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THE REVOLUTION THAT ATE ITS OWN CHILDREN: THE COLOURFUL REVOLUTION FROM CONSENSUS TO DISCORD

ABSTRACT
The main goal of this essay is to provide an in-depth analysis of the trajectory of the Colourful Revolution (CR) in North Macedonia as a social movement. From a more general perspective, the paper engages with the growing interest in the literature that explores the correlation between social movements and democratisation processes, especially in societies that fall into the category of hybrid regimes. The Colourful Revolution is a good example of a protest movement that has created effective regime change. It presented a complex social movement encompassing many fragmented social and political groups gathered around the idea of a common adversary.

Additionally, the Colourful Revolution has one particularity: it is a social movement that has undergone a full developmental circle – formation through utilization of political opportunity frameworks, a period of activity and success and dissolution. Drawing on literature of the political process, opportunity frameworks and cycles of social movements, the paper argues that social movements such as the Colourful Revolution are not just temporary and unstable structures but are also highly dependent on the existence of a common target of the social activism in question. The removal from power of political actors that have been the reason for mobilisation of a complex and diverse network of social and political activism resulted in an absence of an adhesive factor holding together all the parts of this complex system. The absence initiated gradual discord and dissolution of different factions within the social movement (CR in this case) and reveals its true nature – temporary, ideologically diverse, conflictual, and even undemocratic in some respects.

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Introduction

Since the turn of the century, the world has witnessed a proliferation of social movements in both established democracies and authoritarian states. From protests aimed at challenging economic inequality (the Occupy movement in the U.S.), anti-austerity measures (the Indignados in Spain and the Aganaktismenoi in Greece), to the rise of pro-democracy, anti-government protests, such as the Coloured Revolutions in Eastern Europe, the Arab spring in the Middle East and the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong – the surge of protest energy has reinvigorated scholarly interest in contentious politics and the impact of social movements on democratisation.

A similar outpouring of dissatisfaction with the status quo and massive mobilisation has also manifested in the countries of Southeast Europe. Notable examples are the anti-austerity protests in Slovenia (Topliše, Thomassen. 2017), the 'Right to the city' movement in Croatia (Dolenec et al. 2017), the 'Social Uprising' and 'Bosnian Spring' movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Murtagh 2016; Stefanovski 2016; Milan 2017; Repovac Nikšić et al., this volume), and the 'One in a Million' and other local movements in Serbia (Draško et al. 2019; Iguman et al., this volume). In most of these cases the common denominator has been the dissatisfaction with the experiences of the public with the effects of democratic transition in their countries (Brentin, Bieber 2019).

In this sense, one of the most prominent cases of anti-governmental, pro-democracy mobilisation has been the Colourful Revolution in North Macedonia. Triggered by a succession of political crises in the country and notable democratic backsliding, what initially started as an assembly of several divergent movements in 2014, was transformed into an electrifying movement of massive mobilisation of resources across ethnic and ideological alliances gathered under the pretext of demands for democratic reform and regime change. Eventually, the Colourful Revolution achieved its goal, as it became one of the key factors for the fall of Nikola Gruevski's government, unlocking (if temporarily) potential for further democratisation of the country.

In this respect, the main goal of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the trajectory of the Colourful Revolution (CR) in North Macedonia as a social movement and to assess its effect on democratisation and regime change. From a more generic perspective, the paper engages with the growing interest in the literature that explores the correlation between social movements and democratization processes, especially in societies that fall into the category of hybrid regimes. The Colourful Revolution is a good example of a protest movement that has induced an effective regime change. It appeared as a complex social movement encompassing many fragmented social and political groups gathered around a common adversary and expectations of democratization.

More specifically, our study aims to empirically map and deconstruct the contributing factors for the emergence, development and dissolution of the movement. Drawing on the literature on contention, active citizenship and political process theory, this study argues that the initial success in mobilization

and subsequent expansion of the movement is based on political opportunity structures emanating from the volatile political context and the succession of political crises in the country. On the other hand, drawing on the literature on cycles of contention, our analysis aims to uncover the main factors for demobilization. We argue that social movements such as the Colourful Revolution are not just temporary and unstable structures but are also highly dependent on the existence of a common target of the social activism in question. The removal from power of political actors that are the reason for the mobilization of a complex and diverse network of social and political activism results in the absence of an adhesive factor holding together all parts of this complex system. Such absence initiates gradual discord and dissolution of different factions within the social movement (CR in this case) and reveals its true nature – temporary, ideologically diverse, conflictual and even undemocratic in some respects.

Our study employs a qualitative approach based on process tracing. The analysis of the case study is based on primary data from media reports and secondary data based on expert and academic observations. The text is organised as follows: we start with a theoretical discussion on the concepts of contentious politics, active citizenship, political process theory and democratization. We continue with an in-depth analysis of the trajectory of the Colourful Revolution, which we chronologically classify in four phases of development: embryonic, gradual consolidation, engagement and repositioning, and antagonization. The paper closes with a discussion of the findings.

Social Movements, Contention, Political Process and Democratization – Theoretical Considerations

The story of the development of social movements and their impact on political change has amassed a substantive academic literature in the last half century. Originally confined to inquiries of collective action in the 'old' democratic venues of the West, the social movement research agenda has gradually expanded to analysis of the impact of social movements in authoritarian, illiberal and democratizing societies across the world. Our point of departure is Tilly's (1984: 306) classic definition of social movements as "a sustained series of interactions between powerholders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power and back those demands with public demonstrations of support". This definition emphasises an understanding of social movements as collective actions in an interactive framework of power and politics that perceives social movements as political performances (Passy 2009: 353). In this sense, the study of social movements has been predominantly driven by political conflict in society (della Porta 2014b) and power relations between institutionalised authority and challengers to those seats of power, seeking modifications of the political regime to accommodate their voices, demands and values.

Hence, the literature has emphasised the importance of contention when analysing modern social movements and protest groups. The notion of contentious politics is particularly important for our analysis of the Colourful Revolution as an anti-government, pro-democracy movement. Defined as an "interpretative framework that brings together three important areas of social life: contention, collective action, and politics", contentious politics encompasses the channels of expression of popular struggle outside mainstream politics (Mew 2013: 104). While conflict between loosely organised masses of socially/politically underrepresented ordinary people and institutionalised authorities and organised political elites has been a reoccurring historical phenomenon, not every example of contentious politics is equivalent to social movements. As Tarrow (2011: 7) argues, the unique feature of the social movement is its ability to sustain and coordinate contention in a durable framework based on "underlying social networks, on resonant collective action frames, and on the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents". Social movements as expressions of contention, he continues, are defined by four properties: collective challenge, as an expression of disruptive action against institutionalised power; common purpose, as an expression of overlapping interests and values that bond the challengers in a common grouping, social solidarity, as the main factor for mobilizing consensus among the challengers; and sustained interaction that enables the durability of the movement. In this sense, the instrumental side of contentious politics becomes particularly significant, as the performative dimension of protest within the movement's repertoire of collective action expressed through innovative methods of opposition is seen as a key factor for the cohesiveness, durability and the disruptive power of the social movement (Tarrow 2011).

In this respect, our study draws on Isin's (2008, 2009) influential concept of activist citizenship. Isin distinguishes between two types of citizenship. On one hand, there is the mainstream, formal connotation of 'active citizenship' which is legally defined and expressed through institutionalised patterns of fulfilling rights and obligations, such as voting, paying taxes and law abidingness. In addition, Isin introduces the conception of 'activist citizenship', which occurs in an informal setting, as acting outside of the mainstream *de jure* frameworks of the state. Thus, the activist citizen is defined through acts of citizenship that can "happen without being founded in law and responsibility" to the extent that in seeking justice they may question and even go against the law (Isin 2009: 382). In other words, "they disrupt habitus, create new possibilities, claim rights and impose obligations in emotionally charged tones [and] pose their claims in enduring and creative expressions" (Isin, Nielsen 2008: 10). Thus, collective actions of protest are justified as venues for citizens to make claims to justice, even if they become means of disruption of pre-existing orders, practices and statuses (Isin 2009: 384). These acts shift the focus from the normative, conforming framing of citizenship to the political, social and symbolical practice embedded in collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns (Isin, Nielsen 2008: 2).

Much of the debate on collective action has focused on analysis of the trajectories and cycles of social movements. Hence, there is an extensive literature that explores the conditions under which social movements emerge, develop and eventually disappear. Our study draws from the political process approach which focuses on the influence of resources, networks and political incentives on the establishment, mobilisation and success/failure of social movements. Central in this discourse are the theories of political opportunity structure (Eisinger 1973; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 2011) and resource mobilisation (McCarthy, Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983; McCarthy, Zald 2002), which emphasise the exogenous character of the processes of formation and facilitation of social movements.

In this sense, the external factors that are derived from the political context are perceived as key variables that determine the trajectories and success of social movements (Jenkins, Klandermans 1995), but also more specifically "the choice of protest strategies and the impact of social movements on their environments" (Kitschelt 1986: 58). This line of reasoning has inspired numerous studies on political opportunities and constraints that have identified several clusters of determinants of the trajectories of social movements (Tarrow 1991; McAdam 1996; Tilly 2008). The most obvious dimension is the level of openness of the formal institutional system of the state for the demands of the challengers, i.e., the availability of venues for access to policy making. Another key dimension is the political environment, i.e., the constellation of power between political elites/parties, interest groups and other societal actors. In this respect, the degree of cohesiveness/instability of the political milieu and the propensity for alliances can be an important facilitating dynamic in the development of social movements. For example, alliances with opposition parties can be particularly significant. As Maguire (1995: 100) puts it: "an opposition movement facing a strong hostile government shares an interest with friendly opposition parties in putting the government on the defensive and possibly ejecting it from office". So, an alliance serves the mutual interests of both sides in their aspirations to defeating a common enemy.

Political opportunity structures (and constraints) have been extensively studied in the context of functioning democracies. However, they can have a considerable explanatory power for cases in non-democratic or hybrid polities as well. As Shock (2005: 30) has argued, they might be even more important in these cases, since due to the restrictive character of the state, the opportunities for dissent are rare, so when they manifest, there is a high probability that they will generate opposition. In this sense, political crises (Skocpol 1979) in nondemocratic or democratising regimes can become considerable windows of opportunity for the emergence and mobilisation of revolutionary social movements as they weaken the grip on institutionalised power of the ruling elites and make them more vulnerable for contention.

While the emergence of social movements can be initiated and facilitated by favourable opportunity structures, their trajectories are galvanised by the ability of protest groups to mobilize. Resource-mobilisation theory assumes

that the mobilisation capacities of social movements are one of the key determinants of their success or failure. Ingrained in the rational choice approach, resource mobilisation sees social movements as goal-oriented organisations seeking resources to enhance their efforts and mobilise challengers and publics. The notion of resources is multidimensional. Edwards, Mcarthy (2004) distinguish between five types of resources: moral, cultural, social-organisational, human and material resources. In this sense, forming alliances with other like-minded societal groups and political forces that would lead to increased mobilisation of challengers is a key aspect of the political process approach.

However, power relations and rational choices might not be sufficient to sustain alliances. Banaszak (1996) has rightly argued for the role of ideology, identity and common values that encourage contention as a crucial factor that enables social movements to amass supporters that oppose the status quo. As she puts it, "without a movement 'community' and intense social interaction among activists, a social movement will remain divided, impeding the flow of information and reducing its capacity for effective innovation and action" (Banaszak 1996: 223). Equally, if the social movement lacks or outgrows its sense of community (because of massive mobilisation of opposition groups, for example in revolutionary movements), the variation/polarisation in values within the movement could lead to its dissolution.

This leads us to the last phase of the trajectory of social movements in our study, and that is the notion of their diffusion. A majority of movements share the same destiny, as much as they can be captivating at points in their development, over time they suffer from burnout and lose their contentious, activist edge. As Tarrow (2011) argues, the cycle of social movements inevitably ends with their decline, even in cases when they have been able to achieve a significant level of organisation and mobilisation. As they grow, the transactional costs within the movement grow as well, while on the other hand political externalities might accommodate some of the movement's demands. So, as they lose their zeal, they usually end up either in being co-opted by the institutional structures or radicalised. In his far-reaching analysis of the trajectories of social movements, Tarrow (2011: 190) identifies several mechanisms that contribute towards demobilisation of movements: repression or control of contention by the authorities; facilitation, at least of some movement demands; exhaustion, in terms of weariness and disillusionment of challengers; radicalisation; and institutionalisation, as in incorporation of social movement organisations or parts of them into the formal political arenas. Regarding the latter, the process of politicisation of social movements could also morph into absorption of the social movement or parts of it by opposition political parties. Finally, in new and transitional democracies, there is a potential for another specific pattern of the social movement cycle. As Meirowitz, Tucker (2013) have argued, the potency of social movements might significantly diminish after the removal of a non-democratic regime as the challengers develop perceptions that either their goal for democratisation has been achieved, or, more likely, their goal is no longer that valuable. So, even though the subsequent regimes might still

be democratically flawed, citizens still deem them better or else consider the costs of a new wave of protests too high.

This notion is important for our study, as it is embedded in the discussion on the role of social movements in democratisation. Surprisingly, the relation between social movements and democratisation has been neglected for decades by both the social movement and democratisation scholarship. While the social movement literature has been primarily focused on studying the outlook and impact of mass mobilisation in the well-established democracies of North America and Western Europe, the democratisation literature has put emphasis on structural/economic factors (Haggard, Kaufman 1995) or elite driven top-down processes (O'Donnell, Schmitter 1986; Przeworski, 1991; Linz, Stepan 1996). However, following the proliferation of cases of regime changes instigated (at least partially) by popular mobilisation (Brancati 2016; Chen, Moss 2019), the study of the democratising properties of social movements has picked up in the 1990s and started to pay more attention to bottom-up, movement-oriented approaches to democratisation (Bermeo 1997; Giugni et al. 1998; Rossi, della Porta 2009; della Porta 2014a) that highlight the role of mass political contention and its relation to transition cycles and political change (Shock 2005).

These accounts consolidate the perception of a firm corelation between democratisation and social movements. As Tilly (2004: 131) argues, this correspondence is based on three phenomena. (1) Both democratisation and social movements are independently caused by mostly the same processes; (2) democratisation encourages the formation of social movements; (3) social movements themselves promote democratisation (albeit in a limited way). Conversely, the emergence of effective pro-democracy movements is conditioned on their capacity to create broad coalitions and alliances in order to gain greater access to public politics (Tilly 2004). The literature has also highlighted the impact of external factors on the democratising effects of social movements. Especially in the post-communist context, external actors, such as the EU and the U.S., have continuously employed differential empowerment of civil society (through providing political support and resources) as their dominant strategy of democracy promotion (Steward 2009; Beitcheld et al. 2014; Noutcheva 2016).

Explaining the Colourful Revolution

The Colourful Revolution in the Republic of North Macedonia was, above all, a complex and very diverse social movement, or a patchwork of movements for that matter, which in academic literature has been given different, even opposing characterisations. Perspectives on the Colourful Revolution vary from a social movement that was a response to a highly illiberal regime, revolt addressing widespread corruption in society, a movement with subversive potential expressed through specific art forms, to a revolution based on a template and was anything but spontaneous.

One of the most widely accepted perceptions in the literature is that the Colourful Revolution was a gradual effort of creating a collective politicised identity from diverse social grievances (Ahn 2017: 1), which were scattered throughout society during the decade-long rule of Nikola Gruevski's regime. Topuzovski (2017: 16) defines the Colourful Revolution as a specific art form, artistic practice "intertwined with activist forms of action that undermine the institutional and corrupt system in the Republic of North Macedonia". Furthermore, Milan (2017) places the Colourful Revolution within the context of anti-corruption movements in Southeast Europe emphasizing that "the demonstrators targeted, in particular, buildings and monuments that symbolised the urban renovation project launched by the government in 2010, known as 'Skopje 2014', said to have been a source of criminal capital and money laundering". For Stefanovski (2016: 44) the gradual build-up of political and social dissatisfaction leading to social movements preceding the Colourful Revolution originated in economic deprivation and permanent breaches of human rights by an extensively authoritarian regime.

From a more general viewpoint, without denying the massive mobilization and the authentic social energy organised, Way (2008: 60) speaks on behalf of coloured revolutions in general, linking the effectiveness of the efforts of civil society to combat authoritarianism to the more general context of 1) ties of society to the West and 2) the strength of the incumbent regime's autocratic party or state. However, Vankovska (2020: 2) gives a completely opposite assessment of the Colourful Revolution by stating that "in spite of the apparent authenticity and compliance with the key elements of a grassroots social movement (…) the CR was more of a template revolution", where the "protesters employed an already existing template for fostering government change that also preserved the existing system for ethnic power-sharing and a neoliberal model of government". For Vankovska, the Colourful Revolution "relies on elites bargaining and continuous international state-building interventions rather than on people's sovereignty" (ibid). Both approaches link coloured revolutions to international actors but give them opposite values.

The complexity of the phenomenon of the Colourful Revolution arises from both the diversity and the incrementality of its formation. The very process of emanation of the Colourful Revolution to the level where it became one of the decisive factors for regime change in 2017, was a process of build-up of social dissatisfaction. Although it started as a very incoherent and diffuse assembly of topically diverse social movements, they gradually connected into one social energy with a clear common adversary, as well as clear differences and even animosities between its constitutive elements. It is the very process of the formation of the Colourful Revolution that sheds light on its later dissolution and the reasons for its vanishing. In order to understand the process fully, one needs to explain the phases through which the Colourful Revolution was formed, utilised and more or less spontaneously dissolved.

Embryonic Phase (2009-2014)

The initial, embryonic phase of the Colourful Revolution was at the same time the longest phase of its formation. One could even problematize whether the phase of scattered, diverse and sporadic social movements that appeared as a reaction to the policies of the Government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski could be considered a "phase" of the Colourful Revolution due to the incoherence and lack of any significant connections between the movements and protest structures. However, these movements were in fact the initial core of what later grew into a full-scale protest movement that brough about the downfall of Gruevski's government in 2017. It is questionable whether the Colourful Revolution would have been possible if these movements did not form the initial construction of a political opportunity structure.

The period between 2006 and 2008 is typically viewed as the "golden era" of the VMRO-DPMNE[1]-led government where rarely did anyone post the question of its democratic capacity and success. This period of relatively good governance led to pre-term parliamentary elections in 2008, in which VMRO-DPMNE was once again given a four-year mandate. However, the democratic standing of the country started to deteriorate at this time. The political prioritizing of topics turned from economic to national, and foreign policy questions, which gave rise to the spatial restructuring of the capital. Before the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia announced the infamous "Skopje 2014" project in 2010, there was a "test case" in the form of a proposal to build a church on the main square in Skopje (Makfax 2010). Immediately, civil society groups opposed such spatial and ideological interventionism (A1 2009).

Civil unrest and protests started as early as 2009. The first organised and publicly promoted group of protesters consisted of students and professors from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Skopje who directly opposed the idea of changing the aesthetic and political narrative of the main square. In March 2009, the movement "Prva Arhibrigada" (First Archbrigade) held protests in the main square to raise public awareness and possibly try to stop the project using peaceful means (Prva Arhibrigada 2009). However, during the protests, they were challenged by a group of counter-protesters wearing visible religious iconography who engaged in violent clashes with the "Prva Arhibrigada" protesters (Ignatova 2009). It immediately became clear that the counter-protest was orchestrated by the government, which would aggressively intercept any possible effort to express public opposition.

However, the violent response via a proxy counter-protest group, as well as the already visible deterioration of democratic standards in the country, led to a mushrooming of social movements and proliferation of pressure points against the governing parties. "Prva Arhibrigada" was joined by a more structured social movement, "Plostad Sloboda" (Freedom Square), and together the

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1   Vnatresno – Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija – Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) – henceforth VMRO-DPMNE.

movements became even more active upon the announcement of the "Skopje 2014" project. "Skopje 2014" was meant to be the largest architectural (and symbolic) revamping of the city centre since the Skopje earthquake in 1963 (Plostad Sloboda 2010). Civil society protests against it were soon accompanied by a new social movement, "Aman", whose focus was predominantly social, addressing mainly energy poverty and representing economically-endangered citizens (Aman 2012). This took the political struggle to a whole new battleground, displaying serious potential for further deterioration of the relations between the government and civil society groups.

The tipping point, however, was the 2011murder of a young man, Martin Neskovski, during the celebration of the electoral victory of VMRO-DPMNE in the pre-term parliamentary elections. Neskovski lost his life in a brutal attack by a member of the Prime Minister's security team (Jordanovska 2015). The attempt of a coverup of the case by the government led to massive outrage, predominantly among the youth, and triggered the biggest protest movement to date under the slogan "Stop za policiskata brutalnost" (Stop police brutality). The protesters showed their revolt in the streets, with daily protests seriously challenging the authority of the system and the government (Apostolov 2015). This gradually grew into "#Protestiram" (I protest), one of the most enduring and well-organised social movements that contributed to the Colourful Revolution (DW 2021). "#Protestiram" was the first social movement that integrated many of the members of all previous anti-government actions, and it presented a base of all further political protests, especially in the period of the biggest democratic decline in North Macedonia between 2011 and 2016. The outlines of the Colourful Revolution were becoming visible.

Gradual Consolidation Phase (2014-2015)

It is very hard to separate the early emergence of the various social movements that later formed the core of the Colourful Revolution from the consolidation phase for two reasons. The first is the incrementality of the process that over time produced a more structured and coherent social energy, with a political, rather than merely policy target. The second reason is the overlapping structure of the various constitutive social movements, which at times blurred the lines between the Colourful Revolution and previous anti-governmental movements. However, there is a clear line of events that dictated the level of consolidation and activity of the anti-government social movements. This line can be taken as marking points, although remains highly subjective.

If the Neskovski case initiated public outrage and was the inspiration for the formation of the "#Protestiram" movement, the motives for further consolidation of the still scattered social energy lie in the general democratic backsliding of the state.[2]

2   We have extensively analysed the democratic backsliding of the country in Damjanovski, Markovikj 2020. As an illustration: 1) Freedom House's (2018) report "Nations

In addition to the cumulative downgrade of the quality of democracy in the country, the event that triggered the final set of events leading to the downfall of the regime of Gruevski was the Law on Higher Education adopted in 2014 (Ministry of Education and Science 2018). It envisaged wide-ranging state control over higher education, unrealistically strict criteria for career advancement of professors in academia, as well as the introduction of state exams after every other year for the students. The Law was a classic example of violation of academic freedom and an attempt by the regime to twist the arm of the intellectuals in the country.

The resistance that emanated as an answer to the Law on Higher Education led to a specific phenomenon in the country known as "plenumisation" (Stefanovski 2017; Pollozhani 2016; Štiks 2015). Namely, high school students, professors, but mostly university students started organizing into plenums whose main goal was to oppose this Law, as well as strongly resist the rapid regression of democracy. The students' and professors' plenums[3] were the forefront of the resistance. Daily protests led to probably the most massive mobilisation the country had seen to date, when on the 17 November 2014 over 10,000 students protested on the streets of Skopje (Meta.mk 2016). Furthemore, the protests that took place in December 2014 became much larger in reach, as the protesters in Skopje were joined by predominanly ethnic Albanian students from the two universities in Tetovo (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2014). Such occurences displayed that the protests have started expanding beyond ethnic lines. At the same time, smaller scale protests emerged in other cities throughout the country.

The protests against the Law on Higher Education culminated in early 2015, when students "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University occupied the Faculty of Philosophy and created an autonomous zone (Faktor.mk 2019), from which they demanded changes to the Law. Daily demonstrations continued in front of the Government building, with public opinion showing unpreceded solidarity with the protesters (Fokus.mk 2015).

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in Transit" index indicated a significant drop (reverse scoring – lower is better) in its Democracy score in the period between 2010 and 2017 (from 3.79 in 2010 to 4.43 in 2017. 2) The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018) noted a similar decline in the Democracy status of the Republic of North Macedonia (from 7.95 in 2010 to 6.45 in 2018) as well as the rule of law (from 7.3 in 2010 to 6 in 2018). In terms of media freedoms, the situation was even more dramatic. 3) Freedom House in 2016 decided to change its score for media freedoms in North Macedonia from "partly free" to "not free" (Freedom House 2016). Cumulatively speaking, in only eight years, the Republic of North Macedonia fell on the World Freedom of the Press index from 46th place in 2006 to 123rd place in 2014 (Reporters Without Borders 2018). 4) Freedom House lowered the score (reverse scoring – lower is better) on the electoral process from 3.25 in 2010 to 3.50 in 2015 (Freedom House 2016), expressing "concern over the accuracy of the voter registry, the inadequate separation between the ruling party and the state prior to the elections, and overwhelming media bias in favor of VMRO-DPMNE and its presidential candidate during the campaign" (ibid).

3   As expected, counter-plenums were immediately formed under the control of the ruling party.

In parallel to the major upset caused by the students and the professors in the country, the leader of the opposition Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), Zoran Zaev, published wiretap material of high-level government officials (acquired from security personnel within the regime) admitting to illegally wiretapping over 20,000 citizens (Fokus.mk 2015b). In a series of bombastic revelations, the opposition party released scandalous material that confirmed the deeply undemocratic operations of Nikola Gruevski's regime, thus ushering in the final phase of the Colourful Revolution – open animosity and pressure against the sitting government.

The Engagement Phase (2016-2017)

It would be inaccurate to completely equate the social movements that existed prior to the Colourful Revolution with the Revolution itself. Rather, the protest energy that was created over several years, starting circa 2009, erupted in 2016 as cumulative dissatisfaction with a regime gradually pushing North Macedonia into autocracy. However, besides the accumulated discontent, there were several specific circumstances that led to the first protests of the Colourful Revolution.

The first reason was the already mentioned Law on Higher Education, which irritated two big social groups – the youth and the intellectual elite. The second reason were the wiretapped materials that were gradually but continuously released by the opposition, revealing the scandalous and highly undemocratic rule of the parties in power. The third reason was the attempt of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov, to acquit 56 persons, among whom a number of highly ranked government officials, under investigation for serious crimes (SDK 2016). This led to an immediate reaction by civil society, where on the very first day of protests, (12 April), some 4,000 people turned up on the streets of the capital. The next day, a group of protesters escalated the situation by setting fire to one of the field offices of President Ivanov. However, the signature move of the Colourful Revolution, pelting buildings with balloons filled with pigment, first occurred on 16 April 2016 – this can be considered the official start of the Colourful Revolution (DW 2021).

The protests grew by the day and spread to almost all cities in the country, putting immense pressure on the government to resign. Nor were the protests limited to the Macedonian ethnic community; indeed, they appeared with equal intensity in the predominantly Albanian cities (Lokalno.mk 2016). In fact, they demonstrated an unpreceded ethnic solidarity, something that would have been difficult to foresee North Macedonia. The multiethnic character of the Colourful revolution was preserved throughout the complete period of its existence as a movement.

The Colourful Revolution comprised ethnically diverse and ideologically distinct, even conflicting groups, who nevertheless shared a common goal. It became very clear that their sheer size demanded diversity, with left, liberal

and even moderately conservative groups joining.[4] During the many march-
es, public addresses were made by a number of protesters, both party activ-
ists and non-partisan, coming from very ideologically diverse and previously
even conflicting backgrounds. It was clear that the mobilised social energy was
snowballing and that the Regime would continue to face pressure. The gov-
ernment of course tried to match the emerging social outrage by organizing
parallel demonstrations, organised around the movement symbolically named
"Gragjansko dvizenje za odbrana na Makedonija – GDOM" (Citizens' move-
ment for the defence of Macedonia – GDOM). This movement held parallel
events throughout the country, as well as counterprotests, with their activi-
ties covered constantly by pro-government media. However, the potential and
the mobilizing energy of this movement could not match the Colourful Rev-
olution, presenting a rather transparent attempt of the government to 'stage'
public support (Radio Free Europe 2015).

Concomitantly, mainstream politics was undergoing significant change,
with the establishment of the Special Prosecutors Office (SJO) and the Przhino
process. The SJO was formed to deal with the continuous publication of the
wiretap material, its mandate limited to cases emerging from the audio tapes
(Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia 2015). High ranking of-
ficials were indicted, and the SJO was strongly backed up by the internation-
al community.[5] The Przhino process[6] was the name of political negotiations
in an informal setting, resulting from the stalemate of the Parliament. Most
important of the many issues discussed and negotiated was the setting of yet
another pre-term election, initially set for 5 June 2016.

The elections ended up being held in December 2016, with the govern-
ing VMRO-DPMNE gaining only a slim advantage over the Social-Demo-
crats (State Election Commission 2016). With the balance of power now con-
siderably shifted, the decisive factor in the formation of a new Government
would now be the party representing ethnic Albanians – the Democratic Union
for Integration (DUI). The DUI opted to form a new government with the

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4   The division and deep disagreements between ideologically diverse faction was ini-
tially visible in the Students' Plenum and especially after the formation of the autono-
mous zone at the Faculty of Philosophy. On several occasions there were serious dis-
agreements and even verbal and physical conflicts between the left-wing of the student
protests (later on forming the party called Levica – the Left) and the liberal and so-
cial-democratic wing (some of them joining the social-democratic Government after
the downfall of Gruevski). This was the first indicator that the plenum has a very diverse
structure prone to disagreements and conflicts. This ideological cleavage will later on
dictate one of the main lines of dissolution of the social energy gathered around the
Colourful Revolution.
5   In relation to the role of the international community, Stefanovski's research (2020)
indicates that the movements' leadership has considered the international community
as one of its strongest allies, especially as a facilitator in the achievement of a common
primary goal of re-democratization of the country and consolidation of human rights.
6   For a more detailed analysis of the Przhino process, refer to Markovikj, Damjanovs-
ki 2018.

Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), which effectively meant the end of the VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevski's rule. However, VMRO-DPMNE had no intention of leaving power, attempting to filibuster the election of the new parliamentary speaker and organizing protests in front of the Parliament. With the new Speaker of the Parliament due to take office, the protests spiralled out of control and protesters stormed the Parliament Building on 17 April 2017 (SDK 2017). This was an unpreceded act of political violence and the first attempted coup d'état since the country's independence, resulting in several MPs injured, and one almost killed. The violence stopped after police entered the Parliament and evacuated the MPs. A new Government was finally formed in May 2017.

After more than a decade, the regime of Nikola Gruevski ended. The new government, led by the Social-Democrats and the new Prime minister, Zoran Zaev, completely changed the political course of the country. However, the social energy mobilised around the Colourful Revolution started to encounter serious problems. Without a common enemy, the various parts of the social movement took different, even opposing political paths, and the latent serious ideological discord now coming to the fore. The dissolution of the Colourful Revolution was much quicker than its formation.

Repositioning and Antagonization Phase (2017-2020)

The downfall of the regime of Nikola Gruevski meant that the common target of all previous movements suddenly vanished. The breakdown of the regime was incremental and painful for Macedonian society, with political polarisation often on the verge of a civil conflict between opposition protests and counter-protest movements. Furthermore, the formation of the Social-Democratic government headed by Zoran Zaev meant that after the elections, power had to be distributed among many social structures close to the Social-Democrats, including many positions in Parliament, the Government and the like. The positions that were suddenly available in the political and administrative domain needed to be populated, while the new policies envisaged by the new government needed support from civil society, in both preparation and promotion. But not all structures of the Colourful Revolution or its preceding social movements supported all the new policies. Factions within the Colourful Revolution immediately started to reposition and over time divided into several clearly differentiated groups:

– The first group of protesters of the Colourful Revolution joined the structures of the newly formed government. Since the Colourful Revolution was a rather diverse movement, it was expected that some factions would be closer to political parties (then in opposition) than others. As a result, the new Government heavily recruited from the ranks of the protesters to fill the political and administrative positions gained in the elections (Stojadinovikj 2018).

Many of the participants in the Colourful Revolution and the social movements preceding it, became new MPs, PR officers in the Cabinet, local self-government administration officers (especially after the local elections in 2017, which the Social-Democrats won in a landslide, Puls24. mk 2017). It was clear that civil society once again played the role of a human resources base for the political arena that needed a thorough restructuring after the decade of VMRO-DPMNE domination.

– The second group of actors became disillusioned with both the legacy of the Colourful Revolution and the new Social-Democratic Government. The disillusionment came as a result of the new government policies, mostly related to the country's name dispute with Greece, taxation policies, corruption and nepotism scandals, inability to reform the judiciary and public administration, etc. The support for the Social-Democrats visibly declined over time mostly due to this second group of citizens that slowly started to distance themselves from the Social-Democrats but also from the legacy of the Colourful Revolution.[7]

– The third group is quite similar to the second, but with one major difference. It consists of actors disillusioned by the Social-Democratic government, but who have not given up the legacy of the Colourful Revolution. Although there is no fundamental difference in terms of political support for the new government (or the lack thereof), this group does realize and acknowledge the importance of the Colourful Revolution for the gradual democratization of Macedonian society.

– The last group of actors includes political parties and individuals who have become fierce enemies of the new government. Although initially belonging to the same protest movement, even during the early rallies of the Colourful Revolution and the social movements preceding it (students' and teachers' plenums mostly), it became clear that serious political, ideological and programmatic differences exist between different factions. The most notorious example is the group around the political party Levica (the Left), which became probably the most vocal critique of the new Social-Democratic Government especially after the name change of the country and the Prespa Agreement with Greece in June 2018 (Levica 2018).

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7   The public support in every consequent turn of elections from 2016 onwards dropped significantly. Just as an illustration the Social-Democrats won 436981 votes on the parliamentary pre-term elections in December 2016, 322581 votes on the presidential elections in April 2019 and 327408 votes on the parliamentary pre-term elections in July 2020. Furthermore, the Social-Democrats convincingly lost the local elections in October 2021 with winning only 16 municipalities opposed to VMRO-DPMNE that won 42. For more detailed data on election results of parliamentary, presidential and local elections please visit the website of the State Election Commission of the Republic of North Macedonia – www.sec.mk.

The final act, the dissolution of the Colourful Revolution started and ended as soon as there was a change of political elites in the country in early 2017. Although the Colourful Revolution ceased to exist, it is interesting to analyse the relation between its constitutive parts in the *post-festum* period, after the change of the Gruevski regime. What effectively terminated the remaining social energy build-up during the Colourful Revolution, and even antagonised part of the former allies was the disillusionment with the new government in a vast part of society. It occurred because of specific political occurrences such as the country's name change, the inability to start the negotiations with the EU regarding joining the Union, corruption scandals, as well as the dissolution of the Special Public Prosecutors Office (SJO) that served as a strong tool of pressure against the Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE regime. Unfortunately, joining NATO in March 2020 was perceived as an insufficient reward for the efforts that North Macedonia invested in its democratic advancement. In fact, the name dispute between North Macedonia and Greece can be said to be the final step in the dissolution of the energy accumulated through the Colourful Revolution. Moreover, the triple veto that North Macedonia received to initiating EU accession negotiations, as well as several high-level corruption scandals, led to a complete disappointment in the general public, significantly impacting the support for the new Government.

The three-decades long dispute between the Republic of North Macedonia and Greece finally ended with the signing of the Prespa Agreement in June 2019 (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018). In the agreement, Greece finally recognised the existence of a Macedonian nation and a Macedonian language, and in return (now) North Macedonia changed the name of the country (*erga omnes*) and distanced itself from antiquity as part of an identity concession made to the Greek side. The governing Social-Democrats invested a huge amount of political energy to sign and implement the Prespa Agreement. On the other side of the political spectrum, part of their former protest allies deeply disagreed with the Agreement and also invested enormous political energy to block the signing of the Agreement by organizing a boycott of the upcoming referendum for the name change ("#Bojkotiram"). The boycott of the referendum was a more than a successful operation (the minimum turnout was not met), partly organised by a former structure that actively participated in the protests against the regime of Gruevski, the nominally left Levica.

After the Prespa Agreement, Greece lifted its veto to the accession process of North Macedonia to both EU and NATO. The Republic of North Macedonia joined the NATO alliance in March 2020. However, in the case of the EU, there were two more vetoes, an outcome that not even the biggest Euro-sceptics could have hoped for. In November 2019, France vetoed the beginning of the accession negotiations with the EU for Albania and North Macedonia, requiring serious changes in the accession methodology for candidate countries (European Council 2019). In 2020, France lifted the veto after its demands regarding accession path were met (tightened criteria for accession

and reversibility of chapter closures). At this point, North Macedonia hoped to finally start the accession negotiations, but another veto followed in November 2021 from neighbouring Bulgaria (European Council 2021). The third veto to the accession process of North Macedonia was the result of yet another identity dispute between two neighbouring Balkan countries. The result in North Macedonia was complete disappointment and disillusionment with the EU accession process.

The change of the government in April-May 2017 was probably already the end of the Colourful Revolution, not just in terms of its activity, but also in terms of the loose political consensus between its constitutive parts. However, the period after government change not only meant a lack of a common enemy, but also brough about the resolution of a number of sensitive political issues not subject to consensus by the different factions within the social movements. With the emergence of these politically divisive issues, the atmosphere became antagonistic, breaking the bonds between former allies much faster than they were established several years prior. The Colourful Revolution ceased to exist effectively in 2017, but the gradual antagonization of its various constituents is still ongoing.

Concluding Discussion

No social movement can be formed without two minimal preconditions – some sort of dissatisfaction regarding one or more social issues; and a minimal feeling of belonging by the members of the social movement to a common goal, defined either positively (inducing social change) or negatively (dismantling a corrupt regime, for instance), or both in most cases. The example of the Colourful Revolution and the analysis of its gradual growth and dissolution speaks to the fact that even though social or political grievances can have very different backgrounds, under certain conditions and with the aid of external factors, such scattered social energy can in relative unison produce social mobilisation against an undemocratic regime, although only of temporary duration. The main prerequisite for the growth of a social movement comprising a number of previously loosely connected protest groups, some of which have an unclear constituency, is the creation of a political structure that utilises windows of opportunity and creates alliances in order to target critical points of an undemocratic and corrupt regime.

The analysis of the early phases of the Colourful Revolution does not contribute much to theory, mostly due to the isolated approach of the scattered social movements that advocated for separate goals focused on policy issues (energy poverty, spatial organizing, etc.). In the embryonic phase, the social movements that later constituted the Colourful Revolution presented typical focal points of contentious politics, challenging the regime via collective frames of activist citizenship, mostly in informal setting (streets, squares, performative acts in public spaces, etc.). The subsequent phases of the Colourful Revolution, however, are much more illustrative, especially from the perspective

of political process theory and resource mobilisation theory, explaining the phenomenon of gradual snowballing of social energy, resource mobilisation and creating at least a minimal ideological platform for action through political opportunity structures.

The gradual consolidation of the social movements and the ultimate aggressive engagement in toppling the regime was dictated by several factors. The feeling of impotence many citizens had regarding political participation actually drove the radicalization and the formation of alliances between various social movements in Macedonian society. Furthermore, the approach of the Gruevski government to directly confront the protesters via, often violent, counter-protests made the challengers of the regime feel completely excluded; but it thus also created a significant connecting point for all disenfranchised actors. The confrontational and destructive strategy of Gruevski only facilitated the network building between unlikely allies, which was only affirmed first by the Neskovski case and then even more by the wiretapping scandal. At this point, a newly established alliance was formed between social movements and opposition political parties. This unpreceded act of social and political snowballing encouraged much of the passive segment of society to engage and display its dissatisfaction. The revelation of the highly undemocratic nature of the regime caused instability that opened up a political milieu favourable to forming alliances and was thus the crucial factor for facilitating the dynamic in the development of the Colourful Revolution.

The hostility of the regime only further incentivised the political and social actors to unite and bridge social capital between ideologically diverse, even conflictual, groups. The newly established political opportunity triggered by a succession of political crises (Skopje 2014, Law on Higher Education, wiretapping scandal) found a big window of opportunity to challenge the regime and recruit public discontentment, which only grew larger, especially with the release of each subsequent audio material by opposition parties. This concentration of social energy was further backed up by the international community via the Przhino process and the formation of the Special Prosecutors' Office (SJO) which only additionally challenged the regime, especially on legal grounds. These occurrences correspond to Way's assumptions on the role of Western support and ties to society and the weakening of the ruling elites. The expectations for getting back on track of the Europeanization process in the country as well as the already visible vulnerabilities of the elite in power led to a spontaneous mobilisation of moral and human resources, resulting in a better organised and more mass movement, which was no longer possible to ignore. Indeed, the mobilisation was fatal to the regime, especially when it became clear that there was at least a minimal ideological platform for collective action among the protesters, as well as a communal spirit created through everyday protests and collective iconography.

However, as soon as regime change happened in early 2017, the Colourful Revolution dissipated due to a combination of factors, but primarily the lack of a common goal. First, a vast proportion of the protesters considered the goal

of the Colourful Revolution achieved and any further engagement pointless. Further, many of the actors who were at the forefront of the movement were accommodated in the new political structures, while others simply suffered from "revolutionary fatigue." The now ruling Social-Democrats simply incorporated a portion of members from the Colourful Revolution. This began the process of repositioning actors who previously constituted a relatively united social movement. Furthermore, other social movements that were part or close to the Colourful Revolution became organised politically or even radicalised, especially after circumstances rapidly evolved to display vast and conflicting differences. After the country name change and the Prespa Agreement, a number of high-profiled corruption scandals and the three consecutive vetoes of the EU accession, former allies simply took different political courses, ultimately ending in total conflict over the preferred outcomes. As one part of the Colourful Revolution pulled towards painful compromises on the verge of social acceptability, another moved towards radicalisation and political populism in antagonism with its former allies.

Regardless of their temporary nature, social movements such as the Colourful Revolution play a very important role in the democratisation processes in transitional countries. As practice has shown and academic literature has analysed, democratisation is not a linear process and democratising societies all over the political landscape of east and southeast Europe are prone to democratic backsliding and long periods of political recessions. It is in these periods that social movements can play a significant role in democratising the political milieu and, in the right circumstances, lead to effective regime change. This by no means implies that the new political structure will immediately and radically improve the democratic context of a country, but the very fact that a specific society has displayed potential for overthrowing a political regime via political and social mobilisation serves as a reminder to every subsequent government – at least for a given period of time.

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Revolucija koja je pojela svoju decu: Šarena revolucija od konsenzusa do razdora

Apstrakt

Glavni cilj ovog rada jeste da pruži detaljnu analizu putanje Šarene revolucije (ŠR) u Severnoj Makedoniji kao društvenog pokreta. Iz opštije perspektive, rad se bavi rastućim interesovanjem za literaturu koja istražuje korelaciju između društvenih pokreta i procesa demokratizacije, pogotovo u društvima koja spadaju u kategoriju hibridnih režima. Šarena revolucija predstavlja dobar primer protestnog pokreta koji je stvorio efektivnu promenu režima. Predstavljala je, tačnije, složen društveni pokret koji je obuhvatio mnoge fragmentirane društvene i političke grupe koje su se okupile oko ideje postojanja zajedničkog protivnika.

Povrh ovoga, Šarena revolucija ima jednu posebnost. To je, naime, društveni pokret koji je prošao pun razvojni krug: formiranje kroz korišćenje političkih prilika, period aktivnosti i uspeha, te period raspada. Oslanjajući se na literaturu o političkom procesu, okvirima mogućnosti i ciklusima društvenih pokreta, u ovom radu se tvrdi da društveni pokreti poput Šarene revolucije nisu samo privremene i nestabilne strukture, već da oni u značajnoj meri zavise od postojanja zajedničke mete društvenog aktivizma. Uklanjanje sa vlasti političkih aktera koji su bili razlog za mobilizaciju složene i raznolike mreže društvenog i političkog aktivizma rezultiralo je odsustvom spajajućeg faktora koji drži na okupu sve delove ovog složenog sistema. Ovo odsustvo pokrenulo je postepeni razdor i raspadanje različitih frakcija unutar društvenog pokreta (u ovom slučaju ŠR), te je otkrilo njegovu pravu prirodu – privremenu, ideološki raznoliku, konfliktnu, pa čak i nedemokratsku u nekim aspektima.

Ključne reči: šarena revolucija, Severna Makedonija, društveni pokreti, politički proces, demokratizacija, protest, politike razdora, formacija, rastvaranje, politički aktivizam