This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Contemporary European Studies on 27/08/2019, available online: https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1656603

'Our Patience Has Run Out':* Tracking the Anti-Government Protest Cycle in Bulgaria

The increase in protest intensity that Bulgaria experienced over the 2012-14 period had dramatic effects, bringing down a government and maintaining pressure on its successor. These protests started with a campaign over high energy prices, but grew and shifted to address broader issues of governance, encapsulated in slogans such as '24 years of fake transition are enough.' Dramatic though they were, the lasting effects are unclear in environment where the legacies of the communist regime led to a weak civil society and low levels of trust. This paper uses a unique catalogue of protest events over the 2010-2016 period to identify the character and form of protest observed in Bulgaria. Drawing on Tarrow's concept of protest cycles, the aim is to determine why the protests grew and whether there may be more lasting effects after they subsided. The findings point to the importance of the longevity of the cycle in creating spaces for the establishment of social relations that may have more lasting effects.

Keywords: Protest, Bulgaria, Cycle of contention, Event analysis, Identity

Introduction

In March 2013 Plamen Goranow set himself on fire in front of the Varna municipal buildings as a protest over the influence of organized crime and the mayor's links (Der Spiegel, 2013). This act led to the resignation of the mayor and was followed by five more cases of self-immolation nationally driven by despair over economic circumstances (Novinite, 2013). The shocking nature of these acts can obscure a deep-rooted sense of frustration, as they act as 'an indicator of significant tensions between social expectations and the logic of the official system' (Żuk and Żuk, 2018: 615). The decision to target symbolic locations clearly illustrates the adoption of self-immolation as a form of protest, sitting at the extreme end of the repertoire of contention (see Tilly, 2008). These actions were part of a period of sustained protest in Bulgaria, starting in 2012 over energy prices and escalating over the following months into an anti-government campaign. Faced with intense opposition, the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) government resigned in February 2013 (Hallberg, 2013). Protest continued and intensified over the summer despite the resignation, shifting in

* From placard at a March 2013 protest of mine workers in Sofia (BTA, 2013).

focus and composition to target the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) government (Koycheva, 2016). The sustained, but shifting character of the protests raises questions about the underlying pattern of mobilisation and its significance.

Protest actions are driven by many different factors and claims, determined by the situational context and actors involved. The costs and risks associated with protest mean that it requires commitment, with individuals willing to give up time, resources and potentially risking their safety to press claims. Such actions also draw on less tangible resources such as emotions and feelings of affinity to bind actors to a cause. Tarrow (1993) has identified periods of heightened activity as cycles, where the intensity and commitment build over time, before subsequently exhausting reserves and declining. An important point Tarrow (2011: 202) made subsequently was that 'Cycles of contention are usually remembered for big, bold, and system-threatening claims, but the early demands that trigger a cycle are often narrow and group-specific'. The Bulgarian protests of 2012-2014 appear to represent a classic protest cycle, as initial claims around high energy prices reached a level of intensity that was enough to bring down a government. However, this did not satisfy demands, as the perceived structural nature of the crisis led to a multiplication of claims and a challenge to the system. The intensity and shifting character of the protests mean that they make a valuable case in which to consider the patterns of protest cycles in post-communist Eastern Europe and how they resolve.

This paper considers the pattern of protest in Bulgaria over the 2010-2016 period. The focus is on answering the question: how did a series of protests over energy prices escalate into a nationwide movement and are there lasting effects? The paper draws on a unique protest event catalogue to address this question. In doing so, it considers the scale and form of the protests and how these shifted in response to changes in the context of Bulgarian politics over 2010-2016. The remainder of the paper is divided into four sections. The first section examines the nature of the Bulgarian political context, considering the persistence of legacies from the communist period and how these have shaped political contestation. The protest event methodology is outlined in the second section, providing detail on how the data was collated and analysed. The third draws on the protest event catalogue to provide an overview

of character of protest in Bulgaria, identifying how shifts in protest intensity and form responded to shifts in the political context. Finally, the paper considers the scale and form of the protests in relation to cycles of contention and the possibility of lasting effects emerging from such periods.

Bulgarian Political Developments

The roots of the protests that shook Bulgaria can be found in the character of the political system, as the legacies of the communist regime set the pattern for what followed. As Hite and Morlino (2004: 26) argue, such legacies include 'behavioural patterns, rules, relationships, social and political situations, norms, procedures, and institutions either introduced or partially strengthened by the immediately preceding authoritarian regime'. This suggests that the removal of an authoritarian regime will lead to the dismantling and reform of institutional structures, but the shadow cast on social and political attitudes is more persistent and difficult to remove. Addressing the core dimensions, Hite and Morlino (2004: 25) point to the durability of the preceding regime, institutional innovation, and the mode of transition. Together these features determine the extent to which authoritarian beliefs and practices are normalised within the population, as well as how clear the break with the past is when it comes. Analysing events in such regimes must therefore be done with an eye to the past and the way legacies are reproduced through ongoing relations and interactions.

Bulgaria clearly demonstrates the effects of authoritarian legacies. The longevity of the communist regime (1946-1989) meant that it was able to develop and embed a form of governance that permeated all levels of society. Politically, this involved a system of governance relying on a core elite, within which Todor Zhivkov (1962-1989) maintained control by removing potential challengers (Crampton, 1997). In spite of growing frustration within the population due to economic stagnation and emerging social problems (Bell, 1997) the regime remained in power. Stability was maintained through the close control of citizens and civil society, with open dissent almost unknown until late in the regime (Linz and Stepan, 1996). The exclusionary nature of the regime and stunted nature of civil society meant that when Zhivkov was overthrown in a 'palace coup' incumbent elites maintained some control over the initial democratisation process (Giatzidis, 2002). Together, these developments

resulted in a more gradual reform process and one that led to the delay of reforms that would have dismantled and weakened the shadow cast by the regime.

The effects of the legacy of the communist regime and the shallow break with the past can be seen in the form of party politics that developed subsequently. In the absence of a comprehensive overhaul of the political system, actors from the previous regime were able to play a role in the new competition, as the Bulgarian Communist Party re-emerged as the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) (Linz and Stepan, 1996). The victory of the BSP in the elections to the transitional Grand National Assembly of 1991 saw the party legitimise its position and influence the extent of reform embodied by the new coalition. Although the BSP was again successful in the 1994 parliamentary elections, it was forced from office in 1997 due to its failure to introduce economic restructuring and address issues of land restitution (Bell, 1997). The party again returned to power in 2005, capitalising on its apparent stability, moving away from the connection to its communist heritage.

The parties that formed to challenge the BSP presented a different picture, one of relative instability and shallowness. The promise of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) in the early transition period was undermined by its inability to maintain a consistent line among its partners (Bell, 1997) and subsequently by the BSP dominated media (Ganev, 2006). Gurov and Zankina (2013) argued that a central challenge that has plagued the political system, is that it tended to lead to the formation of parties with a thin, populist base, unable to build a sustainable following. Parties such as the Simeon II National Movement (NDSV), which won the 2001 elections from the UDF, operated more as a movement and failed to establish local and regional support (Barany, 2002). More recently, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) was formed in 2006, winning the 2009 elections on an anti-corruption platform (Spendzharova and Vachudova, 2012). As with NDSV, GERB failed to establish a coherent structure, with a 'program [that] consists of elusive and symbolic issues such as "corruption" and "crime" that resonate… with a discontented electorate' (Gurov and Zankina, 2013: 6). The relative instability in the party system is important in limiting the ability of the state to develop democratic norms and entrench a form of politics that reflects the intended future.

The combination of political instability and difficulties reforming the institutional practices of the previous regime also had implications for the administrative structures. Examining developments in the early 2000s, Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2006) noted that citizens tended to have higher levels of trust in municipal agencies than central government. The highly centralised nature of the Bulgarian state meant that this amplified the distance between the population and their leaders, limiting spaces for access. Addressing administrative reform, Ellison (2007: 227) argues 'the most important motivation and vehicle for civil service reform in Bulgaria has been the desire by some Western-looking leaders to join the EU and NATO.' Reviewing the more recent changes, Zankina (2017: 294) argues that:

> public sector reform has been deprioritised. Presently, the only body overseeing the progress of public administration reform is an advisory body at the Council of Ministers comprised of no more than 10 experts.

The reluctance to institute comprehensive reforms is significant in the context of the authoritarian legacy, as entrenched practices are more able to persist.

The legacy of the authoritarian regime is also visible in the social practices that shaped life in democratising Bulgaria. Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Bojkov (2005: 72) illustrate the importance of personal, informal networks arguing that they have shifted 'from being a survival mechanism [under communism] to becoming alternative structures of governance'. The uncertainty created by the end of the communist system led to a reliance on thick internal trust bonds, at the expense of more fragile, social trust (see Lagerspetz, 2001). Kabachieva and Hristova (2012: 42) further illustrate the challenge, noting that:

> Citizens prefer to stay within their family circle and their closest family members. This is coupled with low trust in representative institutions and fellow citizens. The predominant part of the citizens is seemingly indifferent and tends to get provoked when their personal interest is at stake… [but] this personal stake has the potential to get transformed into a substantial social movement.

This suggests that although formalised civil society actors have made limited progress in overcoming the legacies of the communist period, there is a latent potential for mobilisation. Bakardjieva (2012: 1372) notes the importance of new media in helping 'connect the

otherwise isolated and expertise-focused NGOs working in different areas with the energy of a mass of people ready to take over the city squares'. The limited scale of organised action appeared to be related to the disconnect caused by a lack of trust in others combined with weak public administration mechanisms.

Together, these features have created a relatively limited number of political opportunities for outside actors to capitalise on. The centralised and politicised character of the administrative structure limits avenues for activists and citizens to feed in and press for change. In the political sphere, the choice between the BSP and more ephemeral opposition parties has prevented the development of stable bases on which shared interests could be identified and advanced. The emergence of GERB appeared to challenge this perception, but its populist foundation mean the strength of its commitment could be questioned (Gurov and Zankina, 2013). The lack of local and regional structures also inhibits the formation of connections that would allow for the cultivation and development of allies over time. Măgarit (2015: 25) echoes the lack of access, arguing that 'street protests are directly linked to weak political institutions… which lack performances, dismantled by interior tensions between the main actors, rivalries, corruption and inefficiency.' This supports the point that while civil society itself has begun to develop, it remains constrained by issues of trust and resource scarcity.

Methodology

Protest events are ephemeral and fleeting, leaving few traces, other than in the memories of participants and sometimes in changes in the social context. This paper draws on a unique protest event catalogue to capture the range and scale of protest in Bulgaria over the 2010-2016 period. Protest event analysis (PEA) enables a reconstruction of the pattern of past events, as captured by media and other relevant sources. Koopmans and Rucht (2002: 231) argue that the method:

> allows for the quantification of many properties of protest, such as frequency, timing and duration, location, claims, size, forms, carriers, and targets, as well as immediate consequences and reactions (e.g., police intervention, damage, counterprotests).

Drawing on media sources runs the risk of missing events that are not deemed 'newsworthy', but as Rootes (2003) notes, adopting a systematic approach can enable the researcher to reconstruct a reasonable representation of past events. Another consideration when creating a protest event catalogue is determining what counts as a discrete protest event. Following Tilly (2005: 62) the analysis 'concentrate(s) on moments in which people gathered to make visible, public claims, [and] acted on those claims in one way or another'. We are reliant on interpretations and representations in the media when cataloguing events in this way. This introduces the possibility that details and messages are overlooked or obscured, making it important to consider the contemporaneous context to draw out and locate the significance of the events identified.

The data analysed in this paper were drawn from a search of the electronic records of the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA).[i] This source was selected as it is the national newswire and has been active since 1898 (BTA, n.d.). In addition to reporting directly on events, the BTA also carries brief summaries of the major newspapers, broadening the range of events captured. The limitations of relying on one source are arguably outweighed by the breadth of coverage provided by a newswire, especially one that has been in operation for an extended period of time. Data was gathered from an electronic search of the BTA records using Factiva for events between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2016. The search term '*protest**' was used to capture the widest range of possible events and limit the chances of overlooking relevant events (on electronic search strategies see Strawn, 2010). The search returned 2731 stories, yielding 451 unique events. The definition of event draws on Tilly's (2008: 35) definition of:

> an occasion on which ten or more people gathered in a publicly accessible place and visibly made claims that, if realized, would affect the interests of at least one person outside their number.

The specific number of participants has been loosened due to limitations on the data and to capture acts such as entering a property to display a banner or halt production. Events were identified through a two-stage process, involving a manual scan of all stories returned to single out those that were relevant. Each story identified in the first round was read and coded by the author, recording details on location, issue, actions, and participants. The next section

uses this data to consider and unpack the development of patterns of protest over the 2010-2016 period.

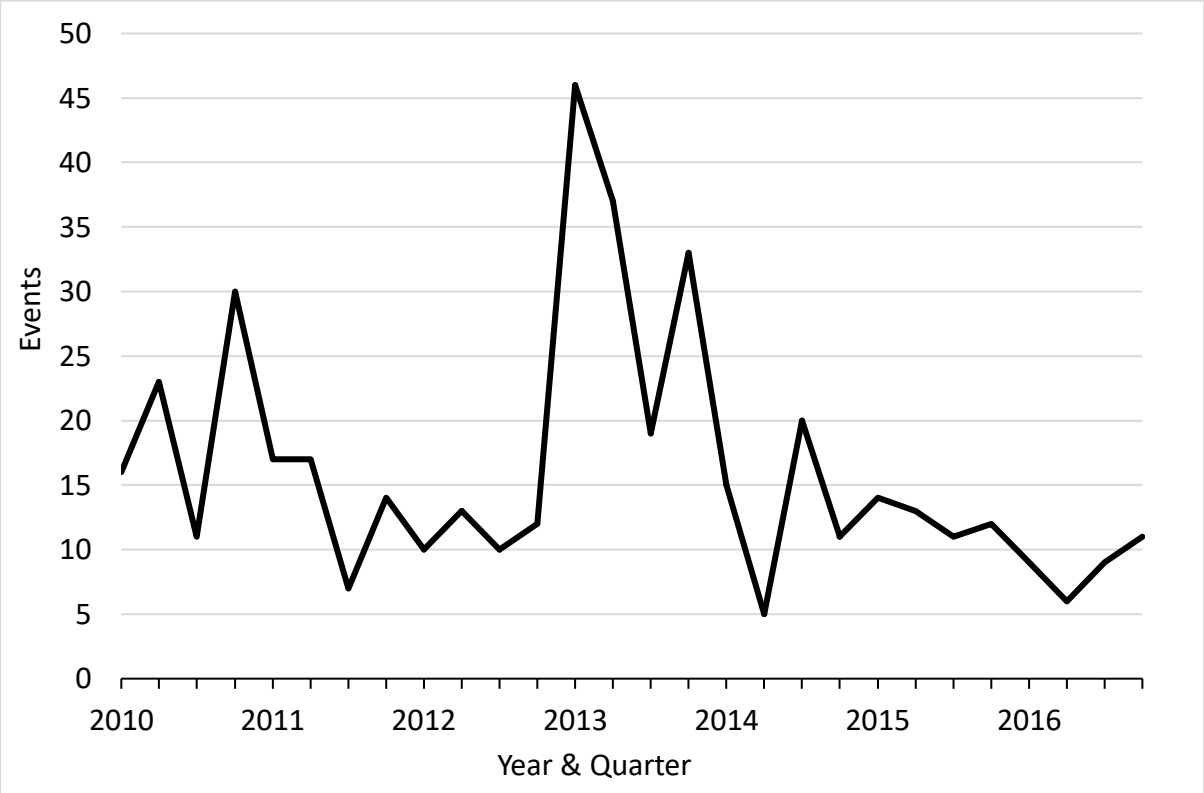
Tracking the Protests[ii]

The protests in Bulgaria over the 2012-2014 period represent an important development in the country's post-communist story. Their intensity echoed earlier protests against state failings in 1997 (Ganev, 1997) and also sat within a wider regional wave of actions challenging governance (see Musić, 2013; Beissinger and Sasse, 2014; van Gent et al, 2013). Previous work on the Bulgarian protests has emphasised the apparently spontaneous and less organised form, resulting from a sense of frustration, with Ambareva (2013) tracing a shift from the anti-neoliberal protests in early 2013 to the protests against the immorality of politics starting in June. Considering the early promise of the protests, Ganev (2014) argued that to have a meaningful effect, the pressure would need to be maintained to hold the elite to account and prevent the persistence of past practices. Examining the form of the protests themselves, Resnick (2017) identified the way they became routine and part of many people's daily activity. Reflecting on this process of normalisation, Koycheva (2016) has argued that it potentially undermines and weakens the possibility of the more radical change desired by protesters. In contributing to this work, the paper here aims to untangle and track the character of the series of protests, considering the degree of continuity across the two apparently distinct periods.

As noted, the international context was a contributing factor, as the after effects of the 2008 global financial crisis impacted countries across Central and Eastern Europe, resulting in a period of economic stagnation in Bulgaria (see Beissinger and Sasse, 2014). In line with regional patterns, frustration among the population boiled over, moving from issues around cost of living to more general claims around government competence and corruption. Starting later in 2012, protests over energy prices became a regular feature of the landscape in Bulgaria, linking economic and political concerns. During a march to the Council of Ministers in July 2012, placards challenging Prime Minister Boyko Borrisov were identified. Slogans such as 'Boyko you are a billionaire, but the people are not!' drew contrasts between government inaction, economic hardship and the wealth of the political elite. Figure 1 shows the number

of protest events by quarter over the 2010-2016 period, demonstrating a clear increase in 2013. The absence of a substantial spike in the second-half of 2012 suggests that while energy prices were motivating action, this remained lower in intensity. The peak in early 2013 coincided with a shift in intensity and focus, as the challenge to the government stabilised and began to attract new participants.

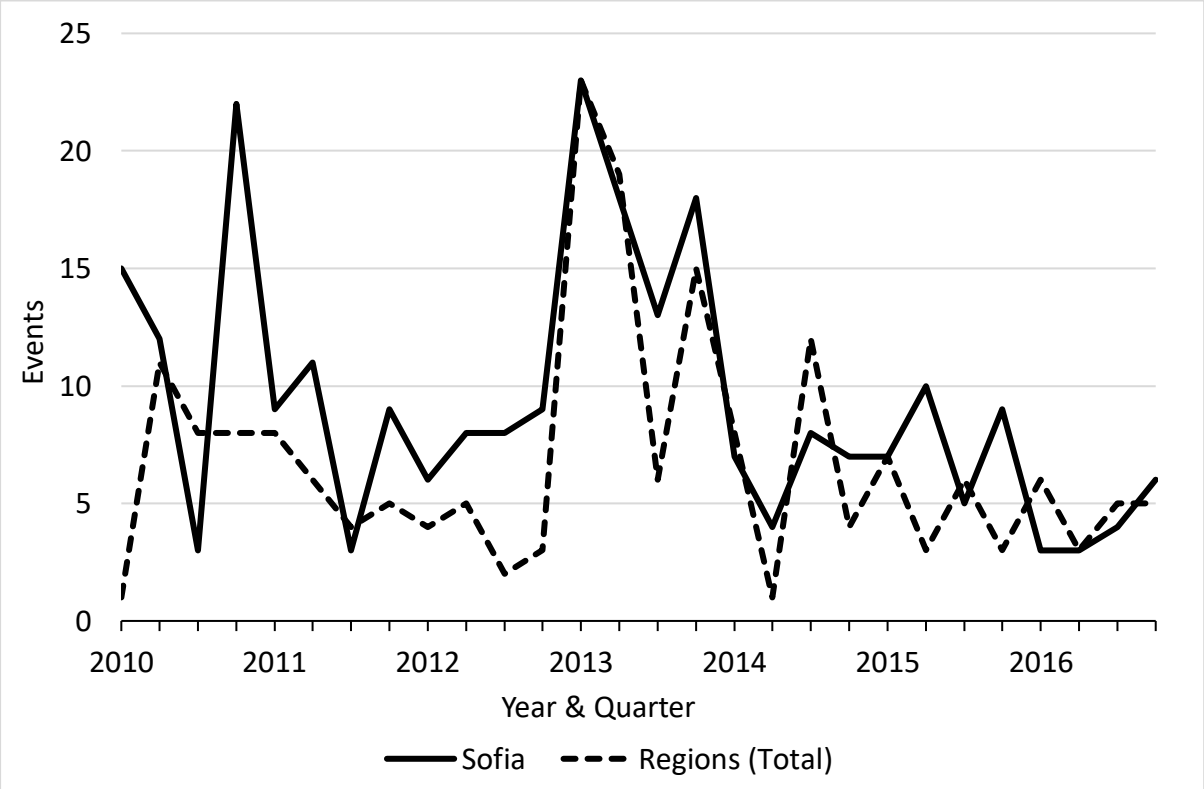
Figure 1 – Protest Events in Bulgaria by Quarter - 2010-2016



Having remained relatively low in number, there was an initial shift in intensity during November and December 2012. This intensification entailed a greater focus on the role of the government in failing to mitigate high energy prices. The continued lack of response led to the connection between government ineffectiveness and energy prices being drawn more starkly, seemingly reinforcing the resolve of the protesters. In this way, the slow build up and lack of resolution around issues of concern led to a spiral effect, as frustrations led to more people mobilising and becoming involved. This failure to address concerns also lead to a broadening of the challenge presented, involving the mobilisation of new actors and claims. It is also important to recognise the lasting effects of the financial crisis, as unresolved claims

around employment that animated actions in 2010 continued to persist at a low level. The eight days of national protests that forced the GERB government from office on 20 February, leading to a caretaker government and new elections, represented a peak, yet the underlying issues had not been addressed.

Figure 2 – Protest Events in Sofia and Other Regions by Quarter - 2010-2016



During the interregnum between the government resignation and the general election in May, protests continued. Having achieved the goal of removing the GERB government, pressure was maintained to ensure the elections were held in a way that was fair and respected the wishes of the electorate. As noted above, levels of trust in politicians were very low, making public mobilisation an important means of expressing popular will. It is important to note the national character of the protests, as Figure 2 shows, the number of events outside the capital Sofia also remained consistently high over this period. Other cities such as Plovdiv, Varna and Blagoevgrad were important protest sites, but there was also a spread of actions across the regions. Maintenance of pressure was an important feature of the protests,

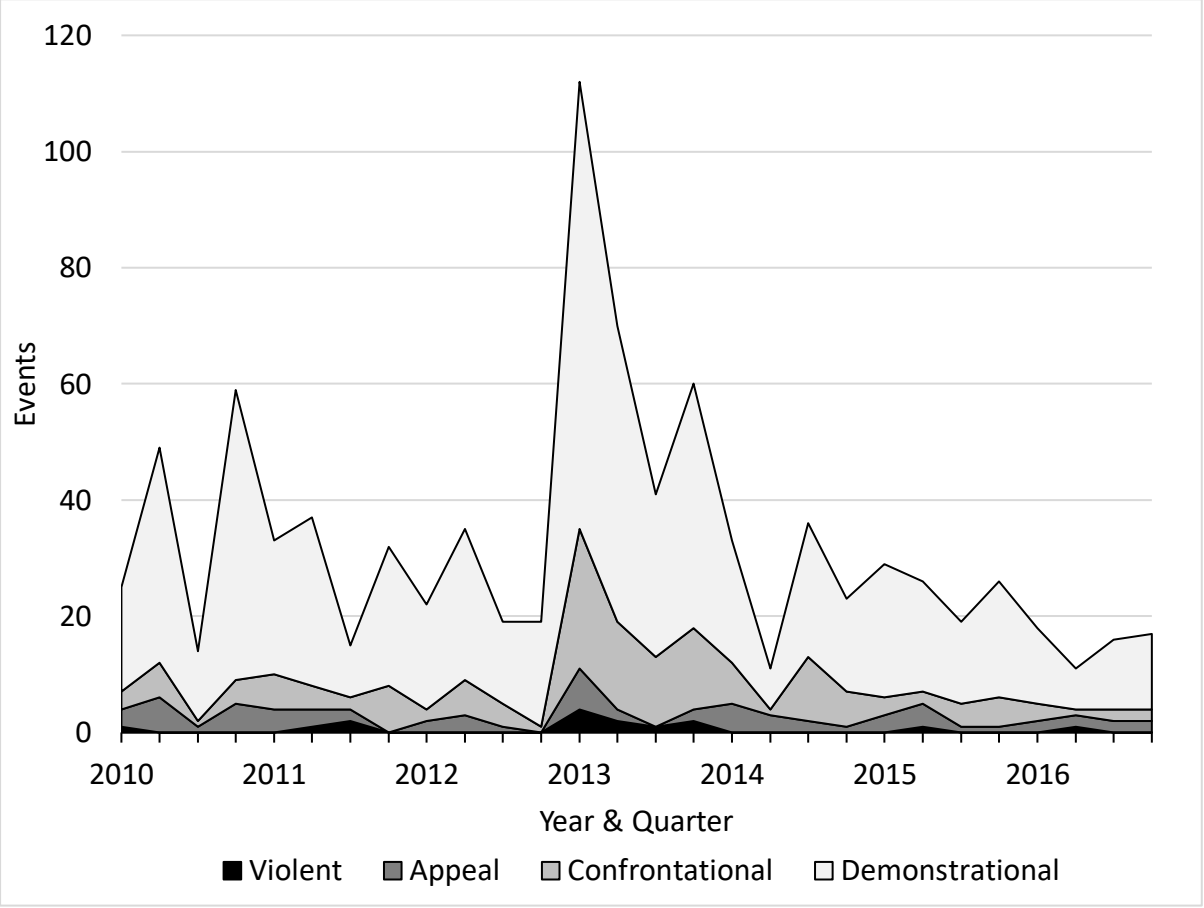
as it began to normalise the actions, making them part of the everyday. Considering the way the protests developed in Sofia, Resnick (2017: 195) argues that:

> within the daily rhythms of the Bulgarian protests, what happened was ordinary. The protests were important, particularly for the participants, not because of their eventfulness, but due to their duration and accumulation, of days, of ideas, of participating bodies.

Through the act of protest, participants were forging new connections and bonds, breaking with the idea of weak and fragmented social organisation that had characterised the country previously (see Dawson, 2014).

The May elections produced a majority for the BSP, along with questions over their conduct. The event that led to the continuation and re-emergence of the protests at scale was the appointment of Deylan Peevski as head of the State Agency for National Security on 14 June. Drezov (2013: 53) argues that the appointment was controversial because of Peevski's control of 'much of the media in Bulgaria… and [because he] had been repeatedly embroiled in corruption and censorship scandals.' Despite cancelling the appointment within days, the episode represented a continuation of the practices that had characterised the previous regime. The political system was seen as corrupt and under the control of a 'mafia' (Resnick, 2017). Ekiert and Kubik (2018: 29) note the catalysing effect of the appointment in the way 'long-lasting criminal practices, political corruption, nepotism, social unfairness, the problem of oligarchy in power suddenly resonated in the image of this candidate for protector of state security'. Having successfully displaced the previous government, the growing normalisation of protest provided an opportunity to press for meaningful and lasting change.

Figure 3 – Number of Action Types by Quarter - 2010-2016

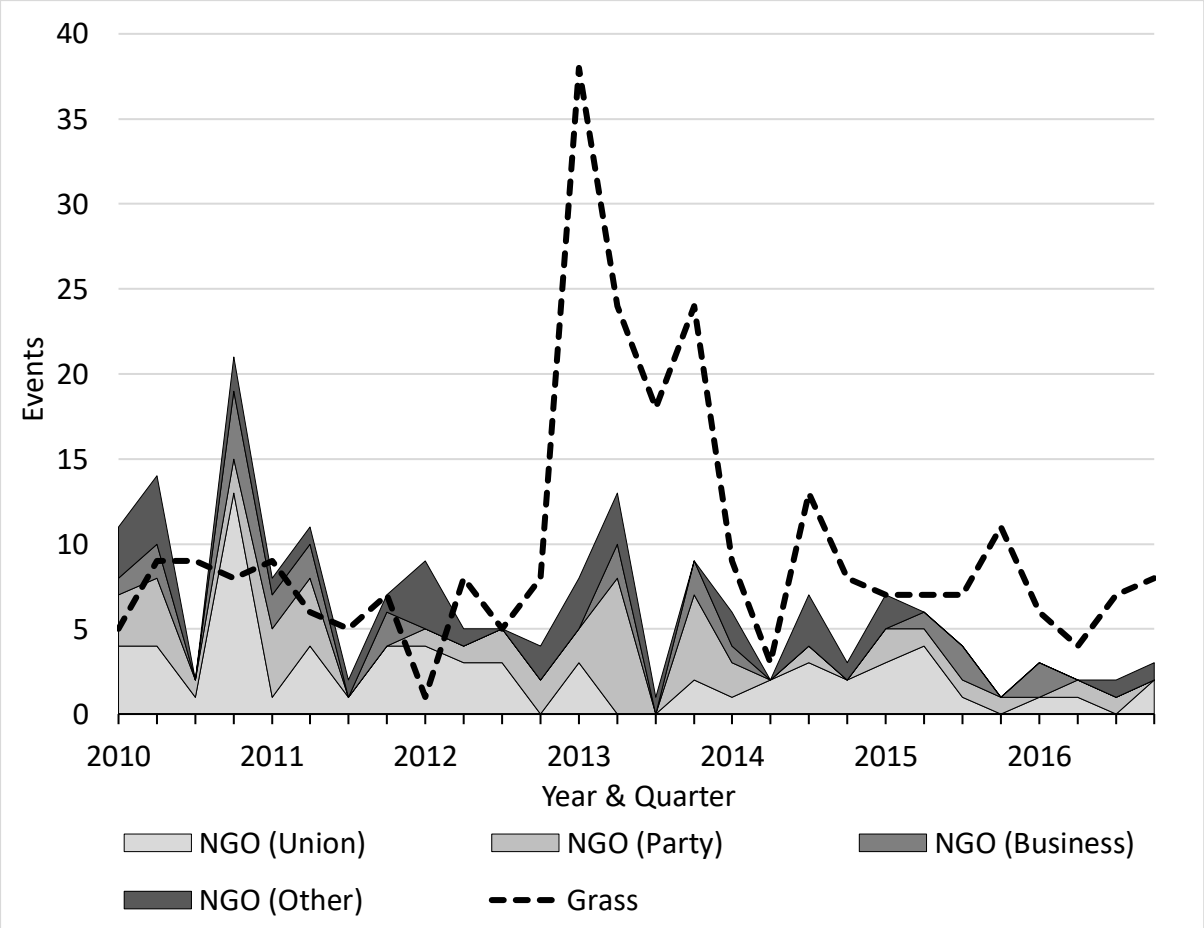


Note: data are presented cumulatively with up to four actions recorded for each event.

The intensity of the protests remained consistent following the removal of Peevski. As identified in Figure 2, there was a broad national movement, as actions were seen across the country. In pressing their claims, participants adopted a variety of actions from roadblocks and clashes with the police through to marches and performances of traditional dances and songs. The protests over the whole period by action type are presented in Figure 3, showing the predominance of demonstrational actions (such as march, rally, display, perform) with a similar pattern, at a lower level, of confrontational actions (such as obstruct, chant, occupy). An illustration of the normalisation and performative nature of the protests is presented by Koycheva (2016: 248) in her study of the protests arguing they 'mobilized the everyday… [demonstrating] the need to practice the protest'. In this way, the protests became mundane, as people treated them as part of their everyday experience, while also introducing the possibility of change. As Resnick (2017: 196) notes 'Most protesters, who arrived before work

to drink coffee and after work for a beer with friends, found themselves at the same place every morning and every evening.' The occupation and repurposing of the city in this way also provided new opportunities and alternatives to be considered. Making the protest act part of the everyday negated the need for dramatic shows, with the exception of key symbolic moments, such as the opening of Parliament after the summer recess.

Figure 4 – Participant Group Type by Quarter - 2010-2016

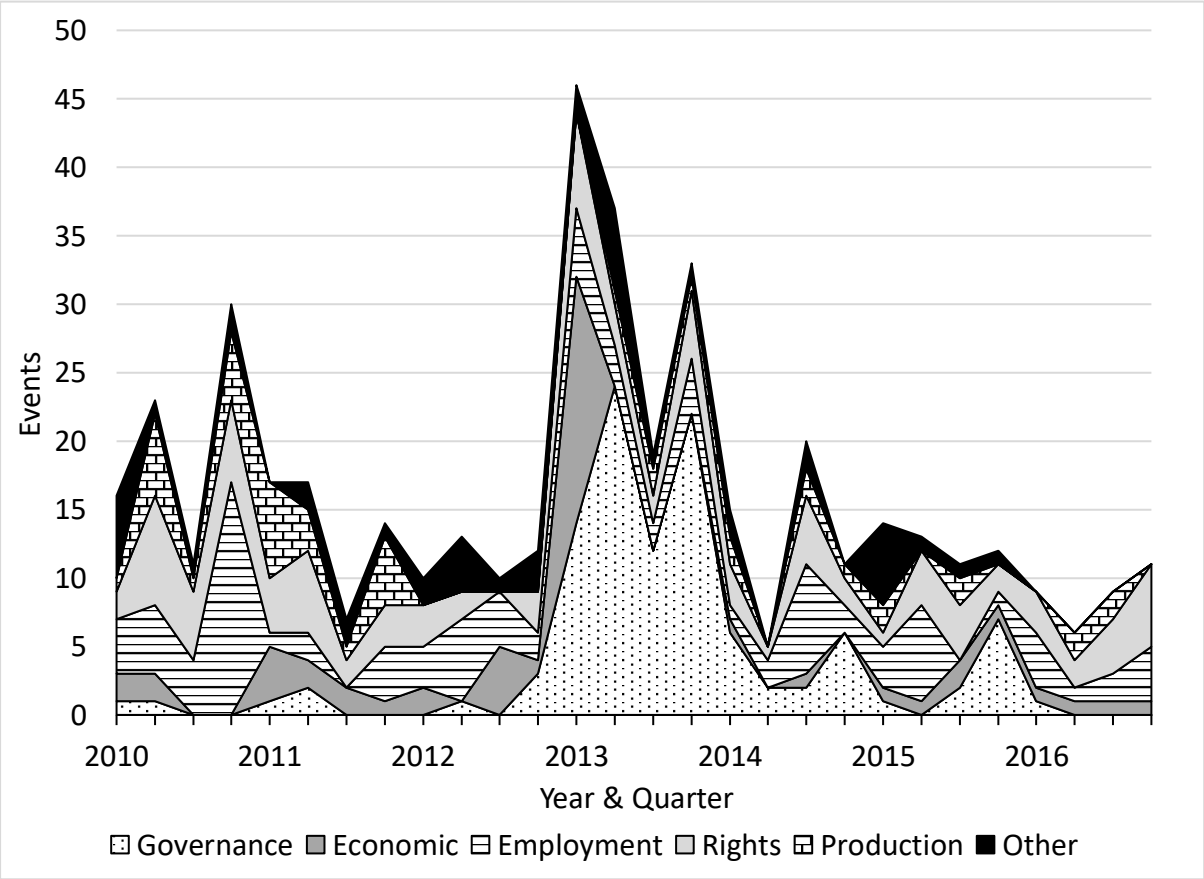


Note: NGO events are presented cumulatively to contrast with grassroots actions.

The range of participants in the protests also varied considerably during the period. As Figure 4 shows, grassroots actors dominated during the 2012-2014 period, reflecting the more spontaneous and ad hoc character of the protests. Outside this period, unions, environmental groups and political parties played a more prominent role. This is illustrated by the fact that unions were involved in 56.7% of events in the final quarter of 2010, but only 8.1% during the

second quarter of 2013. The longevity of the anti-government protests was an important characteristic, allowing for the identification of shifts over time. One such shift occurred form October 2013, as students came to play a more prominent role, 'working against the perceived waning of… energy and significance' (Koycheva, 2016: 249). They were involved in occupations of university buildings, large-scale marches and blockades of symbolic sites in Sofia. For example, a student led protest in Sofia on 10 November blocked streets and displayed banners with messages such as '24 years of fake transition are enough'. The involvement of students appears to have re-energised and sustained the movement for a period.

Figure 5 – Protest Issue Group by Quarter – 2010-2016



Note: events are presented cumulatively for each quarter.

The level of intensity of the protests waned in 2014, as participants began to shift their attention to address other issues (see Figure 5). Some substantial actions still took place in

early 2014, such as a three-day occupation of a Sofia university building, calling for government resignation, but there was a clear fall in such actions. Claims that featured later in 2014 involved employment, with miners, prison officers, and police protesting over unpaid wages and working conditions. The reduced level of anti-government mobilisation was clearly illustrated by the absence of any larger-scale action during the parliamentary elections in October. This tailing off and demobilisation can be linked to issues around lack of success, fatigue and the emergence of other priorities. Despite this, the protests of 2012-2014 were significant, as they presented a sustained challenge to the state. As Koycheva (2016: 249) has argued:

> The protests were the first attempt in Bulgaria in a long time to create an idiom of protest that goes beyond individual grumbling and petty subversion, and re-affirms the daily discontent – and disconnect – which is popularly felt in Bulgaria with the political establishment.

To fully understand what the protests represented, it is important to consider the meanings behind the actions and how they were structured. The fall in protest intensity does not automatically represent the end of opposition, but potentially a shift in focus and form of organising.

Protests, Cycles and Lasting Effects

The protests that shook Bulgaria in 2012-2014 were significant, echoing wider regional patterns of instability as the effects of the global financial crisis lingered. The previous section has outlined and considered the nature of the protests and the way in which they evolved over the period. In order to determine the significance of the protests and whether they bring about the possibility of lasting change it is necessary to draw on elements from the social movement literature. Determining the effects of the protest is significant, given that Bulgaria transitioned from democracy more than two decades previously and was an established member of the European Union when they erupted. While regional dynamics trends are important in influencing domestic developments, the focus of the protests was very much on domestic issues around economic conditions and subsequently morality in politics. Dawson (2014) has argued that rather than a significant change, the protests simply represented an outpouring of frustration that would soon subside. The data suggests that this was indeed the

case, but considering the underlying conditions can also help us gain an understanding of the possible lasting effects.

Considering the way key claims shifted from particularistic issues of employment and living costs to present a generalised challenge to the state and the way it was being governed demonstrates the significance of the protests. The ability to maintain a level of intensity over the extended period, across shifts in focus is important in light of Tarrow's (1993: 302) point that 'Few people dare to break the crust of convention' by engaging in protest. Wariness around participation in this regard is due to the threat of social sanction or in more extreme cases, legal repercussions or repression by the state. Additionally, legacies of the authoritarian regime in the form of low trust and weak civic engagement (Dawson, 2014) means that the crust is likely to be thicker and more difficult to move beyond reactive actions. In spite of this, Tarrow (2011: 201) argues that cycles of contention can form where:

> co-occurrence and coalescence are furthered by state responses rejecting the claims of the early risers – thereby encouraging their assimilation to other possible claimants, while lowering constraints and offering opportunities for broader contention.

It is therefore important to consider the ways in which claims responded to, as rejection can lead to a sense of injustice that brings people to the street in support. The lasting effects are less clear, but the forging of common bonds during a period of contention increases the chances that ties created will persist.

When seeking to understand the development of patterns of protest, it is important to consider the strength and influence of civil society. Defining the broad space of civil society, Linz and Stepan (1996: 7) pointed to:

> an area of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements and individuals, relatively independent of the state, attempt to articulate values and create associations and solidarities that advance their interests.

In the post-communist space, the development of civil society has been impacted by the long experience of authoritarian governance that left lasting legacies in formal institutional structures, as well as social organising and identities (Hite and Morlino, 2004). The importance of these legacies is linked to the way the form of civil society is linked to the ethos of the

socio-political environment, as the state determines the boundaries (Chandhoke, 2001; Tilly, 2003). This environment bred a context where trust was based on personal connections and therefore less able to bridge to general connections through weak or social ties (Lagerspetz, 2001). At an institutional level, such weakness can be observed in the pervasive corruption that characterised Bulgaria, which in turn limited the ability of individuals to exercise trust and organise (Dawson, 2014). The eruption of protest can be seen to present an opportunity to challenge this state of being, creating new solidarities and identities.

Civil society mobilisations that challenge the state do not occur in a vacuum. Oppositional actors must be conscious of the threats and opportunities that the political context presents them. Addressing the difficulty in recognising the configuration of threats and opportunities, Meyer and Minkoff (2004: 1464) point to 'the effects of structural changes in opportunities as differentiated from effects or signals send by the political system' as well as 'issue-specific versus general openings in the polity'. The ability of actors to assess accurately the environment is therefore central to their ability to effectively present claims. Summarising the nature of opportunities (and threats) in this space, Tilly (2008: 92) pointed to the openness of the regime, coherence of the elite, stability of political alignments, availability of allies and repression/facilitation. The political context in Bulgaria at the beginning of the protest wave was characterised by limited elite coherence with shifting political alignments, represented by the relatively fluid party system. On the measure of openness, the picture is more mixed, as the centralised nature of the system suggested a relatively closed regime. The availability of allies also appeared to be relatively low, as established actors had a lower profile in what was a more grassroots and socially driven mobilisation (Figure 4).

It is clear that Bulgaria experienced was a cycle of contention as identified by Tarrow (1993). In defining the features of such a cycle, Tarrow (1993: 284) pointed to 'heightened conflict, broad sectoral and geographic extension… appearance of new social movement organizations and the empowerment of old ones and the invention of new forms of collective action'. Considering the protests in Bulgaria, such a cycle was clearly visible, as the protests grew and diversified before waning, leaving more marginal groups (students) on the field. At the height of the cycle in 2013, the protests were dispersed across the country (see Figure 2) with a

predominance of grassroots actors (see Figure 4). Looking back to Resnick (2017) and Koycheva (2016) the protests clearly demonstrated new forms of collective action. A further indicator of the strength of the cycle was the way it persisted and gained momentum after the GERB government was forced from office. Digging further into Tarrow's (2011) examination of cycles, we see the importance of early risers whose actions facilitate processes of diffusion, extension, imitation and reaction. Together these processes create momentum, making protest available to new participants and smoothing differences between claims being presented.

The character of the cycle of contention means that it has the potential to introduce more sustained and lasting change. The totalising nature of the cycle brings 'heightened conflict across the social system… in industrial relations… in the streets… in the villages or the schools' (Tarrow, 1993: 284). As noted above, the protests in Bulgaria did spread in this way, involving both organised, pre-planned actions and more spontaneous 'events, happenings, and lines of action… which were not planned, intended, prearranged, or organized in advance' (Snow and Moss, 2014: 1123). The presence of individuals and groups in town and city centres made such actions unpredictable and potentially powerful, creating space for encounter. As Resnick (2017) notes, the protests became part of the social context, but were not organised as such around set pieces. Making protest part of the everyday does present challenges in that it potentially drains energy and commitment over time as the sense of urgency falls. Koycheva (2016: 250) sounds an important note of caution in this regard, arguing 'the repeatability of the everyday can be deleterious… [as] the proverbial, fateful, omniscient bills await to be paid.' This fits with Tarrow's (1993) categorisation of the winding down of the protest cycle. Declining resources and fatigue mean that participants will drift away over time, with attempts at re-energisation involving new actors, as was seen with the emergence of the student protests.

These protests were important on the surface, as they forced change in the political system and maintained pressure for a new form of politics. While they ultimately ended with limited visible change in the form of politics, we can also see them as having a potentially deeper impact, when viewed through the lens of civil society and identity. Resnick's (2017)

examination of the lived experience of the protests is vital here. Through the consistent pressure and apparent normalisation of protest new solidarities may be formed. Recognising the shift from particularistic claims around energy prices early in the cycle to more generalised claims later it is possible to see new collectives emerging. Defining collective identity, Hunt and Benford (2004: 443) argue that 'it is a cultural representation, a set of shared meanings that are produced and reproduced, negotiated and renegotiated, in the interactions of individuals embedded in particular sociocultural contexts'. These new collectives are fluid and subject to change, but in an environment where civil society is weak they present an opportunity to challenge existing practices.

Collective identities are also important when considering the decline of the protest cycle and what follows. Rather than simply disappearing and returning to the status quo ante, it can be assumed that participants would continue to draw on the lessons learned and solidarities formed. Bang and Sørensen's (1999: 329) concept of everyday makers can be useful in this regard suggesting a possible shift 'away from the state-civil society opposition and towards those many new types of political coordination and interaction that may be best regarded as complexly organized governance networks'. Dawson (2014) noted the lack of engagement with concepts of democracy in Bulgaria before the cycle of protest, but the lasting effects participation may challenge this. As Klandermans (2004) notes, collective identities are fluid, remaining latent, activating in response to threats to recognisable interests. The predominance of grassroots events at the peak of the cycle (see Figure 4) suggests a latent ability to organise.

The cycle of protest presented an opportunity, bringing concerns from below to the surface and challenging the established political system. The intensity, geographical spread and level of involvement were all important in generating this perception. Challenging the notion of apathy and disconnection, the protests represented a sense of the possible. As Tarrow (2011: 31) argues 'co-ordination of collective action depends on the trust and cooperation that are generated among participants by shared understandings and identities.' In an environment of low trust, the forging of identities through the advancement of claims can have lasting effects. Koycheva (2016) has noted that in relation to the protests, the normalisation of

protest can prevent the realisation of more radical goals. However, it can lay the basis for more sustainable connections, creating space for the incremental development of civil society and the norms that underpin it.

Conclusion

Periods of heightened protest activity are notable as markers of discontent and frustration with existing conditions. Where these grow and are sustained over a period of time they constitute a cycle of contention. This paper has examined the cycle that shook Bulgaria from 2012-14 with the aim of identifying the character of the protests. It also sought to draw out the potential for lasting effects once the cycle had run its course and faded. The protests in Bulgaria need to be seen as part of the after effects of the global financial crisis and the economic stagnation that persisted. What made the protests significant was their intensity and longevity, something that was unique in the post-communist period. In contrast to the 1997 protests that brought down the BSP government, there was a 'diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors' (Tarrow, 2011: 199) over an extended period. Claims presented developed and broadened over time, moving from disputes over electricity prices to quality of governance and then subsequently to more diverse claims regarding a range of practices.

Protest as an activity carries with it potential costs, from direct costs in the form of physical harm or legal prosecution to indirect costs such as reputational damage and associated social sanctions. During a cycle of contention, as was seen in Bulgaria in 2012-2014, these costs can be discounted or removed through the temporary contestation of socially acceptable norms and expectations. The possibility of change and the forging of collective solidarities associated with claims play an important role in this regard. Dawson (2014) has argued that the spontaneous character of the protests meant that they failed to address the underlying concerns that sparked action. Meanwhile, Koycheva (2016) raises the point that normalisation of the protests removed their radical potential. Subsequent developments suggest these interpretations are correct. However, there may be lasting effects that are less visible, as Resnick (2017: 209) argues 'what lingers is amorphous and uncertain, because what existed was so experiential and quotidian'. As the protests recede into memory what remains

is uncertain. Adopting the perspective of the everyday maker (Bang and Sørensen, 1999) it could be that lessons learned through participation could activate individuals and groups to recreate the 'notion of a normal Europe' (Resnic, 2017: 208) in Bulgaria in the future when opportunities are favourable. Further work is required to determine whether the events of 2012-14 have led to a shift in behaviour or whether previous patterns will reassert themselves.

[i] The full dataset is available at https://doi.org/10.15124/1b42ae95-aa59-4af5-87cb-a619a205bb4c

[ii] Events reported in this section are derived from various Bulgarian News Agency stories.

References:

Bakardjieva, Maria. 2012. "Mundane Citizenship: New Media and Civil Society in Bulgaria." *Europe-Asia Studies* 64 (8): 1356-74.

Bang, Henrik, and Eva Sørensen. 1999. "The Everyday Maker: A New Challenge to Democratic Governance." *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 21 (3): 325-41.

Beissinger, Mark, and Gwendolyn Sasse. 2014. "An End to 'Patience'? The Great Recession and Economic Protest in Eastern Europe." In *Mass Politics in Tough Times: Opinions, Votes, and Protest in the Great Recession* edited by Nancy Bermeo and Larry Bartels 334-70. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bell, John. 1997. "Democratization and Political Participation in 'Postcommunist' Bulgaria." In *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in South-East Europe* edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott 353-402. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Vesna, and Victor Bojkov. 2005. "Informality in Post-Communist Transition: Determinants and Consequences of the Privatization Process in Bulgaria." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 5 (1): 69-88.

Brinkerhoff, Derick, and Arthur Goldsmith. 2006. "Organising for Mutual Advantage: Municipal Associations in Bulgaria." *Public Administration and Development* 26 (5): 373–82.

Bulgarian News Agency. n.d. "About BTA." http://www.bta.bg/en/page/79/About_BTA [accessed 20 August 2015]

BTA. 2013 "Over 3,500 People Protest against Losing Jobs in Mining Industry." 5 March.

Chandhoke, Neera. 2001. "The 'Civil' and the 'Political' in Civil Society." *Democratization* 8 (2): 1-24.

Crampton, R. J. (1997) *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dawson, James. 2014. *Cultures of Democracy in Serbia and Bulgaria: How Ideas Shape Publics*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Der Spiegel. 2013. "New Casualty in Wave of Self-Immolations." 22 March. Available at: http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/man-dies-in-sixth-bulgarian-self-immolation-in-less-than-a-month-a-890444.html [Accessed 9 September 2018]

Drezov, Kyril. 2013. "A Neighbour in Turmoil: Two Waves of Popular Protest in 2013 Bulgaria." In *Reflections on Taksim – Gezi Park Protests in Turkey* edited by Bülent Gökay and Ilia Xypolia 52-57. Keele: Keele University.

Ekiert, Grzegorz, and Jan Kubik. 2018. "The Study of Protest Politics in Eastern Europe in Search of Theory." In *The Routledge Handbook of East European Politics* edited by Adam Fagan and Petr Kopecký 197-209. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ellison, Brian. 2007. "Public Administration Reform in Eastern Europe: A Research Note and a Look at Bulgaria." *Administration and Society* 39 (2): 221-32.

Ganev, Venelin. 1997. "Bulgaria's Symphony of Hope." *Journal of Democracy* 8 (4): 125-39.

Ganev, Venelin. 2006. "Bullets, Bribes, and State Building in Bulgaria." *Journal of Democracy* 17 (1): 75-89.

Ganev, Venelin. 2014. "Bulgaria's Year of Civic Anger." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (1): 33-45.

Giatzidis, Emil. (2002) *An Introduction to Post-Communist Bulgaria: Political, Economic, and Social Transformation*. New York: Palgrave.

Gurov, Boris, and Emilia Zankina. 2013. "Populism and Construction of Political Charisma." *Problems of Post-Communism* 60 (1): 3-17.

Hallberg, Delia. 2013. *Bulgarian National Awakening in Europe – The Protest Movement in Sofia 2013*. University of Twente. Available at: http://essay.utwente.nl/64052/ [Accessed 15 May 2015]

Hite, Katherine, and Leonardo Morlino. 2004. "Problematizing the Links between Authoritarian Legacies and 'Good' Democracy." In *Authoritarian Legacies and Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe* edited by Katherine Hite and Paola Cesarini 25–84. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Hunt, Scott, and Robert Benford. 2004. "Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment." In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* edited by David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi 433-57. London: Blackwell.

Kabachieva, Petya, and Desislava Hristova. 2012. *Civil Society in Bulgaria: NGOs versus Spontaneous Civic Activism?* Sofia: Open Society Institute.

Klandermans, Bert. 2004. "The Demand and Supply of Participation: Social-Psychological Correlates of Participation in Social Movements." In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, 360-379. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Koopmans, Ruud, and Dieter Rucht. 2002. "Protest Event Analysis." In *Methods of Social Movement Research* edited by Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg 231-59. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Koycheva, Lora. 2016. "When the Radical is Ordinary: Ridicule, Performance and the Everyday in Bulgaria's Protests of 2013." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 24 (2): 240-54.

Lagerspetz, Mikko. 2001. "From 'Parallel Polis' to 'The Time of the Tribes': Post-Socialism, Social Self-Organization and Post-Modernity." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 17 (2): 1-18.

Linz, Juan, and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Măgarit, Diana. 2015. "Ideology and Social Movements: A Comparative Analysis of the 2013 Protests in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania." In *Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe: A Renewal of Protest and Democracy*, edited by Geoffrey Pleyers and Ionel N. Sava 13-26. Bucharest: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti.

Meyer, David, and Debra Minkoff. 2004. "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity." *Social Forces* 82 (4): 1457-1492.

Musić, Goran. 2013. "Between Facebook and the Picket Line: Street Protests, Labour Strikes and the New Left in the Balkans." *Debatte* 21 (2-3): 321-35.

Novinite. 2013. "Sixth Man Commits Self-Immolation in Bulgaria", 20 March. Available at: https://www.novinite.com/articles/148819/Sixth+Man+Commits+Self-Immolation+in+Bulgaria [Accessed 9 September 2018]

Resnick, Elana. 2017. "Protest and the Practice of Normal Life in Bulgaria." *Lietuvos Etnologija* 17 (26): 193-214.

Rootes, Christopher. 2003. "The Transformation of Environmental Activism: An Introduction." In *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, edited by Christopher Rootes 1-19. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Snow, David, and Dana Moss. 2014. "Protest on the Fly: Toward a Theory of Spontaneity in the Dynamics of Protest and Social Movements." *American Sociological Review* 79 (6): 1122-43.

Spendzharova, Aneta, and Milada Anna Vachudova. 2012. "Catching Up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after EU Accession." *West European Politics* 35 (1): 39-58.

Strawn, Kelley. 2010. "Protest Records, Data Validity, and the Mexican Media: Development and Assessment of a Keyword Search Protocol." *Social Movement Studies* 9 (1): 69-84.

Tarrow, Sidney. 1993. "Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contention." *Social Science History* 17 (2): 282-307.

Tarrow, Sidney. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, Charles. 2008. *Contentious Performances*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, Charles. 2005. *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834.* Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Tilly, C. 2003. *The politics of collective violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Zankina, Emilia. 2017. "Backdoor Politics: Politicisation through Restructuring in the Bulgarian Civil Service." *East European Politics* 33 (2): 291-308.

Van Gent, W.P.C., V.D. Mamadouh and H.H. van der Wusten. 2013. "Political Reactions to the Euro Crisis: Cross-National Variations and Rescaling Issues in Elections and Popular Protests." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 45 (2): 135-61.

Żuk, Piotr, and Paweł Żuk. 2018. "An 'Ordinary Man's' Protest: Self-Immolation as a Radical Political Message in Eastern Europe Today and in the Past." *Social Movement Studies* 17 (5): 610-17.