LESSONS FROM PROTEST WAVES IN EUROPE – MOVEMENTS, NGOS AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

DANIEL SMILOV

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The research for this report was carried out in the period 2015-2016. It combined desk-top research with in-depth interviews with new parties, NGOs, social network activists in the six studied countries – Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Russia, Spain, and Turkey. The country-specific findings and recommendations are to be found in the six country reports. The text aims to provide an overall view of the problems, the common trends, as well as to elaborate sets of policy recommendations travelling well beyond specific country contexts.

The comparative study was prepared by Daniel Smilov, Program Director at the Centre for Liberal Strategies, who also led the group of experts from the six countries.

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Part One: Introducing the project

The recent waves of protests affecting many countries in the world create the impression of rising levels of civic activism. The people vent their frustration with the performance of governments, parliaments and political parties. Trust in representative democratic institutions is very low both in established democracies and in countries in transition. New forms of political representation – like social movements, social networks-based organizations, politicized media, etc. compete with the political parties for the mandate to "represent the people". At present, there is no coherent, fully-fledged alternative political model of governance different from representative liberal democracy. But still, experiments are taking place, and political actors who claim to be an alternative – like Syriza and Podemos – do exceptionally well in elections.

How to make sense of these developments? Do they signal a greater potential for civic activism and public participation in politics? Or are these phenomena a negative reaction, a simple show of desperation and frustration with the inefficiency of the current state of democratic government?

The Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia has addressed these questions in some depth by carrying out comparative research on three forms of civic activism – setting up *novel forms of political representation; involvement in NGOs; and self-organization and self-structuring through social networks, the blogosphere, etc.* – in countries affected by massive protests. The results of the research are collected in this publication. It comprises six case studies, their comparative analysis and a set of policy recommendations regarding the three spheres of interest.

The project on civic activism has combined research with engagement of relevant stakeholders in a dialogue, sharing findings and inviting feedback from civil society. It has covered six countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Russia, Spain and Turkey. The choice of countries is important. On the one hand, we have focused on four democracies of similar size, which are all members of the EU and the Council of Europe, and face similar challenges caused by the crisis in the Eurozone and Brexit. In addition, all of them have experienced (or are about to experience) serious changes in their party systems. The similarity in the background conditions allows us to discern more clearly the factors affecting the levels of civic activism. Further, we look at Turkey and Russia – two countries with considerable weight and significance for Europe in general. Although there are unique, intervening variables in both of them, civil society there also raises extremely important problems which deserve a more in-depth examination.

The publications attempts to give answers to the following three problems and to explore their policy implications:

- Is there a rise in civic activism?

- If there is a rise in civic activism, is this process sustainable or is it just a temporary side-effect of other processes?

- What is the political background against which this process is taking place: are there significant changes in public attitudes or in the functioning of democracy?

Populism, protest and civic activism

Our starting assumption is that civic activism should be understood in the broader context of representative democracy. This is a context which is currently determined by two structural features: a populist turn in politics and significant waves of public protest.

Populism

Populism is a concept which has been well studied.[1] Although there is a debate whether it is an ideology or just a style of politics, there is a certain minimal ideological content of the phenomenon: populists appeal to the people as a whole, as opposed to corrupt and impotent political elites, and consider popular approval as the ultimate justification for political action. In this sense, populism is a basic, minimalist democratic ideology, whose central and only postulate is that elites should follow the people understood as a rather homogeneous entity.

Populism does not offer substantive answers to the question about the public good. It is not committed to either welfarist or neo-liberal ideas *per se*. It just insists that whatever the people want, the political leaders must implement in policy. In this way populists normally present themselves not as an alternative to a specific political party, programme or platform, but as an alternative to the existing representative system as a whole, to its general corruption and incompetence. Some of the populist parties are on the left, others are on the

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[1] For a discussion of populism in Eastern Europe see Cas Mudde, "In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populism in Eastern Europe", in Meny and Surel, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, 2002.

right, and the reason for that is not any sort of deep ideological commitment but the contextual preferences of the majorities in specific polities in a given time.

Populists implicitly reject pluralism. On their account the people tend to be rather homogeneous, which makes it easier to suggest that the interests of groups and individuals must be always treated as inferior to the interests of the people as a whole.

The ideological lightness of populism is matched by certain lightness in terms of party organization. Most of the political parties have long ago lost their members and even their loyal followers, so populists are not very much different in this regard: they rely much more on PR, media contact with and direct appeal of their charismatic leaders to the people. Very often they emerge as broadly based social movements and only gradually become institutionalized as parties. They emerge as challengers to existing party-cartel structures, but with time may themselves become parts of such cartels.

The fight against corruption has become a defining characteristic of the populist parties, since it glues together their basic ideology with their organizational lightness. The populists argue that the existing political elite is corrupt (rather than simply incompetent), and that it should be replaced with new leaders of exceptional moral integrity, which is what their leaders – their main organizational asset - are presented to be. In this sense, the fight against corruption is in fact a rephrasing of the central populist message, which explains the dominance of the issue in the public discourse. It is not that the problem of corruption *per se* is not serious in the region: in some of the countries it is probably right to elevate it to top social priority. Very often, however, populist use the anticorruption rhetoric simply in order to come to power and to displace established elites.

Protests

Contemporary protests share the following features: they largely ignore political parties, distrust the mainstream media, fail to recognize any specific leaders, and reject all formal organization, relying instead on the Internet and *ad hoc* assemblies for collective debate and decision-making. In the last five years political protests have erupted in more than 70 countries and tens of million people have participated in them. Protests engulfed countries savaged by the global economic crisis—Greece and Spain being the most notable examples— but they were also found in high-growth emerging economies like Turkey and Russia, countries relatively unscathed by the 2008 crisis. They engulfed on democratic and non-democratic regimes alike. This new revolutionary wave does not have a common ideology or demands. It consists of mostly young people "aspiring to a higher standards of living and more liberty… connected to one another either by massing in squares or through virtual squares or both, and united less by a common program and more by a shared direction they want their society to go."[2]

The protests were a worldwide phenomenon that has changed many of our ideas of what the future will look like. The protesters were openly anti-institutional and mistrustful toward both the market and the state. They are, as a rule, not inspired by the will of the unrepresented groups in society to enter the institutions but by the hope that important goals can be achieved without the existing institutions. "It wasn't because occupiers brought the politicians specific demands and proposals that they made a difference", insisted OWS activist David Graeber "instead, they'd created a crisis of legitimacy within the entire system by providing a glimpse of what real democracy might be like".

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[2] Thomas Friedman, *Square People*, The New York Times

Civic Activism

Civic activism interacts with these two other phenomena, and partly coincides with them, reinforces and amplifies some of their effects. However, our understanding is that civic activism has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis these phenomena as well. It is an expression of the energy of citizens which is to a degree independent from political mobilization. Therefore, the first task will be to clearly conceptually distinguish between the three phenomena and to find ways to assess them independently of one another.

To illustrate the point, it is obvious that by the fact of massive rallies in a country we cannot automatically conclude that there is a rise of civic activity. For instance, in the autumn of 2013 two Bulgarian political parties staged a huge meeting in the centre of Sofia by busing people from all over the country. While this was definitely an expression of the organizational strength of these two parties, it did not necessarily show pro-active, civic attitudes of their members. Neither could this be read as a desire for a more lasting involvement of these members in politics. Many of the so-called "counter-protests"- rallies of pro-governmental supporters against anti-government protests – have a similar nature. They are an expression of partisan, political discipline and their main purpose is to block the attempts of citizens to put pressure on a specific government. The anti-Maidan "movement" in Russia is of this nature, and it makes the conceptual difficulty even more pressing.

Secondly, support for populist political players may not necessarily indicate growing levels of civic activism. On the contrary, this maybe just a sign of popular frustration with existing political parties and a desire to "solve" all major problems of society with a desperate gesture of defiance. In fact, voting in this way may show that citizens *do not want* to be

engaged in standard political processes, that they want to retreat from politics by delegating powers to someone – typically, a populist, charismatic leader.

Civic Activism, "Political Fans" and Political Ignorance

There is a further problem which compounds the issue. Contemporary democratic publics show dramatic levels of ignorance about political phenomena. Recent surveys have shown that even in established democracies the knowledge of basic facts about politics remains far from complete. In general, there are groups of "political fans", who are very well informed – through traditional media and the Internet – but there are huge groups with minimal knowledge of politics. Political activism normally affects the first, but not the latter. What is more, some recent developments – like the advent of the blogosphere and the social networks tend to strengthen the rift between the two groups. In short, they tend to insulate better from one another, to retreat into two separate worlds, having little common points of reference.

If this is a correct account of recent developments, then even if there is a rise of civic activism among the "political fans" group, this might not necessarily translate into greater involvement of citizens in public affairs at the level of society as a whole. Somewhat paradoxically, the greater intensity of communication among "political fans" may make them even further detached from the rest of society.

Three areas of problems: novel forms of representation, NGOs, and social media

We have identified three specific forms of civic activism as the focus of our interest. In each of them we try to establish the more lasting impacts of the protest waves experienced by the different societies.

Novel forms of politics of representation

Recent waves of protests have resulted in a flurry of new political actors which claim to be much more closely connected with the citizens, providing greater levels of citizen participation in them. We examine the validity of these claims in the six studied countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary Russia, Spain and Turkey. The first question that our study addresses is what are these novel forms of political participation? At first blush, there are at least two of them:

- Non-partisan participation in government through citizen councils: the protests of February 2013 in Bulgaria exercised a significant public pressure for the creation of forms of citizen participation in regulatory and governing bodies. These were the so-called "citizens' councils" attached to ministries, regulatory commissions, etc. President Plevneliev had the idea to set up a general citizens' council with the participation of protesters, leading NGOs and trade unions. Although this plan was ultimately not put into action, sectoral citizen's councils attached to different ministries were indeed established. Furthermore, the interim

government in the Spring of 2013 held three rounds of "public consultations" open to the public at which representatives of civil society were sounded for their views on specific policies;

- Protests in many countries have led to the emergence of new political parties and movements which claim to present a considerable break with former political practices. The most famous current examples are probably Podemos and Syriza, but there are similar developments – with different levels of success - virtually in all democracies. These new parties range from small, boutique formations like DEOS in Bulgaria, to rather popular and influential movements as the two mentioned above. Russia and Hungary provide negative examples - political environments where dominant political players have entrenched themselves in power and successfully fend off attempts to create strong opposition.

NGOs, think tanks, strategic litigation and civic associations

In some respects, NGOs – the civil society sector – has been the driver and beneficiary of the protest waves. Many of the protest activists were socialized in the NGO community, and their stress on transparency and control comes straight from the NGO playbook. Yet the age of protest also may mark the twilight of the NGOs, which may become the period's big losers. The anti-institutional message of the protests drives the younger generation toward Internet-centered activism and distracts them from thinking organizationally. Moreover, since many governments doubt the spontaneous nature of the protests and are constantly seeking out their alleged masterminds, NGOs are an easy culprit. Not surprisingly, in numerous cases the protests have inspired governments to introduce harsh new restrictions on NGOs. Furthermore, the protests have forced NGOs to define themselves in a more open political way, which undermines in the eyes of the public their

claim to independence. And in general, NGOs are very poor substitutes for *representative structures* such as political parties. Forced by the events to position themselves in an openly political way they are easily exposed as non-representative, essentially expertise-based entities, as they are by definition. So, NGOs can turn to be the biggest losers of the "protest mania". Attitudes towards the NGO sector as a whole are undergoing dynamic changes towards a significant increase in criticisms of their activities. The lines of criticism are three.

First, NGOs are criticized for being simply instruments of foreign influences. According to this viewpoint, they have uncritically supported Washington's and Brussels agendas and acted as guardians of some, as defined by the critics, policy orthodoxy.[3] These accusations have been considerably strengthened during protests.

The second line of criticism views NGO's influence as a transitional phenomenon. In this view they did play a positive role in the period of transition but their importance in the post-transition period is doomed to decline. This criticism is especially relevant for post-transition countries.

The third and in a way most challenging criticism to the work of NGOs claims that the problems they face relate to the substance of their agenda. More specifically, it is the tensions between democracy and liberalism, between democracy and the market[4] that cause a crisis of the role of the NGOs. On this view, they have religiously believed that democracy, liberalism and the market go together, but life in the different countries in Europe has reached a point where trade-offs between these three values have to be contemplated.[5]

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[3]A recent publication in Bulgaria advanced this argument: Dostena Angelova-Lavergne, *The Transition Experts*, Sofia, Iztok-Zapad, 2010 (in Bulgarian).
[4]See Wolfgang Streeck, "The Crises of Democratic Capitalism", *New Left Review*, 71, Sept-Oct 2011, http://www.newleftreview.org/?page=article&view=2914

[5]See the works of Nicolas Guilhot and especially his book *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and the Politics of Global Order*, Columbia UP, 2005.

A specific form of NGO that we focus upon are those involved in the instrumentalization of courts through strategic litigation. In Spain, Bulgaria, Russia, Hungary strategic litigation has become one of the most often chosen forms of activism, especially in areas such as human rights defence and access to information. In Spain litigation has been used as a tool to block eviction efforts in mortgage disputes between banks and citizens. We examine whether there has been an increase of such strategic litigation efforts in the context of mass protest and populist mobilization.

And finally, we look into grass-roots NGOs - organizations which do not claim to have certain enhanced expertise or to have an active role in public policy deliberation and formulation, but are associations of citizens motivated by a common cause. Very often such causes are humanitarian in nature and aim at resolving concrete problems created by either market or state failure. We examine whether protests have facilitated the emergence of such NGOs.

In both cases – of strategic litigation and grass-roots NGOs – there exists the potential for linking between the "political fans", who supposedly populate and energize these NGOs, and the politically inactive large groups of citizens. The reason for this is that the activities of these NGOs by their very nature are directly aimed at serving these large groups – whether through securing their rights, or through logistical or substantive aid. An important goal of the research was to discover ways and forms in which the activism of NGOs of these types has the potential to activate the politically indifferent citizens under specific circumstances.

Social media and the blogosphere: the creation of virtual communities

The third problematic area that we explore is the use of social networks and the blogosphere in the new forms of civic activism. On the one hand, the social networks and the Internet are just a tool – from this perspective their impact is more logistical. They cut costs and make particular actions more affordable. On the other hand, however, both social networks and the blogosphere create political communities. These *virtual* communities might be in certain aspects more fluid and indeterminate in comparison to *real* political communities. Yet, the difference is a matter of degree: research has shown that political communities such as "the nation" have been largely the product of specific media (like the printed press) and specific mediated forms of communication and imagination.

We would like to examine the merits and demerits of virtual representation - the participation of political communities constructed in the cyberspace. Virtual representation has a very serious egalitarian and emancipatory promise, but also it tends to create self-isolated political groups, which are impermeable to the opinion of others.

In this sense it is meaningful to ask what kind of political communities may be constructed on the basis of the social networks and Internet communication, novel forms of media, etc.

Part Two: General findings

Novel forms of representation (parties, movements, citizens councils)

The project findings are that the more successful examples of lasting effects in this sphere come from Greece and Spain. There the mass protests resulted in the formation of new left-wing parties which have made important inroads in the national political systems. Syriza has become the governing party in Greece, while Podemos has become a key parliamentary represented party. In Bulgaria there have been partial successes and at a smaller scale by a party emerging from the summer 2013 protests – the Reformist Block (RB). It gained slightly less than 10% of the seats in the Bulgarian parliament in the 2014 elections and did relatively well at the 2015 local elections. This party did not last long, however, and at the moment of writing has split into various parts, two of which have preserved some of its protest-based legitimacy. It remains to be seen whether any of the parts of the RB are going to pass the four per cent electoral threshold at the March 2017 preterm parliamentary elections. In any event, this formation has lost speed and popularity since the time of its inception.

Hungary, Russia and Turkey present more difficult cases for analysis. In these countries there have been no successful political representative bodies emerging on the basis of the protests. The Hungarian opposition to Viktor Orban has remained highly fragmented and unconsolidated. Political pluralism in Russia has been put to a severe test after 2014. None

of the opposition politicians or parties linked to the 2012 protests have managed to enter the Duma. In Russia not only political parties, but also independent NGOs involved in what could be broadly defined as "political activities" (for instance, analyzing politics or playing a watchdog function) have been closely monitored and their funding has been restricted through the infamous "foreign agents" law. In Turkey the political landscape has also seen a transformation in the direction of less political pluralism and authoritarian concentration of power into the hands of president Erdogan. These developments became extremely visible after the summer 2016 crackdown on opposition and civil society in the wake of the failed coup d'état. Then a great number of public employees, journalist, academics, politicians and NGO activists have been vetted for loyalty, sacked and even detained and tried for alleged involvement in the attempt to forcefully remove Erdogan. Even before that, however, it was clear, as our case study demonstrates, that the mass protests from 2013 have not produced a meaningful political party or any other tool of more lasting political representation.

On the contrary, in the three latter countries what is observed is rather more intense government efforts to control civil society and to prevent possible future political mobilization. In Russia, as described in detail in our case study, the government has put a lot of energy in institutionalizing the link between authorities and civil society in the form of official "councils". These bodies are designed to receive feedback and to be something like official watchdogs. From a more critical perspective, they may be seen as instruments imitating genuine interaction with civil society and attempting to control and pre-empt its initiatives. Part of the idea behind these councils seems to be that if there are institutionalized channels of interaction there will be no need for other more drastic forms of civic involvement, such as protests, for example. In Hungary at the moment of writing

the government is considering introducing measures of the type of the "foreign agent" law in Russia with the apparent aim to put pressure on the civil society sector and especially the Soros Foundation. In Turkey the possibilities for independent activities and political expression have been significantly restricted, especially after the summer 2016 dramatic events. But the crackdown against independent/opposition-minded media and organizations had become even before that.

What is the explanation for the success-stories of converting citizen energy into more lasting forms of representation in Greece and Spain? And what is the reason for the apparent failures in Hungary, Russia and Turkey?

The different nature of mass protests: corrective and transformative protests

One reasons for the different impact of protests in the two groups of countries is that they had different nature. Some of the protests are merely corrective: they unite people to say "No" to a specific government policy, a whole government, or a corrupt politician. The corrective protest happens when people do not agree with the course of politics and they want to impose a veto on it. The corrective protests more or less reaffirm the general status quo although it may result in certain changes – personal or substantive.

The transformative protests has a positive agenda as well. It endorses a specific ideology, it has a programmatic character, and it claims to change the course of government in a specific way – and not simply to block something which has been proposed by others. One conclusion which our study suggests is that transformative protests lead more easily to the establishment of parties, movements and other forms of political representation. Corrective protests, on the other hand, tend to lead to the replacement of governments at the most, but fail to dramatically change the structure of representation.

From the six countries that we study Greece and Spain fall in the transformative ideal type. Both Syriza and Podemos emerged on the basis of clearly identifiable left-wing ideology. Here it is not the place to assess the coherence, reasonableness and overall prospects of success of this ideology. But the fact is that its was an open intention of these parties to transform the left, to provide a novel vision and tools of mobilization for the people who have traditionally voted for PASOK and the Socialist party respectively. And ultimately these protests had been able to help reorganize the party systems and become instruments of changing the loyalties of left-wing voters.

Protests in Hungary, Russia and Turkey have been of a different type. There the people wanted to replace specific politicians, fearing their self-entrenchment in power and their corruption. In terms of positive agenda these protests were multi-facetted and pluralistic: they managed to unite people of different persuasion and political views. Therefore, the translation of their energy into more lasting forms of political representation has proven very difficult.

Bulgaria is an interesting example, which also supports this finding. The Reformist Block was partially successful because it managed to invigorate parts of the centre-right political parties in Bulgaria. They used the 2013 summer protests in order to consolidate their electorates, to involve new people through the so-called "Citizens' council", and to forge connections with civil society organizations. In fact, this was what Syriza and Podemos have managed to do in the centre-left political space in Greece and Spain.

The transformative character of the protests is dependent on their ability to interpret in novel ways the left-right political distinction. The corrective protests, in contrast, are indifferent to the left-right ideological division.

More than that in fact, as a rule corrective protests are markedly anti-party character. Many of these protests have been clearly *against* specific parties, but not necessarily *pro* some of the others. Many of the protesters have portrayed themselves as active citizens rather than partisans. Some of these protesters have actually harboured and fanned dangerous anti-party feelings, failing to realize that contemporary democracy at its heart is a competition among parties. Thus, in the February 2013 protests in Bulgaria a sizeable group of protesters demanded the limitation of the role of the parties and the formation of "citizens' councils" in all major public authorities.[6] Further, it very often happens that the political party, against which such mass protests have been held, wins the next parliamentary or major election: such was the case of Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia and Romania.

Corrective mass protests have taken place in most of the Eastern European countries over the last several years – they are far more widespread. The most dramatic events took place in Kiev, Ukraine, where then-President Yanukovych was deposed as a result of the Maidan events, and this led to violence and to military interference – direct or indirect - by Russia in the conflict. Governments have resigned as a result of protests in Bulgaria in 2013 (and partly in 2014) and in Romania in 2014. Budapest and Warsaw have become regular sites of anti-government rallies, and even in Moscow in 2012 there were impressive anti-Putin demonstrations. If these protests are to be classified, they are much more of the corrective ideal type.

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[6] Ivan Krastev, „From Politics to Protest" in *Journal of Democracy,* October 2014.

Protest as process, and protest as result: the importance of the cause

Protests are of two other types: some of them are justified by the results they achieve; others pretend to be a process and value more the forms of expression of citizen will they provide for. Somewhat paradoxically, the former category seems to have a more lasting effect on the system of representation on the basis of our findings.

Protests are by no means something new in democracy – they constitute the expression of a well-entrenched basic civil right.[7] Eastern Europe, for instance, has seen quite dramatic protests since 1989. In the West these have been a part of the democratic process even before that. The new elements in the contemporary period are the following, however. First, the established convention for a long time was that mass protests are justified only as a weapon of last resort, which is to be used in exceptional circumstances that were deemed existential for the polity. The dismantling of the communist regime was definitely a once-in-a-several-generations phenomenon – whether it happened peacefully or through a bloody revolution like in the Romanian case. So was the removal of Milosevic's semi-authoritarian regime in Belgrade, or the protests of Bulgarians in 1996-1997 when the banking system of the country collapsed and there was raging hyperinflation. None of the current mass protests – and none in the six countries that we study - have been triggered by so dramatic and existential events.

Further, apart from change of the government, it seems that the Greek and Spanish protests have been more result oriented: they have demanded anti-austerity change of policy of left-wing type. In terms of result orientation the Bulgarian protests of the summer of 2013 also sought a specific result in terms of changes in the judicial system and specific anticorruption

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[7] Daniel Smilov, "The Power of Assembled People: The Right to Assembly and Political Representation" in Andras Sajo (ed.), *Free to Protest: Constituent Power and Street Demonstration (Issues in Constitutional Law)*, Eleven International Publishing, The Netherlands, 2008.

measures: some of these became part of the political platform of RB. In the other three cases protests were significant in terms of process: they showed an intense opposition to the ruling government and desire to replace it. In the Turkish case the protest was triggered by a relatively trivial matter – the fate of a park. In Hungary the protesters have used a variety of concrete causes – ranging from the refugees to school management to express their opposition to Orban. In this case as well the very process of protesting was more important than the concrete cause. Russian protests were officially against electoral fraud and manipulation, but became a massive demonstration of dissatisfaction with the regime as a whole.

The cause is important, however. It has to be able to generate lasting interest, to focus public attention for a long period of time. Anti-austerity is a cause of this type, while electoral fraud and even the refugees are much more situational. When the cause is more capable of generating lasting public mobilization, it is not a surprise that protests in its favour lead to the establishment of more lasting political structures.

Damaging effect of unrestrained anti-elitism

All mass protests are is anti-elitist to some degree. In many of the cases, as mentioned already, the protesting public perceives the elite as corrupt, treacherous and incompetent. In Hungary and Poland the protests have been against the self-entrenchment attempts of Fidesz and PiS, and their moves to dismantle important checks on government power. Whether the protests are against the "liberal" or the "conservative" elite is of course relevant, but the most distinctive feature of these protests is that they claim to represent the "people" as a whole – they are a form of expression of the sovereignty of the nation. Thus, these protests

themselves are portrayed as an alternative channel of popular representation, a channel which is superior to the political parties and other mediated forms of representation.

When anti-elitism is overplayed by the protesters, it is much more difficult for them to build parties or lasting movements. The protests itself becomes a vehicle of representation, which may deny the right of other vehicles – such as parties – even to exist. This is a dangerous form of evolution of mass protests, which is more typical of Central and Eastern Europe, as compared to Greece and Spain.

Partly because of this, mass protests in Eastern Europe have actually become a rather *routine instrument of opposition*, albeit not necessarily *partisan* opposition. The rise of the social networks has contributed significantly to this development because it has made cheap and almost immediate coordination of angry and dissatisfied people possible. Such flash protests have become a routine instrument of saying "No" to a proposed policy in a matter of hours after its announcement, as happened in the spectacular case from 2013 in Bulgaria. There, the government made a very unpopular appointment for head of the security services of the state in the morning, and in the afternoon more than 10,000 protesters gathered in front of its offices.

The role of the media: the party-media hybridization

The fourth explanation of the different success of political projects linked to protests that emerges from the case studies is the media environment. In general, the freer it is, the easier for new political projects to emerge and to have lasting influence. Not surprisingly government-controlled media environment such as Russia or Turkey create additional difficulties for new projects. Hungary since 2010 also raises similar issues: the 2/3 majority

of Victor Orban has allowed him to impose his control over the public media (rather directly) but as well as over the private.

Political parties, as the main mediators between civil society and the state institutions, have tried to adapt to the new realities of widespread distrust in representatives and fears that the state does not operate in the interest of all. In order to tackle this challenge they have resorted to a number of techniques, the most important of which seem to be the hybridization between political parties and the media.[8] Berlusconi in Italy has been probably the first significant example of this type, with Donald Trump the most recent demonstration. These are politicians/media personalities, who use their media exposure as political capital. What is more, once in office they continue to function partly as media outlets, both in terms of generation of news and in communication with the voters.

The hybridization phenomenon is explained by the fact that while trust in political representatives is generally low, trust in the media, and especially television is surprisingly high (see the table below). Even in countries with minimal support in the political structures like Bulgaria and Romania, trust in television is well above 60%. The average trust in TV for the EU is 53%, which is quite astonishing when compared to the trust in democratic institutions. Because of that political parties compensate for their own lack of trust by merging with popular media programmes or by building themselves around media personalities. Bulgaria provides at least four spectacular cases of TV shows and programmes turned into political parties. A regional TV network (SKAT) has produced two nationalistic parties represented in parliament: Ataka and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria. Another TV station – TV7 – managed to create its own parliamentary

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[8] Daniel Smilov and Ruzha Smilova, "Informal Politics and Formal Media Structures" in Jan Zielonka (ed.), *Media and Politics in New Democracies,* Oxford University Press, 2015.

group following the same pattern. And finally, a popular TV show has been able to organize a national referendum on the electoral system.

Table: Trust in governments and TV (Eurobarometer 2011/2015)

Country		TRUST		DISTRUST		Don't know	
		GOV	TV	GOV	TV	GOV	TV
EU	2011	24	53	70	42	6	5
	2015	31		63		6	
BG	2011	38	73	53	24	9	3
	2015	23		67		10	
EE	2011	49	72	48	26	3	2
	2015	38		49		13	
RO	2011	10	61	84	36	6	3
	2015	27		69		4	
PO	2011	28	57	65	37	7	6
	2015	20		71		9	
CZ	2011	15	71	83	27	2	2
	2015	28		66		6	
SLO	2011	21	69	76	29	3	2
	2015	29		65		6	
HU	2011	26	52	68	45	6	3
	2015	34		62		4	
EL	2011	8	22	90	77	2	1
	2015	37		59		4	
AU	2011	46	72	47	26	7	2
	2015	42		52		6	
DE	2011	32	59	62	35	6	6
	2015	50		43		7	
UK	2011	21	53	74	43	5	4
	2015	37		58		5	

Although extreme, such cases are not exceptional and the link between parties and television/media is quite pronounced. Political parties have always depended on the media – there have been times when they have owned newspapers (in Eastern Europe this was in the 1990s). The difference with the current situation is that while in the past the parties have been the content-providers and the media – just disseminators, in the present circumstances

the media have become content-creators and content-providers themselves. In turn, the politicians are today more focused on the communication of the message rather than on its elaboration.

Two phenomena cause this trend of hybridization. The first one is ideological and it concerns the rise of populism in Europe and beyond. Although this is a contested concept, populism is a minimalist ideology that poses a homogeneous people against a corrupt and inefficient elite. In fact, this is a default level ideology which is resorted to when other, more sophisticated political platforms – such as social- or Christian-democracy – fail to attract voters. Populism is a promise that the leaders will follow the will of the people as it is, without attempting to educate the voter. In this sense, generally the populist party is in essence a media, a re-translator of the views and preferences of other people. The service it provides is more in the area of dissemination and translation into authoritative decisions of these views and preferences.

The second main reason for the party-media hybridization is organizational. Over the last two decades the regulation of party and campaign finance has become much stricter. Eastern Europe is one of the most regulated regions in the world in this regard. At the same time the financing of the media – especially the private ones – is much more confidential and non-transparent. Thus, for a variety of pragmatic reasons, it may be more attractive to start a political project as a media outlet, rather than as a political party. Further empirical work must be carried out in order to substantiate this hypothesis, but it is quite obvious that freedom of speech protection, as applied to the media, provides much more confidentiality and room for financial manoeuvring, than in the case of political parties and even NGOs.

All in all, the emergence of novel forms of representation cannot be discussed meaningfully without the media background against which they operate. The successful emergence of

new political projects is an important indication that media pluralism exists. In our cases, Greece and Spain are obviously better situated than the rest of the countries.

Administrative harassment and other contextual reasons

There are other reasons that explain the differences among our six countries. The first most obvious one is that in some of them newer opposition political projects are put under significant pressure by the authorities. The harassment may take various forms starting from the procedure of registration and reaching the day-to-day operations of the political subjects. Russia has traditionally had complex procedures of registering of political parties. Electoral systems also have different effects and help explain why in some countries there are significant difficulties facing new projects. Turkey has a significant electoral threshold of 10% for instance, which compared to 4% in Bulgaria is clearly very prohibitive. Russia for a long time had 7% threshold which recently has been reduced to 5%. In addition to that factor, the mixed system used in Hungary creates greater difficulties for new, small political projects. Unless they are able to coalesce with a bigger party, the majoritarian part of the election actually makes it extremely difficult for such parties to receive meaningful representation in the parliament. (One of the problems of the Hungarian opposition has been its inability to unite and thus to reduce the negative impact of the electoral system from which it suffers.) The electoral system may explain also the partial success of Bulgarian political start-ups: the 4% threshold and the pure PR electoral system are generally favourable for new comers. Because of that the Bulgarian parliament normally has a large number of parties, many of which are new.

NGOs: counter-democracy, meritocracy or grass-root activism?

The case studies paint a different picture in the countries that we study. In some of them the protests have invigorated civil society, which has taken enthusiastically part in them. Grass-root organizations of various types have sprung out of the crisis of 2018 in Greece and Spain. Some of these have been designed to provide help to affected by the crisis families, others have challenged eviction procedures in courts. The protests have mobilized a plethora of left-leaning organizations in both of these countries. In them there has been no significant negative backlash against NGOs and no governmental initiatives to curb their activities.

In all other four countries there has been a negative backlash against NGOs. In all of them there has been negative publicity and direct attacks against them as influenced by "foreign" powers. The fact that NGOs rely on grants from foreign sources has been targeted in the media with the apparent intention to denigrate them as "traitors" or "foreign agents". The situation in Bulgaria is probably the most moderate among the four, although such attacks are close to the mainstream discourse. In Hungary they are already part of this discourse, while the situation in Turkey and Russia is close to paranoia in this regard.

Apart from media attacks some of these countries have moved to impose restrictions on the operations of foreign funded civil society organizations: Russia and Turkey are at the forefront, but Hungary is also considering similar measures.

In more abstract terms, civil society organisations have faced a difficult period after the protests, because these have challenged their identity quite profoundly. On the one hand, NGOs exist as independent repositories of expertise, which could be made fast available for the public. On the other hand, they are more activist organization, helping the people to

organize themselves around worthy causes. The clash between expertise and activism has become quite apparent by mass protests.

Rosanvallon's concept of counter-democracy is applicable to the situation.[9] Counter-democracy refers to a trend of providing other channels of representation of the people in addition to elections and parliaments. These could be non-elected expert bodies as independent courts, central banks, regulators, but also watchdog NGOs and other monitoring mechanisms. These bodies allow for the citizens to exercise greater control over their representatives. Much in the way John Hart Ely argued in the 1980s for courts, these mechanisms reinforce representation and are essential for the strengthening of democracy.[10]

One of the most interesting developments in Europe is that the rise of populism has actually *not* stopped or blocked the extension of counter-democracy. One would suppose that a populist party will do away with all independent bodies and would concentrate unconstrained powers in the parliament and in the government. At first glance, what Orban in Hungary and Kaczynski in Poland are doing may be interpreted exactly in this majoritarian, populist fashion. But here are some other examples and considerations to take into account before jumping to conclusions.

First, despite the trend of conservative populism, there have been many countries in which powerful independent bodies have been institutionalized over the last decade. Central banks – especially for the EU members and the countries in the Eurozone – are an obvious case in point. Moreover, the process of fiscal consolidation in EU context has proceeded largely unabated by the rise of populism in the region. Eastern European countries have signed up to the Fiscal Compact of the EU, and have accepted to coordinate their budgetary and fiscal

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[9] Pierre *Rosanvallon*, *Counter-Democracy*. Politics in an Age of Distrust (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[10] John Hart Ely, *Democracy and Distrust,* Harvard University Press, 1981.

policies. This has gone hand in hand with the introduction of fiscal councils at the national level – some of which, as in the Hungarian case, have considerable prerogatives to block budget decisions in certain cases.

Secondly, even in unlikely places like Romania, powerful independent judicial bodies have emerged, which have effectively carried out a "clean hands" operation in the country. The final assessment of the effects of this operation is yet to come, but there is no doubt that the anticorruption prosecutorial office is a spectacular example of Rosanvallon's counter-democracy. Similar developments – although with much less visible success – have resulted in the creation of a number of powerful independent agencies and bodies in Bulgaria – a country in our focus - (as the state security agency DANS, the Inspectorate at the Supreme Judicial Council, etc.).

Thirdly, trust in the EU in the region of Eastern Europe continues to be higher than in the rest of the union. More significantly, trust in the EU is generally higher than trust in local, national elites. This explains why many societies accept the monitoring role of EU bodies over the functioning of national governments. In fact, this monitoring role helps the electorate to hold its national representatives more accountable. Curiously, instead of undermining popular sovereignty (as it is sometimes believed), the EU may actually strengthen it very much in the way of reinforcing representation. Here, when we speak of the EU we have to take into account the Council of Europe, the ECHR and the Venice Commission as well. Despite the populist conservative revolution, these bodies are still taken as very authoritative in most of the countries. Even Russia has not fully broken ties with them despite the severe problems the Ukrainian situation, and the general turn to authoritarianism in the country has caused in their relationship.

Fourthly, the popularity of counter-democratic measures leads a number of political parties to imitate independent monitoring institutions or even NGOs. The "party of experts" model is probably the second most popular after the "party-media" model. The expert model draws again on the great distrust in parties and partisanships and offers a fake alternative – the non-partisan party. There are a lot of variations in the implementation of this model but almost in all parliaments in the region there will be political formations which have been built around specific experts. The drama of the Hungarian left is that it is currently fragmented into a number of similar organizations – partly NGOs, partly expert councils. The Reformist Block in Bulgaria emerged in 2014 by combining three elements: a strong presence of experts; NGO model of very horizontal organization; and strong criticism of the political establishment. As argued above, this party gained parliamentary representation in 2014, but at the time of writing it has split into its more NGO parts on the one hand, and its more "political" parts on the other.[11]

There is one fundamental reason why populism and counter-democracy are not mutually exclusive trends. This is that both are the product of significant distrust in the functioning

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[11] Let us consider the more troubling cases of Orban and Kaczynski, who seem to go against the above-described counter-democratic trend. They both look determined to dismantle the independent institutions in Hungary and Poland, respectively. But probably this is an overstatement – up to now they are rather set to take over these institutions by filling them with loyalists. Especially telling is the Hungarian example with the new constitution – the Fundamental Law. This constitution contains a significant number of independent bodies, which have long mandates – up to 12 years. It is true that now Fidesz and Orban can appoint party loyalists to these positions. But if the government changes, these bodies will serve as a significant counter-majoritarian check in the future. Furthermore, according to the new constitution most important laws are to be adopted by 2/3 majority. This also means that future simple majorities will have their hands tied – they will have to tolerate laws, adopted by their predecessors. All this does not fit well with the hypothesis of "dismantling of independent bodies and constraints" on the will of the majority. Rather, what Orban is definitely doing is opportunistic self-entrenchment, including through the capture of independent bodies. How permanent the damage to the system will be depends on the prospects of having a different political majority in the future. If these prospects are realistic, then the impact of the Orban model may actually be strengthening of the counter-majoritarian constitutional instruments – his appointees may block any reform the new majority hopes to implement.

If the prospects of change of the political majority are illusory – as regrettably is the case in Russia – similar policies of taking over of independent bodies are just instances of the installation of authoritarianism. No matter how problematic the situation in Hungary and Poland is, the levels of political pluralism, the viability of the opposition, and the overall chances for a change of the majority are still real there.

of political representatives. In fact, the fanning of fears that the representatives "betray" the people works both in the direction of augmenting populist players and strengthening counter-democratic measures.

In comparison to NGOs in Spain, Turkey and Greece, Eastern European NGOs are more of the counter-democratic type rather than grass-root activist. They have drawn their legitimacy more on expertise rather than on direct involvement with the people. In contrast to think-tanks and other expert-based institutions in the West, however, they are privately funded, as most of their money comes from foreign sources. Some of them have even included it in their strategy to rely on foreign donors in order to achieve a greater degree of independence.

This character of NGOs in Bulgaria, Hungary and Russia has made them much more exposed to negative backlash since the mass protests. Big parts of the public perceive them as the masterminds behind such protests, which is a considerable exaggeration of their actual role and capacities. Such perceptions have "justified" the restrictive measures by some of the governments, however.

Social networks and virtual communities

 The advent of the social media has had a considerable empowering effect on civil society by cutting the costs of communication and making mobilization much faster. A lot has been written on the effect of social networks on mass protests, some even trying to call them "the Twitter revolutions". Our case studies caution against this typical exaggeration of the role of social networks. Such account also neglect the serious problems which new technologies create. Social networks, for instance, have definitely contributed to the manipulative generation of anxieties and fears. This is so because of two basic characteristics of the social networks, two novel forms of freedom they offer: the choice of authority, and the choice of audience. Since almost everyone is on Facebook or Twitter, the average user *potentially* has access to the views and opinions of the greatest authorities on almost any topic. Traditionally the state authorities have been seen as a possessor of immensely greater expertise than the average citizen on virtually any topic. This is why the universal claim of the state to authority has not been seriously questioned, apart from in exceptional circumstances. Today Google and the social networks provide an enormous pool of 'expert' opinions on which the citizen can draw and criticize the positions of public bodies.

The second feature of social media, which is politically relevant, is the choice of audience they provide to the speaker. Apparently people tend to communicate with like-minded people, which creates a very fragmented public space. The promise of limitless access to *all* opinions and the best expertise often boils down to access to the opinion of real and virtual *friends* and friends of friends. It has been argued that this feature of the Internet

communication has aided ghettoization[12] and radicalization, and that it has created new opportunities for manipulation. Since people want to hear things they like, creating likeable viral "news" has become not only the strategy of many social network enthusiasts, but it has also been put to commercial use by both new and traditional media.[13] The abundance of likeable viral "news" has been well-captured by the so-called "word of the year for 2016" – *post-truth.* "Post-truth"[14] refers to the secondary importance of the truth-element in the news: the essential is their potential to generate a response by the public (in terms of clicks, likes, dislikes, etc.), which in turn generates influence and profit.

Further, social networks may generate promises that are unrealistic and ultimately counterproductive. One such promise is that the *virtual reality* of citizens' involvement in politics is equivalent to their real-life involvement. The usage of social networks is normally not designed to enhance *actual* but rather *virtual* participation and representation of citizens. In general, they indeed lower the cost of citizens' involvement both in terms of finances and time. Citizens are not asked to invest a lot of resources in politics, but rather are given an opportunity to mobilize fast in order to make a point. Whether this is a flash mob or an ad hoc electoral party or movement, the idea is to provide an opportunity for a brief and inexpensive moment of actual involvement, which will however become the basis of inflated virtual reality of participation and representation. This virtual reality is a product of the media – both new and traditional – which will for a long time circulate images, slogans and speeches from it in the electronic realm. Thus, through minimum actual participation the citizen will receive a maximum amount of lasting virtual reality representation.

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[12] See Grant Blank, "Who Creates Content?" in Information, Communication and Society, 16:4, 590-612, 2013.
[13] The Rise and Rise of fake News, BBC Trending, http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-37846860
[14] Word of the year of Oxford Dictionary. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016.

The Noble Fiction of the Citizen

The social media also create a misleading, idealized portrait of the citizen. The virtual citizens inhabiting the social network may create the false perception that they are ready to contribute endless amount of time, resources and efforts for the advancement of the public interest. This fiction has been always known to political theorists, but it has never been built to that extent in the functioning of modern, representative democracy. The advent of the social networks has strengthened the notion that virtually everyone could be familiar with and participate in public decision-making at any time and for any duration.

The dominance of the fiction has definitely had an empowering effect for many people both in terms of public discourse, and in terms of institutional imagination. Most of the new political structures that emerge have the words "civic" or "citizen" in their names: Civic Platform, Citizens for the European Future of Bulgaria and so on. The media-party hybrids, the mass protests and the referendums, together with the non-authoritative authorities are all based on the same assumption – that the citizen is capable of autonomous, highly-minded and responsible decisions, in which she puts the public interest ahead of her self-interest.

Compared to this fiction all representative structures – despite their attempts to adapt to it – look corrupt and egoistic. Therefore, despite civic activism and various forms in involving in protests and follow-up activities, trust in political structures has not improved.

The dominance of the fiction of the citizen has other negative consequences as well, however. First, it does not prevent attempts by specific political actors to concentrate power and to engage in serious self-entrenchment – the already mentioned examples of Russia and Hungary are cases in point. Skilful political operators may use the fiction of the citizen to

denigrate their opponents as corrupt elites and then grab arbitrary, unchecked powers. In some cases, the fiction of the noble citizen may be used to discredit *all* political players and the political system as a whole: then in the circumstances of widespread cynicism the people in power can continue to rule unopposed. Thus, the introduction of a fictional, too demanding ideal may actually contribute to the spread of cynicism in society.

Secondly, the fiction of the non-egoistic citizens may be actually too demanding on citizens themselves. They do have their own fears and anxieties – whether real or imagined, they do care first and foremost for themselves and their relatives in many, if not most situations. This is why populists have proven so successful, because they have "liberated" the median voter from the excessive demand to be an altruistic citizen. Populists both generate unreal fears and fan real ones in order to create conservative majorities afraid for their own rights and privileges. In certain cases these majorities are nothing more than a backlash against the fiction of the citizen.

Authorities without authority

As made clear in the previous paragraph, the hope has been that social networks will make political parties more trusted that they now are. They could adopt the social network and their principles in their organizational structures, thus mimicking the immediateness of reaction which virtual communication allows. The lack of trust undermines the authority of any public body. Not surprisingly, some of them have actually decided to accept that they lack authority, and thus to create something paradoxical – the non-authoritative authority. The main technique which makes this option possible is twofold. First, the political party actually sends the policy question it has to decide back to the people. This could be done either via referendum or by turning the political party into a deliberative framework in

which actually "the people" decide what course of action is to be taken. Secondly, the party promises a complete transparency in the manner of taking decisions – both organizationally and financially. These two measures are meant to convince the public that it participates live in the taking of the decision. There is a lot of commonality between the idea of the non-authoritative authority and the media-party hybrids: both of these phenomena have the potential of transforming politics into a reality TV product.

Referendums have become rather popular in Eastern Europe. In 2016 there were at least two such major events in the region – in Hungary (on refugees) and in Bulgaria (on the electoral rules). The migrant crisis has provided a fertile ground for numerous local referendums or threats of such. It is the strategy of national-populist in Bulgaria to threaten the staging of local referendums wherever the government plans to situate a refugee camp, for instance.

The dominance of Google and the social-networks helps sustain the illusion that non-authoritative authorities are actually possible. It was argued above that the Internet could be seen as an endless resource of expertise and self-organization of large groups of people. Political players may offer to coordinate such efforts and to publicize the decisions reached by the "people" through referendums, deliberative polls, intense structured discussions, etc.

The effects of this phenomenon seem to be the following. First, the underplaying of the capacity of politicians to determine the agenda and the content of public decisions actually may strengthen their capacity to do so in hidden and partly manipulative ways. As the example with the local referendums in Bulgaria shows, it is patently clear that in this case the agenda is driven by the nationalist-populist parties and the referendums and public protests are just part of the strategy of these political players. Actually, there is hardly a referendum initiative in Europe which is *not* a result of a party strategy. So, the draining of

"authority" from politics should not be taken at face value: it may be seen just as a manoeuvre of the parties allowing them to do what they have always done but this time in circumstances of low trust and fears.

Secondly, the invention of the non-authoritative authority actually shifts some powers to other actors, which are bound to fill the vacuum of authority. The most likely candidates happen to be the media outlets and the corporate interests behind them. Fears do sell, and a large part of the commercial media have specialized in the field of selling fears in Eastern Europe. When political players officially resign from their responsibility to shape public discourse, educate the public, and take unpopular decisions, they actually shift authority to bodies excelling in generating and fanning fears for commercial purposes.

The positive side

These cautionary remarks do not detract from the fact that the advent of social network has had serious positive effects on the capacity of civil society to mobilize at a lower cost, and to communicate with the public much more efficiently. Especially savvy at that seem to be Podemos, who have used the Internet to include their members and sympathizers in decision-making and agenda-setting (establishing priorities). They have used it very competently for the purposes of fund-raising and accounting to the public for their funds. If fact Podemos has turned its fund-raising activities into part of its ideology by relying on small donations and criticizing the established parties as dependent financially on the state or corporate donations.

There have been also successful attempts at turning "virtual", Facebook communities into real political subjects – the "Yes, Bulgaria" party gathered in 2017 around 1,500 people at

its constitutive party by using only social networks. It is yet to be seen how viable this political project is, however, since as a general rule virtual support not always translates into votes.

Or as the Spanish case study reports: "The characteristics of the more innovative political organizations make it difficult to determine 'membership' with respect to a group or collective. However, although these non-conventional organizations are not stable institutional structures, they nonetheless work according to a certain sense of belonging and a diffuse, but shared, sense of political identity. Political events – physical or digital – generate shared affinities and entrench social networks. These networks create social capital, which make possible the creation of social movements that go beyond single events or mobilizations. In that process, the Internet has an important role to play, as it enables the generation and sustenance of multiple networks created through specific events over time, and makes possible the maintenance of those networks even across dispersed physical locations. Such networks constitute virtual communities, which are constantly connected and work as operative structures for social movements."

Part Three: Policy recommendations

Liberal democracy is put under considerable stress in both established and transitional democracies. Its framework is still preserved in Europe, with the notable exceptions of Russia and increasingly Turkey as well. But pressures that are building up are quite strong and significant. Therefore, the first general recommendation is that liberal democracy needs to be rethought on the basis of more realistic assumptions for the role of the citizens. After all, contemporary democracy is a *representative* democracy and a *meritocratic* democracy. People not only want self-government, but they also desire good governance. This explains why despite all the debates and promises of "radical" revisions of democracy, the only two measures which have the potential to radically transform it have never been seriously considered: the substitution of elections by lottery, and radical reduction of the terms of office so that many citizens could have access to power.[15] The ancient Greeks operated their democracy in this way exactly because they thought that *ex ante* equality should be given preference to merit, competence and qualification. Contemporary democracy tries to combine equality and merit, and most of the people are not ready to part with either of these two elements. In this sense, the lack of certain innovations – like the lack of widespread use of lottery – tell us more about the character of the present-day democracy than some of the abovementioned novelties.[16]

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[15] See David van Reybrouk, *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy,* Bodley Head, 2016. See also Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government,* Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[16] For an account of rather radical experimental democratic measures, which have to been tried in Eastern Europe see Green Paper : *The Future of Democracy in Europe, **Trends, Analyses and Reforms, A Green Paper for the Council of Europe***, Co-ordinated by Philippe C. Schmitter, European University Institute

In more specific terms, our case studies may be read in support of the following policy recommendations:

1. *Transformative protests:* In order for a protest to have a more lasting impact in terms of inspiring new representative structures, it needs to be more transformative in its nature than simply corrective. Massive, highly emotional protests may leave little trace if they are not backed by a sufficiently developed political ideology. Many people seem convinced that *all* ideologies are anyhow flawed and are willing to back more "pragmatic" civic action with a concrete goal and limited time span. If this is the predominant attitude, however, it is hardly a surprise that civic involvement does not translate into new representative structures;

2. *Moderation of anti-partisan attitudes:* In fact, the most effective and influential results are achieved by protests not when they are targeted against the "political system" as a whole, or the "parties" in general, but when they attempt to mobilize part of the voters – be them on the left or on the right. The protests may lead to serious redefinition of what is left and right, but still they are more effective when they contribute to the development of the party system. They may have very limited impact, despite their intensity, if the demands are too abstract, too general and do not provide sufficient focus for voter mobilization;

3. *Protests as a Cause:* Protests do have value both as a specific cause that they pursue, and as a process of civic engagement. Protests that are more seen as valuable in terms of process are less likely to lead to influential political parties or movements.

The issue of the cause is in this sense paramount. Thus, it has proven difficult to build sizeable representative structures around single issues like the environment, corruption or reform of the judicial system. Although such organizations have appeared, they have not have the same political weight as structures offering more comprehensive policy packages including social justice, general economic policy, social inclusion and so on;

4. *Mimicking representation by governments and established political actors:* In the wake of mass protests in many states, governments have become inventive and they have attempted to create their own "protests parties". This has the potential to confuse the public and to denigrate all protesting activities. One possible mistake is to underestimate the impact of these mimicking manoeuvres. They are often quite transparent, verging on the absurdity, and therefore many tend to not take them seriously. At the time of elections, however, some of these engineered political projects have competed successfully with "authentic" political parties. Or at least they undermine the legitimacy of any protest party or movement;

5. *Fake representation:* Sometimes authorities have tried to control the input of civil society in the political process by creating "citizens' councils", where NGOs are represented. This is a doubled edged sword and in political systems with decreased pluralism this is just a demonstration of the non-existent willingness of the authorities to hear the voice of civil society. In pluralistic environments such councils may provide some genuine feedback in terms of consultations, working groups, etc. But often the idea is simply to justify some governmental policy by demonstrating the support of carefully selected organizations. So, such councils should be treated with extreme caution and should be assessed on the basis of their substantive output;

6. *The "foreign agent" paranoia:* By using generally legitimate arguments of transparency and accountability, a number of governments are currently trying to curb civil society activities by effectively banning foreign funding. Branding organizations as "foreign agents" and requiring from them the same levels of transparency as from public servants, politicians or state agencies, these governments have the apparent goal to destroy any voice of dissent and disagreement. NGOs are neither state agencies, nor political bodies. They should report their sources of funding, but also they should not be deprived from their autonomous decision to choose these sources and to manage them;

7. *The opposition is not the NGO sector:* Some governments, which have been successful in self-entrenching themselves against the opposition have started open wars against the civil society sector. These wars use instruments from media denigration to legal restrictions (described in the previous point). It has to be made clear that NGOs do have a right to be involved in political in their nature activities: analysing, commenting on policies, elaborating and advocating specific policies. None of these makes them equal of political parties – they do not participate in elections and they do not form governments. Banning or restricting the political activities of NGOs is a serious form of constitutional abuse. It not only undermines freedom of speech and association, but it effectively destroys political pluralism;

8. *A good word for experts:* The rise of populism and the wave of mass protests has exacerbated public suspicions of experts and has fuelled confidence that government could be based solely on the unadulterated by elitism will of the people. This is a very dangerous assumption which undermines the standing of NGOs and helps their opponents. Very often think-tanks and independent research institutes are attacked as "part of the corrupt" elite. These accusations should be treated seriously despite

the fact that they are overblown and most of the time not in good faith. In order to tackle them these organizations should also make sure that they take into account public attitudes in the elaboration of their agendas;

9. *Social networks and unrealistic assumptions:* Social networks have proven instrumental in protests and in their aftermath. But they should not be used to create misleading and dangerous expectations, namely that:

    - they could substitute party structures;

    - that network users are the same as party members and voters;

    - that they make the involvement of the individual in public matters virtually costless and limitless;

    - that anyone who is paid for working in the public interest (MPs, party leaders and organizers, NGOs, etc.) is by virtue of that more corrupt by the noble and disinterested internet user;

    - that the Internet provides an accessible to all pool of limitless expertise which makes other authorities redundant.

10. *Against slactivism:* Cyberspace provides different opportunities for widening space for political participation. However, political activism and participation could not be achieved solely by engaging with the internet. Conventional social movements should be incorporated with new channels made available by new technologies. For now, it seems like the only way activists can achieve solidarity in a larger scale and collective action is to use internet to organize, and inform people. Without them, it is hard to accumulate much support enough to force administration to change something. Slactivism, at this point, poses the greatest threat to activism. As a feel-

good activity in front of a computer, sitting on a chair, people try to be 'good' activists.

11. *Trolls or fake citizens:* As the faking of political representation and protests, governments and powerful political players have invented fake virtual citizens – the trolls. They maybe a fact of life, but they also help undermine trust in any civil activity and because of that should be treated seriously. Pressure should be put on political parties to condemn such activities and refrain from them;

12. *Media-politics hybridization:* The media and politics should not be treated as separate spheres for the purposes of policy analyses. Their hybridization has become significant.

It is probably too early to pass a conclusive judgment on the effects of the recent protest wave which has affected Europe. Our case studies show that there are ongoing developments: some of them optimistic, others – less so. Of particular concerns is the fact that confidence in the political bodies of liberal-democracy continues to be low and is probably at critical levels. In such a context protests have created forms of civic activism, which have survived them, but most of these suffer from the same maladies as the traditional political and civic structures. Furthermore, the emergence of more and more politicians crusading against civil society is a particularly serious phenomenon, which should be monitored closely in the coming years.

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