constructs solutions and answers for which he did not even know that he already possesses them! In this way, the mentor allows the leader to return from the heat of battle to a broader picture, as well as face errors and learn to correct them when organizing a change. When you are organizing a community or solving a particular social problem, even when you have thought out and prepared everything well, and even implemented, it is advisable to have a person with you who will question certain moves. In this way, as a kind of devil’s advocate, the mentor constantly tests the proposed solutions, which contributes to the selection of the best solutions in the campaign. In addition, the mentor constantly makes us reflect and brings us back

to key insights. Unless we learn from our mistakes, nothing guarantees us that we will not repeat them the next time. Success is not a success if we do not know how we achieved it. Working with a mentor is valuable because it involves taking time to analyze your own actions, a process for which we often do not have time. Through the process, the mentor also gets an insight into someone's campaign, which leads to further accumulation of knowledge.

The key things that we are pointing to are the great trust that must exist and which is built with difficulty over time, but easily breaks down; taking someone to account in case of unfulfilled promises, but also celebration of joint success. Some smaller ones with pancakes with a view of Belgrade or a coffee by the Danube, and those larger ones with a bungee jump.

Maja Korolija

Forced Evictions and Resistance from Below

The phenomenon of forced evictions and the organized resistance of citizens from below can be found throughout the world.¹ In this piece we intend to briefly present this phenomenon in Serbia, and in the Eastern European context, which shares certain characteristics with Serbia due to some common elements of socialist heritage in these countries. The phenomenon of forced evictions appeared in this region with the so-called process of democratic transition, and is intensified by the strengthening of the global economic crisis. At the legal level, it is the result of the process of ownership transformation, the emergence of the heirs to the ruling class from the period prior to real-socialism, and the general impoverishment of the population, which is unable to sustain the imposed neoliberal pace of life on the periphery of the capitalist system. The state in these countries first stopped taking care of the housing issue for the population, and then began battling those who tried to solve it themselves. But both in the countries of the former eastern bloc and in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the way in which this happens varies.

For example, in Hungary the restitution of housing units had a form of voucher privatization, and already in 1991 a significant part of the property was privately owned. By contrast, there is still no law on restitution in Poland, but the right to return nationalized property to pre-war owners under certain conditions, in accordance with the 1946 decree, is permitted.² This form of transformation of ownership of housing units has *de facto* become dominant in Poland. Despite the various kinds of processes that lead to evictions, what is in all situations constant is that those who are the weakest - tenants - usually fare the worst, while the state apparatus is oriented to helping the interests of the richest

1 One finds this problem from Great Britain (<http://www.brightonsolfed.org.uk/brighton/brighton-solidarity-federation-opens-a-dispute-with-g4lets>) to the Russian Federation (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/14/world/europe/protesters-hit-moscows-streets-to-fight-mass-renovation-plan.html>)

2 <http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/the-real-life-of-law-polish-lessons-on-housing-activism-in-the-postcommunist-context/>

strata of society and criminalized businessmen involved in various ways in the eviction processes.

In the former Yugoslavia, occupancy right holders for socially-owned and state-owned apartments received in 1990 and 1992 the possibility to buy apartments in which they live under special conditions, more favorable than the market ones – and, in today’s Serbia, most of the inhabited housing units (about 2.4 million) are owned by families living in them. This process was followed by the phenomenon of the transfer from the status of the occupancy right holder to the status of tenants, which is especially visible in Belgrade and Vojvodina, especially in the lower strata of workers of formerly powerful companies which, due to “circumstances” were not able during the 1990s to buy apartments under favorable conditions.¹ The “circumstances” in question are, in fact, the result of systemic discrimination of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the previous system (Archer, 2016).

Resistance to forced evictions in the region first attracted public attention with the fight against “persecution” in neighboring Croatia, where such actions gave rise to a political party of a confused antisystemic rhetoric – the “Living Wall”. In Serbia, the phenomenon appears after the changes in the relevant legislation, and especially since the introduction of private enforcement officers at the end of May 2012. Since then, as a reaction to increasingly frequent cases of forced evictions, several different initiatives have been launched to help those facing them. In addition to the network “Joint Action *Roof over One’s Head*”, a group established in May 2017 under the name “Collective Defense of Tenants” was particularly active.

The proclaimed goal of this organization is mutual help and defense of the tenants in Serbia “from the violence of the enforcement officers, capitalists and politicians.” The organization was created “due to an increasing number of attacks on the right to housing of workers, the unemployed and students.” According to the documents, the organization is in charge of:

1. Dissemination of information on reported evictions and forced collection of debts, as well as attacks on public property such as hospitals,

1 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:450630-Prazno-800000-stanova-i-kuca>

educational institutions, etc. by the enforcement officers.

2. Organization of propaganda and educational activities aimed at raising awareness about the importance of the right to housing and the fight for its defense.

3. Organizing of concrete, direct actions of physical protection of tenants against criminal attempts to evict and forced collection of debts (Internet, Collective Defense of Tenants 2017).

From conversations with members of this group, we gained insight into how the phenomenon of eviction appears in practice. What distinguishes itself as one of the common traits is that the victims are mostly the poorest inhabitants, who need help from society rather than the attack by the authorities. These are refugees from the wars of the nineties, the disabled, single mothers with sick or small children, pensioners, the aged and the sick, the unemployed, etc. Recently, an attempt was made to evict a pensioner in Belgrade, which was prevented thanks to a protest rally, i.e. postponed until further notice. But this case graphically describes the situation of tenants who are the subjects of such evictions. “Slavka Horvatović is a 76 year old granny. For 25 years she has been working as a cleaner and cook in the construction company Trudbenik, and has been living in a room of 9 square meters in a barrack with a shared bathroom, which is part of the workers’ settlement of Trudbenik in Konjarnik, for more than 30 years. After the company Monterra privatized Trudbenik in 2008, the new management has mortgaged Trudbenik’s property to repay Monterra’s old debts, although this was “prohibited” by the privatization contract. The bank has thus also established mortgages for the adapted accommodation facilities of Trudbenik workers. The former construction giant was gradually destroyed and in 2011 it was brought to bankruptcy, according to a similar model that was applied in a large number of robbery-privatizations in Serbia. In parallel with the destruction of the company and the sale of everything that could be sold, the new owner started to violently expell workers from the accommodation facilities belonging to Trudbenik.

The mafia judiciary ruled that Slavka Horvatović must move out of the barracks she lives in, and pay the court fees of 103,000 dinars, although Slavka’s only income is the pension of 11,000 dinars, with which she can barely buy the medications that she needs.” (Internet, KOS 2017). A particularly morbid case was the eviction process of the Havatmi

family in Dorćol, Belgrade. The family was evicted during the second eviction attempt, despite the involvement of several organizations and a growing number of activists trying to prevent eviction. The eviction case involves a single mother in her seventies who lives with a son who is a severely disabled person. Although she was willing to pay the debt that she had created as a victim of a “pyramidal savings” robbery, the enforcement officer, who was at the time under criminal investigation, did not give her the opportunity to do so. Documentation on the license for eviction, on the sale of the apartment, as well as on the calculation of the total debt with interest and all expenses, has never been delivered to the family (Internet, N1 2017). The most recent attempts at eviction in Belgrade, at the end of November 2017, are directed against refugees who lived in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina before the wars of the nineties. These are people who, due to illness, old age and poor material conditions, have been settled in the studios owned by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. However, despite their good will and innumerable attempts to reach an agreement on the use of the studios with the Commissariat, the state agency whose proclaimed aim is care for refugees, is trying in every way to throw these people out into the street.

“In the meantime, they applied for the competitions of the Commissariat for the allocation of apartments, which, due to irregularities, have been nullified several times. At the last competition, the apartments were assigned to other people, and the families living in them were ordered to move out”(Internet, KOS 2017). Among the first refugees who were targeted by the Commissariat for Refugees is Gordana Radović, an unemployed and sick woman who fled the war in 1992. The attempt to evict her has so far been successfully prevented by activists’ protests. However, already in the following, cold and rainy days, the Commissariat for Refugees tried to evict Sergej Milićević, who lost his leg in the war, as well as several other people. These evictions are, at least for the time being, postponed through the action of tenants and activists (interview with KOS). Although many international charters and legal regulations oblige the state that no one can be left without a roof over their heads, the impression one gets from interviews with KOS members is that the governing structures do not care about these obligations. Housing rights are included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and recognized by the United Nations, the

Council of Europe and the EU Member States. The International Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 1966 prohibits forced eviction and obliges the state to provide alternative housing to those who can not afford it. The provisions on social housing are recognized in the EU as a service of general economic interest (Kenna 2008). However, in post-socialist countries of transition, the situation is different. “The evictions, or forced removals from home, have become such an everyday occurrence, that today the fear of losing the roof over one’s head has become one of the biggest fears of the robbed and impoverished workers of Serbia.” (Internet, KOS 2017).

Unlike in Serbia, where the movement to combat evictions is only in its inception phase, the occupancy movement in Poland has a decades-long experience. The first organization fighting for tenants’ rights was created there in 1989, as the “Polish Union of Tenants” (Polskie Zrzeszenie Lokatorów, PZL) in Krakow. Currently, the struggle for tenancy rights is mostly concentrated in Warsaw. Three of the most active organizations for the protection of tenants’ rights are located there: the Warsaw Association of Tenants (Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów, WSL), the Committee for the Protection of Tenants’ Rights (Committee Obrony Praw Lokatorów, KOPL) and the Office for Social Justice (Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości Społecznej, KSS). WSL began its activity in 2006, bringing together tenants of one of the buildings returned to the old owners; KAS started its activity in 2006, while KOPL began with its activities in 2008.

Multi-year activities of these organizations in Poland have led to the mobilization of a large part of the vulnerable population, which had its effect in the field of state policy. The current government in Poland is considering adopting a special law that would prevent further attempts to return of buildings in which tenants are located to previous owners. However, the far greater success of these movements (in the concrete case of KOPL) in the field of legal regulation is that the movement has repeatedly (the last time at the end of 2017) managed to prevent changes to the tenant protection legislation, which were prepared with the intention of further attacks on basic tenants’ rights. Namely, the Polish governments of the previous several mandates had intended to introduce changes to the law that would abolish the control of rent prices and the rights of those who are threatened by evictions. Their intention was,

inter alia, to abolish the right to find alternative accommodation in the event of the eviction of certain categories of tenants - pregnant women, elderly and infirm - which meant throwing these people onto the street. It is important to note that the attempts to implement these changes to the laws took place under various governments in Poland. This clearly indicates that it is a systemic phenomenon, not a policy of this or that party in power. Fortunately, each time the movement of self-organized tenants was able to prevent them (Conversation with KOPL).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that, in the countries of the semi-periphery and periphery of the capitalist system, the basic human rights are directly violated on a daily basis in the process of transition. However, the series of successful preventions of evictions clearly show us that it is possible to stop the brutal repression of the poorest through good organization of fellow citizens and the implementation of direct action. The dissemination of information to the public about these events creates a public odium against such policies of the ruling classes, which can often lead to the postponement of specific cases of eviction, and when the movement gains pace and becomes broader, as in the mentioned case in Poland, the ruling class can even abandon repressive legal solutions.

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CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији -
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

316.334.3(4-12)"20"(082)

316.443(4-12)"20"(082)

323.21(4-12)"20"(082)

DEMOCRATIC Engagement in South East Europe : stories to be Told / editors Srđan Prodanović, Gazela Pudar Draško, Irena Fiket. - Belgrade : Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Center for Ethics, Law and Applied Philosophy, 2018 (Beograd : Donat Graf). - 104 str. : ilustr. ; 20 cm Tiraž 300. - Str. 5-8: Introduction / Gazela Pudar Draško, Irena Fiket and Srđan Prodanović.
- Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst. - Bibliografija uz svaki rad.

ISBN 978-86-80484-19-8

a) Друштвене промене - Југоисточна Европа - 21в - Зборници b) Цивилно друштво - Политичка партиципација - Југоисточна Европа - Зборници
COBISS.SR-ID 256302604

