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Homo Civicus (Re)Born:
The 2012-14 Protest Movements in Bulgaria
and Good Governance

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Introduction

Over the last couple of years, Bulgaria has witnessed a surge in popular action either on specific issues or in the form of persistent movements with deeper, structural demands. From environmental protests to wide upheavals instigated by unbearable utility prices to steady, persevering protest movements demanding purification of politics and new integrity – this reinvented civic engagement of the new *Homo Civicus*, the Civic Man, has made a difference. It has had its effect on decision-making, producing actual changes in appointments, legislation and

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policies and even provoking mayoral and cabinet resignations. But most importantly, it has facilitated a new spirit of transparency and accountability in public life which, if it becomes the norm, will inevitably be conducive to better governance.

Overview: From Shale Gas to *Ostavka* (Resignation)

A short chronology of protests in Bulgaria over the past several years is due. While popular action, especially linked with environmental issues, has been taking place even before 2012,¹ the starting point for the ‘awakening’ of citizens for more active real engagement with politics was arguably the mass protests against shale gas exploration in early 2012.² They took place in six major cities and involved thousands of people who feared shale gas extraction would poison underground waters, cause disease and even earthquakes. They called on a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing – or fracking – the method used for shale gas extraction. Despite some (not unfounded) claims that Russia had supported these protests financially in an effort to keep its monopoly over gas supplies in Bulgaria (it currently provides between 90% and 100% of the gas), the protests were to a great extent reflecting the general unpopularity of shale gas exploration in Bulgaria.³

The next major outbreak of public discontent was again linked with the environment. In June 2012 thousands of people blocked one of the busiest intersections in the capital Sofia, Orlov Most (Eagles’ Bridge), after the announcement of planned changes in the Forestry Act that would benefit ski resort owners to the detriment of Bulgarian forests and mountains. The changes would allow owners to build without a special permit for change-of-purpose, exposing

¹ See for example Elitsa Grancharova. “Fifth Natura 2000 Protest in Bulgaria”. *The Sofia Echo*, 23 April 2007. Available at http://sofiaecho.com/2007/04/23/653711_fifth-natura-2000-protest-in-bulgaria. Or Elitsa Grancharova. “Environmentalists for Rila Campaign in Front of Barroso”. *The Sofia Echo*, 26 March 2008. Available at http://sofiaecho.com/2008/03/26/659263_environmentalists-for-rila-campaign-in-front-of-barroso.

² “Bulgarians protest, seek moratorium on shale gas”. *Reuters*, 14 January 2012. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/14/us-bulgaria-shalegas-protests-idUSTRE80D0GU20120114>.

³ See “Руснаците ли организират протестите срещу шистовия газ? [Are the Russians organising the protests against shale gas?]”. *E-vestnik*, 16 January 2012. Available at <http://e-vestnik.bg/13649>.

mountains to the risk of over-development. The spontaneous protest action however had much deeper implication than just protecting the environment: it was in its essence a move against the lack of rule of law in Bulgaria and the absurd practice of adopting legal acts that benefit certain individuals, against the common good of society. The Orlov Most protest was the embryo of true civil society in Bulgaria which grew to become a powerful movement only a year later.

Before this happened, however, an abrupt and extensive wave of mass protests took place in February 2013. They were prompted by an unexpected and widespread hike in central heating and electricity prices for households, most of them in the poorer segments of society.⁴ Thousands poured into the streets, and violence occurred in the form of clashes with the police. The protests' message then evolved to become anti-oligarchy and anti-monopoly because the major utility companies were seen as representatives of those monopolies unfairly controlling the market and imposing 'unbearable' prices, and there were frequent calls for nationalisation and other populist measures. Although the February protests brought the then centre-right government down⁵ (Prime Minister Boyko Borisov acted shrewdly and decided to resign so as to avoid a sharp drop in popularity of his GERB party in the tense situation and boost his chances at a quick early poll), they were not anti-government in their initial messages: resignation calls were rare if not non-existent, and the government's resignation on 20 February came more or less as a surprise. The February upheaval also complied with a general trend regarding Bulgarian popular action in the transition years: it had been almost exclusively instigated by economic hardship and fight for individual survival rather than by a perceived urgent need for more democracy and transparency.⁶ Nevertheless, these

⁴ See more at Angel Krasimirov, "Tens of thousands join electricity protests across Bulgaria", *Reuters*, 17 February 2013. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/17/us-bulgaria-protests-electricity-idUSBRE91G0C520130217>.

⁵ Sam Cane and Tsvetelia Tsoleva. "Bulgarian government resigns amid growing protests", *Reuters*, 20 February 2013. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/20/us-bulgaria-government-idUSBRE91J09J20130220>.

⁶ Notably, the 1989/90 rallies in the wake of the collapse of Communism were calling for real reform and democracy, but then it was more of an anti-Communist than a pro-democracy and participation effort. In 1997, when hyper-inflation hit Bulgaria and salaries and pensions plummeted to as low as \$8 a month, people came out on the streets for economic reasons: it was the genuine revolution in Bulgaria (not the

protests achieved also some civic goals (see next section). One sad characteristic was the several self-immolations that took place during the protests, notoriously the fatal case of Plamen Goranov in Varna.⁷

The true awakening of *Homo Civicus* in Bulgaria, however, took place with the spontaneous, persistent and entirely political in nature protests that began in June 2013.⁸ They were not instigated by economic trouble: they were protests about values – against the questionable appointments of the then Socialist-led government and its reliance on the parliamentary support of a far-right, xenophobic and anti-European party, Ataka. The protests began on 14 June, 2013, after Parliament unexpectedly and without any debate appointed a controversial media mogul and well-connected figure among political and judiciary circles for chief of national counter-intelligence, the State Agency ‘State Security’ (DANS). The vote for Delyan Peevski was preceded by covert bargaining between and within the formally ruling parties, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, BSP, and the Movements for Rights and Freedoms, DPS. Some 10,000 people, predominantly young professionals in their thirties but also students and middle-aged people, gathered spontaneously in front of the government building in Sofia after organising themselves in the social networks to protest against the choice of Peevski for a post with such high clearance as well as the lack of transparency in the appointment. As disputable appointments by PM Plamen Oresharski’s government on all levels of power continued and it became clear the xenophobic and populist Ataka party was giving a parliamentary shoulder to the two ruling parties (they only held 120 out of 240 seats), this initial spontaneous protest transformed into mass movement involving everyday marches of 5,000 to 15,000 people along the streets of Sofia.

The demands grew from merely the removal of Peevski to the resignation of the Communist party coup of 1989), yet it was inspired by poverty. February 2013 was again inspired by high prices of heating electricity and is falling more or less within the same classification type.

⁷ See Yavor Siderov. “What a terrible time for Europe to show Bulgaria the cold shoulder”. *The Guardian*, 6 March 2013. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/06/bulgaria-europe-plamen-goranov>.

⁸ See Tsvetelia Tsoleva. “Bulgarians protest over media magnate as security chief”. *Reuters*, 14 June 2013. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/14/us-bulgaria-government-idUSBRE95D0ML20130614>

weak government which had lost the little trust it had in the first place. Protests took place, though at a lower scale, in other major cities and received public backing from opposition politicians, intellectuals, academia and even some ambassadors of EU member states.⁹ The numbers on the streets gradually diminished with the arrival of winter, but the general mood in Sofia was revolutionary, with outbursts of activity at every wrong step the government took. The protests had three major boosts: the blockade of Parliament on 23 July 2013 resulting in injured demonstrators; the refusal of the Constitutional Court to remove Peevski as MP on 8 October; and the student blockade of Sofia University on 28 October. In the mean time, activity in the virtual space never lost on intensity, with constant blogger, Facebook and Twitter posts with the hashtags #ДАНСwithMe ('DANS with me', referring to the security agency's acronym in Cyrillic) and #NOresharski flooding both domestic and international feeds. Western European and American media also took interest in the protests and regularly filed stories during the summer and autumn of 2013.¹⁰ The #ДАНСwithMe movement continued with lower intensity until the resignation of the Oresharski government on 23 July 2014.

The *Homo Civicus* effect: instances of good governance as a result of popular action

The rise in civic activities in Bulgaria in 2012-14 brought about a change in the attitude of those in power towards the people as sovereign, as well as concrete decisions in the direction of better governance. Higher popular involvement created

⁹ "Bulgarian government denies traditional honour for outgoing French ambassador after his statement on protests". *The Sofia Globe*, 3 September 2013. Available at <http://sofiaglobe.com/2013/09/03/bulgarian-government-denies-traditional-honour-for-outgoing-french-ambassador-after-his-statement-on-protests/>.

¹⁰ See for example Anthony Faiola and Paola Moura, "Middle-class rage sparks protest movements in Turkey, Brazil, Bulgaria and beyond", *The Washington Post*, 25 June 2013, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/middle-class-rage-sparks-protest-movements-in-turkey-brazil-bulgaria-and-beyond/2013/06/28/9fb91df0-df61-11e2-8cf3-35c1113cfcc5_story.html; Thomas Roser, "Bulgariens Mächtige werden nicht gewinnen", *Die Zeit*, 24 July 2013, available at <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2013-07/bulgarien-volksaufstand-mafia>; "Birth of a civil society", *The Economist*, 21 September 2013, available at <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21586571-will-bulgarians-daily-protests-have-lasting-impact-birth-civil-society>.

a general atmosphere of increased transparency and accountability: the public reinvented its long abandoned role of a watchdog of decision-makers, and the government started acting in full awareness of potential popular anger at every step which citizens perceived as harmful to the public interest. What Robert Putnam proved empirically in his seminal study on the regions of Italy in the late 20th century, that more engaged and more active citizenry leads to better governance, had its expression in Bulgaria during and after the surge of popular action in 2012-14.¹¹ The culmination of these processes was, as mentioned above, the June movement of 2013-14.

Homo Civicus (Re)Born, in June

The #ДАHCwithMe movement deserves special attention as an embodiment of the heightened civic engagement in Bulgaria, resulting in better governance. The anti-Peevski protests quickly became anti-government and demanded the immediate resignation of the cabinet and parliament and another early election; at the same time, they denounced the previous government led by GERB, too, as also responsible for the status quo, demonstrating their non-partisan nature. They were against the vile interconnectedness between shady business and politics, against the oligarchies and monopolies commanding huge bits of the economy and for more transparency and accountability. The June movement was carried out in its bulk by middle-class, relatively educated people who relied on their own capabilities to succeed in life but who were grossly frustrated by the actions of the government and its unwillingness to hear what they have to say. It was a separate, detached phenomenon from the economically-driven events of February of the same year and, indeed, all civic actions before that. In that sense, the June movement can be regarded as the true birth of civil society in post-transition Bulgaria. The people refused to elect leaders, a potential weakness of every civic movement if it wanted

¹¹ Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (1993).

an effective political change; the protests were amorphous and individualistic in nature. It may be said that the emergence of *Homo Civicus* had stopped short of becoming *Homo Politicus*. Yet the sole existence of the June movement, the daily pressure it exerted on decision-makers and institutions and the positive effects of that pressure gave a new meaning to participation and civic engagement in Bulgaria. What made the June protest special is:

- It was about values not prices; that is, the participants weren't seeking economic privileges but addressing of a huge democratic deficit;
- It was overwhelmingly peaceful in nature with a few exceptions;
- It had worldwide support: Bulgarians in more than 30 cities around the globe were protesting every Sunday in support of their friends in Bulgaria;
- It had international support within Bulgaria and the EU: the European Commission, German, French, Dutch and Belgian ambassadors in Sofia expressed their support, something unprecedented and going beyond the diplomatic tone;
- It had made massive use of social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, with the hashtags #ДААHCwithMe and #NOresharski used intensely and universally;
- It was socially responsible: water and flowers were distributed among the guarding police as a sign of solidarity with them; charity funds were collected for injured miners; and garbage duly collected in designated areas after each protest, leaving the ground even cleaner than before the event.
- Its specific weaknesses were that it was not able to produce leaders and that it was mostly urban in nature, with Sofia and a couple of other big cities protesting and small towns and villages mostly unaware of what was happening.

Yet the most important asset of the June movement was the emergence of the new Bulgarian *Homo Civicus* who has been having a real impact on decision-

making. Until then, the average, potentially active and middle-class urban citizen between 20 and 40 had been living in complacency: with the 1997 sharp improvement of the economic situation, the integration into the EU, the ability to travel to Western Europe without a visa and the relative easiness in achieving decent standard of living with fair, hard work, the average citizen was gradually detached from public life and disaffected with politics, leaving the ruling elite unaccountable and prone to abusing and corruption. This left a huge gap between politicians and their sovereign – the people. After 2012 and especially after June 2013, the sovereign has been awakened. Every successive government, even if formed by the very same parties who were in power in June 2013, would likely have to comply in its actions and policies with the pressure from the re-born *Homo Civicus*.

The concrete examples of positive change stemming from heightened civic engagement in Bulgaria can be grouped in the following categories: legal action; large projects; appointments; resignations of key decision-makers; and political consolidation and maturity of parties.

Legal action

Legal actions have resulted from popular pressure in the form of new legislation (or relinquishing legislation deemed wrong by the citizens); no-confidence votes for incumbents; and withdrawal of immunities of MPs. In January 2012, the then centre-right GERB party majority in parliament imposed a moratorium on shale gas exploration following growing protests throughout the country.¹² This ban came in an already existing general atmosphere defined by suspensions of construction on the Black Sea coastline after environmentalist protests for violation of the EU's Natura 2000 nature protection programme. After the spontaneous protests against the planned amendments to the Forestry Act of June 2012, the GERB government

¹² “Bulgaria bans shale oil and gas drilling”. *Reuters*, 18 January 2012. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/18/bulgaria-shalegas-ban-idUSL6E8CI2ML20120118>.

delayed its adoption, the President vetoed the act and a process of consultation was launched with citizens, experts, investors and other stakeholders.¹³ In the course of the #ДАНСwithMe protest movement against the BSP and DPS-backed government of PM Oresharski from June 2013 to July 2014, the then opposition GERB party filed a total of five no-confidence votes against the cabinet.¹⁴ Albeit unsuccessful, the motions were a political continuation of the will of the citizens voiced every day in front of the parliament building, and given the minority nature of government, they definitely unnerved the ruling establishment. Also as result of public pressure from the June movement Volen Siderov, the leader of the xenophobic Ataka party informally backing the Oresharski government, was forced to cede his immunity as MP and face charges for hooliganism by the Prosecutor's Office.¹⁵ And finally, after social network publications and authored pieces in the media by representatives of the June protest movement, the newly elected Bulgarian parliament in October 2014 rejected a law that envisioned the use of taxpayers' money for the bail-out of the country's fourth largest bank.¹⁶

Large projects

Two big projects which were earmarked as priorities by BSP in their election campaign failed to see progress under the BSP-led Oresharski government – the

¹³ See Alex Bivol, "Bulgarian Government moves to quell protests over Forestry Act", *The Sofia Echo*, 15 June 2012, available at <http://sofiaglobe.com/2012/06/15/bulgarian-government-moves-to-quell-protests-over-forestry-act/>, and Hristina Dimitrova, "Bulgarian President vetoes Forestry Act amendments", *The Sofia Globe*, 16 June 2012, available at <http://sofiaglobe.com/2012/06/16/president-rossen-plevneliev-vetoes-the-forestry-act/>.

¹⁴ See for example Elizabeth Konstantinova, "Bulgaria's Cabinet Survives Fourth No-Confidence Vote", *Bloomberg*, 30 May 2014, available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-05-30/bulgaria-s-cabinet-survives-fourth-no-confidence-vote.html>.

¹⁵ See Sam Bell, "Volen Siderov: Bulgaria's far right psychopath", *CafeBabel*, 13 March 2014, available at <http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/politics/article/volen-siderov-bulgarias-far-right-psychopath.html>.

¹⁶ See "Фейсбук: #Нямадаплатим [Facebook: #Weshallnotpay]", *Dnevnik*, 14 July 2014, available at http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2014/07/14/2343169_feisbuk_niamadaplatim/; "Нови протести и блокирано движение пред НС [New protests and blocked traffic in front of Parliament]", *Novini.bg* 31 October 2014, available at <http://www.novini.bg/>; Elizabeth Konstantinova, "Bulgarian Parliament Rejects Plan to Bail Out Corporate Bank", *Bloomberg*, 31 October 2014, available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-31/bulgarian-parliament-rejects-plan-to-bail-out-corporate-bank.html>.

Russia-backed Belene nuclear power plant project and the Bulgarian section of Russia's South Stream natural gas pipeline.¹⁷ While the strained financial and economic situation continuing since the 2008-09 downturn may have been one reason for this, another strong factor was the constant pressure from the June protest movement on every government plan aimed at incurring additional debt (both projects involved sizeable Russian state loans, which would mean significant commitment of resources from the Bulgarian state budget in the long term). In fact the bloodiest day of protest in the summer of 2013, when clashes occurred between demonstrators and the police in the midst of a parliament blockade, was about a planned budget revision that involved an opening for new 1.0 billion lev (€500 million) debt of the government.¹⁸

Appointments

The #ДАНСwithMe movement was conceived as a protest against a controversial appointment (that of Peevski as DANS chief), and public discontent against appointments of disputable figures was expressed both before and after June 2013. And in all instances it was conducive to change. Oresharski was forced to substitute his nominee for an investment projects minister, Kalin Tiholov, in May 2013 after a public uproar against Tiholov's alleged violation of environment laws in the Black Sea coast area.¹⁹ Under massive street pressure, Parliament cancelled the appointment of Delyan Peevski, the symptomatic security agency chief that drove tens of thousand to the streets on 14 June, five days after it voted him in.²⁰ And one

¹⁷ Preparation activities for South Stream such as land appropriation and even some procurement orders took place throughout 2013 and 2014 despite warnings of the European Commission that the project did not comply with EU regulations. But Oresharski had to officially announce suspension of the project in June 2014 under the pressure from both Brussels and public opinion.

¹⁸ "Bulgaria protesters block parliament in Sofia unrest". *BBC News*, 23 July 2013. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23428628>.

¹⁹ Clive Leviev-Sawyer. "Socialist PM-designate Oresharski names new candidate investment projects minister". *The Sofia Globe*, 28 May 2013. Available at <http://sofiaglobe.com/2013/05/28/socialist-pm-designate-oresharski-names-new-candidate-investment-projects-minister/>.

²⁰ "When protests succeed: Bulgarian street anger claims another victory". *Euronews*, 19 June 2013. Available at <http://www.euronews.com/2013/06/19/with-peevski-out-after-five-days-of-protests-what-is-next-for-bulgaria/>.

day later PM Oresharski dismissed Ivan Ivanov as deputy interior minister because of allegations he had ties with racketeering gangs back in the 1990s.²¹

Resignations

Increased civic engagement in 2012-14 caused also several major public figures to resign from their posts. Despite the essence of the February 2013 protests as economically-motivated ones, they had also a purely civic and political impact. For one, the then-PM Boyko Borisov resigned, after a couple of days of upheaval involving serious clashes between police and demonstrators and injuries on both sides. Although he had done some calculations that resigning then rather than waiting for the regular election a couple of months later will keep his ratings higher, he genuinely believed violence cannot be tolerated on the streets and a resignation was due as a way to stop unnecessary consequences.²² These protests also brought down the long-standing mayor of Varna, notorious among his fellow-citizens for ties with the shady business but re-elected for the post each time with the support of a different political party. Kiril Yordanov announced his resignation “on the day of national mourning for Plamen Goranov, the 36-year-old whose fatal self-immolation became a symbol of civic and political pressure for Yordanov to step down.”²³ And finally, arguably the most anticipated resignation, that of PM Plamen Oresharski, became a fact in July 2014 after more than a year of #ДАНСwithMe protests on the streets of Sofia.²⁴ Although the concrete cause of Oresharski’s resignation was the vanished trust between government partners BSP and DPS after the former’s disastrous show in the European Parliament elections of

²¹ “Bulgaria PM Ready to Dismiss Any Suspicious Appointees”. *Novinite.com*, 20 June 2013. Available at <http://www.novinite.com/articles/151403/Bulgaria+PM+Ready+to+Dismiss+Any+Suspicious+Appointees>.

²² See Sam Cage and Tsvetelia Tsoleva, “Bulgarian government resigns amid growing protests”, *Reuters*, 20 February 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/20/us-bulgaria-government-idUSBRE91J09J20130220>.

²³ “Kiril Yordanov, mayor of Bulgaria’s Varna, resigns”. *The Sofia Globe*, 6 March 2013. Available at <http://sofiaglobe.com/2013/03/06/kiril-yordanov-mayor-of-bulgarias-varna-resigns/>.

²⁴ “Socialist-backed Oresharski Cabinet resigns in Bulgaria”. *Deutsche Welle*, 23 July 2014. Available at <http://www.dw.de/socialist-backed-oresharski-cabinet-resigns-in-bulgaria/a-17803242>.

May 2014, most observers agree that the longer process that inevitably led to this outcome was the consistent and devoted civic engagement demonstrated by the June movement.²⁵

Political consolidation and maturity

The June movement served as a catalyst for the formation of political coalitions which as a rule became more open and responsive to the demands of the citizenry. This is especially true for the right-of-centre political spectrum, which has traditionally been fragmented or dominated by the GERB party with its sometimes populist (as opposed to civic) leanings. The May 2013 early parliamentary election, the sequel to the February mass protests against utility prices and PM Borisov's resignation, produced a hung parliament characterised by unprecedented homogeneity: only four parties made the 4% threshold, leaving more than one million people who voted for centre-right parties unrepresented. When the Oresharski government, a product of this kind of parliament, took office and started unnerving the public with its controversial appointments and policies, it was the centre-right voters who were most infuriated of all. The demands for representation and fairness of the centre-right segment in the subsequent June protest movement was the trigger that made all major, reform-oriented rightist parties who failed to make the threshold in May to sit together and negotiate a new coalition to debut in Bulgarian politics in the subsequent early election. This union of parties was called the Reformist Bloc and included the remnants from the traditional right which ruled Bulgaria during the reformist 1997-2001 period as well as prospective parties formed afterwards. Although their path for intensified partnership has been rough, the Reformist Bloc made a decent appearance in the European Parliament election of May 2014, sending one MEP, and more than satisfactory show in the early

²⁵ See for example Nikolay Nikolov, "How long does it take to overcome an anti-democratic regime - lessons from Bulgaria", *Open Democracy*, 24 July 2014, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/nikolay-nikolov/how-long-does-it-take-to-overcome-antidemocratic-regime-lessons-f>.

parliamentary election of October 2014, earning 8.9% of the vote and 23 MPs.²⁶ It is now the minor partner in the ruling coalition with GERB, which is also supported by two other parties.

Another expression of the benign effect of civic engagement on Bulgarian politics is the manner and tone in which the negotiation for the ruling coalition after the October 2014 vote took place. In an extremely difficult situation totally opposed to what the previous parliament was – eight parties made the 4% threshold this time raising representation but producing an unprecedentedly fragmented assembly with minuscule chances for a stable majority – GERB initiated consecutive negotiations with all parties to discuss chances for a ‘salvation’ majority in view of the dire financial and economic state of the country. The talks were calm, respectful, based on comparison of political platforms and minding the responsibility each party had been endowed with by being sent to parliament by the voters.²⁷ The key factor for this new spirit in politics was the popular engagement during the past two previous years: politicians knew that petty bickering or any irresponsible behaviour on their part in the face of a bank crisis, suspended EU structural funds and a real threat for gas shortages during the winter because of the crisis in Ukraine would easily drive people again to the streets.²⁸

Conclusion

²⁶ For good analyses of the 5 October election see “Experts react: 2014 Bulgarian parliamentary elections”, Europp Blog, London School of Economics and Political Science, available at <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/10/07/experts-react-2014-bulgarian-parliamentary-elections/>.

²⁷ Tsvetelia Tsoleva and Angel Krasimirov. “Bulgaria’s Borisov plasters together coalition government”. *Reuters*, 6 November 2014. Available at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/11/06/bulgaria-government-idUKL6N0SW56V20141106>.

²⁸ See “EC suspends funding for Bulgaria’s environment operational programme – reports”, *The Sofia Globe*, 17 November 2013, available at <http://sofiaglobe.com/2013/11/17/ec-suspends-funding-for-bulgarias-environment-operational-programme-reports/>; Georgi Kantchev, “Caught in Indecision, Bulgarian Government Is Urged to Solve Banking Crisis”, *The New York Times*, 4 August 2014, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/05/business/international/Bulgaria-Under-Pressure-on-Corporate-Commercial-Bank.html>; Sean Carney, “Central, East Europe Brace for Energy Shortages as Russian Gas Flows Fall”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 September 2014, available at <http://online.wsj.com/articles/eastern-europe-braces-for-energy-shortages-as-russian-gas-flows-fall-1410517559>.

Starting from 2012 up until the present moment, Bulgaria has witnessed an upsurge in civic participation expressed in numerous popular actions, protest movements and constant engagement with and critique of the ruling elite in the virtual space. This heightened activity was in fact the rebirth of true civil society in Bulgaria after the harsh and controversial transition years after the collapse of totalitarianism in 1989. More precisely, it is a triumph of the engaged individual in the modern digital era – the Bulgarian *Homo Civicus*. Problems persist but undoubtedly this new civic energy has brought about positive changes in the democratic discourse and politics in the country – laws have been slammed, unfavourable projects abandoned and governments have fallen under the watch of the newly engaged sovereign. However, the most important effect of the protest years of 2012-14 has been the newly established general spirit of transparency and accountability of those in power, which had all but disappeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s. If the watchfulness of the reinvented civil society in Bulgaria persists and this spirit is transformed into norm, the inevitable effect will be a better governed and more successful entity.