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"CITIZENS FOR MACEDONIA" – FROM CITIZEN MOBILIZATION TO DEMOCRATIZATION?

Abstract

During its 25 years of independence, the Macedonian society has faced democratic turmoil many times. Still, there is a general belief that since the beginning of 2015, Macedonia has entered in its biggest social and political crisis. Following the release of the wiretapped conversations by the president of the largest opposition party in Macedonia – SDSM, Zoran Zaev, a group of citizens and party activists occupied the space in front of the Macedonian Government, asking for resignation from Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. Protestors claimed that the Macedonian Government has lost its legitimacy to govern, and asked for immediate rebuilding of the Macedonian institutions. These actions have created the biggest political cleavage in Macedonian history.

The main purpose of the paper is to examine current and future movement related outcomes, and its capacity to push for power change. Secondly, the paper defines the genesis of the movement and classifies it as type of social/political movement. Lastly, it portrays possibilities for larger citizen mobilization for wider social restoration of Macedonian society in the future.

From a theoretical perspective, the paper presents cutting edge literature review analyzing contemporary concepts of social movements and citizen mobilization. Regarding the methodological approach, I apply a combination of thorough document analysis and in-depth interviewing. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with movement stakeholders.

Key words: democratization, movement, mobilization, Macedonia, citizens

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INTRODUCTION[1]

Bridging social movement literature and literature on democratization has not been done frequently throughout the past in the fields of Political Science and Sociology. Requoting the words of Sidney Tarrow, initially quoted by Donatella della Porta in the introductory chapter of her path-breaking piece *Mobilizing for Democracy: Comparing 1989 and 2011*, "Most scholars of democratization have either ignored movements altogether or regarded them with suspicion as dangers to democracy, while most students of social movements have focused on fully mature democratic systems and ignored the transition cycles that place the question of democratization on the agenda and work it through to either democratic consolidation or defeat" (Tarrow, 1995: 221-2 in della Porta, 2014: 1), it is quite clear that combining these two theoretical strands is likely to add value to the studying of a particular movement, in this specific case, the Citizens for Macedonia (hereinafter CfM) movement.

After briefly presenting the methodological approach and the main research questions which are addressed in this paper, I move towards a brief summer of the history of formal democratization of Macedonian society, which I argue that came from above, following a specific pattern of elite transformation.

Furthermore, I try to stress the peculiarities of CfM, and explain from a theoretical perspective why this particular collective action should be considered a social movement. I base my arguments on the theoretical inputs of della Porta and Diani, highlighting the distinctive theoretical elements of social movements.

I then briefly turn towards the main political outcomes of the movement, taking into consideration that many activities are still ongoing, and that the final contours of the outcomes will surely change as time passes by. I particularly focus on activists' impressions regarding the influence of CSOs and parties on state institutions, the international community and the wider public respectively. The results of the Przhino agreement can be considered a focal point.

In the last section of the paper I take into consideration activists' observations related to the possibilities of wider supra-party possibility for mobilization of Macedonian citizens, which will ultimately lead towards one of the paths of democratization from bellow as suggested by della Porta. I close by briefly focusing on the conclusions from the research.

METHODOLOGY AND MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My main methodological approach while exploring the movement-related peculiarities can be defined as dominantly narrative and sociological, to a certain

extent introducing elements of Process Tracing Analysis (PTA). Regarding the theoretical concepts, I rely mostly on recent democratization and social movement literature which dominantly focuses on citizen mobilization. As far as the data collection tools are concerned, I acquired my data via thorough document analysis and open ended in-depth interviews with activists and key informants.

I conducted five in-depth interviews with representatives from different groups of activists, trying to cover multiple angles of the happenings. By the time I performed the fifth interview I had already reached the concept which is referred to as "saturation of knowledge" (della Porta, 2014: 242), since similar information and perspectives started to become redundant. The first interviewee is an activist coming from the civil society, continuously taking part in organization and execution of movement related activities. The second interviewee is a member of the Student Plenum that also partly participated in the movement and had two speakers during the 17th of May protest. The third interviewee is a member of a central body of SDSM, the largest participating political party which had a pivotal role within the movement. The fourth interviewee comes from academia, but he is also closely collaborating both with one of the SMOs and with SDSM. Lastly, the fifth interviewee holds a Ph.D. in Political Science, and is a freelance expert who gave a relatively objective external view of the incidents.

The three central questions which are examined in this paper are the current outcomes and possible future developments related to the movement, and its capacity to push for power changes; the genesis of the movement and its localization in theory; as well as the possibilities for wider citizens' mobilization which can possibly lead towards a complete restauration of Macedonian society, following a path of democratization from below.

FROM FORMAL DEMOCRATIZATION TO SHALLOW DEMOCRACY

Former studies on the processes of democratization of societies in Southeast Europe have, more or less, been divided in regards to the fact whether democratization emerged "from below" (della Porta, 2014), or it was mainly dictated by elite transformation and adaptation including newly established elites (Stepan and Linz, 1996; Higley, Pakulski and Wesolowski, 1998). Regarding the *democratization from below*, della Porta distinguishes three most common paths that single out the substantially important roles of protests and social movements, which are applicable both to societal transformations in Eastern Europe during 1989/90 and democratization processes in the MENA region in 2011/12. She labels as *eventful democratization* those processes where protests performed by social

movements are very important. Her second category is named *participatory pacts*, and it refers to cases where social movements dominantly use bargaining strategies to achieve democratic reforms. The third type of processes have been given the name *participated coup d'état*, signaling out specific societal transformations in which elites engage in the activity of manipulating mass protest events in order to gain power over conservative groups (della Porta, 2014: 296-297). Moving to the *elite transformation approach*, which can also be referred to as *democratization from above*, acting as an antonymic balance to democratization from below, the process of democratization is much more elite-driven and citizens' participation is not in the primary focus of the societal change. Focusing specifically on Eastern Europe, theory recognizes two dominant ways of creation of consensually-unified national elites: a *direct transformation*, and a *transformation through a settlement of basic disputes among the elites* (Daskalovski, 1999: 17). Based on the arguments by Higley and Pakulski (1992), Daskalovski defines direct transformation as an epilogue of party elites being able to acknowledge the counter-productivity of communist ideology, embrace democracy and create space for accommodation of new emerging elites (Daskalovski, 1999: 19). On the other hand, the transformation through a settlement of basic disputes among the elites, is recognized by the literature as a relatively rare and exceptional event when "national elite factions suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements" (Burton and Higley, 1987: 295).

One of the main arguments that I try to bring forward in this paper is that although Macedonia was formally democratized during the late 80s and early 90s of the previous century following a process of democratization from above, mainly driven by former socialist and new emerging, dominantly nationalist elites, this process resulted just with a formal and extremely shallow democracy, lacking functional and democratic institutions as well as participatory decision-making among multiple centers of power. Shallow democracy can be defined as an environment which "allows limited power sharing and restricted participation in decision making" (Meighan, 2001: 297). This form of democracy allows sharing of just small portions of power, tightly limited and controlled by those in power, which also have the space and opportunity to withdraw all elements of power-sharing and confine it only to marginal activities. Shallow democracy increases the probability of malfunctioning which leads towards "cynicism, fatalism and a strong impression that democracy does not work" (Ibid: 297), a description which largely resembles the current environment in Macedonian society. Furthermore, I want to stress the idea that the activities of the CfM coalition are one of the last remaining mechanisms which could result with essential and deeper democratization of Macedonian society, resembling a type of democratization from below that might

eventually lead towards a complete restauration of Macedonian society, finally completing the transition from shallow to deep democracy. This argument raises the need for definition of deep democracy. This democratic environment, conversely to the previous one, allows more power-sharing, as well as agenda-setting. Deep democracy does not boil down to the number or range of items among which power is shared, but it also takes into consideration the levels of decision-making (Ibid: 297).

Taking into consideration the limited time and space, but also attempting not to lose the focus of this writing, I will briefly describe the formal democratization of the Macedonian state during the late 80s and early 90s of the 20th century, subsequently moving towards assessment of the current situation in Macedonia. The current diagnosis will act as a type of introduction to the following section which stresses the core of this research – the definition of CfM and its location within a certain theoretical framework provided by social movement literature.

The formal democratization of Macedonia, which began during the late 80s of the previous century, is inseparably tied to the process of gaining independence. Macedonia's independence formally started to coin by introducing the Declaration for Sovereignty of Socialist Republic of Macedonia (DSSRM, 1991) which was enacted by the Assembly of SRM on 25th of January 1991. Following the first multiparty parliamentary election which were held on 11th November 1990, SRM had started the process of democratization of institutions, migrating from a single party assembly to a multiparty representative legislature which contained variety of political parties and independent MPs. This legislature unanimously[2] adopted the previously mentioned Declaration, this being one of the rare moments in the short Macedonian history when a wide cross-party consensus has been reached regarding a certain issue. Apart from all elected MPs voting in favor of the Declaration, all extant political parties backed the Declaration (Makedonska Nacija, 2010). The text of the Declaration vividly stressed the determination for independence introducing the wording "…independence and territorial integrity of the Macedonian state, as well as the right to self-determination of the Macedonian people, including the right to secession" (DSSRM, 1990: Article 1). This paved the way towards the referendum which formally sealed the Macedonian independence. The referendum was held on 8th September 1991, when 75% of the Macedonian citizens ran for the ballot boxes to cast their vote, answering the referendum question "Are you in favor of a sovereign and independent state Macedonia, with the right to participate in future alliance with other sovereign Yugoslav states?" (Referendum report, 1991: 1-2). Out of the 1.132.981 citizens which participated in the referendum, 1.079.308 citizens voted "YES" clearly stating the citizens' will for an independent and democratic country.

However, not all went rosy for the young post-Yugoslav state. The problems related to the international recognition, the economic sanctions imposed by the southern neighbor, as well as the lack of capability to deal with minority dilemmas, just announced what was going to be a long and painful 25 years path towards eventual deep democratization of Macedonian society. The formalization of the democratization process in Macedonia was a type of compromise between the direct elite-transformation model, combined with the settlement of disputes model. Both the old and the new emerging Macedonian elites opted for democracy in comparison to the old regime (see more Daskalovski, 1999). Still, the failure of the Macedonian institutions during this period is even more visible from a time distance of over 25 years. This was clearly pointed out by one of the interviewees: "… Gruevski managed relatively easy, in a short period of 2-3 years, to literally occupy all state institutions and to suffocate them without any resistance whatsoever. This obviously proves that the authoritarian tradition and the system which has been corrupt by various cliques has much deeper roots than the ruling of VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevski…Thus, we are battling a heritage deeply enrooted in history…" (IV 4, 2015).

Regarding the current state of failed and shallow democracy in Macedonia, which eventually led to the creation of the CfM movement, it is more than enough that one takes into account the recent report triggered by the crisis – the Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systematic Rule of Law issues relating to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015, colloquially known as the "Priebe Report". This document surgically notates the main spheres of concern, categorizing them in 5 areas: the interception of communications, judiciary and prosecutions services, external oversight by independent bodies, elections and the media (European Commission, 2015: 2), which leads us to the conclusion that all main pillars of a normally functioning democratic state are dangling. This undoubtedly explains the deep reasons behind the emerging of the CfM movement.

"CITIZENS FOR MACEDONIA" – INITIATION AND CATEGORIZATION IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

On February 9th, after a longer period of announcements, the President of the largest party in opposition – SDSM, Zoran Zaev, released the first package of series of wiretapped conversations involving high-ranked public officials, members of the opposition, prominent journalists, as well as ordinary citizens. This led towards a string of reactions from parties in government, primarily by the leading ones in the coalition – VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, representatives of the international community, university professors and intellectuals, all of them engaging in the

endless debate regarding the sources of the released materials, their authenticity, the main reasons and timing of the unveiling, further dividing the already polarized and cleavaged Macedonian society.

I've got soul but I'm not a soldier[3]

The promotion video launched on YouTube, starting with the lyrics from the popular song *All These Things That I've Done* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMNoOcANQKE 2015), performed by *The Killers*, announced the grand citizens' protest scheduled for 17th of May, which officially presented the CfM platform to the wider public. The CfM movement represented a coalition of more than 70 NGOs, over 15 political parties and thousands of unaffiliated citizens. As highlighted in the headline of the declaration which was compiled by the activists, the movement represents a "citizen and non-partisan coalition for reintroducing human dignity and protection of the Macedonian Constitution" (Citizens for Macedonia, 2015). But how was this non-typical network of entities perceived by the actors themselves, which were involved in the movement from different perspectives and performing different roles?

One of the core questions which often appears in Political Science and Sociology, and which at first glance creates an impression that it has a relatively straightforward answer, is the dilemma "What is a social movement"? Still, the specificities and distinctive characteristics of social movements cannot be easily answered, since the definition of this social process is everything but simple, straightforward and with clearly set boundaries. A good starting point for providing the answer to this rather complex question, is turning towards Mario Diani's reflections (see more in Diani, 1992; Diani, 2003; Diani, 2004 and Diani and Bison, 2004). A synthesis of his thoughts will lead towards defining social movements as "distinct social processes, consisting of the mechanism through which actors engaged in collective action and are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents, are linked by dense informal networks and share a distinct collective identity" (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 20). It is clear that the CfM platform can be easily located within this overarching and widely encompassing definition.

The conversations are stapled, edited and remastered[4]

Regarding the *conflictual collective action*, della Porta and Diani stress the engagement of social movement actors in political and/or cultural conflicts aiming towards opposition or promotion of social change (Ibid: 21). In the case of the CfM movement, a clear opposition towards an almost decade-lasting irresponsible

governing by Nikola Gruevski is visible in the information obtained by the interviewees. They describe the reasons behind the creation of the movement as a "…need which came out from the general state in which Macedonia found itself, meaning the extensive and concerning breach of human rights…" (IV 1, 2015), and as a "…challenge for unification against a political regime whose functioning and methods exceed the limits of all democratic practices, even extremely broad defined…" (IV 4, 2015). In regards to the conflict, which building on the theoretical inputs of Tilly (1978) and Touraine (1981: 80-84), della Porta and Diani define as "an oppositional relationship between actors who seek control of the same stake – be it political, economic, or cultural power – and in the process make negative claims on each other – i.e., demands which, if realized, would damage the interests of the other actors" (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 21), the social movement activists involved in the CfM platform particularly stress the political power, aiming to deprive the current establishment from their positions as soon as possible, making a clear distinction between "us" and "them" and identifying "them" as a clear target towards which claims and grievances are articulated: "…so we have a common enemy, we have an evil which is terrorizing us, and we should get rid of our personal frustrations and vanities, and we should sit together, and create a joint strategy..." (IV 2, 2015).

SOROSoids and communists[5]

Moving to the *dense informal networks*, which act as distinctive points between social movement activities and numerous occasions when collective actions are brought forward usually between specified entities (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 21), the CfM movement resembles a coalition of numerous SMOs and individuals which cannot be exhaustively enumerated. Using the words of one of the interviewees "…I treat this as a movement. It was not…this…their structures, NGOs, legal persons blablabla…that's nonsense. In general, it was a movement…" (IV 2, 2015). Still, one cannot neglect the dominant position of the biggest political party in opposition – SDSM within the informal network of multiple actors. This strand could be detected in the responses of the majority of interviewees: "…SDSM was not supposed to lead the movement, and they (NGO representatives, I.S.) were not supposed to consult and council the party. There was supposed to be a relationship of equality, and SDSM should not have left in the end…when already both groups of actors entered the story called political party and civil society…that is why I say that some things are disputable…" (IV 3, 2015); "…I think that the platform ended at the moment when SDSM stepped out and said that 'we are not a part of the platform anymore because we are entering the government'…now, this is slightly

complicated. I think that it (the platform, I.S.) ended. So, apparently they cannot function without the party. Look, they basically do not exist anymore. Now they might have even renamed themselves into 'We Deserve Better', or this is one of their activities…it doesn't matter…" (IV 2, 2015); "…SDSM had to allocate more space for a wider spectrum of stakeholders. Although the movement was consisted of party activists, members of NGOs and non-affiliated individuals, and although there were numerous debates, discussions and other brainstorming activities, still, I think that a much wider pallet of people could have been included in generating ideas about how to fight the regime…" (IV 5, 2015). On the other hand, it must be noted that all known participating actors kept their autonomy and independence, engaging in the exchange of resources, coordination of activities continuously discussing about issues directly referring to the collective action. Additionally, the principle that "…no single organized actor, no matter how powerful, can claim to represent the movement as a whole…" (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 21) was never violated. A solid proof for this claim is the fact that SDSM, undisputedly the most powerful actor within the movement, formally left the platform as soon as the arrangements from the Przhino agreement(s) were put into motion (Telma, 2015). A more vivid picture regarding the structure, the density and the organizational and resource-sharing relationships between the actors within the informal network(s), can be obtained by prospective performing of social network analysis (SNA), as a very suitable methodological approach for measurement of these movement particularities (see more about SNA in Caiani, 2014 and Diani, 2003b).

#WeAreComing #WeAreStaying #Resignation[6]

Lastly, these theoretical and classificatory reflections which should help in definition and characterization of the CfM movement, should be rounded with a final reference to the *collective identity*, as the third and last distinctive element of a social movement. One can speak of a social movement process only if the actions are accompanied by a development of collective identities (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 21). The concept of collective identity is usually correlated to recognition and creation of relatedness (Pizzorno, 1996). This concept is strongly visible within the CfM platform. Previous quotations from interviewees stressed common beliefs that those in power almost equally underrepresent all movement actors concerning their values, morals and visions regarding how modern Macedonian society should be shaped. Quoting one of the activists "…for them (CfM, I.S.) to be analyzed as a concept, we should firstly define the concept. In this autocracy…let's call it a modern autocracy, it can be said that in this particular moment the civil society actors and the political parties must come together…" (IV 2, 2015).

Setting clear boundaries regarding what is and what is not a social movement is never an easy and naïve task. This difficulty becomes even greater when one has to make a distinction between social movements and other different forms of collective actions. It is very likely that no social movement compared *stricto sensu* to each of the above mentioned characteristics will fully fit within the framework which represents the "pure type" of social movement. Taking into consideration the above mentioned peculiarities of the CfM platform, I would personally define this collective action as a social movement.

CURRENT MOVEMENT OUTCOMES – FROM PRZHINO TO EARLY ELECTIONS

Social movement outcomes focus on social and political changes which resulted from collective mobilizations and protest activities. Contemporary social movement literature usually distinguishes three broad types of social movement outcomes: biographical, cultural and political outcomes (Bosi, Giugni and Uba, forthcoming: 4). Regarding the CfM, this section focuses only on the political outcomes of the movement, bearing in mind that not all events can be covered and explained in detail. Furthermore, taking into consideration the current unravelling of events, one must also acknowledge that a new wave of political outcomes is likely to follow in the near future. Within the typology of social movement outcomes, political outcomes are defined as "those effects of movement activities that alter in some way the movements' political environment" (Ibid: 4).

I will make an attempt to frame the most significant political outcomes taking into consideration one of the critical open-ended questions which was posed to the interviewees, asking them to categorize the level of pressure which CSOs and political parties, as two different entities within the movement managed to exert over the state institutions, the wider public and the international community respectively. A wider consensus can be reached that the most significant political implications regarding the CfM movement were born from the Przhino agreement. This was also clearly stated by all interviewees.

"Frying" in Przhino[7]

After long and tiring negotiations between the leaders of the four biggest parties in the Macedonian political arena – VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA, on 2nd of June 2015, a political agreement brokered by the Head of the EU Delegation to Macedonia and the US Ambassador to Republic of Macedonia, was

signed by all participating parties (Agreement, 2015). After continuous failures for implementation of several agreed provisions, pressured and facilitated by the international representatives, the party leaders signed a protocol to the Agreement on 15th of July 2015 (Annex to the Agreement, 2015), shaping the final version of the document (Protocol to the Agreement, 2015).

Interviewees are convinced that the movement played a substantial role in influencing crucial stakeholders which shaped the final text of the accord. Distinguishing between CSO and parties, their impression was that CSO representatives dominantly influenced the international community: "regarding the external…the international community, EU and the others which are involved in this process, there was a significant influence by the NGOs…" (IV 1, 2015), "…I think they (CSOs, I.S. 2015) dominantly influenced the international community, because they had extensive meetings with international community representatives and they listened to their arguments…" (IV 2, 2015), "…the civil society, which is traditionally…this civil society, which organized these activities…is traditionally pro-European and pro-American…because they are their main donors…they had blogs, columns, statements, or attitudes which were directly communicated and through which they pressured the international community…" (IV 3, 2015), "…in the initial phase, in that first phase, especially within this informal coalition, know I am referring to that period somewhere…March-April, on the eve of the 17th of May protest, the civil society exerted much greater pressure over the international community in comparison with the political parties…" (IV 4, 2015). Another common observation is that the political parties in opposition managed to impose a general pressure over all entities, primarily by releasing the materials from the wiretapped conversations: "…the releasing of the 'bombs' by the opposition contributed in the creation of a better perception in the eyes of the undecided voters, some of which knew what was happening even before, but they needed the audio materials to convince themselves…" (IV 3, 2015), "…we cannot overlook the fact that the opposition, as the major force, played a serious part in the pressure which the international community imposed over the state institutions…" (IV 2, 2015), "…there was a general continuous pressure imposed by the political parties in opposition…" (IV 1, 2015), "…I think that the political parties dominantly pressured the public, most likely because of the 'infrastructure' which the biggest party in opposition SDSM, has on its disposal…" (IV 4, 2015).

The people will decide[8]

One of the issues agreed upon in Przhino, which from this perspective is very like to be timely effectuated, are the early parliamentary elections scheduled for April

24th 2016. Although preceded by the appointment of the special prosecutor and her team, introduction of intra-party ministers, and additional deputy ministers, as well as the prospective new Government which should be appointed 100 days before the early elections, there is no much space for optimism among the interviewees: "…I am not sure about the elections to be honest…I think that VMRO-DPMNE and Gruevski still control the main pillars of society which can enable them to forge the elections…" (IV 5, 2015). Even those who believe in change, coming from the party base of the largest party in opposition, are not very sure that change of power will lead to substantial change by default: "…If it is not a strategy, but simply a hunch about how civil society and the parties should act, then it will be detected very soon and it will have negative repercussions on the campaign which should lead towards regaining power…and even if we obtain power, this may have negative impact on real democratization of society. If this was not done on purpose we will easily recognize it, and it will tamper the real prosperity of our country, even if we come into power recently…" (IV 3, 2015). Still, one of the interviewees has the impression that party activists are extremely optimistic: "…a large number of party activists are persuaded that there is going to be an institutional and relatively peaceful transfer of power and unravelling of the crisis…At least for now, they are convinced that this will happen…" (IV 4, 2015). The varying answer from the respondents add to the uncertainty on the eve of the early elections in approximately half a year from now. Only an analysis from a proper time distance can provide sufficient facts regarding the influence of SMOs over election results.

MOBILIZATION FOR RESTAURATION? THE OPTIMISTIC PESSIMISTS…

There is maybe one thing which is less certain than the election results in late April – the potential for future citizen mobilization which has the impetus for profound changes of Macedonian society. Regarding this last issue which is treated in this paper, I asked my five interviewees whether they believe that Macedonian society has the potential for a wide supra-party citizens' mobilization leading towards a complete change of values and restauration of Macedonian society, which will ultimately lead towards a certain path of democratization from bellow. The received responses stretched across the two poles on the scale, moving from eternal optimism to entrenched pessimism. This was also a way to test the potential for protest cycles and waves in a Tarrowian sense, referring to "a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system that includes: a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors; a quickened pace of innovation in the forms of contention; new or transformed collective action

frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified inter-actions between challengers and authorities which can end in reforms, repression and sometimes revolution" (Tarrow, 1994: 153), basically, initial sparks of what infected Macedonian society during the process of plenumization, a series of activities by university and high school students, professors as well as concerned parents, which suddenly went off waiting for the epilogue of the CfM – this "bigger brother" which overarched all these mobilizations.

#IProtest[9]

Optimism was very present in the response of an activist who was substantially involved in movement activities: "…My impression is that the citizen capacity still exists and I think that the real role of the civil society will follow after this situation changes…this means that it will be a long-lasting process…the authority and the power which were built during this period should be used in the future…" (IV 1, 2015). Unfortunately, this cannot be said about the other interviewees. The interviewed activist who is also a member of the central body of SDSM sees the only solution in a wide front headed by SDSM but on strictly horizontal principles: "…citizens' potential is on machines…in severe clinical condition…Is there a possibility for something bigger? The very moment when the leadership of SDSM opens the front and starts standing side by side with other stakeholders in a certain 'peer to peer' relationship, then, maybe we stand a chance…" (IV 3, 2015). One of the two interviewed academics draws a parallel with neighboring Serbia, highlighting Djindjic's efforts as wasted, together with his life, unfortunately: "…if a change of power occurs, and if the new political elites show an extremely strong will, and if many sacrifices are made…maybe…but there are too many if, if, if…I am general relatively skeptical from this perspective…" (IV 4, 2015). The Student Plenum member does not see any kind of possibilities for sharp improvement, at least not in the next 4 years: "…In the next 4 years I don't think that there is a possibility for something like this to happen… If a mobilization is initiated by young people which are still not profiled in the public, and which are not related to a first, second, third, fifth or tenth organization or side, and in this case, and I stress once again, there is a possibility, but there is a possibility of 2% for a mobilization to happen. But currently, I don't see a probability for something like this to happen…" (IV 2, 2015). Lastly, a lot of pessimism can be heard in the voice of a young and over-educated mother of two young children: "…just for their sake, I hope that there is some kind of possibility…but I know that it won't happen, simply, it is obvious…I don't care that my life has gone to hell, I cannot live with the fact that there is a high risk that their lives will be wasted as well…" (IV 5, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

Starting from the main research questions which were addressed, I will try to derive some general conclusive remarks, which taking into account the qualitative research design and the dynamic evolvement of events, must not be taken for granted.

Beginning with the political outcomes accompanying the movement, it is rather clear that the collective action left an eternal blueprint in Macedonian society – something which by any means can never be forgotten or disregarded. This is particularly visible through the conclusion of the Przhino Agreement, a process during which the movement actors played a serious role. As for the capacity of the movement to produce change in power, the rather ambiguous responses by the interviewees can only lead to the conclusion that time can be the appropriate "judge".

Closing with the central topic which was object of research, the mobilization from below, unfortunately the level of dominant pessimism in the voices of the interviewees can only lead me towards thinking about "failure from below". If the several percent lamented by some of the activists accidentally come to life, and Macedonian society enters into the much wanted and expected process of democratic restauration, in that case we would most probably witness a combination of possible paths ranging between *eventful democratization* and *participatory pact*.

Notes
(Endnotes)

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to the 5 interviewees for devoting part of their valuable time and energy to provide me with valuable insights and reflections.

[2] All 120 elected MPs voted in favor of the Declaration

[3] Lyrics from the song *All These Things That I've Done* performed by *The Killers*

[4] A sentence frequently used by PM Nikola Gruevski. Derived from the Macedonian: „Снимките се сечени, лепени и монтирани".

[5] Wording frequently used by journalists and public figures supportive of the Government to stigmatize government challengers. In Macedonian: соросоиди и комуњари

[6] Hashtags used on social media but also depicted on placards during the protests on 17th of May, and later during the encampment. In Macedonian: #Доаѓаме

#Остануваме #Оставка

[7] Przhino is the name of the neighborhood where the political negotiations took place. The political agreement was given the colloquial name "Przhino Agreement". The name of the neighborhood derives from the Macedonian "пржи" which is a verb with the meaning "to fry".

[8] One of the most popular statements frequently repeated by PM Nikola Gruevski. In Macedonian: Народот ќе одлучи

[9] The name of an informal contentious group which continuously organized protests. The hashtag has been frequently used during their events. In Macedonian: #Протестирам

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