

Securitisation versus citizenship in the Balkan states: Populist and authoritarian misuses of security threats and civic responses

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Abstract: *The objective of this article is threefold: to identify the main security threats in the post-conflict and (post)-crisis Balkans; to analyse the emergence and strengthening of authoritarian and far-right tendencies as both a response and catalyst to securitarian policies and politics, as well as their variation across the region; and to examine the capacity of civil society to produce alternative discourses and mobilise resistance through various forms of civic activism and popular protest. The analysis is structured in three parts. The first part introduces three country cases – Bulgaria (mainstreaming of populist securitisation); Macedonia (ethnic securitisation in a deeply-divided society); and Serbia (democratic backsliding and populist authoritarianism). The three case studies reveal an important variation in the dynamics and outcomes of a broader populist and authoritarian trend that swept across the region. The three countries illustrate various types of civic resistance and contestatory citizenship. The two other parts are comparative: They enlarge the countries' coverage and identify major regional trends from two perspectives: populist and authoritarian misuses of security threats and authoritarian trends; and emergence and diversification of forms of citizenship as expression of civic resilience. Nationalist, populist and authoritarian politics have moved from the periphery of the political scene to the mainstream. The trend takes a paradoxical form: on the one hand, a promotion of the EU agenda and regional co-operation; on the other hand, securitisation, construction of political opponents, ethnic, religious and cultural Others, and civic activists as threats to national security and national identity. The civic resistance and human rights responses to populist authoritarianism and mainstreamed securitisation are analysed through the theoretical lenses of citizenship. It expresses the transition from the engineering project of building civil society in post-communist countries to the emergence of new forms of civic agency. Three types of citizenship are studied comparatively – green, contestatory, and solidary.*

Key words: *securitisation; authoritarianism; populism; citizenship; civic mobilisations; Bulgaria; Macedonia; Serbia; the Balkans; South-Eastern Europe*

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1 Introduction

A transition from post-totalitarian and authoritarian regimes to a democratic liberal society, a prosperous market economy and a vibrant civil society. This was the project and the promise of the post-communist transition at the beginning of the 1990s. Twenty-seven years later the situation is quite different: A rise in and mainstreaming of national populism; authoritarian trends; the façade of illiberal democracy; and an uneven capacity of civil society to resist the erosion of democracy characterise the Balkan states. Authorities in these states have increasingly justified their populist and authoritarian policies by reference to growing security threats. These policies have had a negative impact on the protection of individual and collective rights in the region, and have threatened to undermine pluralism and free and fair elections, thus also the very foundations of democracy. The objective of the article is threefold: to identify the main security threats in the post-conflict and (post)-crisis Balkans; to analyse the emergence and strengthening of authoritarian and far-right tendencies as both a response and catalyst to securitarian policies and politics, as well as their variation across the region; and to examine the capacity of civil society to produce alternative discourses and mobilise resistance through various forms of civic activism and popular protest.

There are two major divisions and crises that – perceived as security threats – provide the context for this authoritarian and populist trend in the region. One of them largely originates from the migration crisis and its mismanagement by the European Union (EU), within a broader context of attempts to deal with the economic crisis and its consequences, which is principally reflected in the recent experience of Bulgaria and, to a smaller extent, also in other countries. The other draws on the legacy of the nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and is illustrated in the different examples of Macedonia and Serbia.

The analysis is structured in three parts. The first part introduces three country cases – Bulgaria (profiling mainstreaming of populist securitisation); Macedonia (ethnic securitisation in a deeply-divided society); and Serbia (democratic backsliding and populist authoritarianism). The three case studies reveal an important variation in the dynamics and outcomes of a broader populist and authoritarian trend that swept across the region. Bulgaria's democracy score according to the Freedom House is the highest among the analysed countries: 80 (out of 100) – 'free', and a lower figure for freedom of the press – 'partly free'. Macedonia is at the opposite pole with 57 – 'partly free' and 'not free' press. Serbia stands between the two poles: 76 – 'free' and 'partly free' press¹ and backsliding. According to the latest report of Freedom House,² the three countries vary in their European profile: Bulgaria has been a member of the EU since 2007; Macedonia and Serbia both are candidate countries. The three countries illustrate various types of civic resistance and contestatory citizenship. The two other parts of the article are comparative: They enlarge the countries' coverage and identify major regional trends from two perspectives: populist and authoritarian misuses

1 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017> (last visited 11 July 2017).

2 As above.

of security threats and authoritarian trends; and the emergence and diversification of forms of citizenship as an expression of civic resilience.

The theoretical background of the study is built around three axes: securitisation; authoritarian trends; and citizenship. *Securitisation* is conceived, in the perspective of the Copenhagen school, as a discursive construction of the threat and the transformation of a challenge into a security problem (Buzan & Waever 2006; Buzan, Waeve & De Wilde 1998). The article borrows particularly from the critical sociological approach of Thierry Balzacq: 'Processes of securitisation could happen even in the absence of explicit discourse and, often, of identifiable audience' (Balzacq 2016: 204). The visible and invisible processes of securitisation will be analysed in the Balkans with an emphasis on their 'fundamental aim – preserving the regime' (Balzacq 2016: 207). Our major disagreement with the securitisation theories is the understanding of the relevant audience: It is conceived in terms of acceptance and agreement that is necessary for the intersubjective construction of the security threat (Balzacq 2005; Balzacq 2016: 195). This homogeneous and passive understanding of the audience limits the possibilities for resilience; therefore our preference for the concept of citizenship with its strong theoretical potential for dealing with agency and activities.

A major *authoritarian trend* has in the last few years swept across post-communist and other European states, undermining democracy and human rights. There has been a wide variation in outcomes of this trend across the continent due to different historical, institutional and political contexts of various countries. While growing authoritarian and populist currents in Western Europe negatively affected the quality of democracy, the same trends threatened the very foundations of democratic regimes in post-communist states in the Balkans. One of the main sources of this trend in the latter states has been the populist and authoritarian misuses of security threats by both the far-right and mainstream political parties, which undermined individual and collective rights, even political competition.

The choice to conceptualise civic resistance and responses to authoritarianism and populism through the theoretical lenses of *citizenship* is substantiated by three reasons. During communism, citizenship was understood as belonging and identity, as integration into the state; one of the democratic discoveries of post-communism is citizenship as participation, activism, and contestation. The second reason is the theoretical richness of the concept which distinguishes different types of citizenship – green, contestatory, solidary, digital, creative (Krasteva 2013; Krasteva 2016a) that could explain the diversity of mobilisations. Citizenship expresses the transition from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen 2008); from the engineering project of building civil society to the emergence of a new form of civic agency.

2 Bulgaria: Mainstreaming of populist securitisation

The Bulgarian case is characteristic of three trends in South-Eastern Europe (SEE): securitisation by above and by below; mainstreaming of national populism; and securitisation of civic activists. National populism

is – and often wants to be – a paradoxical phenomenon (Krasteva 2016). Here, we summarise its Bulgarian version in three paradoxes and two periods.

2.1 First period: Late emergence of far-right extremism but firm establishment in the political scene

National populism³ emerged in the form of a democratic paradox: In the 1990s, democracy was fragile, but there were no influential extremist parties; once democracy was consolidated, extremist parties appeared and achieved success. In 2005, Volen Siderov literally burst out of his television show ‘Attack’ into parliament with his new party ‘Attack’ (ATAKA). Radical nationalism happened to be not a comet-like phenomenon. Even after the decline of some of its pioneers, nationalism has not shrunk like shagreen, but has demonstrated resilience and established a lasting presence on the Bulgarian post-communist political scene (Krasteva 2016).

The second paradox is the surprising nexus between far-right populism and domestic crises. Generally, they are conceived as interconnected. The Bulgarian case shows a different picture. The ‘usual suspects’ – severe economic crises; political instability; waves of refugees – will come later and cannot be held responsible for the genesis of the first radical party (Krasteva 2016). The love for crises is inherent to national populism and is conceptualised by Krasteva as follows: ‘If crises did not exist, populism would have invented them’ (Krasteva 2017).

The third paradox is that the diversification and multiplication of extremist nationalist political parties⁴ do not increase the nationalist electorate. The unification of the three main ‘patriotic’ parties for the presidential elections in 2016 and parliamentary elections in 2017 shows similar electoral results.⁵ This paradox is positive – the proliferation of nationalist leaders and parties does not increase the number of nationalist voters.

What is crucial for our analysis is the symbolic cartography of national populism. It was initially designed by Volen Siderov for ‘Attack’ and remains fundamentally the same for the nationalist coalition today, independently of the leadership decline of Siderov himself. Authoritarianism, populism and nativism are the three pillars of radical far-right parties (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013: 497). All are present in ATAKA’s symbolic universe. The latter, however, could be better understood via another triad: identitarianism; post-secularism; and statism (Krasteva 2016). The identitarian pole concentrates on the overproduction of ‘Othering’ and expresses its politics of fear. Religionisation of politics is a fundamental post-communist trend of the political instrumentalisation of religion. It is even more central in the nationalist symbolic map, acting as its second pillar. ‘Orthodox solidarity’ has been the name of ATAKA’s programme at several elections and is crucial for the post-secularist

3 For the purpose of the study we use national populism and far-right populism interchangeably.

4 For details on internal divisions, splits, new nationalist parties, see Krasteva (2016).

5 The candidate for president of the ‘United patriots’ in 2016 received 573 000 votes or 14.97%, which is less than the support for Volen Siderov in 2016 – 649 387 votes or 24.05%.

message. Bringing the state back into politics, and revitalising it against the neo-liberal weakening is the core of the third pole of statism and the politics of sovereignty. The people – the *sine qua non* of any national populism – are in the centre of the three-pole map. The radical demophilia is defined and defended through radical anti-elitism (Krsteva 2016). The symbolic universe could be summarised with two characteristics: the overproduction of ‘Others’ and enemies; and the transformation of ‘Others’ into a security threat. The most emblematic ‘Other’ transformed into enemy are the Roma, conceived not as a vulnerable social group, but as a threat to the national identity and public order.

2.2 Second period: Mainstreaming of populist securitisation

The presidential campaign of 2016 exemplified the hegemonisation of populist securitisation of migration. The far-right candidate, Krassimir Karakachanov, built his campaign on anti-refugee and anti-EU migration policy and attained a significant increase in votes.⁶ The left-wing candidate and current President, Rumen Radev, presented refugees as a security threat and raised severe criticism to the EU migration policy (Krsteva forthcoming). Once elected, in the beginning of 2017, the President asked the interim government he had appointed to annul the national strategy for integration of refugees.⁷

The second period differs from the first in four significant ways. First, the new emblematic figure of the ‘Other’ is the refugee constructed not as a humanitarian problem, but as a threat to national security and national identity. Second, the major difference is that the overproduction of securitarian threats comes not only from the far-right pole of the political scene, but also from the mainstream. The third difference is discursive: The impact of the discourses, themes and diagnoses of populist securitisation succeeded in framing the media, public and political discourses, making their political influence much more pronounced than their electoral support. Fourth, the populist securitisation from above could not but stimulate securitisation from below – vigilante, ‘hunters’ of refugees have been mediatised and heroised.

2.3 Civic activism in situations of mainstreaming of securitisation

This issue is summarised by two contrasting trends: the emergence of new forms and actors of civic activism; and the securitisation of civic actors by populism. For the purpose of this short case study, we use the example of a new civic actor of the wave of solidarity at the beginning of the refugee crisis: ‘Friends of Refugees’. This is a volunteer citizen movement, spontaneously created in June 2013 as a response to the refugee crisis and the inability of institutions to manage it appropriately. A small group of committed citizens succeeded in an impressively short time in attracting several other very different types of civic, humanitarian, business, numerous small human rights groups and a large number of individual citizens. They concentrate on three activities: humanitarian help; mobilisation against extremism and the increasing number of xenophobic attacks against refugees; and the symbolic fight for words: Nationalist

6 From 32 236 in 2011 to 573 016 in 2016.

7 A new slightly reformulated strategy has been adopted, also as a response of a strong media and civic criticism.

actors and some mainstream politicians constantly sought to impose the term 'illegal immigrants' while human rights activists fought for the legitimacy of the term 'refugee' (Krasteva 2016). Today Friends of Refugees has lost its public visibility and functions as a digital network of engaged activists sharing practices of solidarity.

The contrasting trend is the securitisation of the civic activists themselves – they are ridiculed and marginalised by populist actors and numerous media outlets, and presented as national traitors, financed by foreign donors, promoters of 'failed' multiculturalism and liberalism. This is a general trend in the entire Balkan region, and has been particularly exacerbated during the migration crisis.

3 Macedonia: Ethnic securitisation in a deeply-divided society

In the last three decades Macedonia and Serbia experienced turbulent political change, repeatedly shifting between authoritarianism and democracy. Just like in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, the legacy of violent nationalist conflicts – a massive restructuring of international and internal borders/boundaries, changing ethnic composition and political institutions – keeps resurfacing and threatens to eradicate gains in economic and democratic development achieved in the 2000s. National identities hardened during conflicts and thus provided a springboard for exclusionary policies towards ethnic and other minorities within and 'rival' groups beyond international borders. Like Bosnia, Macedonia is a plural society in which political institutions are designed to closely follow and manage ethnic divisions. At independence, Macedonia introduced a soft, informal power-sharing arrangement of representatives of the majority of Macedonians and of a large minority of ethnic Albanians (about a quarter of the population). Power-sharing coalitions in government were formed by a Macedonian party – the Social Democratic Union (SDSM), who were refurbished communists, or the conservative Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (VMRO-DPMNE) – and their ethnic Albanian partners. Ethnic antagonisms remained, as well as unresolved issues with neighbouring states, including Greece (over the country's name resulting in its international recognition as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – FYROM); Bulgaria (language/national identity); and Serbia (Orthodox church), so that the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and major Western powers became involved early on in an attempt to prevent a breakdown of the state.

The transition from communism ended in a hybrid regime and not in democracy. Newly-introduced multi-party elections were not free and fair, and freedom of speech, the press, association and assembly were frequently and systematically violated by power holders. Such an arrangement, in which opposition parties are permitted to contest elections but are severely constrained by incumbents in the process, is called 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way 2010). The SDSM initiated this authoritarian cycle and justified restrictions to the democratic process by state building and related security threats. International pressure in the following years led to more open elections and government turnover, but still within the context of hybrid regime. In 2001, a large group of ethnic Albanian rebels initiated an uprising, modelled on the

Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), confronting the state's security forces and undermining an already weak and insecure new state. The conflict ended in a peace agreement brokered by extensive international intervention, which turned Macedonia into an increasingly formally institutionalised (almost bi-national) consociational/power-sharing state with proto-national territorial autonomies at the local level. The 2001 uprising, however, remained a major source of tension as many ethnic Macedonians kept referring to it when supporting the mainstream parties' securitising discourse and policies. The rebels acquired popular support and replaced established ethnic Albanian parties in government coalition. While subsequent elections were more open and press freedom advanced due to international pressure, many citizens felt left out as their living standards and economy tumbled, and clientelism and corruption remained extensive.

In 2006, the VMRO returned to power, this time with a technocratic and anti-corruption programme. However, as popular support for the rival SDSM collapsed in successive elections, their rule turned increasingly nationalist, populist and authoritarian. As Greece vetoed Macedonia's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the nationalist 'antiquisation' project, aimed at transforming Macedonian national identity from that embedded in Slavic Orthodox heritage into identity based on alleged ancient Macedonian roots. A major construction project in the capital Skopje and other cities involved the building of hundreds of 'ancient' monuments, triumphal arches and buildings where none existed before, while facades of communist era buildings were renovated in the baroque and neo-classical styles. The monumental publishing projects, focusing largely on literature and history, which aimed to demonstrate historical continuity with ancient Macedonia, unfolded in parallel (Georgievska-Jakovleva 2016). Ruling parties built a large clientelist network in the public sector and gained control of the media by undermining the public broadcaster and relying on privately-owned pro-government newspapers and television networks. Elections also turned increasingly unfree and unfair.

Since the emergence of Macedonia as an independent state in the wake of Yugoslavia's break-up to 2014, civil society has remained weak and marginalised. Non-state initiatives had long included only a small, highly professionalised NGO sector. This is not surprising as most plural societies tend to shun popular politics and focus on elite co-operation to achieve political stability (Lijphart 1977). In this case, the elite focus was boosted by international intervention as the EU and the US officials preferred to deal with party leaders and avoid less predictable civil society activists. A major authoritarian shift since 2008 then provoked response from civil society. In 2014, student protests, including the occupation of universities, stirred discontent among public sector employees against authorities. Students provided a horizontal, committee-style organisation model to others and, despite initially focusing narrowly on higher education and student welfare, had a broader political impact (Vankovska 2016).

In 2015, a wire-tapping scandal erupted as the opposition leaked audio recordings of government officials who suggested that thousands were under government surveillance, including opposition leaders, judges, civil society activists and journalists, and provided ample evidence of corruption and electoral fraud. The opposition (SDSM) leader was indicted for 'espionage' and agitating to 'overthrow the constitutional order'. After

peaceful protests, violence erupted on the streets of Skopje as the riot police suppressed protests in the wake of one of the leaks. Then, civil society protests (*#Protestiram*) and opposition demonstrations unfolded in parallel, culminating in a massive protest on 17 May. The ruling party organised a counter-protest to demonstrate its considerable popular base. In parallel, violent clashes occurred between a group of ethnic Albanians and security forces in North West Macedonia, in which several police officers died. The government exploited this event to boost its security agenda and to shift public focus away from pro-democracy protests.

Under pressure from the EU and US officials, the mainstream parties agreed to organise early parliamentary elections and to investigate the wire-tapping scandal through the interim government. As the VMRO reneged on parts of the agreement, tens of thousands protested for two months, demanding free and fair elections, and opposing authoritarian and nationalist policies. In turn, the VMRO organised large pro-government rallies. Ultimately, the parliamentary elections proved inconclusive as the two major Macedonian parties did not receive a clear majority, making the ethnic Albanian parties the king-makers. Still, the latter lost a major share of the minority group's vote as many apparently voted for the opposition SDSM – in contrast to previous elections. As the ethnic Albanian party started negotiations with the SDSM, the President refused to offer the coalition in the making a formal mandate to form government, and the VMRO orchestrated rallies of its supporters, including a mob attack on parliament that injured several opposition leaders. Both unconvincingly cited security concerns, such as a potential 'division' of Macedonia due to demands of ethnic Albanian parties – until recently their coalition partners. Eventually, the VMRO withdrew under strong international pressure, leading to a government turnover. In summary, Macedonia is an example of broad and effective mobilisation of opposition parties and civil society in reaction to authoritarianism and attempts to securitise politics and ethnic relations.

4 Serbia: Backsliding democracy and populist authoritarianism

The nationalist legacy of the former Yugoslavia is also important when it comes to explaining the government's securitisation strategies and authoritarian trends in contemporary Serbia, although in a somewhat different way than in Macedonia (and Bosnia). Serbia and Croatia emerged from the Yugoslav conflicts as increasingly mono-national and nationalising states in which – at least some – ethnic groups find themselves at the receiving end of nationalist governments. While the position of minorities, including the protection of both individual and collective rights, has improved considerably since the war, it still depends heavily on the mainstream party competition and bilateral relations between states. The end of communism in Serbia resulted in a hybrid regime. Slobodan Milošević, an energetic communist functionary, employed nationalist appeals to gain popular support at a time when communism became unpopular, and exploited state resources to build a competitive authoritarian regime. Despite recurrent popular mobilisation against authoritarian rule, Milošević managed to stay in power, partly due to extensive authoritarian manipulation and partly because of fragmented opposition. Still, the regime grew increasingly exclusionary and repressive, and gradually lost its social base. In 1999, NATO intervention in Kosovo

effectively created a protectorate run by the UN representatives and NATO-led military forces, while Serbia lost control over its autonomous province. A year later, a massive popular mobilisation removed Milošević from power as he refused to leave power after the opposition's election victory (Vladisavljević 2016).

The new democratic ruling coalition introduced democratic elections, economic reforms and promoted regional co-operation and EU integration. While government coalitions changed and debated about EU integration, Kosovo's secession and economic reform persisted, democratic parties from the anti-Milošević coalition remained dominant until 2012. Elections now were fully free and fair, and press freedom advanced considerably, as well as political stability. Simultaneously, the executive kept encroaching upon the power of the legislature, the judiciary and agencies of horizontal accountability, such as the Central Bank, the Ombudsman, the Public Information Commissioner and the Anti-Corruption Agency. The growing economic crisis since 2008 revealed a large clientelist system across the public sector as ruling parties abused state resources to employ their activists, supporters and friends (Vladisavljević 2011). A sharp fall in living standards then made the ruling Democratic Party (DS) unpopular, which made a turnover in power possible. The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which originated from the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS), the main carrier of exclusionary nationalism and chauvinism since the early 1990s, was the main beneficiary as leading SRS politicians turned moderate and suddenly started promoting the agenda of EU integration, good relations with Serbia's neighbours and economic reform, aiming at international actors and undecided voters. After winning the 2012 elections, the SNS-led coalition gradually consolidated its power as the DS collapsed, leaving the country without an effective opposition.

The first casualty of Aleksandar Vučić, an increasingly popular Prime Minister, was press freedom. He systematically undermined the public broadcaster and most influential newspapers, while using pro-government tabloids and TV networks to criminalise opposition. Vučić pursued a somewhat schizophrenic but effective political strategy. It involved the extensive promotion of the EU agenda, regional co-operation, economic reform and anti-corruption initiatives for which he received praise by international players and those local NGOs involved in post-conflict reconciliation – formerly his fierce critics. The SNS also discussed the 'normalisation' of relations with Kosovo's government, risking a popular backlash since many of its supporters opposed such policy. Simultaneously, however, the SNS tried to criminalise opponents by way of the tabloid media, which became mouthpieces of the government. The media frequently employed hate speech and led chauvinist campaigns against 'rival' ethnic groups – in line with the ruling party's roots in the extremist SRS – and with the implicit (and sometimes explicit) support of the prime minister. The government rhetoric of regional co-operation occasionally turned sour and antagonistic towards Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Macedonia, where it found 'worthy' associates. Actual and potential security threats, originating from both the legacy of nationalist violence of the 1990s and the recent migrant crisis, served as a foundation for attacks on government opponents within and beyond the country's borders. Elections remained competitive but not free and fair, with highly asymmetrical resources of ruling and opposition parties and little access of the latter to the electronic media (Vladisavljević, Krstić & Pavlović 2017).

While campaigning on an anti-corruption ticket, the SNS considerably expanded corruption and clientelism levels.

The authoritarian turn remained largely unopposed, not only because of weak and fragmented opposition parties but also the silence of civil society. In the 1990s, massive repeated waves of popular resistance to authoritarian rule in Serbia were an outlier among post-communist authoritarian states (Vladisavljević 2016). In the early 2000s, however, many civil society activists moved to the public sector while key NGOs became highly professionalised. A more diffuse part of civil society demobilised as free and fair elections provided an opportunity to pursue various agendas within democratic institutions. After 2012, Vučić initially bought off sections of civil society by the rhetoric of reconciliation and regional co-operation. An effective challenge initially came from the Ombudsman, who investigated cases of abuses of power by government, hate speech in the tabloid media and government restrictions on the independent media. Civic resistance slowly started to grow, principally from local initiatives that focused on local issues, such as environmental problems, unlawful construction projects and corruption.

The most visible protest emerged in the capital Belgrade in response to a major government-initiated but privately-run construction project labelled the 'Belgrade Waterfront' (Borić 2017). A group of urban development activists, supported by influential architects, civil society organisations and intellectuals, initiated a protest campaign. They demonstrated against massive violations of existing urban development plans; the looming major damage to Belgrade's central, most prized but still undeveloped riverside area; the great potential for corruption in suspicious government deals with foreign investors; as well as the irresponsible, authoritarian and unlawful behaviour of both Serbian state and city authorities. The small initiative soon turned into a major popular challenge to power holders. As precincts closed on the night of the 2016 parliamentary elections, bulldozers entered the Belgrade Waterfront area to demolish a number of remaining buildings. Guards and passers-by were removed by masked men in unregistered vehicles, while the police repeatedly refused to send officers to investigate the cases. The Ombudsman's investigation later revealed that various state agencies colluded to aid the illegal clearing of land that authorities had targeted for the Belgrade Waterfront. In response, the civil society initiative grew considerably stronger, repeatedly attracting thousands (occasionally tens of thousands) of people to its protests against severe violations of individual and property rights and growing authoritarianism. A coalition of local civil society initiative gradually emerged, setting the stage for the expansion of popular mobilisation. After the unfair 2017 presidential elections, students and other citizens protested for weeks, occasionally drawing large crowds. Overall, Serbia involves both successful populist appeals of authoritarian incumbents and growing popular resistance to authoritarianism and securitisation.

5 Populist misuses of security threats and authoritarian effects

Contemporary misuses of security threats in the Balkans are rooted, at least partly, in political legacies of the second half of the twentieth century. The Cold War sharply divided the region, not only into communist and anti-communist parts, but it also separated Yugoslavia from the Soviet

bloc, and Albania from both, providing an excuse to governments to treat various issues in economic and political development as undercutting or enhancing national security. The 'national question' also facilitated securitarian responses, principally in highly-complex and multinational Yugoslavia, but also in Bulgaria regarding its Turkish minority in the 1980s and in Greece with regard to the Greek-Turkish conflict within and over Cyprus. Finally, both communist regimes and the anti-communist military regime in Greece largely treated potential and actual informal political opposition as enemies of the state and dealt with them accordingly, systematically violating the human rights of their citizens. In the 1990s, new authoritarianism in the former Yugoslavia was driven, and justified, by state-building and security issues. Real and imagined security threats, exploited by authoritarian rulers, resonated well with large sections of the electorate and reduced the appeal of pro-democracy parties and movements.

In the early 2000s, nationalist and chauvinist claims were largely pushed towards the margins of mainstream politics throughout the Balkans, as democratising trends shifted elite and popular energies of mainstream parties to democracy, economic development and EU integration. In turn, this trend relaxed ethnic animosities in and between new states, provided more rights and protection for ethnic minorities and supported regional economic and political co-operation. In Bulgaria, the Turkish minority party entered a governing coalition. In the former Yugoslavia, authoritarian parties, such as the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), the VMRO and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) changed leaders, accepted the democratic rules of the game, facilitated the integration of their countries into the EU and included ethnic minority parties into government, while far-right parties and movements had limited access to the media. In Bosnia and Macedonia, which were gradually recovering from violent conflicts, even nationalist parties softened their positions somewhat hoping to gain from the prospects of EU accession. The electoral rise of ATAKA in Bulgaria is an exception to this trend.

Nevertheless, major external shocks – such as the increasing global focus on terrorism and related security threats, the financial and economic crises and, more recently, the migrant crisis and its mismanagement by the EU – undermined genuine achievements in democratic and economic development and regional co-operation. A spread of the economic crisis to the region ended growth and boosted socio-economic inequalities, and undermined economically-ineffective democratic governments, which had become increasingly clientelist and corrupt. The trends provided ample space for populist, authoritarian and exclusionary politics, this time at the hands of governments and mainstream parties, which also led many citizens to withdraw from political participation. While rhetorically promoting the EU integration agenda and economic reform, the populist parties and governments increasingly deployed securitarian discourses, partly borrowing from the securitarian rhetoric of Western governments focused on fighting terrorism and partly drawing on their parties' baggage of nationalist and chauvinist rhetoric. Implications of this trend for democracy and individual and minority rights have been considerable.

This trend unfolded across the Balkans but produced different trajectories, illustrated by our case studies, due to their different structural,

institutional and political contexts. In much of the Balkans after communism, the far-right parties are the main source of the return to securitisation of ethnic relations. As in Central Europe, the far right has drawn heavily on the nationalist legacy, including hostilities to ethnic minorities and 'rival' neighbouring states, and not on opposition to immigrants as in Western Europe (Minkenberg 2015). In Serbia and Croatia, extreme nationalist and populist parties have been a permanent fixture on the political stage since the war but with declining electoral support, which kept them largely on the political margins. Occasional successes, such as the electoral rise of the SRS in the mid-2000s due to a sudden change in leadership and programmatic moderation, were followed by a swift return to the political margins as moderate factions split up. In Bulgaria, by contrast, the electoral rise of the far-right party did not occur before 2005 when ATAKA campaigned against the 'political privileges' of the Turkish minority. In Greece, the rise of immigrant numbers simultaneous with the beginning of the financial crisis brought about a major increase in voter support for the Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi and anti-immigrant party.

However, regardless of the electoral success, populist and far-right parties managed to preserve a broad repertoire of nationalist and chauvinist themes, principally related to hostility to ethnic and sexual minorities and 'rival' neighbouring states, and to adapt it to a different political context of new democracies, while creating new constituencies, such as sections of the youth. They worked in parallel, and sometimes together, with football hooligans, skinheads, neo-Nazi and racist groups, who often deployed hate speech online and offline and violence against ethnic and sexual minorities and their activists. The principal impact of the far right went well beyond elections and non-institution action, such as protests. It involved the framing of the public discourse and public-policy agenda in exclusionary fashion and shaping party competition. The far-right repertoire of exclusionary national themes to some extent shaped mainstream politics even in the 2000s, but more recently became more resonant among the public and mainstream parties. While hostility to ethnic and sexual minorities remained the main source of populist securitisation in Yugoslavia's successor states, the anti-refugee and anti-EU migration policy proved to be more important in Bulgaria and Greece. In any event, the public focus shifted away from individual and minority rights and democratic procedures. Populist ruling parties increasingly exploited the situation to take control over influential print and electronic media and to undermine their opponents from opposition parties and civil society.

A different trajectory unfolded in plural societies after violent conflict, such as Macedonia and Bosnia, where far-right parties had less space to develop and prosper, as mainstream parties (or their important factions) harboured populist and nationalist agendas. The ethnic and institutional complexity of these countries facilitated the rise of competing securitising discourses that blamed 'rival' groups' political platforms for undermining national security, state institutions and EU accession. Multi-ethnic coalitions only rarely resembled democratic power-sharing arrangements in pursuit of collective rights and autonomy and of economic development, based on the rule of law. They looked more like vehicles designed for a division of spoils between distrustful partners that ruled their communities in authoritarian fashion, with ample clientelism and

corruption, tolerating each other in government. Occasional changes in government would only alter the personal composition of the networks, with little impact on the informal rules of the game. In the last few years, weak democracies transformed into hybrid regimes, with rapidly-diminishing press freedom, the abuse of state resources by ruling coalitions on a grand scale, including massive surveillance of actual and potential political opponents, increasingly exclusionary nationalist agenda and little space for legitimate political opposition, and with rival securitising nationalist discourses, especially in times of crisis.

Overall, nationalist, populist and authoritarian politics has gradually moved from the political wilderness of the 2000s towards the political mainstream. While few enjoyed electoral success, the far-right parties influenced mainstream politics in different, potentially more damaging ways, by framing public discourse and shaping policy agenda in several countries in the region. In plural societies, radical factions of mainstream parties served the same function. While failing to successfully manage existing crisis and security threats, populist ruling elites produced new crises and threats, not least by adopting and pursuing far-right populist rhetoric and policies. Therefore, populism is both a consequence of security threats and an active producer of securitisation. While populist and far-right strategies were similar across the board, their outcomes varied considerably due to different political contexts in different states.

6 Post-communist citizenship as a civic resistance to populist securitisation and authoritarianism

I do not like how media, people and even some friends of mine speak negatively of refugees. I have been working as a volunteer with refugee children for already a few years. I feel, I really feel I can change the world.⁸

We start this part of the discussion with the interview above, with a Bulgarian teacher who professionally works with children, but who volunteers for refugee children in her few free hours, because of three strong messages: the domination of populist securitisation of refugees in the public sphere and attitudes; the resilience of humanitarian solidarity; and the transformative power of civic agency. All three messages are crucial for the article, which aims to analyse the (in)capacities of civic activism to counter the authoritarian and securitarian trends. The research tries to understand if populist securitisation weakens the role of citizenry or, on the contrary, catalyses civic discontent and protests.

The three cases – ‘Don’t Drown Belgrade’ in Serbia, the ‘#I protest’ in Macedonia and ‘Friends of Refugees’ in Bulgaria – refer to overlapping, yet differing forms of mobilisation and activism, illustrating the trend that movements of the 2010s are even more diverse than the ones of previous decades (Della Porta & Mattoni 2014: 9). Two conceptions compete in explaining mobilisations: the diffusion model of social movements (Della Porta & Mattoni 2014); and contestatory citizenship (Pettit 1997; Krasteva 2016a). We borrow from Della Porta and Mattoni the diffusion model – the variety of ways in which dissident ideas, practices and tactics have

8 Interview by A Krasteva with a Bulgarian volunteer working with refugee children, 13 July 2017.

diffused across borders and adapted to local contexts (Della Porta & Mattoni 2014). Despite the theoretical debt to the social movements approach, we prefer the conceptualisation of mobilisations in terms of citizenship (Pettit 1997; Krasteva 2016a) for three reasons. The first is connected with the relation exogenous – endogenous in the source and ‘authorship’ of civic activism. In the beginning of the post-communist transition they were predominantly exogenous – the democratic engineering project to build civil society as part of the triple democratisation together with market economy and representative democratic institutions. This article deals with mobilisations from inside and below. The differences are so substantial that we distinguish first and second generation mobilisations which differ also in respect of the type of actors – NGOs for the first generation; citizens for the second. The former are more efficient and professionalised, but rather think tanks than civic actors; the latter are more spontaneous, ready to make mistakes, to experiment and innovate (Krasteva 2009; 2013; 2016a). The second reason for our preference for citizenship is that it subtly conceptualises agency. The third reason is the political innovation in the understanding of citizenship: If during communism it meant allegiance to the state, today it increasingly means criticism of captured states, contestation and protest.

The political context in which civic activism unfolds and aims to transform has also changed: The first generation of civic activism develops against a background of fragile, but consolidating democracy and, more importantly, trust in democratisation; the second generation mobilisations face the emergence of post-democracy (Sauer, Krasteva, Saarinen 2017) in which populism has ‘transformed the transformation’ (Minkenberg 2015). For the purpose of the article, we analyse three trends of civic resistance to mainstreaming of securitisation, state capture and authoritarian leaders: greening of activism; Occupy mobilisations, humanitarian solidarity, conceptualised respectively in green citizenship, contestatory citizenship, and solidary citizenship. They are present in the three analysed cases and in most of the countries of the region with varying temporality and intensity.

6.1 Greening of citizenship

Gizi demonstrations proved how the ecological cause for saving a park from a small initial protest by green activists has been transformed into a mass contestatory mobilisation (Uncu 2016). ‘Don’t Drown Belgrade’, a campaign against megalomaniac urban and architectural projects mobilised, is one of the largest anti-government protests in Serbia after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic (Borič 2017). Green initiatives and protests for saving a park, beach, forest and wild nature mobilise the Balkan youth everywhere in the region. Environmental protests are ‘the patent’ of post-communist youth. Eco-mobilisations are the activism of a generation that does not identify itself in terms of the communism/anti-communism polarity. The struggle for preserving the *purity of the environment* is a struggle against the *pollution of politics* (Krasteva 2016a).

‘The greening of the Self’ (Castells 2010) marks the most distinctive transformation of contestatory agency (Castells 2010: 168):

If we are to appraise social movements by their historical productivity, namely, by their impact on cultural values and society’s institutions, the environmental movement has earned a distinctive place in the landscape of

human adventure ... Two-thirds of Europeans consider themselves environmentalists; parties and candidates can hardly be elected to office without 'greening' their platform ...

The greening of the protesters' Self in South Eastern Europe has a double expression: environmentalists are among the most active protesters; and a significant majority of the protesters are environmentalists (Krasteva 2016a).

The green values and ideas inspire the Balkan youth more than any other cause or challenge. Poverty, discrimination and inequalities do not have the mobilising potential of mountains, forests and wild nature. The green mobilisations in the Balkans are also the most globalised in the sense that among all the other protests they stand the closest to the transborder inspiration for a radical participatory democracy, deliberative and participatory democratic practices (Della Porta & Mattoni 2014: 5; Krasteva 2016a).

6.2 'Occupy' Balkans or contestatory citizenship

'Do not expect the system to change. Try yourself.' This appeal by Kristian Takov, professor of law, one of the leaders of the protests in Bulgaria during 2013, who passed away during the week we were finalising this article, expresses the spirit and ambition of Occupy mobilisations.

'Don't Drown Belgrade' offers a beautiful semantic polyphony with its two meanings – taken literally, it has an environmentalist meaning and, more general and more political, 'Don't give [them] Belgrade'. This shift from environmentalist to anti-elite and anti-authoritarian claims marks the new mobilisations from Gisi in Istanbul to Belgrade. They are conceptualised in the article by two types of citizenship – green and contestatory – which interfere with and reinforce each other.

The Balkans entered the Occupy mobilisations later than the global wave, but are experiencing high peaks over the last years. Triggers and temporality vary from country to country. The Bulgarian protest in the summer of 2013 started on the day an oligarch with a particularly negative reputation was appointed director of the governmental agency for national security – the same day tens of thousands of people gathered in downtown Sofia, and these protests lasted an entire year (Krasteva 2016a). The issue that triggered the protest in Sarajevo was of a completely different nature and concerned at first glance an administrative issue – the registry of citizens (JMBG). Because of the ethnopolitisation of the issue,⁹ newly-born children were not issued with JMBG and found themselves in the situation of full rightlessness (Arendth 1973). The protest started with a small demonstration by about a hundred citizens, and over next days the number of protesters had risen to several thousand (Mukic 2016). The 'Colourful' revolution in Macedonia mobilised thousands for countering the oppressive and corrupted political elite (Petkovska 2017).

Despite the variety of causes, the Occupy mobilisations are aimed not so much at one or another public policy but at the very core of politics – both *against* a particular elite and *for* another type of politics: 'They are against

9 The Bosnian Serb political leaders insisted it should designate the ethnicity of the citizen.

social injustice and the system that produces laws and political structures that maintain their hegemonic privileges and hierarchy' (Mukic 2016: 217). 'The problem isn't in people; it's in the system'; and 'We've had enough of hierarchy. We want direct democracy.' These slogans from the June 2013 protests in Sofia summarise the high ambitions both of rejecting the existing model and inventing a new model. The impact is so crucial that Krasteva (2016a) defines it as a 'second democratic revolution'. It did not transform society but transformed civic agency. In the first post-communist revolution of the elites, citizens were assigned the role of applauding and attending the democratisation process; they were second-class actors. In the second revolution, it is the citizens who experiment, innovate, and re-found democracy. This fundamental role has transformed their status, asserting them as first-class actors. By protesting online and offline, the citizens have taken democracy into their own hands in order to experiment with new forms of participation, engagement and responsibility. The key word is experimentation: In Occupy mobilisations one sees more aspirations than results, more utopia than politics. Occupy is the watershed marking the transition from party politics to contestatory democracy. Contestability is more important than consent (Pettit 1997; Braithwaite 2007; Krasteva 2016a): 'Political protest has become an integral part of the way of life: Protest behaviour is no longer used as a last resort only, but employed with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies, to represent a wider range of claims than ever before' (Kriesi 2014: 371).

6.3 Humanitarian solidarity as 'act of citizenship'

Group 484 was founded in Belgrade in 1995 to support 484 families who had found refuge in Serbia after fleeing the violence of post-Yugoslav wars. Today Group 484 is a policy-based organisation specialising in the migration policy and refugees from other wars and conflicts. It illustrates the shifted target of humanitarian solidarity – from refugees from local wars to refugees from distant conflicts. 'Friends of Refugees' in Bulgaria is typical of the emergence of civic organisations and initiatives, spontaneous and often ephemeral, in a situation of a migration crisis. Young lawyers have been particularly active with legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, such as the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association; the Voice in Bulgaria Foundation; and the Bulgarian Lawyers for Human Rights. The local branches of Caritas and Red Cross are among the main actors for humanitarian assistance. The Divac Foundation in Serbia, created by a famous former basketball player, is an exception, but illustrates the wave of civic solidarity at the beginning of the refugee crisis. The humanitarian campaigns of solidarity could be summarised in four characteristics: the capacity of civil society to respond positively to the refugee crisis by impressive humanitarian mobilisation; the transformation of citizens without an NGO or other militant experience into activists; the emergence and massification of volunteers, as both an expression of the vitality of civil society and a catalyst for its innovation and dynamisation; and the fast rise, but also the relatively rapid decrease of the wave of solidarity. The longer the crisis, the less the civic enthusiasm for humanitarian help. Today, some of these groups, such as 'Friends of Refugees', are loose networks functioning predominantly through the social media.

The humanitarian initiatives are less organised and less professionalised and introduced the figure of volunteer – citizen 'amateur' devoted to the

protection of a vulnerable group, restoring the idea of civic activism as a cause. This new generation of mobilisations may be conceptualised through Isin and Nielsen (2008) 'acts of citizenship'. They fight at two fronts – humanitarian and securitarian. 'Help on the road' is the apt title of a human rights report summarising the battle for the defence of refugee rights and of their right to have rights (Macedonian Helsinki Committee 2017). The second battle resembles the biblical battle of Goliath – the giant machinery of securitisation of refugees and the young courageous David of human rights activism. The victory of the human rights David is not taken for granted.

The three types of mobilisations – green, Occupy and humanitarian – vary in size and target. The humanitarian mobilisations are the least in number, the more sporadic and the least publicly influential; the green mobilisations vary considerably from one protest to another, but they are by far the favourite 'voice' of the Balkan youth today; Occupy is the largest and the most visible. The targets also vary: The humanitarian mobilisations address the securitisation of refugees; the green and the Occupy mobilisations contest state capture, urban and environmental degradation, corruption and authoritarian trends.

Paradoxically, what these mobilisations have in common is that they all are targets of securitisation – civic and human rights activists are systematically targeted by policies and practices of Othering and Ordering, constructed as traitors to national identity and cohesion. The negative impact of securitising civic activism varies. The actors in humanitarian activism are ridiculed as promoters of failed multiculturalism and marginalised in the public space. The securitisation of mass protests is not only less effective, but, on the contrary, fuels and catalyses the mobilisations.

7 Concluding remarks or the Balkan Janus of securitisation and citizenship

The Balkans today is a Janus with two faces: populist and authoritarian, on the one hand, and civic, on the other. The conclusion delineates this ambiguous profile by two trends – an authoritarian turn and a revitalisation of the citizenry.

7.1 Authoritarian turn and mainstreaming securitisation

Nationalist, populist and authoritarian politics have moved from the periphery of the political scene to the mainstream. The trend takes a paradoxical, almost schizophrenic form: from one perspective, the promotion of the EU agenda, regional co-operation and economic reforms; from another perspective, the tabloidisation of the media, securitisation of both opponents and others. Authoritarianism, populism and securitisation interfere and form mixtures with considerable variations across the region. 'Politics of enemy' (Schmidt 2007) frames the political and media discourses. The study demonstrated two different targets transformed into a security threat to the national identity and national security: ethnic and religious minorities and migrants/refugees, on the one hand; and civic and human rights activists, on the other. While failing to successfully manage security threats and crises – economic, refugee-driven, identity-based,

populist elites produce new ones. As dealers of these crises, these elites capitalise politically on the fears induced by them. Populism is both a consequence of security threats and an active producer of securitisation.

7.2 Civic resistance to authoritarianism and securitisation through innovation and vitalisation of citizenship

Civic resistance started to grow slowly, initially from local initiatives on environmental issues, unlawful construction projects and corruption. Their temporality varies from country to country: Occupy mobilisations started in Bulgaria in 2013 and later in Bosnia in 2013 to 2014. 'Don't Drown Belgrade' in 2015 and *#I Protest* in Macedonia in 2017 continued the Occupy wave. The greening of claims and mobilisations is on the rise almost everywhere in the region. The wave of solidarity with refugees reached its peak a few months after the refugee crisis. The three types of mobilisations – green, Occupy and humanitarian – differ in targets, intensity and efficiency. The civic mobilisations remain profoundly asymmetrical: The clusters of intense mobilisations are formed by the green and the anti-oligarchy, anti-corruption, anti-authoritarianism ones; acute social and humanitarian problems such as poverty, inequalities, and refugees cause weaker – rare, few in number, relatively unpopular – mobilisations, such as anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, and anti-extremism marches and initiatives. Some protests succeed in achieving their goals rapidly and with a relatively small number of mobilised participants (such as some environmental protests). Other protests – lasting for a long time and with a larger number of participants – fail to achieve their initial demands. The effectiveness of the protests is variable.

In this analysis, we are less interested in their efficiency than in their double positive impact. Civic resistance is a counterforce to securitisation and authoritarianism, particularly crucial in a period of mainstreaming of populism. The second impact is less visible and equally fundamental: the creation, experimentation and innovation of new forms of citizenship as participation, contestation, and activism. The classic concept of citizenship as belonging defines it from the top down; the other from the bottom up. In the first, the state is key: It sets the framework into which individuals fit or evade, or opt to 'exit'. In the case of citizenship as engagement and contestation, the framework is set not by the state but by the activity of citizens and becomes 'voice' (Krasteva 2016a). The words 'I feel I can change the world' by a volunteer summarises the high transformative potential of human rights activism for social change and innovative citizenship. The Goliath of populist securitisation and authoritarianism demonstrates strength and arrogance; civic David resists and innovates.

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