

Lessons from the Protest Wave in Europe

Policy Paper

**The Politics of Protest:
Between the Venting of Frustration
and Transformation of Democracy**



CENTRE FOR LIBERAL STRATEGIES

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BETWEEN THE VENTING OF FRUSTRATION AND
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The Politics of Protest:

Between the Venting of Frustration and Transformation of Democracy

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In drafting this paper, the author has used the briefing materials produced for the *Lessons from the Protest Wave in Europe* project as well as publications of Ivan Krastev, CLS

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Introduction: The Zeitgeist of Protest

What we witness today is the global rise of “Square people”¹ - a spontaneous protest movement that has emerged between governments and traditional oppositions. At first sight, this movement ignores political parties, distrusts the mainstream media, fails to recognize any specific leaders, and rejects 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 crisis. They engulfed on democratic and non-democratic regimes. This new revolutionary wave does not have a common ideology or demands it consists of mostly young people “aspiring to 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 not inspired by the will of the unrepresented groups in society to enter the institutions but by the hope that we can do without the existing institutions. “It wasn’t because occupiers brought the politicians specific demands and proposals” that they made a difference insisted Occupy Wall Street 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.”³

Protests take place in countries that are very different from one another: some democratic and some not democratic countries, some rich and some poor. There are countries that have been very much affected by the economic crisis like for example Spain, or Portugal, or Greece, and there are countries like Brazil, that have been doing very well economically.

Social inequality cannot be singled out as a major explanatory factor. Brazil again is a case in point: there inequality has been reduced as a result of recent economic successes. In most

of the cases protests were not organized by political parties or trade unions. What is more, they were not simply not organized by political parties and trade unions, but they were organized against political parties and trade unions. The new social media played a quite important role in this regard and made mobilization and organization possible without traditional political and trade union structures.

Another element which was noticeable was that protests were not directly linked to traditional forms of political action seeking representation in parliament or other bodies of power. The “Occupy” movement and its demands are a case in point: its demands were so abstract and far reaching – as the revision of capitalism itself – as they were impossible to translate in the language of routine party politics. Elsewhere, as in the mentioned case of Brazil, demands were so concrete – as the price of bus tickets – that it could hardly become an issue leading to a substantial transformation of the party system. In a way, most of the protests produced next to nothing in the sphere of proper political action. It was very much participation without representation.

Another preliminary observation is that election results have not been always affected by protests. The case of Turkey illustrates the point, where despite massive protests against Erdogan, he and his party have been able to win all subsequent elections. Something similar happened in Bulgaria, where two very large protests did not change the places of the first and the second major parties in the countries. Curiously, opinion polls in January 2013 – before the first wave of massive protests – and the May 2013 election results (which took place after them) were almost identical.

Of course a lot of discussion seminars and literature on protests have been produced. Most of that have been from the point of view of the protesters. There were a lot of sociological studies, a lot of anthropologists trying to understand why protesters went on the street: what have they been trying to achieve?

How can we make sense of all these protests? Do they signal a radical change in the way politics will be practiced or are they simply a spectacular but ultimately insignificant eruption of public anger? Why have the protests happened in democratic and non-democratic countries alike? And why is the politics of disruption more attractive to the protesters than traditional revolutions or political reformism?

In this policy paper we take stock of a large body of research and the rich discussions from two workshops, which took place in 2014 in Barcelona and Berlin, as well as during the panels at several conferences, where members of the CLS team presented their work on these issues. The first of these events gave an opportunity of participants in the protests to express their views, to present their case for the recent events. In the second event in Berlin, people knowledgeable of the government response to the outbreak of protest were invited with the aim to discuss the governmental strategies of containing or limiting the political impact of massive outbreaks of anger. Five countries were covered in the project: Bulgaria, Russia, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine.

One conclusion which comes out very strongly is that although there are common trends – analyzed in more detail below – protests do have rather different nature and character. From the selection of countries that we have focused on, the Ukrainian protests stand out as a very specific case in which the people were motivated by a geopolitical choice for their country – between the European Union and Russia. Events there unfolded as a national independence movement, as the expression of a specific vision for the general development of Ukraine as a European democracy.

The protection of national sovereignty was not in the centre of the events elsewhere. In Turkey, for instance, the massive protests against Erdogan’s rule were motivated mostly by fears of authoritarian tendencies, fears that a non-secular political force is invading public spaces, reducing the freedoms of the public in their use. Not by chance, protests over a public space – a park – triggered massive participation of young people in rallies and activities lasting over many days.

The Spanish case, as the case in many other countries from the EU Southern periphery (Greece, Portugal, Italy), features a very strong leftist, anti-austerity element. In this case the influence of economic considerations is by far the strongest: there, the protesters have a clear stance against certain policies, which they see as “imposed” on their countries by the EU, the IMF and other international organizations.

Russia’s protests were directed mostly against the “managed democracy” installed by president Putin in the country. This is democracy which features elections, but normally the results of these elections are known much in advance, and the opposition can practically never win them. In addition, there is significant governmental control over the media in the

country, as on all forms of protest activities. Out of all five countries, the Russian case is by far the most difficult for protesters – they are forced to operate informally, because any form of organization immediately comes under heavy pressure from the authorities. Since 2014 and the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis things have actually worsened: control has tightened, enormous nationalistic public support for the president has emerged, and criticism against the regime has been stifled or marginalized in the media.

The Bulgarian case is founded on the issue of corruption and capture of the government by powerful economic groups. As a result, the government does not deliver policies in the public interest, in the eyes of many people who took to the streets two times in 2013 against two different governments. Overall, the protests were motivated by a desire to reclaim the government, to reduce the influence of special, “oligarchic” interests on it.

If there is one generalization to be made with considerable certainty, this is that in all cases people went to the streets with the understanding that *they* act as the *sovereign*. No matter what the number of protesters actually was, they all claimed to express and represent the wishes and the positions of the people as a whole. They claimed to be the true, authentic voice of the political community. This is a central feature for the understanding of the events. These were not issue-protests focused on specific, concrete policies. It is true that in all cases protests were triggered by a specific issue – be it the price of electricity or the appointment of a notorious person as an important public official (Bulgaria); an association treaty with the EU (Ukraine); suspicions of electoral fraud (Russia); construction works in a public park (Turkey); austerity policies (Spain). But these policies were only the starting point. They became the pretext for a much more significant claim that the protesters made: that the democratically elected authorities in their respective countries have failed to perform their duties properly, have lost legitimacy, and should be replaced by others. The protesting people in all five countries were convinced that they have a right to make such a pronouncement, although not in all countries they had a clear alternative as to who exactly should replace the failed governments.

Since this claim to representation of sovereignty is very central to all events that we discuss, now we turn briefly to a theoretical elucidation of the relation between assembly, protest and popular sovereignty: this discussion will be necessary for the policy-oriented part of the paper.

1. The right to assembly and protest are expression of popular sovereignty

The right to assembly, although firmly established among the fundamental rights in liberal democracy, has a dubious independent value, if any. Indeed, for an individual it is hardly distinguishable from the right to expression of a specific type: expression requiring the physical presence of the individual in public spaces. From the point of view of social groups, the analysis follows the same logic: the right to assembly could be reduced to a combination of the right to association and the right to expression. It is simply the right of social groups to express their views through their physical presence. The enormous possibilities of modern technology have actually rendered the value of the right to assembly rather low in this regard as well: nowadays it is, as a rule, possible to create the impression of the physical presence of masses of people, even if they are not assembled in a single place. Therefore, the right to assembly has generally given way in terms of importance to expressive rights (the rights to create impressions) and associative rights – the rights to institutionalise relationships with others for the purposes of collective action.⁴

There is actually only one perspective from which the right to assembly seems to have an independent value, and this is the perspective of the *sovereign*: the people. As it is well known, the First Amendment to the US Constitution speaks of “the right of the *people* peaceably to assemble”. Since it is not indicated otherwise, we have to assume that these are the same “People of the United States” who ordained and established the Constitution. Written before the advent of mass democracy, the US Constitution still nurtured, it seems, one of the foundational misconceptions of early liberal democracy: the myth of the possibility of the physical presence (or the “existence” in the European metaphysical tradition) of the sovereign people. Put simply, this myth consists in the belief that ‘the people’ is not just a useful legal fiction, but an actually existing political body, which could demonstrate its presence through assembly. The extension of the franchise and the growth of the population necessitated the revision of this foundational myth, but, actually, it has never been fully refuted. The revised version of the myth goes as follows: ‘the people’ is an actually existing political entity, which could demonstrate its presence through assembly, if the time and space allow for that. Since time and space can practically never allow for the assembly of the people in a contemporary mass democracy, the foundational myth can never

be falsified: as such, rather than being refuted, it has acquired a status of a first principle of modern constitutionalism, a principle which simply should be taken for granted.

Thus, the right to assembly serves an important role in modern constitutions, not as an instrument useful to individuals or groups (as such it is dispensable with and reducible to other rights), but rather as indirect evidence for the existence of the sovereign people. The right to assembly demonstrates that the people exist not only as a product/construction of democratic representation and the counting of individual votes, but also in a more real, even physical sense. The people are not only *re-presented* in the political process, but they are also *present* in it as a political body. Even if it is admitted that their presence is not constant, since it is usually impossible to assemble the people in a single space, there is still an irreducible possibility for them to interfere, to assemble, and to exercise their sovereign power without any mediators and without any re-presentation. In short, the right to assembly is a kind of Cartesian ontological proof of the potential presence of the sovereign people in politics.

It is true that this interpretation of the right to assembly sounds somewhat fantastical. The point is that if we bracket it out, there will be little else to discuss in the right to assembly – it will be reduced, as argued above, to rights to expression and association. In the best case, it could be discussed as a constitutional fossil from the early days of liberal democracy, when the possibility of all enfranchised to assemble seemed not that fantastical. Probably, this deflationary approach is the right approach to the right to assembly.

Proponents of such a deflation of the right to assembly might point to the fact that its importance as a right of the sovereign people has been stressed mainly by the fiercest critics of liberal democracy, a fact which should alert everybody to the threats implicit in the very concept. Carl Schmitt, for instance, started his radical criticism of parliamentary democracy from a position with which very few democrats would want to disagree: that all power emanates from the people.⁵ Schmitt's quarrel was mainly with the idea that the exercise of this power should be done through the counting of (secret) votes – be it in a direct or representative form of democracy. Schmitt argued that such a construction of the will of the people was 'mechanical' and 'artificial', and it could not ensure what he called 'substantive representation' of ideas. The aggregation of private interests, Schmitt went on,

could not lead to the articulation of public ideals and goals. He believed that through assembly the real nature of the people could be better represented than through the formal channels of liberal democracy. Supporting a popular leader, gathering together to acclaim a single decision-maker in Schmitt's view constituted the proper alternative to the flaws of mechanical representation in liberal democracy.⁶

This controversial defence of the importance of the right to assembly understood as a right of the sovereign people should serve as a warning: any undue inflation of its importance might lead to anti-liberal, anti-democratic apologies.

The idea that the sovereign – the people – are a really existing body, which could demonstrate its presence through assembly, is the cornerstone of the populist rhetoric which sweeps much of Europe at the present moment.⁷

Let us consider a reconstruction of the populist argument, which could be discerned in the political discourse of many countries:

1. 'The people' constitute a sufficiently coherent subject, which could be attributed a personality, rational intentions, and a sufficient degree of homogeneity;
2. The classical ideological parties of the left and the right progressively grow alienated from the 'people'. This creates a crisis of representation, the creation of a secluded group of 'party elites', which defend their own interests and fail to represent the interests of the people;
3. There is a need for new political actors and leaders, who have a more direct appeal to the people, who could restore the broken chain of representation;
4. These are the leaders who could 'assemble' the people without the mediation of the traditional political parties. They achieve this through their personal charisma, or through appeals to issues such as nationalism, identity, personal integrity, public morality, issues which appeal to everybody from the people regardless of their party affiliation or ideological bend;
5. The power of such leaders to 'assemble' the people as a whole, to appeal to them as a whole, and to re-present them as a whole is more important than issues such as efficient party organisation, ideological coherence, narrative coherence through time, etc;

6. The support of the people – expressed either in elections or through direct assembly and action - is the ultimate source of legitimation in democracy. The will of the people should not be frustrated through constitutional constraints, foreign commitments and conditionalities.

It is important to distinguish this argument from Carl Schmitt's direct advocacy of plebiscitarian dictatorship. The populist mindset is laying the foundations for a majoritarian, illiberal democracy, in which individual and minority rights are under increasing pressure. It is not necessarily the case that the institutions of democracy themselves are going to be undermined by the rise of populism, although such a development could not be excluded. On the basis of the evidence thus far, however, it is more probable that Central Europe, including the new members of the EU, is more likely to head to a kind of illiberal and generally troubled form of democracy, rather than to plebiscitarian dictatorships. For the rest of Eastern Europe plebiscitarian forms of authoritarian government are by no means excluded. Hybrid versions of authoritarianism – as Putin's Russia – seem to be increasingly assertive.⁸

2. Protests and populist parties both pretend to express popular sovereignty, both speak on behalf of the people as a whole

Our second main assertion is that the nature of protests has to be interpreted against the background of rising political populism. The link here is again through the idea of popular sovereignty: both populist parties and protests claim to be representative of sovereignty, they claim to be *better* expression of sovereignty than the traditional parties of the left and right. Much has been written about political populism: here we just refer to its most basic features, necessary for the ensuing analysis.

Populism is a concept which has been well studied both generally and in the context of Eastern Europe.⁹ Although there is a debate whether it is an ideology or just a style of politics, there is, I believe, 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. This explains the difficulty in situating populism on the classical left-right spectrum of political competition. Some of the populist parties are on the left, others are on the 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. Further, since populists do not have any developed programmatic and ideological language, they borrow freely from the vocabulary of the left and the right, often creating refreshing and curious collages.

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 Central European family of populism is openly and often aggressively majoritarian: it is centered on the belief that the consent of the majority is the ultimate ground of legitimation in politics. Therefore, this type of populism is particularly opposed to the idea of minority rights. Further, and to varying degrees, populists in the region challenge at least some elements of what they see as the “liberal consensus” of the transition period: market-oriented reforms, integration in the Euro-Atlantic organizations, rejection of nationalistic language and behavior. Populists “challenge” all these “taboos”, reject the “political correctness” of liberalism, and give an opportunity for the citizens to discuss problems which have been “bracketed out” by the mainstream parties. Often these challenges remain at the level of rhetorical flourishes, but there are instances in which they have produced concrete policies as well.

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 populists, 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, but it is hardly more troubling than in other countries of (Southern) Europe where it has not become such a societal preoccupation.

In their deepest and simplest core it may be argued that all democratic players are populist, and this argument is often used by critics of the concept of populism: if all parties and political actors are in a certain sense populist, what is so distinctive of the phenomenon? This challenge is a misunderstanding of populism, however, since populism is a conscious and sustained exercise in political minimalism. The populists strip down democratic politics and the idea of a political party to their bare essentials, shedding on their way the ambition to educate the public (they represent preferences as they are), to provide expertise (they are representative of the expertise of the public), to offer elaborate ideologies and programmes (they do not normally have such), and to create a complex organization with developed hierarchies and requirements for loyalty (they operate normally as horizontal networks held together by the immediate public appeal of their leaders). Thus, the populist actors reject to be anything but the simplest core structure necessary to translate the wishes of the people in political decisions.

From this perspective, the populist party may often metamorphose into a media or a mediatic phenomenon, a sort of political reality show in which the desires and frustrations of the public are revealed on their way to becoming dressed in political decisions. It is no coincidence that some such parties, as Ataka in Bulgaria, for instance, have started as TV

shows: eventually, the presenter of the show registered a party under the same name, which entered parliament soon after its creation in 2005.

Populism is conceptually linked with nationalism, as far as it is majoritarian and insists on the homogeneity of the people. But populist parties are not extremists or extreme-right organizations. Normally their nationalism is more tempered and centrist although they may enter into explicit or covert coalitions with more radical nationalist organizations. Generally, however, populists tend to mainstream nationalist themes (even obnoxious and dangerous ones) borrowed from radicals, by trying to make them more palatable to the public.

Populism has many and different faces. Some of these are actually rather civilized. For instance, the former Bulgarian tsar Simeon II in 2001 formed a political movement under his name and managed to win the parliamentary elections in the same year by a landslide. The movement was gradually transformed into a liberal party, but this transformation was unsuccessful: at present the party is outside of parliament and enjoys the support of less than one percent of the citizens.

This discussion was necessary to show that protests emerge in a period of time when populist party politics has been on the rise. In this sense there are multiple synergies between protesters and populist players. First, it is possible that protests and populist parties *compete* with each other as better representations of the will of the people. Secondly, it is possible that some populist players manage to tap the protest energy for the purposes of party creation. In the case of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain we do have such cases. Thirdly, it is possible that protests benefit some non-populist, traditional parties, which manage to capitalize public energy for their own reinvigoration. Admittedly much more rare, this also has happened: in Bulgaria a rather traditional centre-right party – the Reformist block – emerged on the basis of the summer 2013 protests. Last but not least, protest could help to consolidate populist or even semi-authoritarian leaders as the Turkish and the Russian cases demonstrated. Although quite massive, protests in both countries have helped (as an unintended side effect) to mobilize the supporters of Erdogan and Putin respectively.

3. Main facts about the recent protests

In this section we start to review the most important features of the protests in the five countries and to draw their specific policy implications. Before embarking on the analysis, however, it is necessary to recount briefly the five cases:

Bulgaria 2013-2014

In 2013 Bulgaria has seen two large waves of protests. First, the government of GERB – a centre-right party - was brought down in February by a series of mass rallies and marches. These started in January in the city of Varna, where people were protesting mostly against the high prices of electricity and other utilities. When the protests moved to Sofia in February, the government of PM Boyko Borissov became their primary target, and after an incident in which the police used some violence against the protesters, the government handed in its resignation. Reportedly, around a hundred thousand people took part in these protests, as the most populous marches took place in the city of Varna.

The country went through a turbulent period in which President Plevneliev needed to form an interim cabinet in early March. The cabinet organized pre-term elections on May 12 which resulted in a parliament badly divided between the former ruling party – GERB – and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS). In the circumstances, the radical nationalistic party Ataka became the king-maker, allowing BSP and DPS to form the cabinet of PM Oresharski.

On June 14 this cabinet made an ill-fated move: it appointed a media mogul – Delyan Peevski – as head of the major state security service (DANS). The appointment immediately brought thousands of people to the streets. After several days, they started to demand the resignation of the whole government: the resignation of Delyan Peevski from his position in DANS did not calm down the situation. Massive protests continued throughout June and July, and after some break in August continued in September and October under various forms. Overall around 500,000 people took part in these protests.

The February protests started as a public reaction to rising prices of electricity and other utilities. The people did not immediately blame the government for that. In the city of Varna, where the whole process started, the first targets of popular anger were “the

monopolies” (electric power supplier companies), and what is seen as a Varna-based shady business group – TIM. In Bulgaria there was no special emphasis on austerity policies after the financial crisis in 2008, because economic policy in the country has been quite financially disciplined since at least 1998. Generally, the country has been run on very low taxes, balanced budgets, low foreign indebtedness, restricted public spending, relatively low salaries in the public sector. This model was rather functional until 2009, when solid economic growth led to a gradual rise in living standards. The stagnation that followed, however, the rising unemployment associated with it, led to a significant deterioration of the situation of specific vulnerable groups. The GERB government was slow in figuring out and addressing the problem, which finally erupted in 2013 in the form of public protest. Not surprisingly, the GERB government did become a target of the protesters (probably not without the support of interested political players).

Apart from the rallies and marches, the February protests took another, rather horrifying form. There was a wave of public suicides of people setting themselves on fire: this really shocked society and politicians, and led to quite considerable societal confrontation in which the whole political elite became to be seen as problematic. Some of the suicides were clearly politically motivated, like the one of Plamen Goranov, who was protesting mostly against corruption and the role of TIM in Varna: he asked for the resignation of the mayor of Varna, and this resignation was handed in shortly after the suicide. Others, like the attempt made by a man who set himself on fire in front of the President’s headquarters, in the center of Sofia, was rather an act of desperation, without a clear political agenda. The suicides did amplify considerably the effects of the protests, and were an expression of the public disgust towards the political parties, as well as desperation. In Varna, Plamen has become a symbol of the protests.

Gradually, in late March the protests started to slow down in intensity and the political parties recovered from the shock of the previous month. The immediate effects of the protests included not only the resignation of Borisov’s cabinet; they also changed the character of the electoral campaign in the May parliamentary poll. All the parties tried to adapt their program to the new reality, and they included measures to alleviate the situation of people more affected by the economic crisis. Mostly, these included financial help for vulnerable groups, some lowering of the prices of electricity, etc. Also, there were some new

faces on the party lists: for example, the socialists excluded from their party lists some of their strongest and more influential politicians. Even the party leader - Stanishev - promised not to become Prime Minister if they win the elections.

As to the June protests, after the formation of Oresharski's cabinet, one of its first initiatives was a revision of the law on state security services and the appointment of a new head of DANS. On June 14 Delyan Peevski was elected by parliament, and this immediately brought around ten thousand people in front of the government headquarters. Peevski handed in his resignation on the next day, and after some delay and procedural complication he was ultimately relieved from his duties a couple of days after. However, the protests did not subside – on the contrary, people started to demand the resignation of the entire government of Mr. Oresharski. This was anyhow a difficult cabinet, created by the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms representing the Turkish minority (together, both parties having exactly half of the seats in Parliament). Yet the government could not survive without the support of the far-right populist party Ataka.

According to representative polling data, 85 percent of Bulgarians supported the protest against the appointment of Mr. Peevski, a media mogul and politician, a front-man of corporate interests with strong influence over the previous three governments. The respondents put remarkably little confidence in the current government and parliament at the beginning of their term (23 and 14 percent, respectively – lowest point since the 1990s), while only 18 percent reckon Oresharski's cabinet will fulfill its full mandate (data for June 2013, Alpha Research).

People were outraged by the fact that a very sensitive state agency could be in fact put in the hands of a controversial businessman, whose media enjoyed almost a monopoly position in the newspaper market, and who was known mostly for his good connections with governments in power whom he provided “media comfort”. Many saw in the appointment an attempt to “privatize” vital state authorities. Further, the appointment made it clear that Peevski – an MP from DPS – had an exceptionally strong position and role in Parliament and the ruling coalition. This further undermined the trust of the people that the political parties behind the government – BSP and DPS – could keep strong corporate interests at bay. Thus, in short, the June protests were mostly about what people saw as structural

corruption in the government and parliament. These were not protests against economic policies, the prices of electricity, etc. – these were protests about what many saw as a very poor quality of democratic government.

Russia, 2011-2012

First wave - the day after the elections - about 7 thousand people in Moscow (a very large number by Moscow standards) took to the streets spontaneously called by activists, Navalny included. The rally was brutally roughed up – several hundred detained, Navalny among them. Next day – just 1500 showed up, a signal to the authorities that their tactics was effective. But in Dec 10 – about 30 thousand gathered in the streets, unprecedented in Putin's Russia.

Several groups and individuals claim the fame of organizing the Dec 10 protest rally. The truth is, however, that nobody had the slightest idea that it would be so many people. What can be said is that the civic skills (organization, management, information exchange) accumulated over the previous 2 or 3 years have come in very useful for political rally organization. The political activists /midget groups of the previous years/ though, proved to be unpopular with the crowd. Unlike media/cultural figures and some of the new leaders, such as Navalny and Udaltsov, who were most cordially welcomed by the crowd.

The rallies were nonpolitical in nature. The very idea of agenda/program/leaders (it was common to hear: it's GOOD that we don't have leaders) and especially negotiations with government authorities were seen as unnecessary, at best and – even betrayal.

Vy slili protest – was a common line expressing people's harsh criticism of those who argued in favor of negotiations with the government; even if negotiations were about the venue and march route.

There was no sense among the protesters of what they actually wanted beyond «Russia without Putin» (they would not even think about who might replace Putin and what that should entail). Concrete demands such as a recount of the Dec 4 Duma election results, dismissal of the infamous head of the electoral commission Vladimir Churov were soon all but forgotten.

It is no minor matter that the protests were coordinated with the authorities who issued permissions for rallies. The bulk of the protesters were invited to join the rallies by the

organizers/coordinators, and people eagerly joined, but it was in large part to have fun together for a few hours and then go back home until a new initiative would be called. Unlike the Turkey protests in Russia were about isolated events that took place at long intervals - Dec 10 – Dec 24, February 10 and up until mid-May 2012. There were groups of activists and even Organizatsionny Komitet Mitingov; they discussed all kinds of organizational issues, but not political ones, such as demands. A feeble attempt by Aleksey Kudrin to reach out to the protesters and organize a meeting failed completely.

The “mass rally season” was not very long in Russia, however, and the protest gradually died down. The government/Putin opted for a virtual (and ongoing) overhaul of state-society relations as applies to the modernized, energetic, defiant, etc. Putin abandoned his stature as the “leader of all the Russians”, alienated the most modernized, energetic part of the population, opted for an anti-Western and anti-liberal course, etc.

The environment has changed, and governance has become a graver challenge to the Kremlin (economic factor of course shouldn't be underestimated). Governance has been reduced to patching and mending; new adjustment and contraptions. The Kremlin faced dilemmas: Navalny and Moscow mayoral election in 2013 was the most striking example. Moscow municipal election in Sept 2014 were very different from the previous one in 2009. One should not be under any illusion: the government has huge advantage over the society in all kinds of resources (material, information (TV), power agencies etc.). But keeping societal forces under control by way of further restricting freedoms and shifting farther toward political and social conservatism comes at an increasingly high cost.

According to participants, the protests did create certain, although rather weak sense of togetherness – such as we are “protesters”, “members of a movement” etc. But they admit that there will be hardly another wave like the of 2011-2012 – at least not because the government has since adopted harsh restraints on the right to rally. But the general hardening of policies, dwindling resources and, not least, the rise of anti-migrant sentiments suggest that there may be in the future other waves of mass protests – of a different kind and with different causes and demands.

Spain 2011-2014

Spain was the first country in Europe where social protests appeared in 2011, with important technological influences, and quick spreading. Not too many social movements occurred in Spain from the beginning of democracy in 1975 until 2003-2004, not counting general strikes by unions and demonstrations against the Basque Country terrorism.

Spain has gone through some anti-globalization mobilizations since 1999. In 2003 the Popular Party in government supported Iraq invasion and the Azores meeting took place with Bush, Blair, Barroso and Aznar. Then huge protests happened on the streets organized by left political and social groups.

Contemporary protests started in 2011 and led to the establishment of the 15M Movement (May 2011). The demonstration slogan was: "Real Democracy Now: we are not merchandise for bankers and politicians". It was an open, inclusive, non partisan slogan of consensus. It was performed a few days before local elections and there were dozens, then hundreds of people occupying the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, thousands of them in concentrations and demos. They stayed there until August.

This citizen awakening would have not been possible if social media did not exist (94% of the activists on the first days were users, and were informed of demos and meetings in there).

At first, the political impact of this movement was rather paradoxical: it seemed to favour the conservatives, by weakening the traditional left. Thus, the local election results on May 22nd 2011, a week after the protests started, made the conservatives of the Popular Party, still in opposition, the great winners. The results were confirmed in the general elections in November the same year.

The movement has been often in the news since 2011. But its most durable impact was in the social networks – it created a form of extensive horizontal network of people and debates. Activists got organized in specific groups, and connected with other spontaneously formed groups. These groups specialized in different spheres of social policy: public health, education, housing.

Protests did happen at tidal waves. These tides mainly consisted in protest actions defending social services. In the beginnings they were concrete mobilizations reacting to specific

government decisions. First was public education protest in Madrid at the opening of 2011-2012 school year. Internal employees' lay-offs and salary cuts (affecting the rest of the public workers in Spain as well) were the principal reason for these protests. But they achieved an important goal: this self-organized first wave went beyond labor requests, aiming at parents and students to join the protesters' networks.

Protests went on in this way for a couple of years. By the end of January 2014, privatization programs planned for six public hospitals in Madrid were stopped thanks to civic platforms, unions and even political parties' legal appeals. Actions and rallies took place in the streets of major cities. Another example was Balear Islands, where education protests managed to delay the beginning of 2013-2014 school year for three weeks: rallies against social cuts were at the heart of the activities.

None of these activities (together with three general strikes in 2010, 2011 and 2012) produced a serious change in public policy, however. Austerity measures were adopted by both centre-left and centre-right governments. Yet, in 2014 a political party – Podemos – was set up, which comes out of the protest movement. This party quickly gathers public support and will be a major player in the next parliamentary elections. As things stand now, it has a good chance to follow the path of the Greek leftist party Syriza.

Turkey 2013

Taksim Gezi Park events marked a turning point in the political history of Turkey. The small park in Taksim square is one of the few green spaces in the city centre. The initial protests in Istanbul at the end of May were led by about 50 environmentalists, opposing the replacement of Taksim Gezi Park with a shopping mall and a possible residence as well as a reconstruction of the historic Taksim military barracks (demolished in 1940) over the adjacent Taksim Square. The protests developed into riots when confronted with excessive police violence on Thursday, 30 May 2013. During the next 24 hours, thousands joined in the demonstrations, which first led to a 10 day commune in the heart of Istanbul, then broadened beyond the development of Taksim Gezi Park into a wider anti-government demonstrations. Protests grew exponentially, first to other neighbourhoods in Istanbul, and then to other provinces, with over 60 of Turkey's 81 provinces experiencing some form of protest by Monday 3 June.

There was a moment of hope when PM Erdogan met protesters on June 12. At first, Erdoğan looked ready to compromise; after discussions with some of the participants, he said he would honour a court decision suspending the government's plan to demolish the park, and added that, if his project to build a replica of the Ottoman barracks were cleared by the judiciary, he would take the decision to the public for a plebiscite. At this point, the protesters in the park had a brief opportunity to declare victory. But as in the various Occupy movements, there was no central command; there were more than a hundred different groups camped in the park, and it would have been impossible to reach any consensus short of a very long forum. In any case, Erdogan did not even wait until daybreak.

Claiming that the protesters had vowed to continue with the occupation, he ordered the police back into Taksim Square and Gezi Park. By Sunday morning, following a long night of tear gas, arrests and vicious beatings against large crowds throughout the city, the centre of Istanbul was under police rule, with the minister in charge of EU relations declaring that anyone entering Taksim Square would be considered a member or supporter of a terrorist organisation.

For two weeks, massive anti-government protests have rocked Turkey, a country widely has been seen as a bastion of stability and secular democracy in its region. Despite often violent police intervention, people have not hesitated to take to the streets and block avenues, neighbourhoods, and their cities' central spaces. Others participated from their balconies, with whole families chiming in to the protesters' chorus, banging on pots and pans. They have found pacifist means of protest that require no arms or political slogans to express their discontent and frustrations with the Erdogan regime. Milliyet newspaper reported 3,400 protesters arrested nationwide, with many later released, and the Doctors' Union reports 1,800 protesters wounded by June 4. The government stated that 244 police have been injured. The death toll of the protests rose to 8 with the death of Berkin Elvan on March 11, a 14 year old boy who had been in a coma since June 2013 after being struck in the head by a gas canister during a police crackdown on protesters. Sunday and Monday nights, June 2 and 3, saw especially ugly battles in Ankara and on 2 major streets in Istanbul, where several badly hurt protesters were taken in for treatment in a waterfront Ottoman mosque commandeered by volunteer medics. The uprisings had become the biggest challenge to the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since it came to power in 2002.

Regarding the aforementioned politics of the AKP, any group that has been disturbed from the authoritarian attitude of more than 10-year rule of Erdogan became a part of the movement. In this respect, it was not a conventional protest, which was characterized by a single/concrete demand and dominated by one political/ideological group. In the protests, there was almost every group, which did not have an interest in the AKP government, including the young and the old, the secular and the religious, the soccer fans and the blind, anarchists, communists, nationalists, Kurds, gays, feminists, and students and even some liberalistic Islamic organisations. In this respect, Gezi Park protest was not unique to Turkey but shared many similarities with the contemporary social movements in Europe, Brazil and to a certain degree with the Arab Spring, which were shaped by the wide usage of social media as a tool for mobilization. In fact, far from being a coup attempt to the government, Gezi protests were an example of contemporary collective action based on horizontality, replaceability and leaderlessness, which had been academically called as “*subterranean politics*”.

Undeterred by violence or the threat of arrests, protesters had found ways of circumventing heavy-handed government crackdowns, countering police brutality and state force with peaceful, creative ways of protesting, such as the then-ubiquitous “*still-standing people*” all over Turkey, satire and their own independent media, coloured stairs and park forums, which were organized in 35 Istanbul parks throughout the summer. These park forums continuing throughout the summer, can be regarded as an attempt/an initiative for a civil decision making assembly.

The government has avoided confronting with the real causes of the protests and has perceived it as a conspiracy against PM Erdogan’s political career by foreign powers, especially by the so-called interest rate lobby. George Soros and Open Society Foundation branch in Turkey were addressed as one of the strongest figures behind the movement.

Before and after the raid on the park Erdogan staged massive rallies, in Ankara and in Istanbul, which he claimed were the opening salvos of AKP’s local election campaign. Despite of the calls from the EU, several statements released by the White House and by other international actors and media for a restraint of the police violence, the government chose to crush the movement with excessive use of police force. Instead of forming a

dialogue, Erdogan mocked protesters by calling them hoodlums and drunks (he even suggested they had drunk beer and copulated in an Ottoman-era mosque which was later proven inaccurate). The comprehensive coverage of the protests by the foreign press such as CNN International was interpreted as part of a global conspiracy, with an aim to bring down Turkey's economy by increasing borrowing costs. Pro-government titles are awash with stories of the roles played by Israel and the Jews.

The message of the Gezi Park events was interpreted within the framework of conspiracy theories and the demand for a more libertarian society did not enter the agenda of the ruling party; AKP. In contrast, the authoritarian and conservative tone of the ruling party has significantly increased after the protests. In the last months, Erdogan made a number of statements, which were evaluated as intervention into people's private lives and indicators of Erdogan's secret agenda of Islamic law.

Ukraine 2013-2014

Events started in November 21-24, 2013 and were triggered by the failure of President Yanukovich to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The protests started by representatives of NGOs and students on Independence Square (Maidan) (2-3 thousand people every day). Several tents were put up with rotating young protesters constantly present. Meanwhile, on the closest square a rally began on the initiative of three opposition parties: Batkivshchyna (Yulia Tymoshenko), Udar (Vitaliy Klitschko) and radical-nationalists (Svoboda) – 2-3 thousand people. The opposition proposed they all unite, but protesters refused and invited the politicians to speak on Maidan without any political flags or symbols. From the very beginning, Maidan proclaimed itself a broad public movement.

The first massive rally was on November 24 in Kyiv (up to 100,000). On the same day large rallies were held in cities in the regions, while the government staged anti-Maidans under the slogan "No to homo-Europe!". This marked the beginning of what is widely believed to be paid-by-the-government anti-maidan movement, less numerous than Maidan, but accompanying all protests.

On November 30, 2013, Saturday a small and purely peaceful rally of students and other young people takes place in Kyiv and it was brutally attacked at night by armed Berkut forces – a special unit of the internal troops. The young people were beaten and dispersed.

This triggered the first really huge public rally in Kyiv on Sunday, December 1: after a spontaneous call to protest by the opposition and NGOs, up to 500,000 protesters from Kyiv and other cities gathered by the monument to poet Taras Shevchenko in Kyiv. They walked to the Independence Square. The Berkut troops that were guarding the fenced-in square fled. The Maidan mass movement begins under the slogans: “For human dignity!” and “Down with the government!”

After the December 1 events, on the weekends large peaceful Maidan assemblies started to gather up to 200-350 thousand people. They are called “Viches” (popular assemblies held by medieval Slavs). A central stage is constructed where opinion leaders of the Maidan and opposition politicians that start to contend for leadership of the Maidan movement speak. The tent city grew in size. Protesters occupied the Trade Union Building, Kyiv City Administration and several other buildings near Independence Square.

The Maidan infrastructure was organized through the efforts of volunteers, NGOs and protesters: supply of food, warm clothing, equipment for tents, firewood, a medical brigade, fundraising, etc. Barricades were erected along the perimeter of Independence Square. There was evidence that certain Ukrainian oligarchs helped finance some of the Maidan infrastructure.

January 19, 2014 saw a serious escalation of violence. The government announced the start of an anti-terrorist operation. There were mass clashes between protesters, on one side, and Berkut and other special units of the Interior Troops brought in from other regions of Ukraine, including Crimea.

In the following days the government launched a major attack against the protesters. Court processes were held where protesters, including random pedestrians, were convicted without investigation. Many were detained. Protesters that sought hospital treatment were detained. Some activists were kidnapped and tortured. Several of them were killed.

In response, the opposition in parliament demanded the government’s resignation, and amnesty for all protesters. The draconian laws were revoked by parliament. On January 28 the president accepted the prime minister’s resignation. On February 12 the president formed a coalition government. On February 15 the government released all the detainees.

EuroMaidans in the regions unblocked government buildings. The opposition demanded a return to the previous constitution, which significantly limits the powers of the president.

The subsequent history of the Maidan is well-known. On February 18-21, 2014 the situation on Maidan escalates sharply. During clashes between protesters and internal troops, unidentified snipers (evidence is being gathered that they acted on orders from the authorities) kill 77 protesters. This changes the situation dramatically. President Yanukovich makes concessions: Berkut pullout from Kyiv, sign an agreement with the opposition on a return to the previous constitution within two days. On February 22, as a result of a decisive turn of events on Maidan in favour of protesters and the opposition, Yanukovich flees Ukraine for Russia. The situation resembles civil war. The main combat forces of the Maidan include the so-called Right Sector and its leader Yarosh, who is an ultra-right nationalist. Because of the presence of the Right Sector, opponents of the Maidan accuse its participants of fascism.

The consequences of the Maidan were extremely far-reaching. There was change of power, new elections for president and parliament, and internal strife in some of the Eastern regions which led to the intervention of Russia. First, by the annexation of Crimea, and secondly, with rather open support for the rebels in the Donbas region.

4. Policy implications of the protests

In this section we address the major policy implication of the mentioned protests. As the preceding discussion has shown, these are protests that are revealing deep, foundational issues of contemporary democratic policies. In a variety of different ways, they raise the question that people are dissatisfied with the exercise of their sovereignty. What is interesting is that these expressions of dissatisfaction are becoming more intense and more regular than they used to be. Post-war politics in Europe has been rather tranquil if the turbulent period of the 1960s is excluded. After that, political mobilization went mainly through the standard channels of party representation. In Eastern Europe, 1989-1990 was a period of *regional* massive participation through rallies in politics: since then there have been outburst in specific countries but nothing as the rather epidemic spread of protests we are experiencing at present. The very quantity and geographical coverage of the phenomenon comes to show that there are deep processes in the very foundations of democratic government, which are affected.

4.1. Protest signals the declining importance of elections in democratic politics

The first policy-relevant conclusion that we draw is that people see elections as important, but less and less meaningful and efficient instrument for the change of public policy. Protesting empowers and voting frustrates because today voting for the government is simply no longer a guarantee that things will change. Elections are losing their central role in democratic politics firstly, because citizens do not believe any more that it is governments that govern and because they do not know whom to blame for their misfortunes. The more transparent our societies become, the more difficult it is for citizens to decide where to direct their anger. We live in a society of “innocent criminals,” where governments prefer to trumpet their impotence rather than their power.

4.2. Protests indicate that people will assert their sovereignty as the power to refuse.

People will step into the limelight very often only to reject certain policies or debunk particular politicians. The new democracy that is emerging is a democracy of rejection. And indeed, in most of our case-studies protesters do not have developed sets of alternative ideas, they do not stay behind specific developed ideologies. This is often used by governments in the handling of the protests – they accuse the protesters of having no positive alternative. Although this is often a fact, it does not diminish the corrective role of public protest – it indicates that the representative structures of democracy have deviated rather drastically either from foundational political and constitutional rules, or that they have not defended adequately what is seen as the public interest.

4.3. The reasons for protests are not only economical. These reasons are the fears of the middle part of society (the “squeezed middle class” included)

While anti-austerity sentiments were at the forefront in Spain, Greece and other countries, there were countries, in which economic considerations were not dominant. In Russia, Turkey and Bulgaria protests emerged because of problems of authoritarian tendencies, endemic corruption, electoral fraud. These problems emerged against the background of strong economic performance as in the case of Turkey, or rising oil prices as in the case of Russia. Generally, it will be a mistake to hypothesize that recent protests have been organized and carried out by the socially most vulnerable groups of society. Very often these protests are actually driven by the anxieties of the middle classes or at least the median voters in society. This was definitely the case of Bulgaria’s protests (especially those in the summer of 2013), the Russian protests in Moscow, but also the Turkish and Ukrainian protests. In Ukraine it was specifically clear that the middle of society is strongly pro-European in most of the regions (something which was confirmed at the elections after the fall of Yanukovich). Probably it will not be too speculative to hypothesize that the vulnerable middle sections of European societies are now much more often voting their fears and frustrations. In the cases we have studied, these fears have been connected with the austerity in the Southern periphery, corruption in South-Eastern Europe, authoritarian

tendencies and rights abuse in Turkey and Russia. But there are other fears of the squeezed middle of society – like immigrants, for instance – which can also mobilize large masses of people.

4.4. Protests are interlinked with populist parties in a variety of ways

As already indicated above, protests and populist parties are by-products of the desire of large sections of contemporary democratic societies to regain their sovereignty, to increase their control over their representatives. So, populists and protests could be competitors, could be friends, but they could be also enemies. Turkey is an interesting case where protests have vented the frustration of masses of people with a strong, populist Islamist leader – Erdogan. In Hungary, recent politics has been marked by the attempts of the urban middle classes to displace a populist leader engaged in self-entrenchment in power – Viktor Orban of Fidesz. In a similar fashion could be read the Russian situation, although there both the slippage into authoritarianism and the curtailing of the rights of the protesters are much more advanced. From our case studies Spain provides an example of a protest which has led to the setting up of a leftist party, which could be called populist – Podemos. (Similar is the situation in Greece). And Bulgaria indicates that populist party politics and protests are separate tracks – they have not made an obvious impact on each other: neither populist parties need protests for their operation or survival, nor protests need to be supported by populist players. This complex relationship needs to be taken into account seriously: protests can neither be treated as a remedy for populism, nor as a populist tool *per se*. The two phenomena are linked through the issue of sovereignty, which the people try to reclaim through them, but this link does not mean that these two are identical.

4.5. Mass protests are not an NGO revolution.

In some respects, commentators are right when they define the NGOs – the civil society sector – as 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".

4.6. Protests do not claim power but they do represent an effective strategy of citizen empowerment in the age of globalization.

Protests succeed in influencing politics beyond national borders and in subverting any sense of security among the elites. Protests unlike elections were able to represent effectively *the intensity of public sentiment*, and it was the intensity of anti-elite sentiment that is at the very heart of protest politics. They demonstrate that things could change. The protests also create community. People who take an active part customarily make them a part of their political identity. One notable consequence of the current protest wave is that it has made the practice popular. Ultimately, protests create a new public culture in which the citizen does not participate in politics primarily and mainly through elections. His or her involvement is more permanent, the individual is hooked to a number of networks which are on a "stand-by" mode, and could be easily mobilized to veto a specific policy or censure a specific government. It is questionable to what extent this public energy will have a really permanent character – there have been examples of deep frustration and disappointment with the protests themselves in some countries. But the falling costs of participation and coordination through the social networks are a major incentive for quick mobilization.

4.7. Protests are risky instruments of citizens' control - cannot be confident that people will again be ready to mass on the streets if the public interest is violated

Protests are not a tool of routine, everyday governance. If they are used for trivial and inconsequential matters, people get tired and become irresponsible. In all of the countries that we have studied massive protests have erupted around issues, which the public sees as crucial for the society. This could be the geopolitical orientation of the country, endemic corruption, wrong economic policies leading to massive social problems, electoral fraud, etc. Again, the variety of issues which trigger protests indicates that these are not limited to truly existential issues of life and death: still, however, the politics of protests begins where a government commits a serious, out of the ordinary mistake.

4.8. While the protests in their pronouncement are a passionate rejection of a politics without possibility, they may also be a form of temporary acceptance of this new reality.

None of the major protest movements emerged with a credible platform for changing the world—or even the economy. Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain come close to this mark, but still there is a lot of justified skepticism about what they are actually going to achieve. Even these two parties – emerging on the basis of protests – are far from the drivers of an anti-capitalist revolution. In fact, they might be seen as capitalism's safety valve. The protests do not mark the return of revolution. Like elections, protests serve to keep revolution, with its message of a radically different future, at an unbridgeable distance. The protests succeeded to disrupt the political status quo but they also helped the elites to re-legitimize their power. For this purpose it is rather instrumental that protests are being “normalized” – that there is the understanding that they are a permanent feature of democracy, an instrument which the sovereign resorts to only in cases of substantial frustration and dissatisfactions. In essence, protests become an opportunity for second-order elections. It is of key importance that the classical infrastructure of representative democracy is preserved in this process, however. From the studied countries, Spain and Bulgaria have been the positive examples of an unproblematic relation between electoral politics and

protest politics. There haven't been in these two countries serious violence, constitutional violations, restriction of rights, attempts to exclude protesters from the public sphere. To an extent in Turkey, but especially in Russia and Ukraine – the link between protests and electoral politics has been damaged and even severed. They resulted in considerable violence and abuse of rights, they damaged constitutionalism and the rule of law.

4.9. Governments bear the primary responsibility for the prevention of violence and the ruining of the democratic process and constitutionalism

In order to prevent the ruining of the democratic process and constitutionism from happening, the enormous burden is on the side of the governments in power. In Ukraine much of the violence and the legal and constitutional violations were a result of the attempts of the government to suppress protest and to punish the protesters: people were killed and kidnapped from hospitals by governmental forces. Similar cases of excessive violence and tough suppression of protests we found in Turkey and Russia. When treated in this way, protests easily become subversive – people themselves respond with violence. Or, protests become an easy excuse for entrenchment of authoritarian leaders in power. Therefore, it has to be accepted from the very start that peaceful protests – even when people challenge entire governments, are a normal instrument of contemporary democracy. Yes, this instrument needs to be used responsibly and carefully, but even if it may seem whimsical, pointless or unfounded, the right to protest should be robustly protected.

4.10. The politics of protest signals the twilight of both the classical idea of revolution and the notion of political reformism.

Revolution assumes political ideology and a struggle for taking the government. Protests are rebellion without ideology or demands. Political reformism was the grand strategy of the progressives and liberals in the 20th century. It accepts that the world is imperfect but it also believes that the world is improvable. It assumed work within the institutions and not against them; policy of small steps and gradual changes, acting on insights and constant mechanism of self-correction are at the heart of political reformism. In its classical manifestation it combines reforms from inside and political pressure from outside. It succeeded to utilize

elections as an instrument for political change. The reformism was the strategy behind the success of Western societies in the last century. Democracy of protests turn its back on both revolution and reformism and brings at the center of public life political dynamics centered on the successions of disruptions and restoration of public order. By rejecting revolution, protests may be treated as some legitimation for the status quo, but it needs to be stressed that this is temporal and provisional legitimation. People continue to be angry and frustrated, they continue to look for better forms of exercise of their sovereignty. They are ready to experiment.

Conclusions

The analysis thus far has shown that if protest is understood as a demonstration of the desire of “the people” to have a direct impact on politics, to reclaim their sovereignty, the value of the right to assembly becomes very high. Because of this high value, political players will always dispute who is actually represented by the people in the street; do these people really represent the people as a whole.

In this contestation, on the one hand there will be populists of various sorts, who would like to show that they are capable of mobilising the people, on the other hand there will be vulnerable groups, who have been categorised as “national traitors” or at least as not proper members of “the people”, who also need to demonstrate physical presence. In general, there is a possibility for a number of types of conflicts: i) between different types of populists, and ii) between populists and vulnerable excluded groups; iii) between populists and traditional parties; iv) between the people and the party system as a whole (anti-party protests).

From this perspective, the politics of protest is similar to other types of politics in a democratic state and the main policy recommendation is that it should be subject to the same high and demanding standards of observation of rights and the rule of law. Protest is not an excuse for violence, it is not an extraordinary situation in the sense of Schmitt, which calls for suspension of separation of powers and dictatorship. Yes, there will be strong temptations on both sides – governments and protestors – to cross certain lines. But “the normalization” of protests means that societies have to learn to live with them, to create a political culture which reads them correctly and treats them according to normal democratic rules.

Conflict – and protests are a form of conflict - is not necessarily dangerous for democracy. On the contrary, sometimes it is necessary for the *invigoration of democracy*, for the revision of representative structures, and for the restoration of the trust of the people in these representative structures. In this sense, some of the aspects of populist types of politics might be actually beneficial for democracy in the longer run, if they lead to the replacement of inappropriate institutions and practices with better ones. Yet, an excessive instrumentalization by populist or authoritarian leaders might actually destabilise democracy and endanger the liberal protection of rights.

This is the real trouble with the sovereigntist reading of the protest, as a right of the people. Sometimes such a reading will be necessary for the replacement of outdated, inefficient or oppressive governmental and representative structures. Indeed, the transition in Eastern Europe started with popular pressure through mass demonstrations in the streets, which led to the liberalization of the oppressive communist regimes in the region. Since liberalisation has by no means been accomplished in large parts of the region, there are numerous examples in which the assembled people are struggling against oppressive regimes: the Russian and Ukrainian case studies could be interpreted in this fashion.

Direct popular intervention in the political process has sometimes produced questionable results – it has given an opportunity for non-democratic, authoritarian, nationalistic leaders to make it to power, or to entrench themselves in power. The huge pro-governmental rallies in Turkey and Russia and other places have been a case in point. The so-called “orange revolution” gave hopes to the advocates of the assembled people in 2004. However, the second revised edition of the Ukrainian revolution (2006-2007) demonstrated that popular mass assemblies could be manipulated by political actors pursuing opaque ends in battles for power. The Hungarian “revolt of the decent” against a “political lie” of a Socialist PM (in 2006-2008) also demonstrated that mass protests might be manipulated in the clash between different versions of populism: nationalist v. welfarist. Ultimately, they led to the coming of Victor Orban to power, who has put significant strain on Hungarian democracy.

A most striking recent example came from Turkey: the secularist urban middle classes and Islamist versions of populism entered into direct competition in their demonstrations of the will of the people. The protests discussed in this paper were an expression of this confrontation. This show of numbers is apparently meant to represent a direct intervention of the people in the political process: for the time-being, it has had mixed results and has not stopped the advent of Mr. Erdogan to power.

Thus far we have shown that the sovereigntist perspective might be put to good use for the dismantling and liberalisation of oppressive regimes, and for the reinvigoration of stagnant representative structures. Also, and more commonly, the sovereigntist perspective could be put to more questionable uses in the struggle of populist actors for political power, struggle in which they try to monopolise the mobilisation of the people, and to present their

opponents as traitors of national ideals or morally corrupt in some other way. Here, the degrees of danger are nuanced. They start from the direct collapse of democracy into some sort of dictatorship (Belarus) or manipulated, directed, managed democracy (Russia). At the other end of the same negative spectrum are more benign cases in which populist movements and leaders shake or disrupt the representative structures of government, like in the case of Ukraine. The following table presents a brief taxonomy of the uses of the sovereigntist perspective to protest by the people, and illustrates the different categories with examples from Europe:

Dismantling and liberalising oppressive regimes	Re-invigorating stagnant or corrupt systems of representation	Contributing to the rise of populists and serving in their power struggles	Marginalising and oppressing minorities/opposition	Undermining democracy
<p>Mass demonstrations across Eastern Europe in 1989-1990 demanding liberalisation;</p> <p>Student demonstrations against Milosevic in Serbia late 1990s;</p> <p>Kasparov's <i>Other Russia's</i> activities (unsuccessful);</p> <p>Russia's protest from 2011 (unsuccessful)</p> <p>Ukraine 2013-2014 (?)</p>	<p>Greek Protests since 2008; Spanish protests 2011-; Bulgarian protests 2013;</p> <p>Georgian "rose" revolution;</p> <p>Orange revolution in Ukraine (2004)</p>	<p>Power struggle between president and parliament in Ukraine (2006-2007)</p> <p>Power struggles between president and parliament in Romania (2007)</p> <p>Greek protests 2008 onwards (?);</p> <p>Hungarian mass protests in 2006</p> <p>Mass rallies in Turkey in 2006-2007 in the struggle between secularists and Islamists</p>	<p>The rise of an anti-Roma parties organizing rallies: Yobbik in Hungary, for instance, or Ataka party in Bulgaria;</p> <p>Anti-Islamic rallies in Western Europe and Germany in particular;</p> <p>Denying the right to assembly of Macedonians from OMO Ilinden in Bulgaria;</p>	<p>The institutionalisation of plebiscitarian dictatorships, as in the case of Belarus, and in some of the countries of Central Asia after mass protests in support of populist leaders;</p> <p>The institutionalisation of a directed, managed democracy in Russia in which the political opponents of the president are systematically denied basic rights, including the right to assembly, while the government organizes massive rallies of its supporters;</p>

The suggested taxonomy does not pretend to be exhaustive or analytically very precise. Its point is to demonstrate that there is a spectrum of uses of the sovereigntist interpretation of protest, starting from the clearly beneficial, going through the benign, and ending with the clearly dangerous and malicious forms of the intervention of the assembled people in politics, which actually result in the subversion of democracy. While there could be much less substantive disagreement concerning the cases in the first and the fifth columns of the table, the rest of the three columns seem more fluid. In any event, the categorisation of a particular situation in one of the categories could hardly be fully objective: assessment to the danger of democracy is liable to depend on the views of the persons passing the judgement. This irreducible political element makes it difficult for the issue of the danger of particular developments to be treated in a judicial context: courts are liable to be involved in political arguments, as the Ukrainian example shows.¹⁰

The taxonomy also demonstrates, however, that the people's direct intervention in the political process is much less dangerous when: a) it is meant to create competitive representative political structures – parties and parliaments; or b) when it happens in circumstances where viable competitive political structures already exist; c) when both government and protesters work under the clear assumption that they are operating within democracy and the rule of law. On the contrary, in circumstances of absence of robust competitive structures of representation, the “assembled people” could be easily manipulated by skilful demagogues, who might do away with democracy altogether. It is probably not a surprise that super-presidential systems with weak parliaments have produced more dangerous forms of intervention of the people in the political process.

Further, the taxonomy actually shows that when a non-democratic regime has been put in place, it is no longer interested in the *real* presence of the assembled people, but rather in their *virtual* presence behind the authoritarian leader. Mass assemblies become either fully directed and managed, or are being replaced by media impressions of such demonstrations. This comes to show that there is some deeper link between the right to assembly and democracy than a deflationary account of the concept of the right to protest would suggest: protest is important where democracy still exists.

Endnotes

1. Thomas Friedman, "Square People" part 1 and 2, in *The New York Times*, May 13 and 17, 2014, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/14/opinion/friedman-the-square-people-part-1.html>
2. Thomas Friedman, "Square People" part 2, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/opinion/sunday/friedman-the-square-people-part-2.html>.
3. Quoted in Krastev, Ivan. (2014) "From Politics to Protest" in *Journal of Democracy* Volume 25, Number 4 October 2014, at <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Krastev-25-4.pdf>
4. Comparative constitutional law casebooks interpret the right to assembly mostly from the perspective of social groups seeking public expression through meetings, marches, demonstration, etc. In most of the high court cases on the right to assembly, the main issues are reducible to freedom of speech problems (as "time, place and manner" restrictions, "prior restraint", etc.). See, for example, N. Dorsen, Michel Rosenfeld, Andras Sajó, Susanne Baer, *Comparative Constitutionalism: Cases and Materials* 1306-1316 (2003).
5. For an analysis of the evolution of Carl Schmitt's ideas of political representations from his early writings (like *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923)) to his criticism of parliamentarism in *Parlamentarismus* see J. P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* 157-205 (1997).
6. Schmitt argued that "[t]he will of the people can be expressed just as well and perhaps better through acclamation, through something taken for granted, an obvious and unchallenged presence, than through the statistical apparatus that has been constructed with such meticulousness in *the last fifty years*. The stronger the power of democratic feeling, the more certain is the awareness that democracy is something other than a registration system for secret ballots. Compared to a democracy that is direct, not only in technical sense but also in the vital sense, parliament appears to be an artificial machinery, produced by liberal reasoning, while dictatorial and Caesaristic methods not only can produce the acclamation of the people but can also be a direct expression of democratic substance and power." *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* 16-17 (1986).
7. For a review of recent developments see the special issue of the *Journal of Democracy Is East-Central Europe Backsliding*, Volume 18, No. 4 (2007). See in particular I. Krastev, "The Strange Death of the Liberal Consensus", available also at http://www.cls-sofia.org/uploaded/1192611853_8_krastev_pp_56-63.pdf and <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/gratis/Krastev-18-4.pdf>
8. For a brief account of the dangers related to the rise of populism in Eastern Europe see D. Smilov, *Early Warning: Rising Populism and Its Impact*, *The Bridge: Bimonthly review of European Integration in South East Europe and the Mediterranean*, Issue 4, 2006, http://www.bridge-mag.com/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=120&Itemid=39 and *Populism, Liberal Democracy and the Rule of Law*, *Forum Analytica*, No. 8, Spring 2007, Special Issue on Populism http://www.forum-csr.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/fa_br8_populizam_eng1.pdf
9. 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.
10. For the impact of the rise of populism on the rule of law see: D. Smilov, *Populism, Courts, and the Rule of Law: A Policy Brief*, *Foundation for Law, Justice and Society* in collaboration with the *Centre for Socio-Legal Studies*, University of Oxford (2007) http://www.fljs.org/images/Smilov_Policy_Brief.pdf