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The student protests in Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria in 1996/97

The interplay between liberalism and nationalism

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Abstract

The thesis comparatively examines the student protests that took place in Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria in the winter of 1996/1997, with regards to the interplay between liberalism and nationalism. It compares the three similar post-communist countries with non-consolidated democracy through the instances of liberalism and nationalism that could be found in the student protests that happened in a parallel time-period. Specifically, the thesis tries to find out how liberalism and nationalism coexist in a protest movement, on one side, and in which instances nationalism is present in pro-democratic movements, on the other side. The literature used is mostly local from the countries, and information and opinions have been largely taken from participants and observers of the events. The thesis shows that in the cases of Macedonia and Serbia the lining of liberalism and nationalism is inverted – while liberalism is in the front side in Serbia, nationalism is dominant in Macedonia. Furthermore, it shows that nationalism is present in Macedonia and Serbia, but not in Bulgaria, because Macedonia and Serbia have issues of contested statehood and unresolved inter-ethnic problems, which are absent in Bulgaria.

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I. Introduction

I. a. Purpose of thesis and general settings

This MA thesis aims to explore the relations between nationalism and liberalism in student movements in transitional societies, through the cases of three post-communist Balkan countries: Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria.

In the period 1996-1997 the students in these three countries became highly politicized and had a significant impact on the further development of their countries and the emergence or consolidation of democracy (to varying extents in the specific cases). These movements still remain in the memories of the three countries with different views towards them from today's point-of-view. In the thesis, I claim that all three movements had liberal demands (in the sense of economic and political reforms for an accountable government to provide a stable democracy) and pushed for the democratization of their countries. Nationalism played various roles in at least two of the cases, but nevertheless influenced the nature of the movements. It is interesting to note that, while somewhere the use of national symbols and nationalist demands did not endanger or hamper the meaning of their democratic demands, in other cases it did. I will explore in which cases one or the other was dominant, and how they were used and operationalized by the students.

The prime reason why I had chosen this topic was the lack of academic discussion over what happened in Macedonia in 1997 during the biggest student protests that the country has seen so

far. There are many (miss) conceptions in the country about the nature of the protests and the real motives and demands of the demonstrators. Considering that the time period coincided with the Serbian and Bulgarian protests, I believe that drawing parallels with those two neighboring countries would shed more light into what was going on in Macedonia.

I would like to put this in the framework of the relation between nationalism and liberalism, because those are very delicate issues in the Balkans, and are not necessarily mutually exclusive in the processes of democratization, as I hope to show in my work. Thus, with the three cases that I have chosen I will show how nationalism or liberalism were merely used to achieve certain goals, as they themselves might or might not have been the goals.

First, I explore the situations in the three countries and the conditions that led to the protests. Then, I engage in describing the protests, their dynamics and symbolism, with special emphasis on the presence of liberalism and nationalism. Finally, I compare the movements in order to address my research questions and assess my hypothesis.

I. b. Research design

For this thesis, I have used qualitative analysis. Thus, I have gone through various literatures written on the three movements, even though on the Macedonian protest movement there has been almost nothing. Furthermore, in order to establish the social, economic, and political conditions in the three societies during their transitions from communism and see the specific events that lead to the protest movements, I have analyzed literature that depicts the transitions in the three countries. To make up for the lack of academic literature, I have used media articles,

mostly for Macedonia. Furthermore, since it involves complex movements, and potentially conflicting opinions, I have heavily relied on interviews with protest leaders and participants, as well as journalists, analysts and university professors from the three countries.

I. c. Research questions and hypotheses

For this project, I have two research questions:

1. Are nationalism and liberalism compatible with each other in the movements for democratization or can they only be used as tools to reach the other goal?
2. In what cases does nationalism appear as part of the student movements for democratization?

For answering, I will assess two hypotheses:

1. Nationalism and liberalism are used as "shields" for reaching the other goals in order to gain massive support from other actors.

2. Nationalist elements are present in the movements for democratization in societies with deep ethnic problems and contested statehood.

I believe that this set of three countries, in the depicted time-period, had many similarities that led to popular dissatisfaction and mobilization of the students against the government: belated transition, non-changing of elites, serious economic hardship, and electoral problems. Given these conditions, I will be able to isolate the reasons for the specific interplays between nationalism and liberalism about which I talk.

For the first set of a question and hypothesis, I will compare the cases of Macedonia and Serbia. I claim here that the relation between liberalism and nationalism was inverted in the two cases. While liberalism was used in nationalistic protests in Macedonia, nationalism was used in liberal protests in Serbia.

For the second set of a question and hypothesis, I will compare the Macedonian and Serbian cases on one side, and the Bulgarian case on the other side. Considering that the first two countries had deep ethnic problems and contested statehood, the presence of nationalism in both cases is understandable. Contrary, however, in a country where these problems were not experienced, or at least were solved by the time-period taken by this analysis, nationalism in the protest movement was not present.

I. d. Theoretical framework and definitions

Aware of many disagreements that accompany concepts of liberalism and nationalism, for the purpose of this thesis I will attempt at coming up with a working definition of the two terms in order to have a clearer picture of the character of the student protests in the three cases. I will not approach this problem normatively, but rather analytically.

In a discussion of the hardships of making a clear definition of liberalism, Eccleshall writes:

> I suggest that liberalism is neither coherent nor narrowly individualistic: that what gives the doctrine its distinctive perspective is a strong sense of public duty or citizenship which is linked with the ownership of private property. Liberals, to anticipate the argument, have wished to safeguard individual liberties through a structure of equal rights in the expectation that dutiful citizenship or civic virtue will thereby be enhanced.[1]

[1] Eccleshall, Robert. *Liberalism* in: Eccleshall, Robert et al. *Political Ideologies: An introduction.* London: Routhledge, 2003, p. 19

So, in a minimum sense, liberalism is based on personal autonomy and freedom, which are formalized in the basic constitutional rights. In an effort to effectively protect rights from threats, liberalism focuses on the limits of political authority: thus, limited government, the rule of law, and the separation of powers are its main political arrangements. In order to secure democratic quality of these arrangements, liberalism insists on political freedoms. Importantly, liberal democracy also insists on the protection of minorities, where this concept refers both to changing political minorities, and to stable pre-political minorities. The latter type of minority protection is especially relevant for my analysis, given that the societies that I am referring to in my work (the Macedonian, Serbian and Bulgarian) are ethnically mixed countries in different degrees. This, in fact, would be measurable for the level and usage of nationalism in these movements.

Nationalism, in colloquial talk has often a negative undertone to it, especially in the Balkans, given the historical record of inter-ethnic animosities, and especially considering the outburst of violence that came as a result of the nationalist stances of the ruling elites after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The wars waged in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo and the ferociousness of the violence exercised in them have brought to the situation to see nationalism as very dangerous in these parts of the world. Added to this the armed conflict that happened between ethnic Albanian insurgents and Macedonian security forces in 2001, the Balkan mixture of people has proven to be a fertile ground for scholars of nationalism to conduct various studies. Besides the violence, colder conflicts over history between the countries of the region have impeded the progress and democratization (respect of minority rights in several of these countries, the "name issue" between Macedonia and Greece come to mind here).

Nationalism itself is not always considered a negative instance, as it has proven to be highly valuable while nation-building, especially for small countries and people. Its negative instances, of course, cannot be denied. Thus, a value-neutral provisional understanding of nationalism needs to be applied for the purpose of this study.

Anthony D. Smith differentiates between the "ethnocentric" and "polycentric" nationalism. "For an *ethnocentric* nationalist, both 'power' and 'value' inhere to his cultural group, [while *polycentric* nationalism] starts from the premises that there are many centres of *real* power; other groups do have valuable and genuinely noble ideas and institutions which we would do well to borrow, or adapt."[2] In general, nationalism in the Balkans has been understood in an ethnocentric sense, following Smith's logic, since historically people have tended to live in countries constituted of their 'own' people, even though the success has not always been high. Nevertheless, we still witness mostly the ethnocentric nationalism in the Balkans, but that is not enough to say that the polycentric is also not present, as I will show in the future analysis.

Furthermore, Smith comes up with another two groups of definitions of nationalism. The first group "refers to sentiments, consciousness, attitudes, loyalties, more or less articulated," and these include:

1. an idiom, phrase or trait peculiar to the 'nation'
2. a sentiment of devotion to one's nation and advocacy of its interests
3. a set of aspirations for the independence and unity of the nation.[3]

[2] Smith, Anthony D. *Theories of Nationalism.* London: Duckworth, 1971, pp. 158-159
[3] Idem, pp. 167-168

"The second group refers to doctrines, ideologies, programmes, activities of organizations, movements," and these include:

1. a political programme embodying such aspirations in organizational form
2. a form of socialism, based on the nationalization of industry
3. the doctrine of divine election of nations.[4]

As can be seen from Smith's discussion, whereas some understanding of nationalism has purely neutral or at least positive attitude, others can be seen negatively. For example, the "doctrine of divine election of nations" can lead to dangerous actions by nationalists.

Whether liberalism and nationalism are compatible with each other is a matter of discussion, and especially on how normatively one defines them. On the "marriage" between liberalism and nationalism, Tamir writes:

> Liberal nationalism relies on the assumption that as liberalism is a theory about the eminence of individual liberties and personal autonomy, nationalism is a theory about the eminence of national-cultural membership and historical continuity, and the importance of perceiving one's present life and one's future development as an experience shared with others. [5]

Acknowledging that nationalism can be seen both positively and negatively, depending on the situations when it is present or used, I will look at the nationalist rhetoric and symbolism in the protests, while keeping in mind the context in which they are used, whether nationalism is used against someone instead of other purposes, and how it "plays" with the presence of demands made by the students that comply with the general understanding of liberalism.

[4] Idem, p. 168
[5] Tamir, Yael. *Liberal Nationalism.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 79

While answering the research questions, I will see how liberalism and nationalism were framed within the student movements in the three countries, with what David L. Westby calls "hegemonic ideology." For instance, the civil rights movement had accepted the liberal democratic rhetoric in their frame and varied its mode of actions depending on the areas of the US. On the other side, the protesting students in China in the '80-ies adopted communism, nationalism and Confucianism in their frame strategically for wider acceptance.[6] In the coming pages, I will represent how liberalism and nationalism were incorporated within the frames of the student protests of Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria according to the conditions in the three countries.

[6] Westby, David L. *Strategic imperative, ideology, and frames* in: Johnston, Hank and John A. Noakes (ed.) *Frames of protest: Social movements and the framing perspective.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, pp. 226-229

II. The conditions that led to the protests in the three countries

II. a. Macedonia

II. a. i. 1991-1996: The national setting

Since its independence from the Yugoslav Federation, Macedonia entered a troublesome transition abundant with much controversy: problematic international recognition (its challenged acceptance to the UN, due to the 'name issue'), political turbulence, dangerous ethnic tensions, and of course, large economic hardship. The paths chosen by the ruling elites for transition and privatization proved to be much harder than was expected. A stable Yugoslav market was closed, a Greek embargo was imposed, and wars in the other former Yugoslav countries traced the path for oil and weapons smuggling with consent of the same ruling elites. Unemployment and poverty rates rose rapidly. From 2% in 1990, poverty rate rose to 19% in 1997[7], while unemployment rose from 14% in 1990 to 36% in 1997[8].

> The Macedonian government in 1995-1998, in the time when the process of privatization was conducted and when 95% of all companies were privatized, made wrong choices about [three] issues. First, privatization was conducted in an extremely short, mass, and non-transparent way. That did not allow for the making of good preparations to realize the process. Second, privatization was conducted before necessary complementary reforms were carried out, such as private property rights, strengthening competition, good corporate governance etc. Third, and very important, the model of privatization was the worst of all: privatization through insiders close to the government and the elites. This meant easily obtaining public property. Only formal ownership changed, but without the needed methodological changes, without the needed competition to find the most suitable new owners, and without additional capital. Consequently, privatization was done in a way that completely threw foreign capital out. The

[7] Andrevski, Filip. "Can Poverty Be Reduced?" http://www.civicworld.org.mk/default.asp?ItemID=9D845613EEAC48469F5ED116A1FCA2D1. Accessed 15. 11. 2009

[8] Macedonia in numbers 2008. p. 19. State statistical office of Republic of Macedonia. Skopje 2008. Available at http://www.stat.gov.mk/glavna.asp?br=01. Accessed 15.11.2009

> purpose of political leaders then was not to find the most suitable investors, but to give the firms "for free" to the members of the elites with whom they shared financial and other interests.[9]

It is obvious from the above stated that people were unhappy with the economic and political situation they were in. Protest was not uncommon, and it was almost exclusively the laid-off workers from privatized companies who went out on the streets.

However, a very important event happened in 1994 which caused the opportunity for a protest-to-come. At the parliamentary elections in October that year, the coalition of the ruling Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) won 32.6% of the votes, while the main opposition, right wing Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), won 14.3% in the first round. However, the round itself was full of irregularities, including the mobilization of the public administration and police in favor of SDSM, insecure ballot boxes, and the omission of many citizens from the voter's lists (which disabled them to cast their votes and opened the way to new manipulation).[10] To this, of course, the opposition severely protested. When their complaints were not taken into account, they decided to boycott the second round. This gave a free way to SDSM to win 60 out of 120 seats, plus 30 seats of their coalition partners.[11] Having ¾ of the Parliament, obviously, opened the way to the shady privatization mentioned above.

In 1996, another scandal of economic nature happened. That was the crash of the savings-bank TAT, when about 12.000 people who saved their money in foreign currencies (many of whom from the diaspora hoping to invest in the country) lost 12 million Deutch Marks at the time. The

[9] Stavrevski, Zoran. "Development and the Elites." Skopje 27. 03. 2009. Available at http://www.vicepremier.gov.mk/?q=node/427. Accessed 15. 11. 2009

[10] Naumovski Branislav. "The temptations of the Macedonian transition." Skopje: Feniks, 1997, pp.63-64

[11] Petrovski, Konstantin. "On the way to the second Revival." Bitola 05. 06. 2009. EGO online magazine. Available at http://www.ego.com.mk/arhiva/35-broj161/51-po-patot-na-vtorata-prerodba.html. Accessed 10. 12. 2009.

owners had close ties with the government, the money had disappeared in the hands of unknown "VIP-savers" and the disappointment was very great among the people, considering that the vast of the people were small savers who had put all their savings there.[12]

II. a. ii. The inter-ethnic relations and the "misfortunate" law

In the nineties (as well as now) the inter-ethnic relations, especially between the two largest communities in the country, the Macedonian and the Albanian, were very fragile. With the Albanians wanting more cultural rights, autonomy in the areas where they were the majority, education in their language, and larger employment in the public administration, the confidence between the two communities decreased. In 1992, and attempt was made to create an independent state *Ilirida*, with an illegal referendum among the Albanians. In 1996 at the local elections, in Gostivar and Tetovo the mayors, both ethnic Albanians decided not to put the flag of the country on their buildings, but to use the Albanian flag instead (which was clearly unconstitutional). In the light of ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs in the Serbian province of Kosovo, Macedonians feared secessionism, which further decreased the inter-ethnic trust.

Until 1991, Albanian students from Macedonia could study in their mother tongue in Prishtina, Kosovo, but the Milosevic regime closed these studies. An illegal private university in Albanian language was opened in Tetovo (an Albanian-dominated town in Macedonia) in late 1994, which

[12] Stojcev, Kokan. "The *bashibozuk* of the urban mafia reminds of the TAT-affair." Macedonian Sun nr. 641, 13. 10. 2006, pp. 30-31

was followed with violence emerging between the Macedonian police and the students and supporters as authorities tried to close it. One person died.[13]

In January 1997, the Minister for Education, Sofija Todorova, proposed to the Parliament a Law on the Usage of the Languages of Minorities in the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje, which provided for the studies in Albanian language. The ruling party SDSM saw this as a way to alleviate the escalating situation with the university in Tetovo, and as a way to please their Albanian partners, the Party for Democratic Prosperity.[14]

This single law was the initial spark that fanned the flames for the biggest student protests so far in the history of Macedonia. Macedonian students saw this law to be in conflict with the Macedonian Constitution, which stated that minorities are guaranteed to study in their mother tongue in elementary and high school. They used the momentum of the large social dissatisfaction towards the government and went in front of the Parliament. They promoted themselves as the protectors of the Constitution and the Macedonian nation and language, and as fighters against the totalitarian regime of SDSM, and, as will be shown, were ready to die for that.

II. b. Serbia

II. b. i. Setting the scenes: The rule of Milosevic

[13] The status of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia – Timeline. Available at http://www.macedonia.org/crisis/timeline.html. Accessed 10.12.2009

[14] Georgievski, Boris. "Ten years since the protests that changed the political ambience." Utrinski Vesnik, Skopje 17. 02. 2007. http://www.utrinski.com.mk/?ItemID=3B91761ECFEA5B479DDBAFDC6C0A2782. Accessed 11. 12.2009

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia into several independent republics, Slobodan Milosevic managed to hold onto Montenegro within the Serbian reach and, in 1992, formed yet a new Yugoslavia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, comprised of Serbia and Montenegro. Since his coming in power in 1987, he emerged as a fierce and populist president of Serbia with violent ethno-nationalist policies for a Greater Serbia, which led the country to wars with Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo where serious war atrocities and human rights violations had been committed. None of the relevant authors of the time considered the Milosevic regime to be democratic: there is no doubt that Milosevic's regime "cannot be viewed [even] as a democratic transitional regime," since he only accepted political pluralism to legitimize power, but did not abide by the democratic rules.[15] As Darmanovic writes, the problem of statehood that was inherited from the SFR Yugoslavia, when it had "[a] well-rounded ethnocratic structure of power, resting on the power of the elites in the constuituent republics. These ethnocratic power structures, especially the one formed under Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, were among the crucial reasons why the problem of statehood was solved by war, and the bloodiest war in Europe since 1945."[16]

At the time, the Serbian society was in constant militarization, corruption flourished, freedom of media was frequently suppressed, organized crime was used for state interests in the wars and on the streets with crime figures being treated as Serbian patriot heroes.[17] "Serbia was ruled by a para-state cartel composed of 'official' political institutions, the ruling party with its 'coalition'

[15] Darmanovic, Srdjan. *Peculiarities of Transition in Serbia and Montenego* in: Vujadinovic, Dragica, et al. *Between Authoritarianism and Democracy (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia), Vol. 1: Institutional Framework.* Belgrade: Center for Democratic Transition, 2003, pp. 146-147
[16] Ibid. p. 144
[17] See the 1995 documentary *Vidimo se u čitulji (See you in the Obituaries),* dir. Janko Baljak, B92 Production.

satellites, the army, various police formations, the mafia, Court intellectuals, with the President of the Republic as the center of the spider web and the personification of the system."[18]

Starting in 1992, the UN, EU, UK and US imposed various sanctions and an oil embargo on Serbia due to the military operations that the country was undertaking. Hyperinflation followed, and the people of Serbia were living in extremely hard economic conditions. In the period 1990-1991, about 40% of the publicly owned companies were privatized, and the privatization was halted until 2000 in order to support the war efforts.[19]

> Political elites, war entrepreneurs and market contractors are in a better social position than the public contractors. The lower governing strata together with professionals and experts on their levels, experience shared decline. But the most devastating effects of pauperization have struck manual workers and those outside labor altogether: the unemployed and pensioners, dependent on the state. The position of skilled workers is still a bit better than of the unqualified ones. They have survived mainly because of their access to goods distributed directly by the state. For instance, in 1993, flour, potatoes and meat were at one point distributed directly by the state, to companies (i.e. worker's unions), which distributed it further to their employees.[20]

The unemployed and pensioners were left on the verge of starvation and no help was offered to them by the state, and many were on permanent vacation due to the closure of factories. Large numbers of those people engaged in the gray economy or crime in order to survive the hardships.[21]

II. b. ii. The 1996 elections and the protests that followed

[18] Dimitrijevic, Nenad. *Serbia as an Unfinished State* in: Vujadinovic, Dragica, et al. *Between Authoritarianism and Democracy (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia), Vol. I1: Civil Society and Political Culture.* Belgrade: Center for Democratic Transition, 2005, p. 61

[19] See more on the privatization in: Bolcic, Silvano. *Blocked Transition And Post-Socialist Transformation: Serbia in the Nineties.* William Davidson Institute Working Paper Number 626, October 2003

[20] Djuric-Kuzmanovic, Tanja and Dubravka Zarkov. *Poverty and Non-Directed Development in Serbia,* p. 5 in Metzo, Katherine R., ed. Reassessing Peripheries in Post-Communist Studies. Chicago: DePaul University 1999.

[21] Ibid. p. 5

The country had fertile grounds for the wide dissatisfaction of the people to be transformed into a democratic turnover, but the repressive system, secret police, and most importantly, the successfully run ethno-populist propaganda by the Milosevic regime prevented the country from a greater change towards democracy.

As federal and local elections were set up for November 1996, the three largest pro-democratic opposition parties had agreed to form a coalition in order to change the existing power relations in the country. The Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), led by Vuk Draskovic, the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS), led by Vesna Pesic, and the Democratic Party (DS) led by Zoran Djindjic established the coalition called *Zajedno* (Together). The coalition was joined by Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), but only at the federal, and not local level.[22]

They presented a democratic option to the existing regime, and resisted the war policies of the country. Having visited many places together, and facing severely biased coverage from the public media, they did not expect for much support. The results from the federal elections proved just that, considering they only won 22 seats in the Yugoslav legislature, compared to 64 for Milosevic's Yugoslav United Left (JUL) and 16 for the ultra-right wing Radical Party (RSS). However, after the second round of the elections, they did especially well on the local level. "The victory in the capital came as a surprise even to Zajedno itself."[23] This was accompanied by the victories in 14 major cities, including Nis, Novi Sad, and Kragujevac; in sum they were victorious in 45 municipalities of Serbia.

[22] Anastasijevic, Dejan and Anthony Borden (ed.), *Out of time: Draskovic, Djindjic and Serbian Opposition Against Milosevic*, UK: Institute for War & Peace Reporting 2000, pp. 31-32
[23] Ibid. p. 32

However, Milosevic saw this as a serious blow and could not allow it to happen, so he used the state apparatus to falsify the election results. Irregularities were many, especially in the second round of the local elections, such as falsifying the electoral lists and the reports of electoral supervising boards, or organized casting of pre-fulfilled ballots with the names of SPS candidates. Even though the coalition Zajedno pressed charges against many presidents and members of the supervising committees, only one was accepted by the courts. "The electoral theft showed the real face of the whole legal system and illustrated its complete dependence on the ruling party."[24] The outcome was that the coalition had lost all major cities, which would be the start of the opposition protests on 19th November in Nis, and 20th November in Belgrade. They were joined by university students and professors, who, besides calling for the correction of the electoral fraud, called for university-specific demands.[25] Serbia saw 88 days of Zajedno protests, and 117 days of student protests, accompanied by daily marches, closures of media, clashes with police, much pleas from external factors, and a brink of a civil war in general.[26]

As Mladen Lazic points out, "the mass protests that broke out in Serbia in November 1996 were undoubtedly a delayed echo of the movement that brought about the collapse of the socialist system in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the late 1980s."[27] However, the main difference that there was no emergence of a Solidarity movement like in Poland, or the roundtable talks like in Hungary, was the absence of a foreign (occupying) power such as the USSR. In the former

[24] Goati, Vladimir. *Elections in FRY 1990-1998 – the Will of the Citizens of Electoral Manipulation.* Belgrade: Center for Free Elections and Democracy, 1999. pp. 104-106

[25] Whilst they basically had the same demands, and at most of the times intertwined with each other, the student movement tried to distance and remain independent from the parties as much as possible, thus it is reasonable to analyze them separately.

[26] Ibid. p. 33

[27] Lazic, Mladen, *Introduction: The Emergence of a Democratic Order in Serbia* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999 p. 4

Yugoslavia, the system was autonomously maintained, without external enemies, a relative openness to the West, and the leader of Serbia was able to postpone consolidation of democracy following the fall of communism due to statehood and ethnic problems.[28]

In the following sub-chapters, I will shortly assess the roles and actions of the civil, Zajedno-led protests.

II. b. iii. The civil protests and the Zajedno coalition[29]

The protest led by the Zajedno coalition were held in more than 50 cities around Serbia, and at times over 300,000 people showed up. Basically, the nature of the protests was mass rallies at city squares, where prominent party leaders or supportive public figures would address the public, and then followed by marches throughout the cities. No special permits for rallies were obtained, in order to show the anti-regime character of the movement (it is debatable whether they would have been allowed in the first place), but the rallies were so massively visited by ordinary citizens that the police at start did not react. The three leaders Pesic, Draskovic, and Djindjic were at the front of the marches, and in smaller towns it was the local party leaders. Over time, the protests had become violent with the police forces, under the pretext of "blocking traffic." Pesic even got severely injured at one of the marches on Branko's Bridge in Belgrade after a clash with the

[28] Ibid. p. 5
[29] The chronology from these events was mostly taken from the newspapers *Nasa borba, Demokratija, Blic, Borba* and *Dnevni Telegraf* gathered and published in: Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, pp. 211-230

police. What is interesting that only about 3.5% of the supporters in Belgrade were in fact party members, according to polls taken by the Belgrade School of Philosophy.[30]

> The 1996-1997 public protests and marches were a way for citizens to free themselves of the fear brought on by long-standing economic hardship and police repression. Opinion polls conducted at the time of the protests and immediately afterwards showed strong anti-regime sentiments and high hopes for the future sparked by the rebellion.[31]

During the protests, the coalition leaders had visited several embassies in order to inform the international community of what is going on in the country. It is remarkable to point out that Draskovic on 27th November for the first time called for the resignation of Milosevic, clearly showing the final direction that the coalition was headed towards.[32]

Under both domestic and international pressures, Milosevic agreed to accept the visit of an OSCE mission, led by former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez to examine the election results and provide recommendations. They recognized the victory of Zajedno in 13 cities as well as nine municipalities of Belgrade, where it was previously annulled. Under pressure, Milosevic eventually proposed a special law recognizing some elections results as established by OSCE. At the session of the Serbian Parliament when this law needed to be voted, the Zajedno coalition refused to take part, but the law was passed nevertheless.[33]

The citizen and opposition protests ended on 15th February 1997, when the victory of the Zajedno coalition was recognized in the places where they have won. The most significant achievement is

[30] Anastasijevic, Dejan and Anthony Borden (ed.), *Out of time: Draskovic, Djindjic and Serbian Opposition Against Milosevic*, UK: Institute for War & Peace Reporting 2000 pp. 33-34
[31] Ibid. p. 35
[32] Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, pp. 211-230
[33] Ibid. pp. 212-228

the fact that the DS leader Zoran Djindjic become the mayor of Belgrade, which raised the hopes for further growing of the democratic opposition in the country.[34]

II. c. Bulgaria

II. c. i. The situation in Bulgaria after fall of communism

At the collapse of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Bulgarian Communist Party had no choice but to announce the democratization of the country in 1989. However, at the elections which took place in 1990, the ruling party did not change. The reformed Communist Party, now changed to Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) won the parliamentary elections. Continuing with the old methods and without a true dedication for economic reform, the people grew quickly unsatisfied by them. After a series of protests and strikes, new elections were called and, in November 1991 the opposition, United Democratic Forces (UDF), won by a slight majority. In the meantime, Bulgaria elected its first democratic president. First by the Assembly in 1990, and afterwards in general elections in 1992, Zhelu Zhelev, a popular dissident from the Communist era, was chosen to be the head of state until 1997.

The government of the UDF had a vote of no confidence after only 11 months in power. Following a technocratic government until 1994, the BSP returned to power. In 1994-1997, the BSP was completely incompetent to adapt the country to the new conditions of political, and especially economic, liberalization which was happening in the region and in post-communist Europe in general. According to Vesseling Dimitrov, between 1991 and 1997, two phases

[34] Ibid.

happened in Bulgarian economy: the first one (1991-1994) was liberalization without permanent stabilization, and the second one (1995-1997) was partial reversal of liberalization and a spectacular failure of structural reform.[35]

"By the end of 1996, their government's policies had resulted in a persistent shortage of grain, fodder, fuel and bread, an inflation rate of 2 000 per cent (from about 39 before the formation of the Socialist Cabinet), collapse of the financial system with the closure of 15 banks, policy prostration and complete lack of prospects."[36]

> From a socialist-era situation in which virtually all agricultural land was incorporated into state-controlled co-operative farms and most other economic activities were similarly centrally planned and state controlled, private-sector activity has increased as a share of the overall economy during the l990s, particularly in the agricultural and service sectors. For many Bulgarians, however, this change has not been enough to offset the negative economic effects of the state sector's shrinkage. Agricultural and industrial production has fallen, many people have lost their jobs, and rapid inflation has substantially eroded the purchasing power of wages, pensions, and savings.[37]

Worker's wages began to exponentially drop, the hyperinflation stepped in and average salaries were enough for 5 packs of cigarettes, the pensions ranged between 3-10 dollars.[38] Evgeniy Dainov compared the life in Bulgaria at that time like in the natural condition of Thomas Hobbes: poor, bitter, primitive and short. "Life was more miserable than any centennial man in Bulgaria could remember of. [We] cannot forget when the protesting doctors were walking around with banners on their coats that said their salaries: 18 dollars, 12, 10, to even reach 8 at the end."[39]

[35] Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Bulgaria: The uneven transition.* London: Routhledge, 2001. p. 70
[36] Dainov, Evgeniy. Foreword in: Dainov, Evgeniy (ed.), *The Awakening: a Chronicle of the Bulgarian Civil Uprising of January-February, 1997*, CSP, Sofia, 1998, p. 7
[37] Cellarius, Barbara A. *You Can Buy Almost Anything with Potatoes": An Examination of Barter during Economic Crisis in Bulgaria*. Ethnology, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Winter, 2000), pp. 76-77
[38] Ivan Butovski, journalist in weekly magazine *168 Hours* (business section), student participant in the protests. Interview 20. 04. 2010, Sofia
[39] Dainov, Evgeniy. The Bulgarian State Brings a New Social Contract in: Dainov, Evgeniy (ed.), *The Awakening: a Chronicle of the Bulgarian Civil Uprising of January-February, 1997*, CSP, Sofia, 1998, p. 24

From the point of view of the neighboring countries, even those with serious economic problems themselves, like Macedonia and Serbia, Bulgaria was a symbol of poverty, crime – a place where one could go and buy extremely cheap products, compared to the Serbian or Macedonian low standards.

> At a time when privatization was most needed, it did not happen. While there was an increasing need to reform the principles of work of the companies, it did not happen. The structural firms did not bring any profit – they only spent capital, thus they became increasingly indebted. So, no one wanted to buy them and privatize them. Even though the land was denationalized, privatization was very hard. About 300 big industrial companies were put for liquidation, and people lost their jobs.[40]

"The inability of the Bulgarian governments to find an effective solution to the problems of state enterprises was perhaps the greatest failure of the Bulgarian transition."[41] The voucher privatization was repeatedly delayed and was introduced only when the enterprises were already in deep crisis. Foreign debt was not repaid as there were no resources for it.[42] The bank system collapsed in November as a result of the many unsecured credits that had been extended over the previous years, and at the same time the political crisis deepened."[43] Already in 1995, Zeljko Bogetic hinted at the coming problems:

"The umbilical cord between large state enterprise loss makers and the state banks is at the heart of the problem. Until demand for subsidies generated by the non-viable state enterprises is restrained by explicit government controls or privatization, the already weak banks will find it difficult not to respond with new credits."[44]

[40] Alexander Politov, Executive Director of "Razum Institute," student participant at the protests. Interview 20. 04. 2010, Sofia
[41] Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Bulgaria: The uneven transition.* London: Routhledge, 2001. p. 75
[42] Idem.
pp. 56-56
[43] Todorova-Pirkova, Iveta. *Symbols and images of 'evil' in student protests in Sofia, 1997.* Cultural Analysis 2001, 2, University of California. pp. 107-108
[44] Bogetic, Zeljko, and Arye L. Hillman. *Financing Government in the Transition: Bulgaria*, World Bank, Washington DC, 1995, p. 20

The principle on how the banks were set up was itself illegal. They were all opened with the same capital, borrowing from each other, thus there was no backing for the credits. This made it obvious that it was done with the consent of the authorities, because there was no way that such a scam could be done without the knowledge of the government. There were situations when people invested all their money in a bank, who had just sold their houses and looking to buy new ones. However, at the collapse of the banks, they had lost everything.[45]

There was a serious shortage of basic products. "In 1995, [the government] allowed excessive exports of grain from the country, thus provoking a bread shortage the following year."[46] Even the ones that had money to buy, could not buy things as simple as bread, since the state was keeping the reserves and did not release them on the market. There was some donations in wheat from the US, but they also disappeared. A number of oligarchs close to the regime and to Russia, however, became very rich at that time – they were connected to the arms, oil, and cigarettes smuggling that were going to Serbia.[47] By 1997, more than 30% of the population was living below the poverty line as defined by the United Nations, Development Program – $4 per person per day.[48]

Even though declaratively democratic, the government was looking to the East much more, i.e. to Russia. BSP was very anti-NATO, but "very sympathetic to the regime of Milosevic and very close to the most backward elites of the communist era in Russia. They were even considering Yeltsin's proposal to join a pact with Belarus and Kazakhstan, which would have been the Soviet

[45] Ivan Butovski, journalist in weekly magazine *168 Hours* (business section), student participant in the protests. Interview 20. 04. 2010, Sofia
[46] Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Bulgaria: The uneven transition.* London: Routhledge, 2001. p. 55
[47] Ivan Butovski, journalist in weekly magazine *168 Hours* (business section), student participant in the protests. Interview 20. 04. 2010, Sofia.
[48] Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Bulgaria: The uneven transition.* London: Routhledge, 2001. p. 62

Union part 2."[49] Although in the short rule of UDF, they tried to get closer to NATO, the BSP stopped those advances, and saw that keeping out of NATO, and deepening the already-established close relations with Russia would be better for the country's security.[50]

II. c. ii. The general protests

The growing dissatisfaction was sporadically showing all throughout the rule of BSP, but no protests of greater significance were held before the winter of 1996. Anastasov believes that a beginning of the protests was when in the summer of 1996 old anti-communists protested against the idea of Bulgaria joining the pact with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.[51] However, this is not very widely accepted, considering they were not that massive. After the collapse of the banks, the UDF proposed a Declaration for the Salvation of Bulgaria, which contained economic and political measures to tackle the crisis, including suggestions for early elections. Although the BSP government resigned on December 21, elections were still not held. The parliament discussed the declaration on January 3, but the BSP, who had the majority in the parliament, decided to postpone the voting on January 10.[52]

When the day came, thousands had gathered in front of the Parliament in order to support the declaration. However, BSP refused to submit it to the parliament, and then the opposition left the parliament and called the people for protest under the motto: "'Yes' to the Declaration for

[49] Hristo Anastasov, Political Science Department - New Bulgarian University in Sofia, student participant in the protests. Interview 19. 04. 2010, Sofia
[50] Tashev, Blagovest. *In Search of Security – Bulgaria's Security Policy in Transition,* in: Blagovest Tashev and Tom Lansford, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe and the US: Renegotiating Transatlantic Security in the Post 9/11 Era* Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005, p. 132
[51] Idem.
[52] Benovska-Sabkova, Milena, *The Signs of Protest: January 10 February 5, 1997*, Ethnologia Bulgarica - Yearbook of Bulgarian Ethnology and Folklore, issue: 1 / 1998, p. 67

National Salvation, 'Yes' to parliamentary elections ahead of schedule, 'No' to a second government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)."[53]

The crowd refused to let the deputies ~~to~~ leave parliament, and a more aggressive group attacked the parliament and put fire at the exit. In the middle of the night, additional cordons of police came and used severe force to disperse the crowd. "Experts today believe that there were 'agent provocateurs' who incited the violence."[54]

The bulk of those policemen who came and attacked that crowd were brought from the periphery of the country, because the Ministry of Interior feared conflict of interest.[55] The police managed to pull out the deputies from the parliament after the crowd dispersed. "There was a big chaos. People didn't know in which direction to run. Added to that, there were some shots heard, and people ran away."[56]

After the 'effective' action of the police, on the next day the whole country began mobilizing increasingly. The national media was biased towards the protest activity, and the people from outside Sofia were not very informed what was going on. However, thanks to some independent radio stations, the word was spread and the country entered a non-stop protest activity.[57] "Bulgarians are usually a very peaceful people who do not want to argue against authority much. However, one could really see that 'the knife had reached the throat' since so many people went out in the street.

[53] Idem.
[54] Boyadjiev, Ognian, Editor-in-chief of www.europe.bg and communications and public relations expert in European Institute Foundation, journalist who reported of the protests. E-mail correspondence 20. 05. 2010
[55] Hristo Anastasov, idem.
[56] Butovski, idem.
[57] Anastasov, idem.

The greatest gathering was in front of the church St. Aleksandar Nevski in Sofia on January 11. The estimations are that there were about half million people at that gathering. Following that, until 4 February, almost every town in the country held daily rallies, roads and streeets were blocked, sporadic violence occurred and general strikes were called. During those days, inflation rose to about 1000 per cent, which even further increased the dissent amongst the people, even though this number has never been officially measured.[58]

President Zhelev played an important role in that time, considering he decided not to give a new mandate to the Socialists after their resignation, and waited for the new elected president, Petar Stoyanov from the UDF, to take office on January 19. After the new president came in power, he had to give the mandate to BSP. However, due to the increasing pressure that they felt from the demonstrations, and blockades (the city transport of Sofia was on strike in early February) on streets and roads, they were forced to give back the mandate on February 4, which gave free way for new elections. The victory was celebrated on February 5.

"It was a cold winter and life was difficult. The people were – probably for the first time – united for a common goal – to make life better."[59]

[58] Benovska-Sabkova, Milena, *The Signs of Protest: January 10 February 5, 1997*, Ethnologia Bulgarica - Yearbook of Bulgarian Ethnology and Folklore, issue: 1 / 1998, p. 67-68
[59] Boyadjiev, idem.

III. The student protests

III. a. The student protests in Macedonia

III. a. i. Generally on the protests

January-March 1997, about 35 days of protest, 15 days of hunger strike, and more than 20 000 protesters (at the biggest gatherings) was the result of the proposition of that law. It was a mobilization of university and high school students that the country had never seen before. And it all started at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

The Student Union at this Faculty, lead by its president, Mirjana Kitanovska, started with small protests at the Faculty campus, supported by their Dean. When they saw that there was no reaction and that they lacked more massiveness in order to be able to change a law, they turned to the Student Union of the state University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius," and were supported by them, including the Rectorate at the time. One of the greatest moral support they got was from a rejected candidate for President of the Student Union, Filip Petrovski, a member of the youth wing of the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE.[60]

On 14th January, the first bigger protest started in front of the campus of the Faculty of Philosophy and continued to the Ministry of Education. "As we moved from the Faculty, and then to the Ministry, until our final destination – the Parliament, many more people gathered and we were amazed," Petrovski recollected later[61]. This was the initial round of the protests. They

[60] Georgievski, Boris. "Ten years since the protests that changed the political ambience." Utrinski Vesnik, Skopje 17. 02. 2007. http://www.utrinski.com.mk/?ItemID=3B91761ECFEA5B479DDBAFDC6C0A2782. Accessed 11. 12.2009

[61] Filip Petrovski in TV Show *Profil*. 09. 03. 1997. Sitel TV Channel. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz9gRtD0VZM&feature=related. Accessed 12.12.2009

lasted 14-17th January, and were generally not supported in high numbers. The first semester ended on the 17th, and students went home. It was a time to reorganize, search for more support, and see what happens in politics.

While the students were enjoying or organizing in their winter vacation, 460 faculty members signed a petition in which they warned that the new law is "a step forward to multilingualism of the country, a change of the Constitution, division, and federalization." The Parliament however, voted positively with 54 votes 'for', 12 'against', and 3 'abstaining' on 30th January and enacted the law. The Rectorate, highly dependent on the Government, was convinced to quit complaining against the new law, and also the ruling party convinced the University Student Union to stop supporting protests against it.[62] This opened the door for Petrovski to become more involved with the protest on an organizational level, and supported by his Party comrades, to call for a greater participation of the student body.

On 17th February, the protests started again, more organized than before. Each day protesters gathered at noon in front of the Ministry of Education, Constitutional Court, Government, University, but mostly the Parliament. Soon, the High School Student Union sent a fax that they were supporting them too, and the movement gained a new momentum in increasing numbers, where approximately up to five thousand protesters gathered daily. Students from Kumanovo and Tetovo, both cities at a distance of more than 30 km away from Skopje, walked on foot to Skopje in support. "It was a solidarity you don't find in politics," Petrovski said. The largest gathering was one night at the end of February, when they organized a concert with bands and singers in front of the Parliament, when approximately 20 000 protesters gathered.[63]

[62] Georgievski, ibid.
[63] Petrovski in TV Show *Profil*.ibid

The authorities, however, were deaf to their calls. Momentum was lost, and by the beginning days of March, the support was symbolic. This is when the main organizers decided to move to a more radical measure, as they engaged in hunger strike on 4 March. 15 protesters stayed in a tent in front of the Parliament for 15 days, and their sacrifice earned the respect of their colleagues once more, so the daily protest activities gained in numbers again and mobilization was saved. They were consequently visited by their Rector, several mayors from Skopje, the presidents of the youth of the opposition parties, then the presidents of the opposition parties (including VMRO-DPMNE), and even the Patriarch of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, who decided to give them a blessing – something he had refused before. Protesters were soon joined by labor unions, socially and economically unsatisfied citizens, and NGOs.[64]

Petrovski remembers: "When we first came, police over night moved the independent union protesting before us. But they did not dare move us, and left us in the tents. This is when I realized they started fearing us."[65]

The government became nervous, and it called a Parliamentary session where the non-parliamentary opposition VMRO-DPMNE and the students were invited among the others. However, the session was not called about the law on the languages, or about a law for higher education, but about a declaration for the inter-ethnic tolerance. "It was a good message from the

[64] Ibid.
[65] ibid.

Parliament to bring such a declaration, in a time when the inter-ethnic relations were clearly shaken, and the student protests had greatly contributed to the situation at the time."[66]

The culmination of the protest was reached on 13th March, on the 11th day of the hunger strike, when Petrovski and Kitanovska entered the Parliament, and Petrovski gave a speech in front of the MPs. He clarified what they stood for and severely criticized the MPs for their ignorance, insisting that they need to discuss about the law on languages and the unitary character of the country, instead of inter-ethnic relations.[67] "They listened very carefully, completely opposite to what I was warned it would be like. I was told they would try to confuse me, to ridicule me. But they listened; just like you listen to an opponent you do not want to underestimate without knowing his weaknesses."[68]

> 10 000 people waited for him in front of the Parliament in euphoria. A policemen was hit in the head with a rock, as the students were about to raid the Parliament. A high school student, Vlatko Gjorce, stood in front of the crowd in order to prevent the students from entering into the House, and thus, into a bloodshed. And that is the grand finale of the protests; the coming days the numbers deteriorate, just like the health condition of the students.[69]

"At that time, with the numbers that the students had, they really could have taken over the Parliament. The police was supporting us, but what is more important is that the majority of the police and army were placed along the border with Albania, where a civil war was going on and a lot of weapons were stolen."[70]

[66] Professor Nazmi Maliqi, former MP, currently Vice-dean at Department of Political Science and International Relations at FON University in Skopje. Interview, 29. 04. 2010, Skopje
[67] Georgievski, ibid.
[68] Filip Petrovski in TV Show *Profil*, ibid.
[69] Georgievski, ibid.
[70] Filip Petrovski, Interview 25. 04. 2010, Skopje.

The protests officially ended on 18 March, after six strikers were hospitalized, one of whom in a very serious condition.

> First, 4-5 of us "fell" and went to hospital. There was a few of us still standing. Then we were all for hospitalization. In one night by the end, 6 people were in hospital and there was literally no one in the tent. This is when we saw there was no end in sight, except for dying. This government had no understanding for us and just didn't care. The price was too high for someone to get really hurt, so we had to stop our protest and go home to our families and back to university to our colleagues.[71]

III. a. ii. The ideology, slogans, support, and reactions

This protest movement is freely labeled as "the Macedonian Spring" by its supporters. A "Spring" symbolizes a struggle for human rights, democratic government, and freedom, following the Prague events in 1968. While the contention was mostly admirable as to what had happened and it is non-deniable, this movement has risen many questions as to what really the students were fighting for and how would one characterize them – was it really a "Spring?"

"They treated this as some sort of national awakening, their Spring. But, it was rooted in nationalism, which originates from fear. This fear was from Albanians nationalism, since any question regarding Albanians at that time was treated not as a social, economic, political, but as a security question."[72]

Initially, the students said that they stood in defense of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. Before the Constitutional changes in 2001, Article 48 of the Constitution read: "The members of nationalities have a right to pursue elementary and high school in their mother

[71] Mirjana Kitanovska in *Profil.* Ibid.
[72] Rizvan Sulejmani, former MP, current Professor at University of South-Eastern Europe in Tetovo. Interview, 27. 04. 2010, Skopje

language as confirmed by law."[73] However, if "nothing which is forbidden by law is allowed," as it is common in constitutional liberal democracies, then they were wrong. Indeed, the Constitution did not foresee a higher education in another language than Macedonian, but did not forbid it exclusively either. Moreover, the Faculty of Pedagogy had already had studies in Albanian and Turkish until 1986, so this law was only a reinstitution.[74] Macedonia has been an ethnically very mixed country all throughout its history. The dominant ethnic groups are not immigrants but have been in this territory for centuries and have kept their ethno-linguistic specificity and pride. Thus, one cannot easily argue against education in various languages.

Furthermore, they had demands against the state minority quotas for higher education. The affirmative action for minorities rose from 10% to 23% in the school year 2006-2007, since the university enrollment of Albanians was very low until then – only 4%.[75] They said that they were against discrimination, even if it is positive.[76] However, they still claim that they were not against the Albanian minority, and never xenophobic. They were fighting for democratic ideals in a country devoid of true opposition, considering there was no substantial debate about the law. "We protested in accordance to our student, political and partisan beliefs, and surely in accordance to our constitutional rights."[77] However, in spite of their reiterations that they are simply a pro-democratic youth, according to their claims and slogans one cannot really make this conclusion, or even to assume they made a reconciliation between their potentially chauvinists

[73]Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, 1991. Downloaded from: http://pravo.org.mk/documentDetail.php?id=538&gid=41&page=documentlaws.php
[74] Mehmeti, Kim. "Fascistic Kids." FOKUS weekly magazine. Date unknown. Scan downloaded from http://www.scribd.com/people/documents/715766-filippetrovski?popular=1
[75]Macedonia country report on Human Rights Practices for 1997. Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. US Department of state. January 30, 1998. Available at http://faq.macedonia.org/politics/hrr.1997.macedonia.html Accessed on 15. 12. 2009.
[76] Mirjana Kitanovska in *Profil.* Ibid.
[77] Filip Petrovski in *Profil.* Ibid.

stands. Whereas one could read and hear: "YES to living together, NO to ghettos;" "The cage of democracy" (referring to the tents where they hunger-striked); "This is the future – with a government like this" (accompanied by a picture of a beggar on the street); "Hunger-striking is a democratic right used in non-democratic societies;" "We are truly a social state – the people live on social welfare."[78] Furthermore, in a column written in their newspaper, Predrag Trajkovic wrote on the danger that Macedonia would not be seen as a country with the rule of law, if the Constitutional Court reviews the law on languages as constitutional. Here, he compares the legality of the system with the failure to punish those accountable for the financial crime, and expresses fears that the country would not be attractive for foreign investments.[79] On the other side, however, one could read and hear things like: "Better a nationalist, than nationally unconscious;" "I'm not a xenophobe – I love Americans;" In Macedonia – Macedonian;" "It's not the Shiptar's[80] fault – but down with the government;" "Ask for your rights in Albania." In their publication, on almost every page there were references to the glorious past of Macedonia, the pride of being a Macedonian and living in a Macedonian state.[81]

Other slogans that could be heard draw the attention and support of Macedonian patriots. "We are the future;" "I don't want three, I don't want two, I want one language;" "Hunger Strike: David and Goliath;" "This is not a party – this is patriotism;" "For education with European and world standards; Rebels WITH a cause." Protesters chanted a popularized melodic version of the Macedonian alphabet over and over. The old Macedonian flag (Sun of Vergina) and the new one were constantly used. Notes of support, however, mostly read: "Thank you for throwing away

[78] "David and Goliath – Student protest newspaper."
[79] Ibid.
[80] A derogatory term for Albanians.
[81] Ibid.

the shame that us, the elder Macedonians carry;" "Carry on for us, for you, and for everyone that comes after us;" "Courage, Heroes! You will be remembered by the real Macedonians."[82] Thus, elder supporters saw this almost exclusively as an ethnic issue.

Another of their demands was a law for higher education, which the country was lacking. This exposed a lack of vision on the side of the institutions, as an important area was not covered by a special law. Students rightfully demanded that such a law be brought, which would regulate also the question of the languages, which was the initial reason to clash. For illustration, this law was brought in 2000, and then revised in 2008, and it most definitely regulates the languages in a favorable way for minorities.[83]

Besides these questions, however, protesters really believed that they were also fighting against a corrupt government and called for the resignation of Minister Todorova. References to the criminal transition and especially the TAT-affair were constant.[84] At the first day of protests in January, Petrovski read passages from George Orwel's "1984" in front of the enthusiastic students. "Maybe communism was formally over, but the methods of government did not change. We were living 'our 1984' in 1997 and we had to do something about it."[85]

"We kept repeating we were not against the Albanian minority, and only against the law which would hurt the country, but no one listened."[86]

[82] Pictures taken from blogs *Macedonia 1997*: http://mk1997.blog.com.mk/blogs/mk1997?from=1 and *Filip Petrovski anti-blog*: http://filippetrovski.blog.com.mk/node/67200. Accessed 13. 12. 2009
[83] Law available at http://pravo.org.mk/documentDetail.php?id=799&gid=85&page=documentlaws.php
[84] "David and Goliath – Student protest newspaper."
[85] Filip Petrovski in *Profil.* Ibid.
[86] Mirjana Kitanovska in *Profil.* Ibid.

They felt that they are preventing a further disintegration of the country, and that they are preserving its unitarity. "We are not chauvinists, but conscious children. If we don't act out severely now, in the future greater problems will arise, and at the end we will lose all that our grandfathers managed to build."[87]

However, at times they used sarcastic nationalist jokes, thus making fun of either Albanians or those that "supported" Albanians. The Minister of Education's name was changed to 'Sofi Todori' (an "albanized" version of her real name), or was called *anamche* (*anama* is the term used for Muslim women). In a fake sarcastic letter from Prime Minister Crvenkovski, it was said that he wouldn't eat pork, because it might be seen as chauvinism, clearly referring to the fact that Albanians, who are Muslims don't eat pork.[88]

Besides the sarcasm, the real controversy came with some problematic slogans that could be heard occasionally, and they labeled the whole movement. "Gas chambers for Shiptars;" "Only dead Shiptar is a good Shiptar;" "You give them a finger, they ask for the whole hand." While the organizers tried to stop these messages and were constantly trying to suppress such rhetoric, the reactions were abundant.[89] After all, how can you control such a mass in such a divided society?

Recalling these issues, Petrovski was assured that these slogans were planted by state security agents, in order to label them as "Macedonian extremists," just like he was seen by state security

[87] Statement of Goran Angelovski, student at the Faculty of Economics. "David and Goliath – Student protest newspaper."
[88] "David and Goliath – Student protest newspaper."
[89] Geroski, Branko. "They labeled us we were against the Albanians". Interview with Filip Petrovski. Dnevnik, p. 12-13. 22. 02. 1997, Skopje. Taken from http://filippetrovski.blog.com.mk/node/199022. Accessed 14. 12. 2009

in his secret file, which he got access to in 2000. From what he could read there, he was labeled the fourth most dangerous oppositional activist at the time for "Macedonian extremism."

To their claims of not being nationalistic, of course, there is much disagreement.

> Macedonians, and especially the young Macedonians, were living through a cultural shock, as they saw Albanians getting out of the rural environment and becoming urbanized. Coupled with the increasing opportunity for education, they feared that Albanian students would take over their jobs, would be more capable for fighting for rights, and eventually take over parts of the country. They were largely misinformed, and thus, unfortunately, these protests had an anti-Albanian character.[90]

"While their colleagues in the north and east (Serbia and Bulgaria) are protesting for greater democracy of their countries, why do the Macedonian students open the doors to further inter-ethnic distrust, intolerance and divisions?"

Nevertheless, Macedonian daily newspaper Dnevnik emerged with a headline saying "The Reichstag fire in front of the Macedonian Parliament,"[91] clearly referring to Hitler's methods, while a Macedonian journalist from Sweden sent a letter stating: "Neo-Nazis in Sweden are using slogans like these." [92] Elizabeth Rehn, the Special Rapporteur to the UN Human Rights Commission, stated that she was highly disappointed with the intolerance of Macedonian students, at her visit to the country.[93] The Patriarch had initially refused to give them a blessing, due to their xenophobic calls.

By the government, however, they were only seen as tools of VMRO-DPMNE. The opposition leader, Ljubco Georgievski, stated that they supported the students in spirit, but not logistically

[90] Rizvan Sulejmani, former MP, current Professor at University of South-Eastern Europe in Tetovo. Interview, 27. 04. 2010, Skopje

[91] Dnevnik. p. 1. 17. 01. 1997, Skopje. Taken from http://mk1997.blog.com.mk/blogs/mk1997?from=1. Acessed 14. 12. 2009.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Macedonian Information Liaison Service. Web archives. http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/mils/1997/97-01-15.mils.html. Accessed 14. 12. 2009.

and strategically. In the Parliament, Prime-Minister Branko Crvenkovski attacked VMRO-DPMNE for manipulating the students. Ten years after, he still stayed on this belief: "The protests were a populist attempt for power [without] taking into account the long-term national interests."[94]

It is also interesting to see how students felt in the end of their struggle. As temper rose during the hunger strike, so did the calls to bring the government down come. "At that time, two wings emerged – one radical and ready to topple the government, and another one more moderate."[95] Students felt empowered and had a feeling that they had the capability to force the government into resignation, but Petrovski tried to suppress these movements. Before the start of the hunger strike, they had secretly gone to three opposition parties: his own VMRO-DPMNE, the Liberal Party, and the Democratic Party. He called them to unite against the government and move for early elections. However, politicians did not follow through. The Liberal and the Democratic Parties were in the process of merging and did not want to take such big steps. VMRO-DPMNE was waiting for the elections the coming year, and did not want to risk anything, so the students were left to themselves. When later politicians came to visit the starving students, they were booed.[96]

On the other hand, they did become a symbol for the people who suffered in the transition and that is why support from a wider stratum of citizens came (though exclusively of Macedonian

[94] Georgievski, ibid
[95] Trajce Rushev, participant in the protests. Interview, 15. 04. 2010, Skopje
[96] Filip Petrovski in *Profil*. Ibid.

ethnicity). A cartoonist drew the President of the Republic asking: "How can our kids make it so long without food?" The answer: "They had been training for years."[97]

Petrovski concludes:

> I hope the protests would be defined as a struggle for democracy, as a voice of the students who managed to shake the whole political nomenclature of the illegally elected Government. And I hope that the nationalist lines would be defined adequately – as a demand for a unique educational system to influence the integration of all groups in the society. There are still structures who attempt to give the protests a dimension which they don't deserve. That is why, ten years later, I am still trying to determine if we achieved something with those protests, if we left a mark in society, if we changed something.[98]

With the intention of concluding what I had presented and with the regards on the first research question, I would classify these protests more on the nationalist side. Here, the point of contention was on a national question – the education of minorities in their mother tongues – which is no longer an open question, since Albanian language is widely used in higher education. Unlike the Serbian students, the reason why the Macedonian students gathered to protest was because they felt that allowing the higher education in another language than Macedonian would consequently lead for a separatist movement, federalization of the country, and a serious threat to the state unitarity. Such a constellation of things immediately put the feelings of the issue at hand to polarize along ethnic lines. Even if the endangerment of the inter-ethnic relations might not have been a direct intention of the protesting students it was bound to happen.

Maybe the calling for gas chambers was really a sporadic call, or even a set-up by agent provocateurs, the nationalist overtone of the protests cannot be denied, and it was seen as a national struggle of the Macedonians, thus I would evaluate these protests more on the nationalist side.

[97] Markovski, Darko. Pecko. Dnevnik. Skopje 17.03.1997. available at http://filippetrovski.blog.com.mk/node/242170. Accessed on 16. 12. 2009.
[98] Georgievski, ibid

When it comes to the usage of liberal rhetoric, the students did make numerous references to the national Constitution and the legal system of the country, and the law for the languages did not coincide with the constitutional provisions regulating this topic directly. The constitution clearly said that minorities have a right to pursue education in their mother language, but only for elementary and high school education. However, I would add here that this demand of theirs was a result of wrong interpretation, since just like it did not predict higher education in other languages, the Constitution did not bad it either, thus a law regulating it would have been appropriate. Furthermore, the leaders were openly supportive of the biggest opposition party, which did not participate in the parliament due to dishonest elections. The criticisms over the privatization and economic scandals, and requests for government accountability, add to the liberal traits of the protests.

The popular support they got, however, was due to the ethnic character of the protests, in my opinion. I concluded this from the notes of support that they got, which were referencing to the ethnic character of the protests and the calls for Macedonian pride. Besides written notes on the tents of the protests, in the letters from organizations of Macedonians from abroad, NGO's which deal with ethno-cultural problems, or right-wing parties, in which they are commended of being Macedonian heroes and 'saviors of the nation.'[99] Anyways, the growing dissatisfaction from the badly run transition and the belayed democratization was channeled most effectively at protests of an ethnic character. Finally living in their own, independent country, Macedonians had high expectations of the quality of life awaiting them. Seeing independence as a result of century-long struggle, and feeling that life was not getting better, their pride was hurt and they felt insecure in their own country. Also, they felt that the government had betrayed the national idea by

[99] "David and Goliath – Student protest newspaper."

consenting to enter the UN under the provisional name of FYROM, which was an insult for any Macedonian. Thus, the dissatisfaction of national betrayal was combined with the dissatisfaction of the bad government.

The support the students got from political opposition, the church and, most importantly, the workers that suffered the most in the transition, give the character of a pro-democratic movement. This, however, was put to the second plan, and the ethnonational character and demands were dominant, considering that the main demand was still an illiberal one – the limitation of a right that minorities had already had, and was taken away from them.

III. b. The student protests in Serbia

III. b. i. Belgrade is the World

The most theatrical and memorable activity in the Serbian protests, and the most influential in the civil society, were the university students and their protests. Students from the University in Belgrade decided to take action and contribute to the pro-democratic opposition against Milosevic. On 22nd November, they constituted the Initiative Board of the student protest, where a few student leaders in front of several thousand colleagues demanded that the electoral will of the citizens be respected, and announced a general strike. From its inception, the Initiative Board was very careful in proclaiming that their demands are purely for the respecting of the electoral results, and that they need not be seen as supporters of a specific political party.[100] While there were many supporters and members of the political parties from the opposition even in the

[100] Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, pp. 211-230

leadership of the protest, the students tried their best to keep their independence, and not mix the protests.[101] The student protests were in the morning, and the civil protests in the afternoon, but even though there were situations when the marches might connect, this was avoided.[102] "There were even clashes between the parties and those students that were close to them in the protest, refusing to comply with some directions."[103]

The students, in fact, demanded the formation of an independent state electoral committee which would establish the accurate results of the elections and expose the fraud that had happened, along side with student-specific demands for the autonomy of the University..[104]

Not even ten days into the protest activity, the students got into a serious conflict with the rector and vice-rector of the University, who classified them as a small number of "manipulated students" joined by high school students and ordinary citizens, thus trying to diminish their numbers and importance. From there on, the Initiative Board for the Defense of Democracy was formed, and their demands, aside from the electoral agenda, included the resignation of Rector Dragutin Milutinovic and vice-rector Vladimir Djurdjevic. They were supported by a significant number of university professors and associates, as well as thirty members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art.[105] As Professor Turajlic puts it: "When we protested as students

[101] Marko Blagojevic, representative of the Faculty of Law in the Main Board of the protest. Interview Belgrade 03. 05. 2010
[102] Rastko Sejic, chief of propaganda and marketing of the protest. Interview Belgrade 01. 05. 2010
[103] Budimir Markovic, representative of the Faculty of Philosophy in the Main Board of the protest. Interview Belgrade 03. 05. 2010
[104] Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, pp. 211-230
[105] Ibid.

in 1968, very few professors supported us in our efforts, now I felt my duty as a professor and pedagogue to stand in support for the just cause that my students were fighting for."[106]

Unlike the coalition, whose protests lasted for 88 days, the students protested for 117 because their demands were broader. The Belgrade protests were even joined by their colleagues from Nis, Kragujevac, and Novi Sad, who walked on foot even as much as 220 km (in fact, the students from Nis were the only ones to be received by Milosevic, who promised them to inspect the matter more closely). In their activity, they did not attend classes, and were occasionally in violent clashes with the police.[107] Often times their routes were blocked (and had remained on the street for 100 hours at one point) in their *cordon against cordon* actions. They never managed to visit the President's house in the residential area of Dedinje, because they were always blocked.[108]

However, their creativity and youthful spirit were the strongest weapons against a repressive regime. Their main slogan was "Belgrade is the World" (*Beograd je Svet*) in order to show the importance of their activity for the whole region, and that they fight for basic political and human rights in a democratic society.[109] They threw toilet paper to the City Electoral Commission in order to show them that "[they] had enough of their crap." In the Park of Friendship, they planted a "Serbian plum tree," saying that the tree would bear fruits when democracy came to Serbia. Their marches were often accompanied by a festive atmosphere and a lot of humor, for instance

[106] Professor Srbijanka Turajlic, Electrotechnic Faculty in Belgrade. Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010
[107] More on the police brutality in the civil and student protests in: Kandic, Natasa. *Under Scrutiny: Police Against the Protests.* Belgrade: Center for humanitarian law, 1997
[108] Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, pp. 211-230
[109] Rastko Sejic, chief of propaganda and marketing of the protest. Interview Belgrade 01. 05. 2010

like when they made contests for "Mister Policeman" at the many blockades by the police.[110] Furthermore, they built a wall in front of the City Assembly in Belgrade, to show that they "do not break and destroy, as they were accused by the biased media, but rather build."[111]

Even though the Zajedno coalition had officially finished their protest, as the electoral fraud was recognized, the students did not feel the need to stop protesting, since they had much more to demand, this time for themselves – the resignation of the rector and the independence of the University from the state. After much negotiations and refusal to go back to classes if the rector and vice-rector did not resign, they succeeded in making the necessary changes in the Belgrade University. In their victory celebration on 7th March, they cried: "Slobo, you are next," again expressing their hopes for the fall of Milosevic. On March 20th, the student protests ended. The 50,000 students celebrating on the plaza in front of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, they finalized the protests by covering the rectorate building with a white cloth saying: "To be continued…"[112]

III. b. iii. The students and nationalism

Debates are still present whether this student movement can be described as nationalist or not, and, if yes, to which measure. From what was presented before, one can notice that among participants, supporters and spectators and analysts, the perceptions vary. Whether the movement can be described as outright nationalist, however, the evidence points more towards the liberal nature of the protests.

[110] Ibid.
[111] Rastko Sejic, chief of propaganda and marketing of the protest. Interview Belgrade 01. 05. 2010
[112] Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, pp. 211-230

Chris Hedges, the reporter from New York Times, wrote an article on December 10, 1996, describing the protesters as "fierce Serb nationalists," who blame President Milosevic for failing to create a greater Serbia. In this article, he describes his visit to the Faculty of Philosophy when the former Minister of Culture in France, Jacques Lange, was supposed to address the students who protested and to express his support. However, the students did not want to hear him, considering that he had supported the bombing of Serbia during the war in Bosnia. In a statement taken from a student, he found out that the students are not angry with Milosevic for entering the war, but for failing to win it. "'Milosevic betrayed the Serbian people,'' said Goran Kovacevic, a 19-year-old student. 'We go to class with Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia who lost their homes because Milosevic sold us out to the West.'" In a more broad explanation of Serb nationalism, he concludes that the young people of Serbia are the product of long-term nationalist indoctrination, and now they have turned against the 'traitor Milosevic.'[113] The discussion on the US Public Broadcasting Service from December 11th 1996 portrays the sentiments people from outside the country have about the protesters, after having been portrayed by this article as "'fierce Serb nationalists.' However, the local journalist and correspondent deny such thing.[114]

The overall perception by those who have read this and were concerned by this article from inside the country is that it was an irresponsible over-simplification. "It was actually a funny episode and a misunderstanding. Some students wanted to talk to Lange about his attitudes of the bombing of our country, but no one was aggressive. Hedges got the wrong idea."[115] The

113 Hedges, Chris. *Student Foes of Belgrade Leader Embrace Fierce Serb Nationalism.* New York Times, 10. 12. 1996, last accessed 10. 05. 2010, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/10/world/student-foes-of-belgrade-leader-embrace-fierce-serb-nationalism.html?scp=2&sq=&st=nyt&pagewanted=1

114 *Protests in Serbia.* Forum discussion with Dragan Ciric and Massimo Calabresi. PBS website. 11. 12. 1996. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/forum/december96/serbia_12-11.html. Last accessed on 25. 02. 2010

115 Budimir Markovic, representative of the Faculty of Philosophy in the Main Board of the protest. Interview Belgrade 03. 05. 2010

statement he may have gotten from a student was a coincidence. "While there was undoubtly a variety of students with various political beliefs, even those with ultranationalist, portraying the whole movements as such is ludicrous and foolish."[116]

> These events were taking place after the signing of the Dayton Accords. Milosevic at that time was the 'pet of the West.' He was seen as a factor of stability of the Balkans – the future of the peace considering he gave up from so much territory in Bosnia. He was a personal friend of Richard Holbrook, and that is one of the reasons actually why Milosevic felt so relaxed like he could do anything with the elections. So it might be understandable why some Americans might have thought that if someone was against Milosevic was against the Dayton Accords and thus a fierce nationalist.[117]

"We were at the beginning meeting with people from the US Embassy, who tried to find out what we wanted. They couldn't believe that we are not a more coherent organization and that our demands were only about the elections and the rectorate."[118] "The point is that a lot of Westerners at that time were coming to the country like on a Safari. They were coming with preconceptions, and only looked for what they wanted to find"[119]

As many participants in the protests would later say, the demands of the protests were minimalistic.[120] The electoral will of the people needs to be respected and the autonomy of the Univesity guaranteed. The changing of Milosevic was not an official demand, though it was well accepted and stood as a sub-text in any protest activity.

The gathering of such vast amounts of students was a real cacophony of ideologies and political leanings, that one cannot make a clear ideological picture of the protest. However, the variety of

[116] Marko Blagojevic, representative of the Faculty of Law in the Main Board of the protest. Interview Belgrade 03. 05. 2010
[117] Rastko Sejic, chief of propaganda and marketing of the protest. Interview Belgrade 01. 05. 2010
[118] Miodrag Gavrilovic, member of Organizing Committee of the protests, Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010
[119] Rastko Sejic, chief of propaganda and marketing of the protest. Interview Belgrade 01. 05. 2010
[120] Sejic, Markovic, Gavrilovic

leanings was not present visually so that it would blur the picture. "Everyone was there, but besides the minimalist demands they did not have a clear, unified idea, especially about what to do next after the protests."[121]

One of the main slogans of the protest was "Neither left, nor right – only straight." This was intended to clearly illustrate on the consensus that the students had on their visions, and to distance them from the political parties and separate ideologies that individuals had.[122]

A point where some nationalistic nature could be seen, and clearly such interpreted by observers from outside was on the usage of the national flags and symbols. While on the civil protests there could be seen the flags of various nations such as the US, UK, Germany, or the EU, on the student protests only the flags of Serbia could be seen. On one side that was a defensive mechanism against the accusations of the regime that they are foreign mercenaries and work against the good of the country, but on the other side it was supposed to be seen that the students are the consciousness of the nation, that they fight for the good of the country to be free and democratic.[123] Knowing that the presence of only Serbian flag (considering that the country had already bad reputation in the world due to the wars) might be seen as aggressive and nationalistic, and aware that no one can prevent Serbian students to wear their national flag on rallies of national importance, the leaders at least tried to put it in the back plan, so that the main slogan would be the most noticeable in the front.

> [we] decided to create a slogan such as "Belgrade Is World" exactly with the purpose of creating an internationalist picture of our protest. With such a slogan, we were showing that we were a part of the

[121] Professor Srbijanka Turajlic, Electrotechnic Faculty in Belgrade. Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010
[122] Budimir Markovic, representative of the Faculty of Philosophy in the Main Board of the protest. Interview Belgrade 03. 05. 2010
[123] Miodrag Gavrilovic, member of Organizing Committee of the protests, Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010

> world. Protesting students have a universal, timeless value, since it is the future of the nation that says there is something seriously wrong. "Belgrade is World" symbolized that the struggle for democracy was finally happening in our country, there and then.

The usage of national flags was not supported by all protesters, but of course that the flags of the nation were the easiest to notice and most memorable. "There were a lot of internationalist among the crowd, but the flag of the EU was pointless to be carried."[124]

However, in any country the protesters carry the flags of their nations, and rarely is it seen as aggressively nationalistic. If the students struggled for correcting the injustices of their country, and wanted to see their country better, then there was nothing wrong with carrying it.[125]

Two instances of the protests, however, made an image of clear nationalism: the slogans involving Kosovo and the presence of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Considering that there were many students who were also football supporters, in the festive atmosphere of the protests it was natural to use some cheering hymns and slogans used on the stadiums. Such were "Come on, come on, everyone in attack" (*Ajmo ajmo, svi u napad*) and "Av, av, av" (*Bark, bark bark*).[126] Besides these two stadium-cheers, the one that raised the debate was: "Go to Kosovo" (*Idite na Kosovo*). This was an obvious referral to the times when football supporters were clashing with the police in stadiums, and they yelled at them to go and secure Kosovo, where it was already insecure and parallel institutions existed. And when the protesters had their routes blocked by police cordons, this was heard also.

> Although Kosovo was mentioned to a very minor level, this slogan existed. The students were furious that the roads were blocked and that the police was ready and authorized to use force against them. So, the message was: 'if you want to use force against someone, go to where the law is broken.' Kolarceva Street in the middle of Belgrade is blocked for movement, but no one cares about the place where there are parallel

[124] Uros Majstorovic, member of Main Board, member of European Student NGO AEGEE. Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010

[125] Gavrilovic, member of Organizing Committee of the protests, Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010

[126] The second slogan refers to the onomatopoeia of dogs, considering that the football supporters and the protesters called the police that secured the events "dogs."

> institutions and where one could buy a university diploma from a wooden shack and no standardization. It was also a student outcry.[127]

Even though in that euphoria it was not a clear political demand that the students demand the violence in Kosovo, it did create a negative image. "It was clearly taken from the stadium, and it was convenient to yell such a statement at the time, even though it was not a direct call for violence," says Professor Turajlic.[128] However, Professor Vujadinovic has a different stance: "It, of course, points to elements of unawareness of the young that the violence over the Albanian population is not legitimate."[129]

Another point was the involvement of the Church and their support for the protesters. The Serbian Orthodox Church was considered an integral part of the Milosevic ethno-national paradigm, a reinvigorated source of legitimacy after the fall of secular communism. The regime and the Church shared a common vision of a greater-state which would unify all Serbs, thus the war expeditions were often, if not all the time blessed by priests. It was a tool in the hands of a crafty autocrat in gaining the support of the large masses of religious people.[130] Being a symbol of nationalist conservatives in the country, its connection to the students could clearly cast a nationalist tone to their actions.

The student marches were often preceded by wooden crosses and icons, and student leaders made religious references in their speeches. "God Helps" was the ending of every speech of one of the

[127] Rastko Sejic, chief of propaganda and marketing of the protest. Interview Belgrade 01. 05. 2010
[128] Professor Srbijanka Turajlic, Electrotechnic Faculty in Belgrade. Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010
[129] Professor Dragica Vujadinovic, Faculty of Law in Belgrade. E-mail correspondence 11. 05. 2010
[130] Popovic Obradovic, Olga. *The Church, the Nation, the State – The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Transition in Serbia* in: Vujadinovic, Dragica, et al. *Between Authoritarianism and Democracy (Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia), Vol. I1: Civil Society and Political Culture.* Belgrade: Center for Democratic Transition, 2005, p. 145

leaders – Cedomir Jovanovic.[131] During the "cordon against cordon" actions – the hardest ones for the protesters in the cold, it was manifested the

> 'neoconservative spirit' of the protest. In the first row, right in front of the police cordons, they carried the wooden cross and the icon of the Holy Trinity which they got as a present from the monastery in Hilandar, and in this street struggle-of-will they gave the flyers with an explicitly nationalistic message: 'We've had enough of: people's migrations, betrayal, theft, insecure streets…we stay here. Serbia is holy for the Serbs!' […]Even though they were never intonated in a populist manner, traditionalism and nationalism were important trademarks of the student protest.[132]

Perhaps one of the most important events of the protest was when the Patriarch Pavle came to break the cordon which was not broken for 180 hours. On the greatest Serbian religious holiday, St. Sava, the police dared not stop the Patriarch to walk the procession, which went through the cordons.[133]

"The students used this quite pragmatically, since he was the only who could break the cordon – no police would dare to use force against the Patriarch. While that might have been proven strategically successful at the time, [I] could not agree with the religious element, since it did not represent all the students."[134] After that, priests were often present in the student and civil marches.

In conclusion for the Serbian section of the thesis, I would conclude that these protests need to be defined as liberal, with specific elements of nationalism. While many protesters might have been

[131] Madzoski, Vesna. *The Chief and His Tribe or: Has the Time for a New Tribalism Come?* in: Gorunovic, Gordana and Ildiko Erdei. *Of Students and Other Demons: Ethnography of the Student Protests 1996/97.* Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, 1997, p. 65

[132] Ribic, Vladimir. *The Student Protest 1996/97. Between Political Heterogeneity and a Strategic Consensus* in: Gorunovic, Gordana and Ildiko Erdei. *Of Students and Other Demons: Ethnography of the Student Protests 1996/97.* Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, 1997, pp. 6-7

[133] Bogdanovic, Milica et al. *Chronology of the Protest* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, p. 226

[134] Professor Srbijanka Turajlic, Electrotechnic Faculty in Belgrade. Interview Belgrade 04. 05. 2010

nationalists, the nature of the protests itself was not, since it dealt with issues solvable by liberalism, and the nationalist elements were never allowed to become a dominant trait of the protests.

While my assessment of the Macedonian case is that the nature of the student movement of that time was more on the nationalist side, in Serbia it was more on the liberal side, considering the conditions in which the protests were happening. This relates to the first research question and hypothesis, and it shows that, here, liberalism was in the front side, while there was an undertone of nationalism.

The prime reason why the Serbian students were protesting was the electoral theft, just like the democratic opposition in the civil protests. However, while the coalition Zajedno had a direct interest in protesting, considering they had lost power that was legitimately given to them by the voters of the towns where they won, the students had a higher-value mission, since they did not directly fight for offices (the connection of student leaders to the political parties was certainly important, however the whole movement cannot be judged by this characteristic). Despite hoping to bring about positive changes in their country's political scene, they did come up with demands that were directly of a student nature, and that was for the autonomy of the university and the resignation of the rector and pro-rector.

Besides the minimalist demands for respecting the electoral will, as was pointed out in the interviews with the protesting students, the calls were frequently against the Milosevic regime, which was an established non-democratic regime, as shown in the analysis. The fact that the reason why the students were gathered to protest was elections, and that they protested against a

corrupt political system, which attempted to control any pore of society possible, it would add to the picture of giving them a liberal trademark. Combined with this, the anti-regime rhetoric and calls for economic and political progress of the country most definitely put them in the 'liberal camp.' Bora Kuzmanovic writes that the student protests "officially appealed for the respect of free choice of citizens, democratic elections and free media,"[135] and his research from interviewing protest students showed that they have a large "liberal capitalist" orientation, in the sense that 84 per cent of them had chosen 'freedom' over equality – a sign of liberal over socialist ideology.[136] Furthermore, he concludes that the protesting students display low authoritarianism, reject extreme egalitarianism, and high degree of openness to the world. Nevertheless, they attach significant importance to their national identity, but in his opinion, "[it] does not imply national exclusiveness, but rather a kind of national self-awareness."

On the other side, the occasional aggressive calls for Kosovo, and paying much attention to the religious segment and giving importance to the Serbian Orthodox Church (which was closely tied to the hegemonic Serbian option), provide for the impression of some forms of nationalism. Even though they did not implicitly join the Church in calls for a greater Serbia, giving such an institution so much attention and importance implies to me that many students did agree to such politics.

However, considering that the protests were not for some 'national' question, but purely for democracy and electoral freedom, the negative instance of nationalism can be dropped.

[135] Kuzmanovic, Bora. *Value orientations and political attitudes of participants in the 1996-97 student protests* in: Lazić, Mladen (ed.), *Winter of discontent*: *protest in Belgrade*, Budapest: CEU Press 1999, p. 134
[136] Idem, p. 138

Whether nationalism was strategically used, one cannot say for certain. Nevertheless, nationalism was not the intention of the protesters, but the liberal demands of freedom, democracy, free elections and better government. The usage of national symbols might have come about spontaneously, but it did contribute to a feeling of national unity at those times, something that was very needed in the opposition and for the legitimating of a democratic alternative. Peshic believes that it was the mistake of the opposition, and consequently of the students as well, that the nationalist politics of Milosevic was not boldly criticized, and the pragmatic usage of nationalism of the leaders after the fall of Milosevic has proven to be impeding a more quality change in the country. While I could argue that the Church came in handy when the cordons needed to be broken like for St. Sava Day, the church symbolism gave a "Serbian" national picture, and that the Serbian national character of the protests were a form of reply against the accusations of the counter-rallies that the students are foreign mercenaries, I could not reach the conclusion that nationalism was used to achieve other goals, but simply came hand-in-hand with the overriding discourse of the country – which was mostly on the right of the political spectrum.

Getting back to the first research question, my conclusion would be that, even though on a short term the combination of liberalism and nationalism might have been effective when it comes to gaining a wider support, for the longer run those should not have been combined. In Serbia, it prevented the opposition form leaving a nationalist stand when it was quite needed for the democratization of the country after the fall of Milosevic. In Macedonia, it led to further ethnic divisions, and eventually to a conflict in 2001 – something that the country is still suffering from.

III. c.. The student protests in Bulgaria

II. c. i. The role of the students and the symbolism of the protests

> The students were the driving force of everything that happened. The political opposition joined this "wave" of civic energy at a second stage. The protests were dominated by the students - a completely new generation, for whom violence was unacceptable; further on it expanded to a nationwide strike, lead by the United Democratic Forces and the People's Union (center-right parties and movements).[137]

All interviewees agreed that the students of Bulgaria had the most important role in the protests. Unlike the Serbian students, they did not try to do things separately from the political opposition, thus one can not make a clear distinction between the protests of the political opposition and the student protests. "What is interesting is that the official student union was not controlled by the government as was the case in other post-communist countries of the region."[138]

It was a time when the country had to choose whether it wants to go West, or remain under the control of Russia like in communism. Thus, the feeling of the protesting students was that they had they were doing a struggle of historical importance, and clearly getting away from the hurtful transition. In fact, they felt that they are finishing the job their parents started in 1989 – to completely "clean up the red trash," which was one of the most prominent slogans of the protests.[139]

In fact, most of the symbolism, slogans etc. of the protests of 1997 were the same that were used in the protests of 1989, mostly directed towards the communists and expressing the anti-communist sentiments of the people.

[137] Boyadjiev, idem.
[138] Butovski,, idem.
[139] Dainov, Evgeniy. The Bulgarian State Brings a New Social Contract in: Dainov, Evgeniy (ed.), *The Awakening: a Chronicle of the Bulgarian Civil Uprising of January-February, 1997,* CSP, Sofia, 1998, cover page

”45 years are enough, BSP kills, BSP is mafia, It’s time for the 100-year old party to go to pension, In order to have peace - send the BSP to Siberia.”[140] Big attention was placed on the imagery of depicting the communists as evil, such as drawing them like red witches, because the depiction of the enemy had a very strong integrative role.[141]

There were also many slogans calling for the early elections and directed against concrete individuals from the Party. Quite often, however, there were slogans directly referring to the economic crisis. “Serbs protested for the stolen election, and the Bulgarians – for bread”[142] Combined with the economic situation, the phenomenon of young people leaving the country was also used in the protest. The students demanded a better future for the country – a better economy so that they would not have to leave it. Thus, the following slogans can be illustrative: “I am Bulgarian, I am hungry. Give us chance to stay in Bulgaria! For a future without poverty. We want normal life.”[143]

The color blue, which was the color of the opposition, was frequently used, as well as open support for the UDF. “There was not much choice when it came to political alternatives. The UDF at that time was the only democratic option that could be seen as opposed to the communists.” [144] They had clear solutions for the failing economy, and were ‘clean’ in the sense that were not involved with the previous regime and did not ‘owe’ anything to anyone.

[140] Boyadjiev, idem.
[141] Todorova-Pirkova, Iveta. *Symbols and images of ‘evil’ in student protests in Sofia, 1997.* Cultural Analysis 2001, 2, University of California. p. 109
[142] Parteniotis, Ioanis. *Maybe the Serbs copied us* in: Dainov, Evgeniy. The Bulgarian State Brings a New Social Contract in: Dainov, Evgeniy (ed.), *The Awakening: a Chronicle of the Bulgarian Civil Uprising of January-February, 1997*, CSP, Sofia, 1998, p. 127
[143] Boyadjiev, idem.
[144] Anastasov, idem.

Their creativity was very much expressed with the theatrical forms of protests, such as dressing up as firemen in front of the Bulgarian National Bank in order to "extinguish" the national debt, walking around with pajamas with alarm clocks to show that the country needs to wake up, or organizing "ecological" actions to symbolize the sweeping of the 'red scum.'[145] Furthermore, one of the most memorable shows they performed was the mock funerals, burying the 100-year old one, i.e. the Communist Party.[146]

Besides daily marches, the method that proved to be mostly effective was the blockades. Students were blocking main freeways and border crossing, but also the streets of the city. "Only hospital and firefighter vehicles were let at the blockades in Sofia. Added to this, the diplomatic cars were also allowed to cross. An interesting story was when the French ambassador crossed, and clearly voiced his support for the students."[147] Paralyzing the traffic truly proved to get the message through and to force the government to resign and go for the early elections, just as the popular demand was, eventually.

II. c. ii. The usage of national symbols and the lack of nationalism

Although national symbols were quite used, there were no issues of xenophobic attitudes in these protests. The inter-ethnic relations did not play a part in any way, even though there was

[145] Todorova-Pirkova, Iveta. *Symbols and images of 'evil' in student protests in Sofia, 1997.* Cultural Analysis 2001, 2, University of California. p. 116-117
[146] Idem, pp. 118-119
[147] Anastasov, idem.

problems in the relations carried along from communism, such as the forceful renaming of the Turks in 1989 to make them more "Bulgarian."[148]

The national flag was frequently used, as well as folk referrals in songs in order to establish the historical importance of the protests.[149] They were intended to represent the unity of the nation in those times. For that purpose, a lot of symbolism from the National Revival from the Ottoman period was used, like songs intended to give courage to the people. "Arise, arise thou valiant Balkan hero, and wake up from your sound sleep."[150]

The only instances of negative feelings that one could find was towards Russia, since it symbolized the old system and the ties that the BSP had with those elements. However, it was not done in an aggressive way, and not against the people, but simply against the politicians.[151]

> There was definitely no nationalism in these protests, and even the Turkish minority joined the protests largely. If there was negative feelings, they might have been against the party Movement for Freedoms and Rights, which is considered to be a party of the Turkish minority, since they were in a coalition with the communists. However, they did not represent the majority of the Turkish people of Bulgaria, and thus the feelings for the party did not reflect in negative feelings for the Turks.[152]

People were simply hungry, and they had had enough of communism. Hunger proved to be a highly effective point for mobilization. There was no need for nationalism or to use nationalist rhetoric to bring people to the streets. Even though it might have been expected, considering that anti-communism is closely related to nationalism, this did not occur in the case of Bulgaria.

[148] Grekova, Maya. *I and the other – dimensions of the strangeness in post-totalitarian society*, St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, Sofia 1995, pp. 81-84
[149] Todorova-Pirkova, Iveta. *Symbols and images of 'evil' in student protests in Sofia, 1997.* Cultural Analysis 2001, 2, University of California. p. 115
[150] Idem.
[151] Anastasov, idem.
[152] Anastasov, idem.

In fact, there was even the case, at the end when people were so desperate in the winter cold, and when the future did not look so bright considering that the protests looked unsuccessful, student even had the national flag upside down, which is a sign of serious distress. This example can be quite illustrative of the relation between nationalism and these protests.

II. c. iii. The presence of nationalism itself: Macedonia and Serbia vs. Bulgaria

At this point, the Bulgarian case is appropriate for the second research question that I wanted to explore:

- In what cases does nationalism appear as part of the student movements for democratization?

And my assumption for the reasons for appearing of nationalism in these movements is:

- Nationalist elements are present in the movements for democratization in societies with deep ethnic problems and contested statehood.

Having already explored the difference between the nationalisms in Serbia and Macedonia, for this analysis they will fall in the same category as 'nationalism present'. However, here I will compare these two cases with the case of Bulgaria, which I cannot label as nationalist protests.

The three countries have many similarities since the fall of communism. Even though Bulgaria is not a former Yugoslav country, its proximity and common history with the other two countries, as well as the similarities between the transitions justify the need of putting them in a comparative perspective. As depicted before, the three countries have problematic transitions

with serious economic hardship. In fact, the ruling elites had not changed in the three countries – they were the renamed communists from the previous regime.

Serbia was directly affected by the embargo due to the wars and destructive politics of Milosevic, but the other two countries were indirectly affected. It hurt their economies because it limited trade, as well as opened the gates for illegal trafficking and the 'marriage' between organized crime and ruling elites, which held strong relations or were part of the security services from the communist era. Where privatization happened, it was intransparent and ineffective, thus unemployment rose and the stable economic relations that had been known since communism had banished.

The needs for changing the forces in power was great, but due to non-responsiveness or unreadiness of the incumbents to give power away, it increased the dissatisfaction. In Macedonia, it were the elections of 1994 which deprived the country from a healthy parliamentary opposition. In Serbia, it was Milosevic refusing to admit defeat for the first time in the local elections, which would have led the country to a total turnover (which in fact happened in 2000). In Bulgaria, it was the refusal of the government to agree to early elections and to adopt a program to alleviate the crisis. As Dainov put it: "[the] former communists were not good governors and so they should not be allowed to govern and also that the good governor has to be as different from them as possible and resemble the governors of the developed countries as much as possible."[153]

[153] Dainov, Evgeniy. The Bulgarian State Brings a New Social Contract in: Dainov, Evgeniy (ed.), *The Awakening: a Chronicle of the Bulgarian Civil Uprising of January-February, 1997*, CSP, Sofia, 1998, p. 17

The young, students, or the future of the nation felt that they need to show this dissatisfaction, and this is where the significant differences occurred. While in the Serbian and Macedonian cases nationalism was quite present (something to which I referred and explained in the previous part), in Bulgaria it did not. The reason, I hypothesized, was because Bulgaria did not face inter-ethnic problems and contested statehood like Serbia and Macedonia did, thus there was not reason to use nationalist rhetoric to gain support.

The people did not fear for their national questions in Bulgaria. They had more or less solved the open issues with the Turkish minority, and their state was not endangered by their neighbors – there was no open questions which challenged their national and territorial sovereignty. On the times before 1997, Dimitrov wrote: "one surprisingly positive development has been the integration of ethnic minorities in the national political system."[154]

On the other side, Serbia had entered wars, faced economic sanctions, and also the separatist movement in Kosovo, where the state had almost no control, parallel institutions existed, and the only way that they could keep any hold of it was violence. Macedonia had its own problems when it comes to national questions, interethnic relations and statehood. Having faced an embargo from Greece, it is needless to repeat that the institutions did not function properly. Furthermore, it faced serious problems becoming a member of the UN because of the name issue with Greece. Their southern neighbors did not recognize the name of the nation and the state. Bulgaria, even though it was the first country to recognize Macedonia under its constitutional name, did not recognize the uniqueness of the Macedonian identity, culture, and language. Furthermore, the ethnic Albanians of the country did not identify themselves with the state, there

[154] Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Bulgaria: The uneven transition.* London: Routhledge, 2001. p. 35

was a movement to become independent, and there were several situations of clashes between ethnic Albanians and either civilian Macedonians or the security forces.

Having said all this, my initial assumption was that this is the reason why the cases in Serbia and Macedonia differed from the one in Bulgaria. While all three protest movements had liberal-democratic demands and were rightfully against the governments of the time, the situation required that the Bulgarian case differs from the other two in the nationalist traits.

As Sulejmani had said, Macedonian students gave to a nationalist stance due to the fear they had from something that they did not understand. In the early nineties, Macedonians and Serbians were bombarded with the question of ethno-national importance. Whether it was the name of the country, the culture, losing territory, or failing to create a greater country within the imagined ethnic boarders, the fear of losing something definitely existed and people were ready to mobilize when hearing about those things.

Even though the relation between nationalism and liberalism was different in Serbia and Macedonia as previously depicted – they both shared a common trait – nationalism definitely helped the movements gain support from a wider stratum. In Bulgaria, they did not need this, as there was no need to 'feed' on the fear from minorities, neighbors, or for their borders.

IV. Conclusions

In this MA thesis, I have analyzed the student protest movements of Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria in 1996/97, specifically about the roles that liberal and nationalist rhetoric and demands had in the three cases.

With the first research question, I have shown how liberalism and nationalism have played an inter-changeable role in the cases of Macedonia and Serbia. While in Macedonia liberalism was used to represent a national protest as a more acceptable, non-chauvinist form of protest, in Serbia nationalism was used to represent a liberal protest as a patriotic one. With the second question, I have shown how nationalism is used for mobilization in conditions where the state has problems of statehood and inter-ethnic relations, by putting the cases of Macedonia and Serbia against the one of Bulgaria. While the statehood problems of Macedonia and Serbia had created an environment where nationalism would be accepted in a form of protest against a non-democratic government, in Bulgaria it was not, since the country did not experience these problems.

The potential weaknesses that need to be admitted about this MA thesis is the lack of normative definitions for liberalism and nationalism, and truly they have been loosely used, that is, certain traits of them have been looked for in the stories. Furthermore, another weakness is the lack of "official" truth of these protest movements when it comes to liberalism and nationalism, and, especially for Macedonia, but not less in the other two, it might have been biased due to the statements of participants.

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