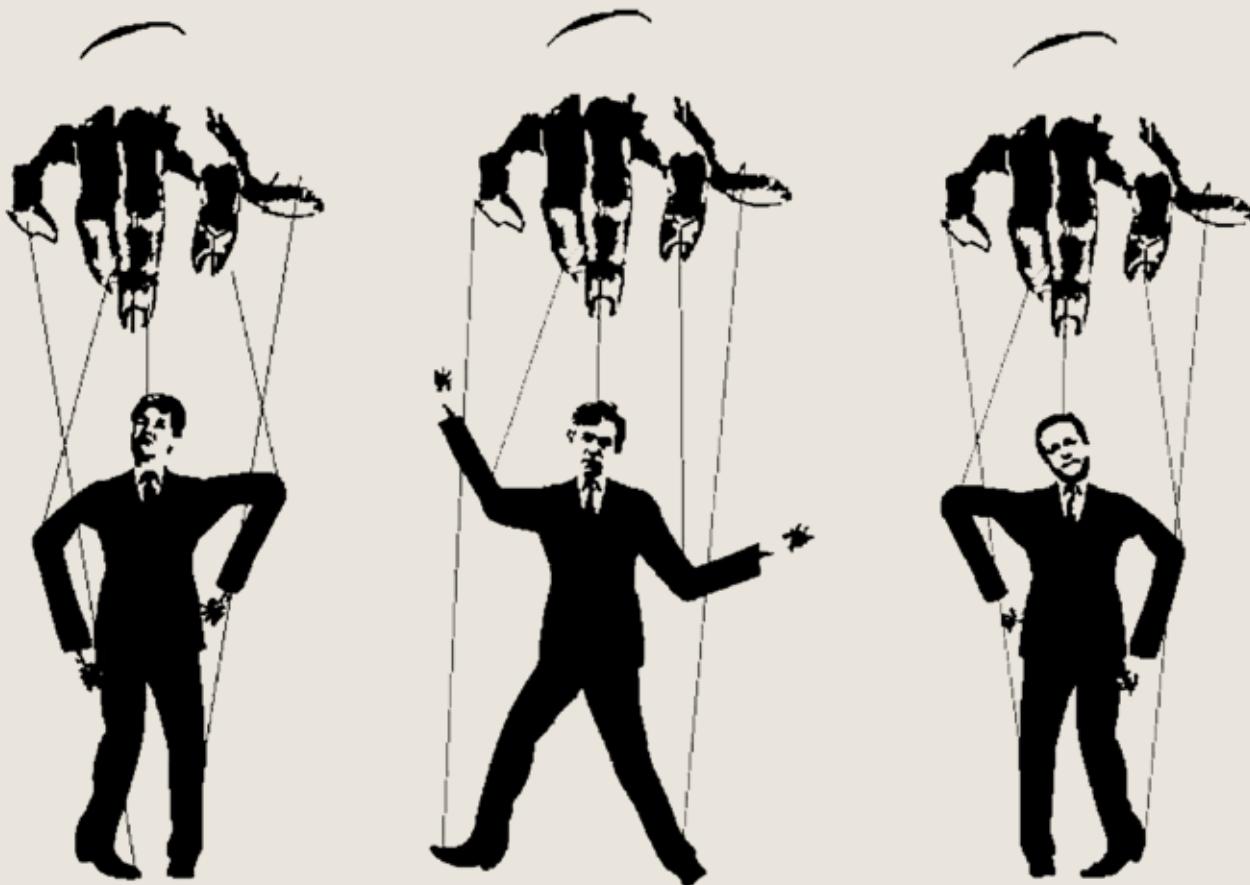


TRAITORS, HIRELINGS AND SANDWICH-PROTESTERS:



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CIVIL ACTIVISM IN THE MACEDONIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Skopje, 2013

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**CIVIL ACTIVISM IN
THE MACEDONIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE**
(POLICY PAPER)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. <u>Civil Activism in Macedonia</u>	3
1.2. <u>Methodology</u>	4
2. THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS	6
2.1. <u>Democratization and Europeanization</u>	6
2.2. <u>Political Culture</u>	7
2.3. <u>Theories on Social Movement</u>	8
2.4. <u>Discourse Analysis</u>	9
2.5. <u>Legal framework</u>	13
3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FOR CIVIL ACTIVISM	17
3.1. <u>Citizens on the street</u>	17
3.1.1. <u>Don't rape Skopje? What about citizens of Skopje?</u>	17
3.1.2. <u>STOP police brutality!</u>	18
3.1.3. <u>AMAN, it's enough!</u>	19
3.2. <u>Media analysis</u>	19
3.2.1. <u>Band of gay people and activists against a church on the square</u>	19
3.2.2. <u>Sorosoids in the service of Hope</u>	20
3.2.3. <u>Social injustice or covering up a transitional crime?</u>	23
3.3. <u>Activists, parties and media</u>	24
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	28
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	32
<u>ANNEX 1</u>	34
<u>NOTES</u>	35

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Civil activism in Macedonia

For a democratic society well-informed and active citizens are more important than exercise of the right to universal suffrage, participation in government or political party membership.

Acting as part of civil society, i.e. non-governmental organizations, or as part of informal groups, can be an alternative mechanism for certain groups of citizens to fulfil their needs or check-and-balance the authorities about serious matters that affect the public wellbeing.

As part of its Euro-Atlantic integration process and being a former Yugoslav and socialist state, Republic of Macedonia faced numerous transitional challenges, but has still not completed this process. In regard to civil activism as a crucial segment of democratic life, the public arena is still dominated by standpoints whereby Macedonian citizens are referred to in diminutive, i.e. people who have suffered injustices and hardships in the past, but have never firmly stood against them. In retrospective, back in 1968 – a year marked by tempestuous events - civil activ-

ism in Macedonia was low to non-existent and beginnings of democratic civil activism are tracked to 1987 events in Vevcani.

Throughout its independence, Macedonia - as a multiethnic society affected by serious problems of power sharing and interethnic relations - has seen many events of citizens being mobilized on the basis of their ethnic background. Most prominent among them are those from 1997, when university and high-school students protested in front of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia against the decision to introduce studies in Albanian language at the Teacher Training Faculty in Skopje.

Only a handful of events are marked by pure civil mobilization, without being organized according to ethnic or party affiliation, and therefore it can be said that Macedonian democracy has still not matured. The purpose of this research is to examine whether the political culture in Macedonia has matured, i.e. whether the Macedonian society has Europeanized so as to be able to accept and uphold creation and maintenance of authentic civil activism, free of ethnic- or party-related doings. This analysis will claim

that political parties failed to create a climate conducive to development and maintenance of authentic civil activism and continue to occupy the space intended for civil activism, by installing, instrumenting and discrediting civil initiatives and movements.

This research will pay great attention to the state-of-play in the last four years, and will examine in detail three cases of civil activism (First Architectonic Uprising from 2009; “Martin Neskovski” case from 2011 and AMAN initiative from 2012-2013) by means of which it will demonstrate that the ruling party, using the public discourse and organizing counter-protests, suffocates development of authentic civil activism in the country and continues to develop a paternalistic and non-inclusive society.

In the first section we provide the general theoretical and analytical frameworks on democratization and Europeanization, social movements, political culture, discourse analysis and legal norms. The second section contains the discourse analysis of public reports related to research-targeted instances of civil activism. In addition and for the purpose of this research, we conducted several interviews with participants in the events, political parties and the media, which enabled us to infer particular conclusions. This research paper concludes with recommendations aimed to overcome the current situation.

1.2 Methodology

Last several years were abounding in events in which citizens - organized in different forms - have taken to the streets to protest against or support state policies. Examples thereof include the general strike of medical doctors¹ (and counter-strike),² various forms of protests against “Skopje 2014” project (First Architectonic Uprising,³ “I Heart GTC”⁴), “Together for Peace” march,⁵ events on the Skopje Fortress where clashes between opposing groups culminated in violence,⁶ many protests that concerned interethnic or inter-religious relations (some of which also ended in violence),⁷ protests organized in the aftermath of Martin Neskovski’s death,⁸ AMAN initiative,⁹ protests against the Draft Law on Pregnancy Termination,¹⁰ the biggest and most controversial events from 24.12.2012,¹¹ protests in front of the Municipality of Centar,¹² and the most recent protests organized for preservation of green areas in the Municipality of Centar, more specifically the park opposite Bristol Hotel¹³ and green areas in the Municipality of Cair.¹⁴ Due to time and space constraints, this policy paper focuses only on three cases that are considered most representative of street-based civil activism in Macedonia in the last five years.

Combining selection criteria with scholar literature resulted in definition of following parameters that should be fulfilled by the cases addressed in this analysis:

1. They should be civil initiatives/protests against current state affairs, state policies or governmental decisions;
2. Activities should concern a broad topic that affects a large group of citizens or the public wellbeing;
3. Initiative has been balanced by counter-protests, i.e. mobilization of citizens against the initial protests;
4. Public and media reporting and comments about the event in question should imply different views and classifications of participants therein;
5. Activities should not be openly linked with a political party, i.e. initiated and supported by a political party;
6. Activities should not concern ethnic/religious relations in Macedonia, as they constitute completely different and separate research topic.

Application of these criteria and parameters resulted in the final selection of following three instances of civil activism subjected to detailed scrutiny:

1. First Architectural Uprising that implied protests against the church construction¹⁵ on the square (March 2009);
2. Protests against police brutality, trig-

gered by the murder of Martin Neskovski (summer 2011); and

3. AMAN initiative against increase of electricity and energy fuel prices (2012-2013).

These three cases fulfil all six criteria defined and are in compliance with the research objectives. All civil initiatives were directed against state affairs or policies and concerned broad issues affecting different groups of citizens (against construction of building on the square/protection of the public space, civil oversight for MoI officers and full disclosure and accountability for the murder, and energy prices). Moreover, all these initiatives implied mobilization of citizens to oppose the initial protests (counter-protests on the square, protests against politicization of protests for Martin Neskovski, and protests called “Expensive Privatization”). All of them triggered different views, classifications and disqualifications in the media, ranging from total support to full-blown attacks on protesters/activists, and none of them were publicly supported by a political party. Last, but not the least important, all protests rose above ethnic and religious affiliation.

Remaining civil activism events were not taken into consideration as they failed short in meeting some of the pre-defined criteria. For example, the strike of medical doctors concerned only the rights associated with one vocation; events on the Skopje Fortress

and other protests concerned interethnic and interreligious relations; “Together for Peace” march was not accompanied by a counter-protest and was organized against interethnic violence; events from 24.12.2012 were openly political; protests in front of the Municipality of Centar were of religious character and were not counteracted, just as those organized to save green areas in the municipality, which are still underway.

Due to space constraints, this policy paper will not cover a multitude of media reports, but focus only on those that imply construction of civil activists’ identity and the Other.¹⁶ Articles in the printed media will be analysed in terms of the meaning they constructed.

Findings presented in the discourse analysis will be supported by conclusions inferred on the basis of interviews conducted by the researcher. Notably, total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of research-targeted civil initiatives, three interviews with representatives of political parties and two interviews were conducted with media workers. Unfortunately, the list of interviewees does not include participants in counter-protests due to the inability to identify or persuade them to discuss these topics.

2 | THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Democratization and Europeanization

Samuel Huntington enlists the fall of the Communism and thus transition of the Republic of Macedonia, under the third wave of democratization, along with the most prominent examples from South Europe and Latin America. Actually, this wave concerns transition of authoritarian/non-democratic regimes into democratic political systems.¹⁷ Transition and democratization of Central and Eastern European countries was and remains in the focus of the academic and expert public, not merely because of the wide territory and population affected by these processes, but due to great variations in the democratization dynamics demonstrated by the countries, in spite of expectations that they would follow similar paths of development. Moreover, European integration processes are also treated with great attention, primarily due to the guarantees for peace and respect for human rights associated with them, especially after the violent 1990s in the Balkan, and the principle of conditionality to which the candidate-countries committed to, including acceptance of EU norms and standards.

In their discussions on consolidation of democracies, Linz and Stepan provide the following definition for the transition process:

“A democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government de facto has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies de jure.”¹⁸

Here, they construe their famous formulation that democracy is consolidated only when it is *“the only game in town”*. Other interconnected and mutually reinforcing conditions for consolidated democracy include development of free and vibrant civil society, relatively autonomous political society, practice of the rule of law that protects individual freedoms and associational life, effective state bureaucracy that is usable by the new democratic government and institutionalized economic society.¹⁹

Experiences related to EU's 2004 and 2007 eastward enlargement reveal that the Europeanization process is not merely transposition of the *acquis*, but primarily an alignment of the acceding countries with democratic values upheld in the EU. These values mirror citizens' positions in more sensitive political areas, similar to the public arenas defined by Linz and Stepan. According to Mungiu-Pippidi, CEE experience is a proof that institutional and legal reforms are not sufficient to initiate irreversible change of policies.²⁰ Therefore, the Europeanization process (degree of transformation) is of greater interest for the academic and expert public and concerns all social, economic and political areas in the acceding countries.

The vast and growing field of Europeanization studies provides several important understandings of this process, ranging from literal understanding of applied policies and degree to which the EC's political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making,²¹ to the view that domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making.²² Radaelli provides the most useful definition for this research and says that Europeanization is a process of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incor-

porated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies.²³ Ladrech adds that the prime concern of any Europeanization research agenda is the causal link and validation of EU's impact on domestic changes.²⁴

In that sense, this research will focus on one aspect of Europeanization in the Republic of Macedonia: civil activism and its acceptance in the public, a phenomenon that is the epitome of changes in the political culture and of the degree of convergence of democratic values in the sense of accepting different opinions, as well as the preparedness of social actors to engage in healthy debate (authorities, media, political parties and citizens/CSOs).

2.2 Political culture

In short, political culture concerns dominant norms and values upheld by the citizens in a society about the political processes and conducts in that society. It determines the conduct and positions of citizens towards authorities, political order, manner of government election, operation of and trust in the institutions.

Primary theoretical literature on political culture includes "*The Civic Culture*", authored by Sindy Verba and Gabriel Almond. They outline three pure types of political culture based on the level and type of politi-

cal participation and the nature of people's attitudes towards politics which, when combined, create the civic culture:

1. Parochial: where citizens are remotely aware, knowledgeable or interested in politics. This type of political culture is in general congruent with a traditional political structure;
2. Subject: where citizens are aware of central government and of politics, and are heavily subjected to their influence, but the individuals have no possibility for disagreement. This political culture is congruent with a centralized authoritarian structure;
3. Participant: where citizens are aware of politics and central government and are affected by it, but have the possibility and tools to influence the decision-making. This political culture is congruent with a democratic political structure.²⁵

Together with Eckstein, they formulate the theory of congruence arguing that a political regime can be stable to the extent its authority patterns are congruent with the authority beliefs of the people.²⁶ When it comes to transition and democratization, Wetzel and Inglehart consider that people's beliefs and standpoints are of great importance for a country to democratize or remain democratic, because mass beliefs (as they call them) determine whether a system

is legitimate or not, and whether a regime will survive or not. They further develop this theory of congruence by arguing that political regimes must deliver democracy at levels that satisfy the people's demand.²⁷

A research study from 2005 finds that rampant patron-clientelism relations, clan culture in place of interest groups politics, multiculturalism, widespread corruption, agricultural peasant societies and communist legacy are common characteristics of political cultures in Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania.²⁸

As regards civil activism, the last survey on the political culture in Macedonia conducted by the Institute of Democracy "Societas Civilis" from Skopje reveals that 60% of citizens have never signed a petition, 67% never participated in demonstrations, 70% have not participated in public gatherings, and as many as 80% never complained to a public institution.²⁹

Theses presented here will help us understand the political culture in Macedonia, and civil activism in particular, i.e. they lead us to the conclusion that citizens are inactive, which is typical for parochial- and subject-type cultures, with widespread patron-clientelism as part of which the authorities "*deliver as much democracy as demanded*" in order to create an illusion of participation, especially by instigating counter-protests.

2.3 Theories on social movement

From the vast number of social movement research studies, we will focus on theories and concepts addressing movement-counter-movement relations, in order to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon of counter-protests as the main feature of civil activism in Macedonia that emerged and reached its summit in the last several years.

Kitschelt views parties, interest groups and social movements as elements of a densely-intertwined network of links between civil society and political institutions in a democratic state. However, he believes that movements and parties operate in two systems of actions - the party and the movement system of actions - and therefore they have different roles in the society.³⁰ Be that as it may, the manner in which these roles are formulated should be researched in the Macedonian context. If Zald and McCarthy (similar to Turner and Killian) define social movements as series of opinions and beliefs expressing preferences for change of certain elements in social structures and/or distribution of goods, and consider counter-movements to be opposing sets of opinions and beliefs,³¹ Mottle views the counter-movement as protesting movement in response to changes advocated by the original movement, i.e. conscious collective and organized effort to counterbalance or divert the course of change.³² According to Zald and Useem, the governments may intervene on behalf

of the opposing sides,³³ and in specific cases they may assume the role of movement instigators or organizers (A/N).

Mayer and Staggenborn argue that three conditions promote the rise of counter-movements:

1. the original movement's success;
2. the original movement threatens existing interests, and
3. the political opportunity to mobilize opposing masses, as the most interesting condition for this research.³⁴

Meyer and Staggenborg indicate that advocates for certain causes use forms of social movement when they believe these forms are necessary for attainment of their goals and are potentially efficient,³⁵ but raise the issue of what happens when governments or governing authorities believe these forms hold potential to effectively counteract the opposing forces.³⁶

In Macedonia, movement-counter-movement interplay will be analysed by scrutinizing protests organized around social concerns or governmental policies, whose doings have been contested by counter-protests of different form. Just as social movement organizations claim they represent the interests of a much bigger constituency group from those present at the venue,³⁷ governing

elites believe that counter-protests would decrease the original movement's representativeness. In that line, counter-protests are considered to be the perfect tool in the hands of populist governments, as they provide a completely different image about the actual "constituency". In addition, counter-protests increase social transaction costs³⁸ of the original movement, i.e. they are an action that increases "costs" (broadly defined) of activists, which will be shown later in this paper, by means of distorted images in the media and the energy spent on proving the opposite. According to Rootes, it needs to be recognized that states and different state institutions treat different social movements and movement organizations in different policy areas differently both, generally and at different points in time.³⁹ Actually, the present research focuses on examining the response of state institutions and governing elites to civil initiatives and movements that challenge their performance, and the image they try to create in the public by means of street activism and media coverage.

2.4 Discourse analysis

As an analytical framework and methodology tool, discourse analysis offers a variety of approaches and interpretations of linguistic and symbolic messages and their significance in the realms of social and policy matters. Before engaging in discourse analysis of data collected about civil activism in

Macedonia, first we must define and explain this method and its evolution. This is done for the purpose of giving the readers clarity about starting positions in the analysis and interpretation of data collected.

Vezovnik understands society and social matters as sedimented discursive practices,⁴⁰ while Laclau views discourse as the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such and adds that *discourse* can be any complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role.⁴¹

The purpose of this analysis, *inter alia*, is to understand the Macedonian public's perception of civil activism or - in the words of Laclau - the type of social objectivity constructed for civil activism, i.e. the overall attitude towards civil activism. Discourse definition is evolving and, to large extent, depends on research stages. Therefore, the most important aspect of any discourse analysis is the understanding of different generations or so-called traditions of discourse theory. These stages are not reconsidered individually, in their own right, but are interdependent and every new stage implies extension and expansion of the previous.

1. The first generation defines *discourse* in the narrow *linguistic* sense of a textual unit that is larger than a sentence and focuses on the semantic aspects of spoken or written text.⁴²

2. The second generation defines *discourse* in a broader way, whereby discourse is not restricted to spoken and written language, but is extended to a wider set of *social practices*. This generation includes the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough and inspired by Foucault's analysis of the discursive practices that form subjects and objects in systematic manner. Here, discourse is defined as an "empirical collection of practices that qualify as discursive in so far as they contain a semi-otic (symbolic) element... and therefore discourse is reduced to a wide set of social (societal, A/N) practices."⁴³ This concept includes all kinds of linguistically mediated practices in terms of speech, writing, images and gestures that social actors draw upon in their production and interpretation of meaning.

Social classes and ethnic groups produce ideological discourses in order to maintain their hegemonic power, or establish a counter-hegemony. Hence, ideological discourse contributes not only to the reproduction of social and political order, but also to its transformation, leading us to the understanding that CDA is interested in discourse' power effects.⁴⁴

Foucault, however, focuses on the **rules of formation** that regulate production of statements and practices. He is not concerned with the truth or the meaning of actual statements, but with their discursive conditions of possibility. Hence, Foucault

draws our attention on the "rules of formation" that regulate what can be said, how it can be said, who can speak and in which name, and what kind of strategies can be realized at the level of discourse. In contrast to CDA, he maintains that all practices are discursive in the sense that they are shaped by discursive rules of formation that vary in time and space.⁴⁵

What is interesting for our research is that Foucault pays great attention to the **power struggles** that shape and reshape particular discursive formations. His power analytics replaces the classical notion of sovereign power (which basically conceives power as dominance and repression), with a new notion of discursive power that emphasizes the **productive aspects of power**. "Power is neither a relation of dominance, nor a capacity to act, but the 'conduct of conduct' which refers to the ways in which the discourse regulates actions by means of shaping the identities, capacities and relations of subordination of the social actors."⁴⁶ Consequently, *power and discourse* mutually constitutive and we cannot have one without the other.

3. The third generation of discourse theory further extends the notion of discourse so that it now covers all social phenomena. According to Derrida, everything becomes discourse and the social identities are no longer fixed once and for all with reference to a determining centre, thus creating an end-

less displacement of limited and provisional centres. In short: social meaning becomes partially fixed in and through discourse.⁴⁷ Post-structuralist writers share the basic view of social identity as constructed in and through decentered discourse systems. These authors, including Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan, all subscribe to a broad understanding of discourse as a relational system of signifying practices that is produced through historical and ultimately political interventions and provides a contingent horizon for the construction of any meaningful object. This tradition of discourse theory is inspired by post-Marxist, post-structuralist and postmodern political theory. Laclau and Mouffe have elaborated a synthetic third generation theory, which is both a development of and a departure from the previous (second) generation. They agree with Foucault's insistence to the internal relation between power and discourse, but ultimately abandon the unsuitable distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive, and draw the conclusion that discourse is a co-extensive with the social (societal).⁴⁸

The post-structuralist notion of discourse, as advocated by Laclau, Mouffe and Foucault, is based on five arguments that are of great importance for our research.

A) All forms of social practices take place against a background of historically specific discourses.⁴⁹ In other words, whatever we say, think or do is conditioned by a more

or less sedimented discourse which is constantly modified and transformed by what we are saying, thinking and doing.⁵⁰ This will help us understand the disqualification used against civil activism that refer to its links to the past and elites of the past, i.e. the transition in Macedonia.

B) Discourse is constructed in and through *hegemonic struggles* that aim to establish a “political and moral-intellectual” leadership through the articulation of meaning and identity.⁵¹ In this way, we will show that the hegemonic position enjoyed by the current government in Macedonia imposes a public discourse whereby only the governing authorities have “moral and intellectual” capacity to develop the society vision and govern it, as well as to determine the truth and assigns certain roles and identities in the society (for example: traitors, patriots, etc.).

C) Hegemonic articulation of meaning and identity is intrinsically linked to the construction of *social antagonism*, which involves the exclusion of a “threatening Otherness” that stabilizes the discursive system while, at the same time, preventing its ultimate closure.⁵² In this way, the government depicts protesters as the Other, i.e. as people who do not belong, and hence triggers social antagonism by organizing counter-protests.

D) Stable hegemonic discourse (and social order) “becomes dislocated when it is confronted by new events it cannot explain,

represent or in other way domesticate.”⁵³ Counter-protests are the means to absorb new developments (protests) by shifting the struggle’s focus away from citizens-government relations, i.e. alternative policies vs. state policies, towards two groups of citizens.

E) Dislocation of the discursive structure means that the subject always emerges as a split subject that might attempt to “reconstruct a full identity through acts of identification.”⁵⁴ This split subject is understood as the Self-Other dichotomy in the sense of antagonistic struggle for hegemonic position in the discourse. This argument is closely related to the previous, i.e. it shows how, by means of counter-protests, the government is not turned into a split subject, but divides citizens and thus maintains its hegemonic position in the discourse.

For the purpose of this research, we partially acknowledge the second generation theory, especially Foucault’s arguments on power and discourse relations, but are of the standing that the third generation theory is much more useful, in particular the five arguments offered by the post-structuralist school. Namely, we rely on discourse analysis and theory because we find that the manner in which civil activism and activists are presented in the public is of great importance, in particular due to the fact that such representations pursue the ultimate goal of maintaining the government’s hegemonic position and constructing identities of those

who differ from the political party’s understanding of democracy and activism. Thus, when analysing media reports and coverage, special attention will be given to the manner in which the message is conveyed, whose goal is not to disturb previous notions of citizenship, but interpret any attempt to challenge the government through the ruling party’s matrix of values, according to which civil activists are merely an extended arm of the opposition.

2.5 Legal framework

As indicated above in reference to Linz and Stepan, healthy and vibrant civil society is a precondition for democracy development and consolidation. Civil society development (as well as creation and maintenance of active citizens) is enshrined in several international legal documents that govern the civil and political rights.

In the sense of this research, most relevant human rights and freedoms include the freedom of expression, the right to freedom of association and the right to public assembly.

Freedom of expression is contained in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was later transformed into the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) of the Council of Europe.

Article 19 of the UDHR reads: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”* Here, it is important to note that the term “interference” implies interference on the part of the government or from any other position of power that compels a change of mind with the individual. Detailed stipulation of this right is provided under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which reads:

“Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: a) for respect of the rights or reputations of others; and b) for the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.”

Thus, obvious is that the right enjoyed by an individual is limited in terms of the rights enjoyed by others and the social wellbeing.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Article 10 of the European

Convention of Human Rights stipulates the right to freedom of expression, as follows:

“1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions and restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interest of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.”

Within the national legislation, the right to freedom of expression is regulated under Article 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which reads:

“The freedom of personal conviction, conscience, thought and public expression of thought is guaranteed. The freedom of speech, public address, public information and the establishment of institutions for public informa-

tion is guaranteed. Free access to information and the freedom of reception and transmission of information are guaranteed. The right of reply via the mass media is guaranteed. The right to a correction in the mass media is guaranteed. The right to protect a source of information in the mass media is guaranteed. Censorship is prohibited.”

International treaties and national laws also guarantee the freedom of assembly and association, political organization and activity.

Although the right to freedom of association is guaranteed under the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it does not distinguish between civil and political association. Namely, Article 20 of the UDHR anticipates that everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and that no one may be compelled to belong to an organization, while Article 11 of the ECHR establishes that:

“1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of

disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.”

On national level, the freedom of association is enshrined in Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia:

“The citizens are guaranteed freedom of association to exercise and protect their political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and convictions. The citizens may freely establish associations of citizens and political parties, join them or resign from them. The programmes and activities of political parties and other associations of citizens may not be directed at the violent destruction of the constitutional order of the Republic, or at encouragement and incitement to military aggression or ethnic, racial, religious hatred or intolerance. Military or paramilitary associations which do not belong to the Armed Forces of the Republic of Macedonia are prohibited.”

Furthermore, freedom of association and various aspects of operation of CSOs are regulated under different laws, such as the Law on Associations and Foundations, the Law on Accounting Practices for Non-Profitable Organizations, the Law on Donations and Sponsorships, etc.

The right to public assembly and expression of protest is guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which stipulates that citizens shall enjoy the right to assemble peacefully and to express public protest without prior announcement or special licence, notwithstanding that exercise of this right may be restricted only in cases of emergency or war.

In spite of such liberal framework in place, the Law on Public Assembly provides detailed definition of the rights enjoyed by citizens in this regard. For example, the law stipulates that this right shall be exercised only in peaceful manner and shall not limit the right to freedom of movement and other rights of citizens who are not part of such assemblies and gatherings. Interesting is the fact that the law also includes a definition of public gathering, (Article 2) as follows:

“For the purpose of this law, public assemblies of more than 20 people shall be any gathering, outdoors or indoors, for the purpose of exercising entertainment, cultural, religious, humanitarian, social, political, economic, sport or similar interests of citizens, and organized for public expression of opinion or protest.

In the sense of paragraph 1 of this article, the following shall not be considered public gathering/assembly:

- religious observances taking place in prem-

ises designated for that purpose;

- common celebrations;

- funeral processions;

- gatherings in spaces to which free access is restricted for the purpose of reconsidering matters pertaining to trade unions;

- common gatherings of cultural and entertainment or sports prominence, which are organized indoors and in compliance with the organizing party’s primary activity;

- common gatherings, meetings, seminars, public debates of representatives of state administration bodies, organizations and other legal entities performing public services, or gatherings of political parties indoors.”

The law also provides restrictions to the right to public assembly, while the latest amendments that concern limitations in terms of public assembly venues and locations stipulate that public gatherings cannot take place in the vicinity of health care institutions, in a manner that prevents access thereto for emergency vehicles and disturbs the patients’ peace; in the vicinity of kindergartens or schools, at times when children are in attendance; and on motorways and regional roads, in a manner that endangers road traffic.

Although the Constitution stipulates that organizers of public protests are not obliged to notify the Ministry of Interior, this possibility does exist and is left at the discretion of protest organizers, whereby such notifications should be made at least 48 hours in advance. In that, the said notification should enlist the goal pursued by the public assembly/gathering, time and venue (public space), organizer, measures taken by the organizer with a view of unhindered organization and procession and information on ordinance measures in place. When requested in advance, the police can secure and maintain the order at a public gathering, costs of which should be covered by the organizer. Although MoI is not allowed to disband the public assembly, in cases when it has established that the gathering might impose a threat to the life, health, safety and security of individuals, environmental hazard or traffic disturbance, in compliance with the international treaties, the police are entitled to disperse the assembly and protect the citizens (Article 6).

Participants in the public assembly are prohibited to commit violent acts, carry firearms, consume alcohol and use opiate drugs, disturb normal traffic flow, etc. (Article 5).

3 | DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON CIVIL ACTIVISM

In the sections below we address the manner in which selected civil activism events were covered by and reported in the media. Namely, this part of the document contains the discourse analysis of news and articles aired or published by several broadcasting, printed and Internet-based media outlets.⁵⁶ The next section presents the results of interviews conducted with representatives of said initiatives/protests, political parties and the media with a view to convey their views on specific events and on the overall state-of-affairs concerning civil activism in the state. Unfortunately, the list of interviewees does not include participants in counter-protests, since we were unable to identify and locate them, while some of them refused to discuss these topics.

3.1 Citizens on the street

This section provides a brief overview of events and factographic description of developments and doings that are later subjected to analysis in terms of media reporting and perceptions.

3.1.1 Don't rape Skopje? What about citizens of Skopje?

Events from 28th March 2009 were called the First Architectonic Uprising, organized by the First Archi-Brigade (FAB) and supported by group of young people, who latter organized themselves as the Freedom Square. Actually, at that time the contours of “Skopje 2104” emerged in the public, although the project was not explicitly announced as a large-scale construction venture, but rather implied erection of several buildings in the downtown area.⁵⁷ Most impressionable among the new buildings announced was the construction (revival) of the Church “Ss. Constantine and Elena” on the central square in Skopje. As soon as they learned about these intentions, group of students from the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje started to gather in university classes and coffee shops to discuss the need for public reaction against the church construction on the designated place. In that, they justified their reaction with the fact that proposed construction works are unsuitable and illogical for such public space, they are contrary to

square's purpose, do not allow air friction and are might present a threat for safety of citizens and visitors.

Truth be told, these events were preceded by a public debate about the church construction organized at the Cultural Centre "Tocka". Key-note speakers at this event included Trifun Kostovski, who at that time was the City Mayor and was openly against the church construction; however, the public debate was forcefully interrupted and discontinued by people wearing religious insignia.⁵⁸

After FAB revealed its plans on the social networks, they were joined and supported by organizers of the debate. They planned to hold a peaceful protest on 28th March 2009 under the motto "Don't rape Skopje!". It is very important to note that the event overlapped with political campaigning for the forthcoming local and presidential elections.

The night before, on the show called "Eat This!", show-host Janko Ilovski announced that "*a band of gay people and atheists*" will protest against the church on the square and appealed to his viewers to counteract them.⁵⁹ Same appeal was published on the Facebook profile of Ivica Georgievski, MP from VMRO-DPMNE.⁶⁰

The next day, around 200 students and supporters gathered in the square to express their opposition, but were counteracted by a well-organized group, twice as numerous and comprised of people wearing religious insignia.

After unpleasant verbal exchanges between the two groups, counter-protesters exerted violence towards students and their supporters, which the scarce number of policemen was unable to prevent.⁶¹

Ultimately, the church was not constructed on the square, but the infamous "Skopje 2014" project was publicly promoted shortly after these events. Violent clashes on the square resulted in several misdemeanour charges raised against participants from both groups and heralded a series of protests in different forms, followed by formal establishment of FAB and Freedom Square as CSOs.

3.12 STOP police brutality!

What many perceived as most massive protests ever organized in Skopje were actually triggered by a tragic event - the murder of Martin Neskovski on the night between 5th and 6th June 2011, in the midst of celebrations for VMRO-DPMNE's electoral victory held on the Macedonia Square. In a matter of hours, social networks were flooded with information about a boy being battered by MoI member, although the event was not recorded in the official newsletter issued by the Sector for Internal Affairs in Skopje. Initial reports indicated that the boy fell ill and shortly after died, and only 2 days later (7.6.2011) MoI admitted that the boy had suffered serious injuries inflicted by a member of the special police task force "Tiger".

The story was already placed in the public and was picked up by the media, together with the deceased's actual identity (Martin Neskovski; initially the boy was referred to as Daniel), and on daily basis young people started gathering at 18:00 hours to protest against attempts to cover up this affair.⁶² Later, protesters expanded their demands and included an explicit motion of resignation for the Minister of Interior, Gordana Jankulovska, establishment of full accountability among MoI members, disbandment of the police task force "Alpha", as well as increased civil oversight for MoI's actions.⁶³ With variable intensity, the protests were organized and lasted by the end of summer 2011.

In this period there were numerous accusations that Neskovski's family was threatened to discontinue its support for the protests.⁶⁴ Also, many participants in the protests were under public attack of being instructed by the opposition, as members thereof could be noticed among them. On that occasion, a group that identified itself with the initial protest organized another round of protests in front of SDSM's headquarters, as they said, to object politicization of police brutality protests.

Igor Spasov, member of the special police task force "Tiger", was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment on the account of murder charges,⁶⁵ the movement was allowed to make a presentation in the Parliament

of the Republic of Macedonia, and the case was duly noted in the EC's Progress Report for the Republic of Macedonia,⁶⁶ but none of the demands put forward by the movement against police brutality were delivered.

3.1.3 AMAN, it's enough!

AMAN movement was organized in response to the Decisions and Rulebooks adopted by the Energy Regulatory Commission and Toplifikacija JSC Skopje, which implied increase of electricity and district heating prices.⁶⁷

First round of protests was held on 14.8.2012 in Skopje, followed by a second round one week later, and soon enough protests were organized in other towns countryside: Bitola, Kumanovo, Prilep and Tetovo. These protests were organized around the demand to reduce electricity and district heating utility prices to 2008 rates, re-introduce cheap electricity tariffs, retract the engaged capacity charge set at 33 % of the electricity bill, immediately withdraw the new District Heating Rulebook and reduce oil derivative prices so as to reflect the standard of living in the country.⁶⁸

These protests were organized once a week, on Tuesdays, and had different procession routes. According to movement members and participants, their activities were insufficiently covered by the mass media. For that purpose, they organized a more impressionable

gathering in front of the Public Broadcasting Service's building, because the broadcaster did not cover their activities. This protest had a particular motto: "If they won't come to us, we'll come to them", and used banners with paroles: "Enough with the silence", "No justice, no peace", etc.⁶⁹

Protests culminated with collection of more than 13 thousand signatures in February 2013 endorsing the proposed amendments to the Energy Law. The motion presented in the Parliament was expressly denied by the ruling majority.⁷⁰

Counter-protests for AMAN were organized under the motto "Expensive Privatization" expressing dissatisfaction with 2006 unbundling and privatization of the Electricity Distribution Company, implemented upon a decision taken by SDSM, which was in power at that time.⁷¹

3.2 Media analysis

3.2.1 Band of gay people and activists against a church on the square

Following the announcement of protests against construction of buildings on the square, initial reactions came from Janko Ilkovski, show-host at *Nasa TV*, who aired and posted the following statement on his blog:

*"Tomorrow at 12:00 hours, on the square in Skopje, a band of gay people and atheists will most likely attempt to spread infamies, under the pretence of caring for city architecture, and will oppose the church construction. Therefore, I and my family will participate in counter-protests organized an hour earlier at 11:00, to express our support for having the church built on the square."*⁷²

In the aftermath of violent events that took place in the square, Minister Jankulovska issued a statement broadcasted in all media wherein she said that religious followers were provoked by demonstrators opposing the church construction,⁷³ which immediately leads to the conclusion that the latter are to be blamed, i.e. they are the actual bullies and provocateurs. Similar explanation was offered by Prime Minister Gruevski, who said that protests are a doing of Miroslav Grcev, opponent to all projects promoted by the government and prominent member of SDSM. Also, it was reported that Gjuner Ismail, Ljubomir Frckoski and their daughters were present in the protesting crowd, implying a conspiracy by the opposition.⁷⁴ Referrals made to Frckoski, Ismail and Grcev (as well as many other opposition members or employees at the Foundation Open Society - Macedonia) would continue to be the most utilized tool in later reports, and served the purpose of construing the identity of these people as a symbol of the so-called SDSM-led transition, thereby undermining the protests' importance and the right to civic engagement. Such statements shift the pub-

lic's focus from the actual cause, and further strengthen the hegemonic discourse that governing authorities are always right.

News captions such as “Exclusive: SDSM's plot against the church construction!”,⁷⁵ “Only SDSM profits from incidents in the square”⁷⁶ and “Protests sponsored by Soros and Frckovski”⁷⁷ explicitly interpolate that clashes were a doing of SDSM and inevitably of Soros, as two symbols created by the government and assigned associations of evil, conspiracy and treason.

Another interesting moment is the fact that although organizers were careful to indicate that protests are organized against construction of any building on the square,⁷⁸ media reports labelled them as protests against the church,⁷⁹ which is yet another attempt to depict them as anti-Christian and anti-Macedonian, whereby protesters are presented as the Other, i.e. the “disenfranchised”.

3.2.2 Sorosoids in the service of Hope

News about Martin Neskovski first appeared on social networks and was officially reported by the Internet portal *Netpress* on 6th June 2011.⁸⁰ This report included statements from eyewitnesses who did not know the deceased boy's true identity. One day later, vast majority of media outlets re-aired the news, indicating the identities of both, the victim and the offender. These and media announcements that

followed can be grouped into: 1) stories focused on case proceedings; and 2) stories focused on the protests.

Namely, the statement issued by Ivo Kotevski, MoI's Spokesperson, was duly covered as early as the first day of reports. As regards the speculations and disinformation marketed on social networks in the past two days, as well as calls for violence, for the web-portal *Kurir*⁸¹ Kotevski stated that many of those involved in the protests were called to informative talks in the police, as well as that nobody had notified the police about organization of protests. He added that protesters had been unknowledgeable of why they are on the streets, but were called to do so, which immediately created a mysterious atmosphere about the possibility of a background power centre that manipulates the protesters and conspires violent gatherings. Daily *Dnevnik* qualified MoI's press release as fortunate circumstance, due to threats for mass protests and “*all kinds of possible distortions and abuses that could have been created by and associated with this case*”⁸², attributing a negative context to mass protests and insinuating no need for continued protests. In its unique style of reporting, newspaper *Vecer*⁸³ announced that all speculations are to no avail and that although the victim's identity is not yet confirmed, some non-governmental organizations have taken to the streets, again alluding to some kind of secretive organization in spite of the fact that there were no NGO activities in the initial period. Anti-NGO narratives are identified also

in the article published in *Nova Makedonija* on 14.12.2011, where it was said that sociologists believe that mass and long-lasting protests, by default, have political background. Organizer of the protests lasting for several days now must have enjoyed certain security and greater support. In support of these conjectures, the newspaper article includes the statement given by prof. Ilija Aceski:

*“There are indications that political parties are involved in the protests, however important is to see the extent of their involvement. If they are not involved, the situation is indicative of a strong non-governmental sector, which in our country could be disastrous. A strong non-governmental sector in a weak country can create chaos.”*⁸⁴

News story aired on *TV Sitel* followed the same narrative and broadcasted the statement given by Neskovski’s brother whereby he appeals for non-politicization of events, at which moment the news anchor conjectures: *“This is how the brother of Martin Neskovski addressed political parties and self-proclaimed non-governmental organizations which, assisted by some media outlets, attempt to score political points on the brutal murder of an innocent young man.”*⁸⁵

From the early days, the entire state and party machinery disposed by VMRO-DPMNE was recruited to link the protests with SDSM’s doings, thus accusing SDSM members of *“abus-ing this event for political party goals”*,⁸⁶ and

arduously stressing that the case has nothing to do with politics, and therefore should not be used for daily politics or manipulation with citizens.⁸⁷ Similar demands were presented by VMRO-DPMNE’s Youth Union.⁸⁸

Diversions came in the form of overview of police brutality instances and most prominent in that regard was newspaper *Vecer* which published a title caption *“Those who profit from death, lose everything in life!”* Specifically, cases covered in this article concerned the work of SDSM and only in the closing remarks referred to the recent death of Martin Neskovski, indicating that distorted realities are presented in the public for the purpose of political gains.⁸⁹ Editor Dragan Pavlovik – Latas went another step further and assigned the label of *“SDSM and Soros vultures”* to individuals like Milcin, Frckoski, Goran Georgiev, Branko Gerovski and others attending the protests,⁹⁰ as was done in the case of Ismail, Frckoski and Grcev on the occasion of protests organized against the church on the square.

The same overtone continued in the following period, with numerous qualifications being uttered as part of prime-time news programme aired on *TV Sitel* and related to protests against police brutality. News stories and reports featured statements about SDSM members participating in the protests *“led by the head people at the Soros [Foundation]”*.⁹¹ Announcements referred to a secretive plan whose *“ultimate goal is not justice, but to overthrow the government one week after VMRO-*

DPMNE's landslide election victory", adding that protests are part and parcel of project "Hope", designed by Slovenian PR experts who advised Branko Crvenkovski⁹² how to improve his popularity.

On 16.6.2011, daily *Dnevnik* published an article with a rather interesting structure. Namely, the text "MoI and Demonstrators are of Different Opinion",⁹³ first referred to the statement issued by a member of the movement, followed by excerpts from the official press release issued by the Macedonian Police Union and information that the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights supports the protests, and closed the article with information that SDSM urged the public prosecutor to raise charges against Gordana Jankulovska on the grounds of "abuse of office and public authorization" and against Ivo Kotevski on the grounds of "covering up a criminal offence". This sequence of information aims to create a mental image that the protests, Helsinki Committee of Human Rights and SDSM are one and the same group of people, thereby reinforcing the discourse about one identity opposing the identity of governing authorities.

Also, attempts to depict the protesters as "somebody else" (holders of the Otherness) were prominent in the column written by Zoran Dimitrovski. In spite of his request Minister of Interior's resignation, he also wrote:

"[...] *Not because of demands put forward by the recently defeated opposition and SDSM, not*

because of street revolutionaries who so desperately wish for a Greek, Algerian or another scenario to overthrow the government, but for the benefit of Macedonian citizens, for the benefit of 430,000 votes who brought VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition in power, to which Martin and his family pledged alliance."⁹⁴

Such writings directly link demonstrators to street revolutionaries cheering for foreign-assisted scenarios, usually implicated in violent tactics. Moreover, this type of qualifications were assisted and reinforced in the interview with Umberto Pascali, US political analyst, aired on the Public Broadcasting Service, and euphorically reprised by *Vecer*, *TV Sitel* and *Nova Makedonija*, especially his assessment that the protests organized around the death of Martin Neskovski represent propaganda war and people are used as cannon fodder, as part of the scenario of colour revolutions that rely on Soros' financial power, western media and Internet controllers. All these create an image that movements of this kind are not indigenous to the Macedonian space, but must have been instilled by foreign factors with anti-Macedonian prominence. Personal disqualifications about two prominent participants in the protests indicated that they had attended a seminar in Belgrade, organized by the Soros Foundation, including a lecture on protests in foreign countries organized for the purpose of state destabilization. Such media reports openly indicate that these people are now returning a favour to their mentors and financiers.⁹⁵

Rather interesting was the reporting angle pursued by *MTV1*, where on daily basis it was reiterated that despite disclaimers that they are not politically instrumented, “*the protests are attended by SDSM members.*”⁹⁶ On several occasions, it was indicated that the protests are organized against the so-called or alleged police brutality, insinuating that the protests might not be organized around the publicly declared cause or that police brutality never occurred.⁹⁷

Counter-protests for Martin Neskovski announced for 18th June 2011, but organized on 20th June 2011, ended up in front of SDSM’s headquarters. In this case as well, speculations were made or, to use the words of a counter-protester, “*rumour has it*” that some participants had been contacted by SDSM inquiring about protest organization and wanting to turn Skopje into Beirut,⁹⁸ after which the group of counter-protesters demanded these abuses to be discontinued.⁹⁹ In addition to the fact that counter-protests support the thesis whereby protests are organized by SDSM, they also intensified the discourse about the split subject, i.e. they put the citizens on the side of authorities and against other citizens who protest against police brutality, in that removing the governing authorities as the bone of contents in the social struggles.

3.2.3 Social injustice or covering up a transitional crime?

In their reports on AMAN initiative, pro-governmental media used similar methods and did not miss an opportunity to underline links between the initiative and SDSM. For example, information that the “Alliance for the Future” supports the initiative for collection of 10,000 signatures to propose new legislation,¹⁰⁰ as well as that AMAN protesters are members of SDSM (showing photographs with circled individuals alleged of dual membership).¹⁰¹ Moreover, in his public statement, Prime Minister Gruevski¹⁰² accused SDSM of manipulating the citizens, who “*organized in an association, attempt to stage certain protests, but are managed by SDSM members and associations financed by the Soros Foundations, which also wish to create an image that the government formulates energy prices and should be held accountable*”. To make matters worse, the media published documents that “*smear*” AMAN’s track record and provide evidence that SDSM has requested its members to go out and support the protests, although AMAN “*presented itself as an independent entity*”.¹⁰³

Counter-protests organized to balance the protests against police brutality and, in the case AMAN, counter-protests called “Expensive Privatization”, together with the media attention they were given, confirm the thesis that the movements opposed are actually led by people who lack authenticity (outcasts). On the other hand, “Expensive Privatiza-

tion” emerged as ad hoc organization, whose only purpose was to protest against SDSM and ESM’s privatization from 2006, yet again stressing that SDSM manipulates AMAN.¹⁰⁴

Creation of such discourse on the part of some pro-governmental media is best explained with arguments offered by the post-structuralist discourse theory. Namely, in order to maintain the hegemonic position in the narrative about Martin Neskovski’s murder, governing authorities insisted on so-called “*non-politicization*” of the subject, i.e. treated the case as criminal offence whose resolution falls within the competences of the police and state institutions, while civic demands for resignation (read: political responsibility) of the Minister of Interior on the account of extreme police brutality, were labelled “*vulture-like, Sorosoid-instigated, ill-intended, politically motivated, etc.*”. The ultimate goal pursued by these qualifications is to discourage civil reaction to the case, and to label all individuals wishing to join the protests as instruments in the hands of SDSM or Soros. This is how the government made sure that protests would not be massive (which should have been expected, if they maintain the label of civic engagement) and at the same time controlled the hegemonic discourse and confined it within the realms of the police and state institutions that are fully controlled by the government, instead of allowing the story to develop in the realm of political responsibility among high level officers at MoI and the stance against police brutality, a phenomenon that cannot be

tolerated in a democratic society. In this way, the government protected the on-going discourse from shocks and possible “dislocation”, i.e. prevented future events that it cannot interpret in its favour.

At the same time, the government made sure that the dominant discourse promoted in the public maintains the existing social antagonisms and strengthens the discourse on election winners and losers, according to which governing structures have the legitimate right to act in all areas and the opposition – when supporting or participating in protests – attempts to deny the election victory.

3.3 Activists, parties and media

For the purpose of this research, we interviewed several activists from the three civil initiatives, members of bigger political parties and journalists from influential media. Discussion topics included their perceptions of research-targeted cases, views on civil activism in Macedonia, and more broadly, their understanding of the political culture in Macedonia.

As regards the situation in Macedonia, a particularly controversial question was the accurate definition of authentic civil activism. Hence, definitions offered by our collocutors ranged from the understanding that any activism is authentic as long as it is part of the citizen’s identity, primarily the personal, and then the civil identity.¹⁰⁵ We also encountered inter-

pretations whereby authentic civil activism is simply a struggle to express thoughts and beliefs,¹⁰⁶ but also a means for more citizens to gather around an issue of common interest, i.e. respond to problems and act before the institutions.¹⁰⁷ More practical views on civil activism were offered as well, such as the definition of civil activism as strategy for improving public policies, i.e. the public wellbeing.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, non-authentic activism (dominant among interviewed activists was the opinion that counter-protests are the epitome of non-authentic activism) was viewed as pretence, installed activism, instrumentalization, spin, deceit, or attempt to express governmental views, but in other words,¹⁰⁹ or activism manipulated by political parties.¹¹⁰ Some activists believe that from 2009 onwards non-authentic activism emerged in the form of pro-governmental activism, i.e. an expectation that citizens should do the work of the government.¹¹¹ In the opinion of Nikola Naumoski, the main problem is that recently there are too many fronts and too little people (civil activists), preventing true development of and better civic engagement.

On the contrary, Roza Topuzova-Karevska from LDP believes that pro-governmental activism has always existed, but in covert forms. In her opinion, the government is no longer attempting to conceal this form of activism and openly establishes organizations for its own interests, instead of citizens' interests. Aleksandar Spasenovski from VMRO-DPMNE is of the standing that certain social roles are overlapping, which

does not exclude the premise that artificial activism does exist. In that, he criticized the opposition for tailoring the protests to its liking, but did not deny that the government is doing the same.

With the exception of Spasenovski, all collocutors agreed that the political culture is non-existent, low or in serious decline. The biggest problem was identified in distinguishing between the civil/policy and the party.¹¹² In their opinion, the thesis whereby only politically active citizens are allowed to protests has been successfully promoted, i.e. political parties successfully communicated the thesis that only party activism yields results¹¹³ or that a protest is an act of aggression,¹¹⁴ and there is no civic concept.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, negative labelling in the public discourse is a common feature and threatens potential activists. According to Taleski “*one enjoys freedom of opinion and expression, but also freedom of suffering the consequences*”. Taleski adds that in the period leading to 2006/07, the political climate progressed from subject- to participation-type. Nevertheless, it later made a turn downwards. Another phenomenon addressed by the interviewees implies an ultimate division of the society into ours and theirs, patriots and traitors.¹¹⁶

Journalist Goran Momirovski stressed that the political culture has been Europeanized in one aspect: political parties have exercised political marketing to perfection.

Contrary to other collocutors, Spasenovski thinks that the political culture in Macedonia has progressed, especially in comparison to other Central and East European countries. In stark opposition to above-referred division of traitors and patriots, Spasenovski reiterates that political communications between the opponents are on high level and that communication channels are not closed.

On the question inquiring about relations between civil movements and political parties, almost all activists said that in their respective cases they successfully managed to maintain the image of independent entities, although their respective constituencies (especially in the case of AMAN) included members of different political parties. As regards counter-protests, they all shared the impression that such activities are exclusively organized by the ruling party. Taleski believes that is more likely for members of fan clubs and religious followers who participate in counter-protests to have already pledged alliance to VMRO-DPMNE. However, his offer to assist the Freedom Square and the movement against police brutality were denied or at least he was asked not to act in the capacity of political party member. Similar experience was shared by Topuzova-Karevska in the case of AMAN. Namely, members of her party supported the protests, but were not prominent in activities so as to avoid misinterpretation of their involvement.

Referring to internal discussions within AMAN, Vangelov stressed that some members opposed

the decision to organize protests in front of the Parliament or the Government, as they feared being labelled as affiliates to the opposition.

Activists are grossly dissatisfied with media coverage of their movements, as well as with airing time and space given to their activities. Apart from the fear of being labelled, too much energy had been spent on justifying why one or another opposition member was spotted at the protests, although the movements were declared as independent. In relation to protests related to the city square, noticeable is that activists are disappointed that most media outlets, including pro-opposition outlets, focused on representing them as opponents to the church, although they were very careful in their press releases and statements and stressed their opposition to construction of any building on the square.¹¹⁷ First Archi-Brigade shared its concerns with the media reports aired on *TV AI*, as they paid greater attention to the aspect of human rights on the detriment of the actual reason behind the protests: architecture. Be that as it may, their movement gained popularity due to the counter-protests it triggered.

Threats and pressures were a regular feature in all movements and were emphasized by many activists.¹¹⁸

Although media representatives stressed that they did not suffer from political pressures when covering these events, according to Mirovski, in the constellation of different inter-

ests of journalists, editors and media owners unlikely is that interests of one political party will take primacy. He shared a rather interesting insight that during initial reports on Martin Neskovski's death, no other journalist at *TV Kanal 5* dared to cover the news.

Our collocutors had several ideas for overcoming problems in the field of civil activism. According to Naumoski, the civil society is too small and too weak to be the holder of changes, and therefore the opposition should take a more prominent role in designing a solution. Similar insight was provided by Momirovski who, aware that the government has no intention of changing its conduct, believes that the opposition should discontinue the measures it has taken in the past. Sarakini sees the solution in propaganda saturation and resorting to humour, while Vangelov believes in mobilization of people, one at a time. Golubovska is of the opinion that public labelling must be ignored and efforts should be made to strengthen solidarity within the movement. First Archi-Brigade believes that all movements should be radically inclusive and should not fear the support of party members, whereas Taleski identifies the solution with greater mobilization of narrowly-defined vocation and interest-based groups.

Momirovski stressed that civil initiatives can and should cooperate with political parties, as it is the only way for them to influence institutional changes, and Taleski's vision for SDSM is further cooperation with civil movements.

On the other spectrum of opinions, Spasenovski believes that shaping of movements by political parties is a brutal practice. In his opinion, efforts are needed to strengthen the political culture for the parties to withdraw within their inherent framework of operation. He understands that it is in the best interest of the opposition to stimulate activism, but civil activism must develop spontaneously, rather than be modelled, as is the case now.

Conclusions inferred on the basis of interviews go along the line of conclusions produced by the media analysis. Namely, activists and members of opposition parties believe that negative labelling in the media further sustains the moral-intellectual leadership enjoyed by governing structures and maintain their hegemonic position, thus excluding the threatening Otherness represented by civil activists. Furthermore, most interviewees believe that counter-protests are non-authentic and installed, enabling the conclusion that the government attempts to preserve itself as "undivided" subject, instead dividing the citizens and instigating them one against the other.

Also, the fact that it was difficult, if not impossible, to identify counter-protesters willing to be interviewed, while those identified declined participation in this research, further confirms the thesis that they only simulate civil activism, lack arguments to support their doings, and are used as tool in the hegemonic struggle.

4 | CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Facts and positions presented here indicate that Macedonia is characterized by or moves towards non-participation and subject-type political culture. This becomes obvious from the attempts of governing authorities to counteract different opinions and make maximum use of their powers to organize counter-protests. Contrary to Kitschelt's belief that political parties and social movements operate in two separate systems of actions, evidence provided in this research shows that is not the case in Macedonia, as the ruling party assumes the role of movement-instigator. By means of counter-protests, governing authorities attempt to achieve greater representativeness in the realm of civil activism to their own benefit, thus crushing all chances for development of independent civil activism, while public labelling and counter-protests increase the social transaction costs.

Analysis of the public discourse concerning the three case studies provides the conclusion that through media and counter-protests governing structures work along two lines: first, any protests that is not pro-governmental (or contests governmental policy or position) is invalid by the mere fact of be-

ing pro-oppositional, and second, those who protest are the Others (opponents and members of disenfranchised groups), are of different identity and as such do not belong in the public discourse.

Specific referrals made to opposition members or civil activists close to the Soros Foundation allows us to conclude that the dominant strategy in place aims to demonstrate that Macedonia cannot have authentic civil activism, unless it is supported by popular vote (elections), i.e. unless it represents the government/the ruling party. Recollections of 1990s and linking the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia to SDSM is indicative of the argument that the civil society sector was always dominated by the party and served its purpose. As stressed by Topuzova-Karevska, there were always organizations that in one way or another worked for the government. However, she believed that in the short period 1998-2002, large number of non-governmental organizations were established in different areas of interests and for the purpose of supporting the ruling party, in the likelihood of the latter becoming the opposition.

Each discourse depends on sediments accrued in time, i.e. what has been said, conceptualized and done. Therefore, discourse is a variable category and derives its meaning from the actors, which in our case are the authorities, parties, civil activists and the media. Accordingly, civil activists and political parties are in permanent struggle for the dominant (hegemonic) position in creation and interpretation of the civil discourse. Since we live in times when the ruling party attempts to impose a completely new paradigm, i.e. association with the “*criminal 1990s*” and “*logical*” coalition among civil initiatives, the Foundation Open Society -Macedonia, SDSM and the opposition, dominant is the narrative that any open protest against the current government is an effort to reverse its achievements and restore the old relations typical for the 1990s. That is why its most power instrument is public labelling of civil activists.

By demonstrating capacity for alleged civil mobilization in support of governmental policies and actions or in protest against the opposition, an illusion is created about the existence of a dynamic and free civil society, as coveted by Linz and Stepan, and that it already accepted new relations and paradigms imposed by the government.

Discourse is created by so so-called hegemonic struggles for “*political and moral-intellectual leadership for articulation of identities and meanings*”. This is why the government attempts to create a balance, by means of

organizing counter-protests (civil counter-balance) in response to any opposition to the government’s discourse, and second, to label and belittle anyone and everyone who dares to question the official discourse established by the government, and third, to give the media a special role in securing itself as the political and moral-intellectual hegemon (dominant factor) with exclusive rights to establish which civil movements are good and which pertain to the Otherness and represent seeds of discontent in the society.

Combining these elements with practices on linking civil initiatives with foreign donors and elements, creates an impression that they do represent some kind of Otherness, which is not an indigenous attempt to improve the society as a whole, but works on fulfilment of other, foreign interests. The hegemonic position enjoyed by the government’s discourse versus civil protests can be sustained only by maintaining social antagonisms as the only way to insist on the existence of “*threatening Otherness that enhances the government’s discourse and those mobilized around it*”. That is why civil protests organized to oppose the church on the square, the murder of Martin Neskovski and AMAN were abused by the government as they provided a political opportunity to strengthen its discourse in the said matters. Namely, governing authorities strengthened their positions by promoting religion as state doctrine and moral vertical (in the first case), making it clear that they do not intent to build an inclusive (and liberal)

society, but showing that the voice of “*gay people and atheists*” opposing the church has no place in the public discourse and by applying the logic that everybody who is against the church is actually “*gay and atheist*”. In the second case, the government resorted to classical populist discourse that the issue of police brutality must not be “*politicized*” and that political responsibility should not be demanded, because the authorities – in their expert knowledge and capacities – will resolve the case on the basis of its merits, while those attempting to protest are politicized, manipulated and instrumentalized by SDSM and Soros, both depicted as symbols of the Otherness and the disenfranchised. In the third case, yet again populist discourse was used to defocus the public from the current standard of living and problems associated with it, notably through counter-protests that shifted the focus to the narrative about the bleak transition and privatization pursued by SDSM and Branko Crvenkovski, as only culprits for the country’s distressed economy. All cases include an element of maintaining the society as “*split subject*” with mandatory distinction between the Self and the Other, in order to prolong social antagonisms and keep the focus on the need for defining of the Self. Furthermore, notions such as “SDSM” and “SOROS” serve the purpose of empty, but powerful signifiers that can accommodate anything beyond the frontiers (of the accepted identity) and therefore create a stretching delineation for exclusion from the dominant discourse.

Finally, through its difficult media struggle to dominate the public discourse, in all three cases the government did not allow these events to “*dislocate*” the discourse, i.e. avoided situations that cannot be interpreted to its benefit in terms of moral and political righteousness, and not in terms of social necessity and/or responsibility.

Moreover, a specific problem especially noted in regard to the First Archi-Brigade is seen in the tendency for corporative and particularity, i.e. insistence to identify their initiative with a narrow interest (such as the public space on the square) and avoid putting forward broader demands, due to own general interests. This was skilfully used by the government in the institutional response to protests against police brutality and the successful annihilation of reasons for their continuation.

All discussions lead to the inevitable issue of relations between political parties and civil initiatives and organizations, and the approach pursued by the two groups. There are two dominant views on this matter: the groups should be completely separated one from another (advocated by Aleksandar Spasenovski) or they should pursue an ever-closer cooperation (advocated by Goran Momirovski).

Apart from these two micro-level solutions, it is of utmost importance for all parties to understand the importance of civil society, leave it breathe and institutionalize cooperation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the civil initiatives:

1. They need to act in a more strategic and creative (on-line) manner, and promote their messages in public, in hope that negative labelling by the mass media would become a matter of the past;
2. They should approach and establish direct contacts with citizens, people to people, in order to re-connect with their constituency and deconstruct the myth about CSO's non-authenticity;
3. They should use more and diverse forms of protests, following the example set by Singing Citizens of Skopje, or use humour/satire as manner of expressing protest/opposition;
4. They should focus on clarifying the distinction between policy and party, as basis for social activism;
5. They should ignore negative labels and unresolved issues within the movement, in order to build solidarity among the membership;
6. They need to avoid particularism of action and put forward broader and comprehensive demands, meaning that in addition to specific demands or causes, successful

civil movements commonly have a broader agenda that covers a range of general policy demands or reflects certain (ideological) values that underline civil activism as a whole. Existence of such agenda should not be treated as disadvantage, but rather advantage and opportunity for specific expression and broader social and ideology framework;

7. Civil initiatives need a broad, inclusive approach to all citizens interested in civil activism, regardless of their political affiliation;
8. They should exercise clear and transparent methods of operation and be adherent in sending out messages to the public.

For the media:

1. Media workers must uphold the professional standards and refrain from negative comments;
2. They need a broader understanding of civil activism and should interpret it against the matrix of democratic values. This implies media's openness to civil initiatives and interest in their causes, free from prejudice and labelling;

For the political parties

1. They should participate in broad participatory forums, together with civil initiatives and other political parties;
2. They should refrain from abusing civil initiatives as instruments for agenda promotion and enable their spontaneous development;
3. Political and civil doings must be distinguished, especially in cases when party members decide to join initiatives and movements;
4. The public discourse must be opened (liberalized), in terms of acknowledging CSO's political engagement, exercised by means of criticism and proposal of new policies, as normal occurrence in the society. Party must be separated from policy and policy must be open for CSO contributions. The realm of politics should be treated only in terms of power struggles;
5. Political parties should refrain from hate speech and labelling of civil activists;
6. Specific activities are needed to develop and improve the political culture and to open up arenas for citizens' independent action.

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ANNEX 1

List of interviewees

1. Jasmina Golubovska, Helsinki Committee of Human Right in the Republic of Macedonia, activist for AMAN
2. Kiril Efremovski, Coalition “All for Fair Trials”, activist in the protests against police brutality
3. Martin Nanik, activist in the protests against police brutality
4. Nikola Naumoski, Freedom Square
5. Petrit Sarakini, Macedonian Institute for Media, activist for AMAN
6. Vladimir Vangelov, activist for AMAN
7. Aleksandar Gocev, activist for AMAN
8. Gago and Caci, activists for the First Archi-Bigade
9. Goran Momirovski, editor at TV Kanal 5 and columnist for Republika
10. Miroslava Simonovska, journalist for Focus and Plusinfo
11. Aleksandar Spasenovski, MP from VMRO-DPMNE
12. Dane Taleski, former executive director of the Institute for Social Democracy “Progress”, SDSM member
13. Roza Topuzova-Karevska, Vice President of LDP

NOTES

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- 15 Decision to clarify this event as “protests against the church” is not random, but was made due to the fact that this event is best known under the given formulation, although later in the paper it is revealed that the formulation was construed by the media.
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- 97 Prime-time news on MTV1, 11-12-20.6.2011 115 J. Golubovska
- 98 Prime-time news on MTV1, 18.6.2011 116 M. Nanik, V. Vangelov
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